MOBILITY AND CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN AMA ATA AIDOO'S *ANOWA*

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Abstract

This paper examines the historiographical drama of *Anowa,* with a focus on the cultural, socio-economic, and spiritual specificities of the world that the characters inhabit and attempt to traverse. Ama Ata Aidoo elaborates in this play translocal practices and beliefs about metaphysical forces, specifically those that have an impact on the modern mobile African subject's trajectories. The paper posits that in *Anowa,* Aidoo re-positions the autochthonous, re-maps the cultural frontier, and re-claims the space for Africa's spiritual economies. It argues that by re-inscribing the cultural practices and beliefs onto the figures of Anowa and Kofi Ako, the playwright demonstrates that for the modern transnational and/or mobile African subject, roots and routes are intrinsically bound. The main insight of the paper is that the spatial assertions about practices of autochthony are connected to African teleologies of progress, and that these work in tension and in tandem with the temporal realities of global neoliberal capitalism.

Keywords: Autochthony, mobility, roots/routes, border-crossing, spiritual economies

1. Introduction

"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together". This African proverb resonates in Ama Ata Aidoo's play, *Anowa*. The play corroborates the principles of collectiveness, of concerted effort, and of African-inspired teleologies of progress, as suggested in the proverb. It dramatizes the interplay of mobility, acts of self-will, and African spiritual economies as shown through the protagonist of the drama, Anowa, and her husband, Kofi Ako, who both leave their hometown of Yebi in search of a sense of self-actualization. Anowa and Kofi learn, through their border-crossing experiences, the value of conjoining the spiritual and the material, the metaphysical and the political, and the local and the global. Anowa and Kofi also elaborate, through their creative subversions, the significance of conjoining individual trajectories with collective spiritual roots.

Although much scholarship exists on Ama Ata Aidoo's plays (Seda, 2016; Adams, 2012; Yan, 2002; Azodo & Wilentz, 1999; Odamtten, 1994), most of the critical offerings have concentrated on feminist and gendered representations, African orature, and the staging of Ghanaian history and culture. Few have committed to an investigation of how Aidoo's oeuvre intersects mobility and acts that reinforce the value of indigenous practices and religious observances. This essay attempts to add to the literature on

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Aidoo by investigating the tropes of mobility, border-crossing, and cultural consciousness in her play *Anowa*. In this play, Aidoo stages the experiences of Anowa and Kofi Ako, and demonstrates how they attempt to navigate the multiple frontiers of roots and routes, the translocal and the global, the spiritual and material, as well as individualism and communalism. Anowa and Kofi's trajectories—physical, psychological, and economic—and the tragic consequences of these movements, symbolically reinforce the values of African spirituality and cultural consciousness. Specifically, they corroborate the notion of autochthony by underscoring the inevitability of chaos that occurs if one neglects autochthonic observances. Put differently, Aidoo's tragic characters illuminate the cultural ideology of remembering one's roots as one crosses borders.

The story of *Anowa* is set in Ghana—previously the Gold Coast. It narrativizes the experiences of Anowa and Kofi Ako, two young lovers who decide to leave their hometown in search of a better life in a foreign city. Anowa, born beautiful and cherished by her parents, is a strong-willed young lady. She is apparently of the line of special priestesses of the clan, a spiritual vocation which the mother shelters her from, hoping to get her to marry a good man, be a good wife, and become a mother to healthy children. Anowa, however, refuses the offers of her many suitors until she chooses for herself Kofi Ako, much to her mother's disapproval. Her father wishes that she could take to her spiritual calling and become a priestess. Anowa decides to run off with her chosen lover to make a living from the colonial trading companies that had cropped up in the Gold Coast, not long after the experience of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. In their new home, the couple builds wealth through the sale of raw materials, animal skins, and the exportation of palm oil. They seem to be doing well until Kofi joins the slave trade. Anowa disapproves of slavery and refuses to enjoy the wealth they both create. There is no companionship between husband and wife. Kofi, on realising he is impotent and the fact that not even his wife enjoys their wealth, commits suicide. By this time, the struggle to stay in a fruitless marriage and the stubbornness that made her vow not to return home leave Anowa feeling very lonely and in a state of regression and insanity. The play ends tragically with Anowa's suicide as she drowns herself in the sea. Back in their town, the relatives congregate in mourning. Old Man reports that Anowa's father and mother and a few relatives have gone to retrieve the corpses to return them home to Yebi. The concluding sonic cue of the *Atentenben* (flute for funeral processions) that is heard "wailing in loneliness" (Aidoo, 1965, p. 124) reverberates a funeral dirge that seals Anowa and Kofi's tragic trajectories. The narrative gives insights into the relationship between traditional gender norms and trajectories of feminist resistance, underscoring efforts to subvert repressive norms as useless and deserving of punishment such as madness and death. Arguably, the play inadvertently scripts the notion that the roots/routes of progress for women are tied to cultural practices and indigenous religious observances. Such a perspective betrays the feminist project on the Continent.

2. Theoretical Formulations: Autochthony and Traditional Epistemologies

In fact, the play is an appropriation of a Ghanaian folktale, translated to the stage by the playwright. We learn earlier on in the play that "Anowa is not a girl to meet every day" (Aidoo, ibid., p. 67), and that she "wants to behave like the girl in the folk tale" (ibid., p. 75). The drama follows the formulaic plot of African narratives about the disobedient daughter. Ajayi-Soyinka (2012, p. 352) offers a summary of the folktale,

> The girl [...] after rejecting all eligible partners, chooses to marry a dashing stranger who turns out to be a non-human monster. Once outside the community it subjects the girl to a terrible ordeal, until she is rescued, near death, by one of her rejected suitors. She returns home, disgraced and humiliated.

This essay reads the experiences of Anowa within the context of this cultural aesthetic, particularly its link to the ideology of autochthony. The notion of the autochthon is read here as the inhabitant who is closely tied to a place by virtue of origin and who subscribes to its conceptualizations of cultural and spiritual distinctiveness (Rapoo, 2019, p. 16). The *American heritage dictionary* defines an autochthon as "one of the earliest known inhabitants of a place; an aborigine." In the *Century dictionary and cyclopedia*, the notion is defined as "one sprung from the land he inhabits; one of the primitive inhabitants of a country; a member of the race found in a country when first known; an aboriginal inhabitant." Etymologically, an autochthon is "one sprung from the soil he inhabits"; literally "one who sprung from the land itself" (Rapoo, 2019, p. 16). Drawing on ancient Greek mythology, Walter (2012) defines autochthones as "people sprung from earth itself"; that is, people originating directly from the soil or land; people born from the earth; the "earthborn".

Rapoo (2019) argues at length about African practices and myths about autochthony, underscoring how the concepts echo notions and ideologies about a "natural" adherence to the land of origin, about being bound to the land from which one sprung. Traditional epistemologies dictate that for the autochthon, return to the land of origin is inevitable. These autochthonic beliefs are framed within imaginings of proximity and rootedness to the original land, and are anchored on the teleology of return, re-entry, and/or being re-routed to one's metaphysical connections to their land of origin. Hence, the notion of autochthony illuminates identity as being defined according to the body's relation to geo-physical space and to indigenous roots and claims of belonging. If one is earth-born, they are bound to the earth (or soil), irrevocably joined to it, and cannot end the bond and connectedness to the land to which they are spiritually bound. According to African spiritual systems, one receives nourishment from their land (variously read as 'soil', or 'earth', or 'ground') of origin, hence the expected return and eventual re-incorporation into the soil upon death. The principle recalls the Judeo-Christian belief and practice of human matter returning to the ground, "for

out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."[2] Failure to return is believed to lead to individual and cosmic chaos. These cosmic underpinnings of orderliness and the associated metaphoric resonances of return and autochthony are fictionalized in Aidoo's play, *Anowa*.

In essence, these are metaphysical constructs that collude with traditional strictures on individual acts of self-determination. Aidoo expresses this in the play *Anowa* through the experiences of Anowa and Kofi. They are fated to an unavoidable tragic ending from the moment they decide that they "shall not be coming back here to Yebi" (Aidoo, 1965, p. 77). Anowa seals their ill-fated trajectories through her statement, "I shall walk so well that I will not find my feet back here again" (ibid., p. 79). The couple attempts to traverse these strictured roots and routes as they search for a sense of self-actualization. But the elders know that their efforts are doomed, which is why Badua calmly tells Anowa, "When I am too old to move, I shall still be sitting by these walls waiting for you to come back with your rags and nakedness" (ibid., p. 77). In this scenario, Badua, Anowa's mother, foreshadows the inevitable end that awaits Anowa. She articulates the fragility, vulnerability, and precariousness that characterize Anowa's future. Like the headstrong but foolish girl in the folktale, Anowa will return home disgraced and humiliated. Reflecting on autochthonic beliefs, Badua underscores the inevitable return of Anowa to the land from which she sprung.

Further, Old Man observes that Kofi "was, is, and shall always be/ One of us" (ibid., p. 67). This evokes the idea of being perpetually bound to one's original home. He and Anowa do manage to transform their living conditions—from their peripatetic lives on the Highway to become foreign merchants who amass a huge wealth. However, they remain wayfaring strangers in a land that cannot sustain them long enough to allow them to enjoy their fortune. Theirs is a life of pretentiousness—ephemeral and rootless. This is demonstrated most perceptibly through Kofi's gilded chair in their "Big House" (ibid., p. 103). The gilded chair is an ostentatious symbol of his wealth, power, and success. Because it gives a false sense of brilliance, security, and fulfilment, it can be read as a metaphor for Kofi's life. He is lauded as "the richest man, probably of the Gold Coast" (ibid., p. 104), and is "resplendent in brilliant *kente* or velvet cloth and he is over-flowing with gold jewelry, from the crown on his head to the rings on his toes" (ibid., p. 104). However, all that glitters is not gold; these showy decorations thinly cover his lack. He complains to Anowa, "you can't give me the only thing I want from you, a child" (ibid., p. 116), and hides the fact that he is the one who is impotent. As Anowa later reveals, he has been living with the tormenting secret that perhaps he "consumed up [his manhood himself] acquiring wealth and slaves" (ibid., p. 122). The exposure and public humiliation concerning his impotence drive him to commit suicide. His attempt to disavow the traditional life of Yebi in favour of a life of riches is not fully accomplished, and he, like his wife Anowa, is restored to his home of origin—disgraced and

2. Genesis 3: 19.

humiliated. The bond that ties him to his land of origin is sealed through being returned home. His border-crossing experience thus metaphorically corroborates the notion of autochthony.

Aidoo underscores the idea of return and restoration to one's origin through the recurrent tropes of "bond" and "binding". There are layers of nuance in the use of the notion of "the bond" and "being bound" that are at play in *Anowa*. Firstly, there is the bond that Old Man invokes in the Prologue.

> It is now a little less than thirty years/ When the Lords of our Houses/ Signed that piece of paper-/The Bond of 1844 they call it-/Binding us to the white man/Who came from beyond the horizon (ibid., p. 68).

Old Man calls forth the events surrounding Ghana's history, specifically the British colonial encounter in the Gold Coast. This is a reference to the Bond that assured Ghana as a Protectorate of the British. Its recollection here foregrounds colonization and its harms—slavery, exploitation, and social chaos, among others. Old Man's action of foregrounding this bond and its repercussions is quite significant as it highlights Kofi Ako's embodiment of these same experiences and their negative effects in his personal life. The practice of slavery brings destruction to his life.

Closely linked to the Bond of 1844 is the bond to domestic and trans-Atlantic slavery that the community cannot erase. Old Man elaborates,

> And yet, there is a bigger crime/We have inherited from the clans incorporate/ Of which, lest we forget when the time does come/ Those forts standing at the door/ Of the great ocean shall remind our children/And the sea bear witness (ibid., p. 66).

The dramatic historicization of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade here opens a window to the complicity and guilt that Africa engendered but attempts to erase. Later generations, as evidenced through Kofi Ako, are bound to that historical experience through the forces of repressed memory. As Ajayi-Soyinka (2012, p. 351) rightly observes,

> Slavery is the big taboo subject no one in the land wants to confront. Yet the codes of the crime of greed and its consequences are prominently visible and not hard to break… the forts by the sea, through whose tiny doors countless of Aruba people and their neighbours far and wide, pass to the land of no-return. Standing majestic, out of place by the sea, the slave castles are testimonies to the enormous gains—political and economic powers—of the 'pale stranger' while signifying the culpability of the elder, and untold losses to the land.

The slave castles and the sea bear permanent inscriptions of the history and memory of slavery and Africa's rupture. Further, the slave trade monuments collude with bodily inscriptions to hauntingly remind the communities to confront the fact of their culpability in the Atlantic Slave Trade. The bond to

that historical fact and the memories of the guilt surrounding it cannot be suppressed. In the play, Old Man foregrounds the bigger crime—of Africans selling out on their own; of secrets of losses, and harmful norms of personal aggrandisement that collude with greed at the expense of communal welfare. Old Man's accusatory words function to foreshadow Kofi Ako's imminent greed and insensitivity towards other people. Kofi surrogates the elders who gained from the crimes of the Slave Trade by selling their clansmen and exploiting their own people. This can be understood through Roach's (1996) notion of surrogation. Roach uses the notion of surrogation to elaborate on the reproduction of collective social memory; that is, the substitution of one generation by another in the process of collective memory and historicization. In accordance with Roach, Kofi simultaneously stands-in for the former African slave masters as well as the continental neo-liberals of the now. The crimes of exploitation and greed that he embodies give currency to precarious conditions in the post-colonial space and are echoed in the machinations of neo-liberal capitalism which remain prevalent in modern-day Africa. The historical recollections echoed here foreshadow the imminent chaos that is bound to befall Kofi and his house. The play thus offers return to the values of human and cultural integrity as spiritual exigencies to individual and social chaos.

3. Bonding, Bodily Inscriptions, and Structures of Power

The notion of bonding also expresses the politics of the body that are dramatized in the play and underscore the underpinnings of indigenous technologies of autochthony. *Anowa* reverberates with multiple inscriptions of power onto the body. This is observable through the deployment of cultural memory and ideological impositions to police the individual's acts of self-determination. Foucault (1977, 1995) and other scholars such as Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) have theorized about the body as the site of politics and social control, showing how power relations—domination, subordination, oppression, resistance— are inscribed onto the body. The play *Anowa* demonstrates the society's inscription of power onto the bodies of Anowa and Kofi in several ways. Firstly, power is exerted through naming and designation. Anowa is referred to as "a child of several incarnations" (ibid., p. 67). She is "a born priestess" (ibid., p. 68) whose vocation is pre-selected for her. These forms of identification reveal the social and spiritual imperatives that Anowa is expected to embrace. She is to become a "dancer priestess" (ibid., p. 71) who counsels with spirits (ibid., p. 72) and must not turn into "a prophet with a locked mouth" (ibid., p. 73). It is repeatedly emphasized that "from a very small age, she had the hot eyes and nimble feet of one born to dance for the gods" (ibid., p. 80). Her body gets inscribed with these cultural practices and societal imperatives. These scenarios elaborate theorist Roach's formulation of "the construction of collective memory out of genealogies of performance" (1996, p. 194). Drawing on Roach, the assertion of power is demonstrated through the performance genealogy of priesthood and the bond to one's spiritual call. As a priestess, Anowa surrogates the gods

as their intermediary.

The body of certain individuals, according to Roach (1996) and Girard (1977), performs and signifies the values of religious practice. These individuals are the effigies (Roach, 1996), and act as the monstrous double or sacrificial surrogate victim (Girard, 1977) onto whom the society projects structural and religious violence. The function of these surrogate actors includes the responsibility to forewarn the community about imminent dangers, such as that of incorporating "strangers in [their] midst", and being sacrificed in order to restore harmony in the case of a breach between the living, the dead, and the ancestors. This is the understanding of the politics of the body in African religious performance, according to African cosmology theorist and playwright Wole Soyinka. The body of the tragic hero in Yoruba drama, according to Soyinka, energizes the "abyss of the re-creative energies" (Soyinka, 1976, p. 31); and gets sacrificed in order to restore the cultural order. Hence the punishment that Anowa incurs when she attempts to refuse her spiritual assignment. Her desire to assert her agency by breaking away with these repressive traditions gets trampled upon by the communal act of restoring her remains to her home. To borrow from Foucault, her father, mother, and the rest of the community dramatize the economy of the power to restore her and her husband to their home and origins. The drama of *Anowa* thus stages the unequal power relations between the body of the individual and the social body, in the Foucauldian sense (1977, 1995). Acting to enforce the spiritual forces of this religiously-imagined community (Anderson, 1983), the family violates Anowa by disregarding her choice—to gain a sense of self-actualization—and putting the pressure on her to embody their sense of cultural continuity and identification. The act of retrieving her and Kofi's bodies and taking them back home is a cultural technique of restoring order. To echo Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, it elaborates cultural technologies of power that sustain the imagined linkage between the individual and the land from which they originated. For the autochthon, the drama implies, return to the land of origin is inevitable.

Power is also inscribed onto Anowa's body through the attempt to control her relations. Her mother attempts to dictate to her whom she must marry, thereby attempting to maintain notions of purity. She takes issue with the fact that Anowa wants to marry "this fool, this good-for-nothing cassava man, this watery male of all watery males" (Aidoo, 1965, p. 74). Badua would rather her daughter "take Her place at meetings/ Among the men and women of the clan /And sit on [her] chair when [she is] gone". She believes "a captainship in the army/ Should not be beyond her/ When the time is ripe!" (ibid., p. 72). Badua's retorts signal ideas of social status and hence point towards the family's or clan's notions of purity. The rest of the community also seeks to curtail Anowa's movements by insisting that if she abandons her vocation as priestess, she will come back humiliated and disgraced. Members of the community thus invoke cultural memory, mythic imaginings, and the construct of the headstrong, disobedient daughter to exert power on Anowa.

Yet the body, in accordance with Foucault, and Gilbert and Tompkins, is also the site for possible re-inscriptions of power and creativity. This is what enables characters and/or social actors to express themselves creatively and to reconstruct their identity. In the current play under investigation, Anowa re-inscribes her body with the power to choose her marriage partner. As Wumi Raji correctly observes, Anowa resists masculinist tyranny by "kicking against the established marital procedure of her society by insisting on the right to choose her own man" (Raji, 2011, p. 503) and by "forcing a revision of the received pattern of relationships in marriage where the man is dominant and the woman the dominated" (Raji, 2011, p. 517). She also chooses her lifepath and ending, as seen in the way she subverts the impositions of priestess-hood and autochthony. Granted, her ending is tragic, and, like the headstrong daughter archetype, she is disgraced and returned. But it is on her terms. The family repatriates her bodily remains, but not her unconquerable spirit. She has arguably set herself free at sea. Her power is enacted through breaking with the past; a past which is normalized and constructed as singularly uniform and inevitable. She challenges the rootedness of the cultural aesthetic of returning to the source from which she supposedly sprung. The sea—and not the earth—becomes the site that sustains the currency of the memories about who she is, was, and shall always be. In a fascinating twist of fate, she joins those from the past who died during the Middle Passage and were connected to the sea as their burial-ground. Anowa thus embodies a new sense of consciousness and collective identification with those Africans who were displaced from the continent and were lost to the sea during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade movement.

Arguably, Anowa confronts and reconciles with the fear that characterizes the nightmare about the big woman, the boiling sea, men, women, and children spewing out of Anowa's body, and giant lobsters thrown out of the steaming sea. The nightmare signifies the experiences of the slave trade, especially the exploitation of other bodies. The surrealist imagery of the consumption of bodies by other bodies is simultaneously an act of cultural memorialization and politicized self-determination. As Gibbs correctly observes, "linking the nightmare with an account of slavery enables Aidoo to provide an element of psychological consistency, an 'explanation' for Anowa's intense unhappiness when her husband, Kofi Ako, starts buying human beings" (Gibbs, 2012, p. 280). The nightmare that Anowa has is a metaphor for the historical moment of rupture that the Atlantic Slave Trade engendered. The sea, as the site of trauma for those who were captured, sold, and buried, animates the psychological inscriptions that mark Anowa's attitude towards slavery and the remembered nightmare. The act of drowning herself in the sea is therefore a compelling act that seals her mental, physical, and ideological trajectories. She has gone full circle to connect with the site of trauma, and consequently transforms it to a welcoming site for her act of self-determination. This reading becomes pertinent when linked to the "voices of the unseen wearied multitude [who] begin to sing 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot'" (Aidoo, 1965, p. 107); a sonic act that is reminiscent of the so-called

"Negro Spirituals" whose lyrics echoed the Black people's desire to escape from Slavery. The voices re-inscribe the desire for freedom onto an oppressed body, here echoing Anowa's body which is trapped in an oppressive vocation and marriage. Ama Ata Aidoo's juxtaposition of the "negro spiritual" and the revivified scenario of slavery and dying in the sea underscore acts of freedom and desire for self-expression.

4. Feminist Resistance and Routes of Freedom

Anowa's tragic ending seems to underscore the perspective that traditional womanhood and its structures of oppression are inescapable and immutable. This choice in scripting has prompted scholars such as Owen Seda to argue that Aidoo's oeuvre exudes an ambivalent attitude towards female emancipation (Seda, 2016, p. 35). Seda asks a critical question, "to what extent has African women's writing, especially that written from a feminist perspective, made an effort and succeeded in refuting the long-standing subordination of women?" (Seda, 2016, p. 35). By scripting a drama that is characterized by ambivalence towards female social mobility, a drama that casts failed "trajectories of border-crossing" by female figures (Yan, 2002, p. 246), the play recedes into a regressive narrative that is at odds with the search for a sense of female self-actualization. Within the world of accumulation, enslavement, and exploitation that Kofi occupies, Anowa feels displaced. "What is the difference between any of your men and me?" (Aidoo, 1965, p. 97) she asks Kofi. "None of us belongs", she elaborates, highlighting the sense of loss and displacement experienced by herself and the slaves. "I am only a wayfarer, with no belonging either here or there" (ibid., p. 96). "A wayfarer is a traveller. Therefore, to call someone a wayfarer is a painless way of saying he does not belong. That he has no home, no family, no village, no stool of his own; has no feast days, no holidays, no state, no territory" (ibid., p. 97). The condition of displacement elaborates Anowa as a female wayfarer who is perpetually launched into a space of statelessness and non-belonging. Having left her town as an estranged, disobedient daughter, she remains uprooted and unrooted; never quite belonging anywhere. The wayward Yebian girl eventually reconciles with the condition of traditional womanhood whose sense of self-actualization is framed through notions of wifehood and motherhood. "Someone should have taught me how to grow up to be a woman" (ibid., p. 112), she laments.

> ANOWA: You cannot send me away like this. Not to Yebi, or anywhere. Not before you have told me why. I swore to Mother I was not returning. Not ever ... No, I am not in rags. But ... but I do not have children from this marriage (ibid., p. 121).

Weariness and loneliness propel her down the dark abyss of unfulfillment. We read from the stage directions that she "begins to address the furniture", and "fixes her eyes on the gilded chair", and "jumps a step or two and sits in it and begins to dangle her legs like a child, with a delighted grin on her

face. She breaks into a giggle" (ibid., p. 122). The description befits Old Man's summation of her as the "unfortunate Anowa" (ibid., p. 67), and Old Woman's prophetic statement that "the gods will surely punish Abena Badua for refusing to let a born priestess dance" (ibid., p. 68). It appears that Anowa's father's fears are becoming real, that Anowa might be "wandering … her soul hovering on the outer fringes of life and always searching for something" (ibid., p. 93). The thoughts by Old Man, Old Woman, and Osam express the cultural expectations imposed on women, that is, to get married, have children, and/or serve the clan in vocations that maintain orderliness and continuity in the community and overall cosmos. These are reminiscent of the prescriptions that were imposed on the character of Eulalie in the other play by Ama Ata Aidoo, *The dilemma of a ghost* (1965). Eulalie was equally alienated from the clan for apparent barrenness and for focusing too much on modern machines that resonated with the commercial culture of the West. The staging of both Anowa and Eulalie point to the repressive norms and cultural practices that curtail female progression and acts of self-determination.

5. Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated how the ideology and practice of autochthony can fruitfully be applied to Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*. In the play, Aidoo re-affirms African beliefs and practices about roots, routes, origins, and autochthony. Even though she appears to be ambivalent about whether or not progress, advancement, and identity are tied to place, she seems to echo—through tropes of mobility, border-crossing, and cultural consciousness—the notion that the modern African mobile subject cannot erase the roots and memories that are inscribed on their bodies. This essay asserts that for the modern (African) mobile subject to progress, they must consider the two parallel orders of African spirituality and the global neoliberal capitalism. Given its cultural rootedness and the dramatic re-enactments of history, within the play *Anowa,* the ideological and the aesthetic converge (Roach, 1996). The play demonstrates the significance of conjoining memories of traditional values, and religious practice with individual acts of self-assertion. An alternative power (in the sense of individual agency) can be enacted by creatively navigating the operations of the global neoliberal capitalism, while strategically negotiating the impositions and processes of the metaphysical and/or spiritual.

Most importantly, the essay discussed the various ways through which the characters mobilize the notion of autochthony and the idea of origins. A pertinent example is the nightmare that Anowa experiences, that poignantly re-articulates the traumatic experiences of rupture, dislocation, and trauma, as discussed. In addition, the nightmare signifies the inscription of cultural memory on the origins of the African body. Considering the etymology of the word autochthony as one who "sprung from the earth", the denizens of *Anowa* are presumably "earth-born". This myth resonates with other myths of origin, such as that one is "born out of a womb of a woman" (Aidoo, 1965,

p. 17). These two imageries are warm, loving and/or welcoming metaphors, compared to the nasty, negative, and sinister metaphor used for the origin of the White "strangers in our midst", specifically the giant, monstrous lobsters thrown out of a boiling hot and steaming sea, as visualized through Anowa's dream. The imagery of being thrown up or thrown out of the sea is rather unpleasant, though widely used and considered a benign connotation. Such a metaphor, together with other cultural imaginings of origin, return, and identity construction demand further interrogation.

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