ABSTRACT

AMA ATA AIDOO’S ANOWA: PERFORMATIVE PRACTICE AND THE POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECT

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This critical analysis asserts that the play Anowa is a critique of the ideologies imposed upon the African postcolonial subject. Chapter one is a dramaturgical exploration of the position of oral literature in the perpetuation of the Akan cultural myth through exposure of specific gender discrepancies inherent within its form, and examination of its influence in the creation of modern Ghana whose social and political environment is the inspiration for Aidoo’s work. Chapter two, a literary analysis, positions Aidoo’s construction of Anowa as a performative critique that dismantles the myth of the Akan gendered identity supported through indigenous oral literature, and perpetuated in West African written works, which, in cooperation with colonial indoctrination, entraps the African subject (Anowa). Chapter Three offers a critical analysis of the themes, symbolism, and performative results manifested through the direction and design of the Miami University production of Anowa, which served as the writer’s directing thesis.
AMA ATA AIDOO’S ANOWA:
PERFORMATIVE PRACTICE AND THE POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECT

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Dr. Paul K. Jackson, whose passion for performance (and life) has inspired me as a scholar and an artist to see beyond the obvious, and to dig into those not so pretty places to seek the truths inside all facets of performance, whether it is theater, music, dance, culture, politics, and finally… myself. Thank You!
INTRODUCTION

West African women writers are confronted with specific challenges in their quest for critical and popular acceptance. The hegemonic structures that control literary circulation provide resistant barriers for all women as cultural producers. In Western societies women have begun to break the barriers of male exclusivity in literature with the creation of woman-centered discourses, and literary independence through publishers catered towards distributing works by women. Furthermore, a critical pool has developed within these discourses that are committed to the preservation of these works. Unfortunately, in West African communities women’s production in the realm of literature is thwarted by the combination of neocolonialist attitudes towards women’s roles as well as the inability for West African countries to gain self-sufficiency. The dependence upon colonial systems of thought and control is evident in the realm of literature. The limited West African women writers who excel in the recent adopted forms of literary expression are hesitantly accepted into the postcolonial literary circle that is by and large exclusive to men.

Creative literature published by African writers in colonial languages began to gain prominence in the second half of the twentieth century as a result of a resurgent cultural and political nationalism fueled by the international Pan-African movement. While it has been noted that women sometimes shared recognition as griots within the medium of oral literature, early colonial education was offered almost exclusively to African males, therefore excluding African women from the training that enabled them to succeed in the colonial linguistic form.

Images of the African woman in writings pioneered by early West African male writers tended to include marginal female characters who were submerged in the lives of a central male character or who were deviant and acting in petty gossip to the detriment of their household or community. Negritude, the major literary device of the Pan-African movement, further handicapped the position of women within in the West African postcolonial milieu. In the works of the major Negritude writers and critics, femininity

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and womanhood were mythologized through images of Africa as mother, and reinforced with the ill-constructed ideal African woman who was a supportive and unquestioning mother, wife, sister, and daughter yielding to the African male’s judgment.

Post-independent West Africa gave rise to the limited, rarely recognized, and critically condemned female voice. The chosen few African women writers who were granted a colonial education, acquired their critical voice in response to the inadequate illustrations of the African woman in the writings of the newly published African (male) elite. The literary works of these new women were synonymous to the work of their male colleagues in that they offered a critique of the encroachment of colonial values on the African colonized subject. However their writings expounded upon the issues facing the colonial subject by expressing the disparities in the treatment of women and children during the pre-colonial/colonial period and the increasing subjugation of women by the merging of the contrasting cultures.

These writers served as early feminist critics of the society in which they were submerged by choosing to expose the unrealistic and deterrent images of women. Although they were not recognized as critical scholars, nor did they profess to be such, their writings served a dual purpose in this period of analytical insufficiency. Carol Boyce Davies offers a definition of the quest of the African feminist critic in the following passage:

…African feminist critics seek to make writers conscious of unrelenting, uniformly, undesirable stereotypes and other short comings in female portraiture. Included here also is making visible the “invisible woman”, or audible, the mute, voiceless woman, the woman who exists only as tangential to man and his problems. Additionally it explores the idealization of women and motherhood in the Negritude vein-woman as super mother, symbol of Africa, Earth as muse, how this supports or distorts the creation of a female mythos and how it conforms to the realities of women’s lives. (15)

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3 Early published West African women writers include among Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Grace Ogot, and Efua Sutherland.
In the absence of a formalized critical theory, early West African women writers served as African feminist critics highlighting specific concerns that women faced in addition to those already recognized in the postcolonial genre. In many of the texts readers are confronted by unifying themes such as: (1) The struggle for self-definition in a society that has inflexible expectations of women; (2) Contradictions of motherhood-issues of barrenness, and mother/child relationships; (3) The struggle for economic independence in the evolving neocolonial culture that granted women less power; (4) Issues of monogamy and polygamy; (5) Divisions of Power- who has it, how do you get it, and how it is expressed? These themes are unmistakable in early-published writings by West African women and are continually prevalent in contemporary works. Their critical importance had not been acknowledged until the past twenty years, due to the neglect of early major literary theorists who employed a male subject centered analysis.

The first African woman to publish in a colonial language in this era was Christina Ama Ata Aidoo (1940), whose work *Anowa* (1970) is the subject of this thesis. Ama Ata Aidoo received initial acclaim as a postcolonial playwright. Her dramas, novels, and essays have recently been integrated into the passionate discourse among various critical circles in the Western hemisphere. However, in her native country of Ghana and within the English/European postcolonial discourse, she remains not much more than a one-line reference in many scholarly works on postcolonial texts and authors. It is important to note that Aidoo’s early works were dramas and short stories, which has resulted in her recognition often being overshadowed by other West-African women novelists of the time.4

Ama Ata Aidoo was born in the central region of Ghana during the heightened fight for independence. Aidoo was raised within the comprador class of the Fanti, the coastal Akan speaking people, who first befriended European settlers while serving as traders and as liaisons between them and other ethnic groups. Her father, host to dignitaries and intellectuals of the Pan-African and other nationalist groups, exposed

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4 Some persons argue that Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966) is the first novel written by an African woman, which recognizes the literary hierarchy evident in critical discourse.
Aidoo to various and contrasting ideas. And, unlike most Akan women, Aidoo was sent to school based on the belief shared by her father with and other Ghanaian elite that “to educate a woman was to educate a whole nation.” (Odamtten 10)

Several factors influenced Aidoo’s written craft that merged traditional orality with the Oxbridge model, the British form taught in the Ghanaian classroom. As a student at the University of Ghana, Aidoo’s mentor was Efua Sutherland, playwright and founder of Ghana’s Drama Studio. Sutherland, a pioneer in championing Ghanaian culture and utilizing Ghanaian traditional forms of storytelling and folklore in her dramatic works, “reinforced Aidoo’s commitment to the effective and radical use of traditional oral forms and strategies in her works” (Odamtten 10). The second was Aidoo’s advocacy for Pan-Africanist and socialist ideas championed by Ghana’s first president Kwame Nkrumah and her father, which she developed further as a research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at the University.

In this developmental stage Aidoo wrote her first dramatic work, Dilemma of a Ghost, produced at the University of Ghana in 1964, and published the following year. Dilemma received harsh responses from European critics despite its popularity in Accra, Lagos, and Ibadan. (Odamtten 14) Aidoo’s incorporation of a traditional Ghanaian aesthetic into a western conventional format led many Western critics to label the play as an inferior text. More importantly, Dilemma of a Ghost was successful within the West African community due to its engaging dramatization of the complexities affecting the postcolonial Ghanaian family.

Dilemma tells the story of Ato Yawson. Yawson is a been-to (one who has been educated in Europe or America) who has returned from the United States to his traditional maternal community. The problem/conflict arises when we discover that Ato has married an educated, African-American woman, Eulalie, without his family’s knowledge, while simultaneously refusing to orient Eulalie in the social traditions and

6 Oxbridge is a term used to denote the learning style championed at Oxford and Cambridge University in England, and adopted as an educational structure within most international universities built during the British colonial regime.
expectations of his community. Cultures collide when the women in the play confront preconceived notions about what it means to be African/African-American.

*Anowa* (1970), Aidoo’s second work, and the subject of this thesis, was not produced for many years after it was published. The drama surrounds the story of a young Fanti woman who, six years after her puberty, remains unmarried after refusing all of the suitors proposed by her family. Much to her parent’s dismay, she chooses a young man, Kofi Ako, who has a reputation for indolence. Upon marriage, Anowa and Kofi are forced to leave their village of Yebi amidst ridicule by the townspeople, spearheaded by Anowa’s mother. They undertake the positions of nomadic traders dealing in skins. The major conflict begins when the couple, childless after several years of marriage, disagrees upon the ownership of slaves. The assumption amongst the community and couple is that Anowa is barren. Their rift widens, as Kofi becomes the richest man in all of West Africa upon the backs of enslaved men, women, and children. Anowa assumes Kofi’s choice is a substitution for their childlessness. She repeatedly insists that Kofi take another wife who is able to reproduce as an alternative to indentured servitude. Finally, Anowa’s predetermined gift of sight reveals that their childlessness is due to Kofi’s greed, which has replaced his virility. Upon the community’s discovery of Anowa’s realization, Kofi in disgrace shoots himself.

Aidoo offers two possible conclusions for Anowa. First, after Kofi’s suicide, the play ends with Anowa in a state of insanity, laughing on Kofi’s throne. In the optional additional ending, the community members and Anowa’s parents grieve while the Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-and Pepper, the narrators, elders, and voice of the community, lament over the death of Kofi and Anowa who has also committed suicide, by drowning herself. The inclusion of optional endings signifies upon a traditional literary form of expression, the dilemma tale. This common form of oral literature within West African culture is used as a technique of intellectual rearing. It is employed to broaden the minds of individuals, but traditionally it rarely disrupts the dominant ideology of the community. Rather, it serves to enhance the ethical and moral consciousness embedded in the folktale and proverb.

Aidoo’s choice to structure Anowa as a dilemma tale serves two purposes. First, it employs a traditional African tool of intellectual interrogation to illustrate the
ambiguity of African colonial/postcolonial subjectivity. This decision also strategically disrupts notions of orality such as the creation myth, the folktale, and the proverb, therefore interrogating the performative nature of oral literature in the Akan social milieu. Traditionally, oral literature is gendered in such a way that it affirms man within his fallibility while denigrating women for the same human characteristics. It further advocates an ideal African performance of womanhood that is ultimately unattainable. Its indeterminate origin and supposed infinite presence in the community makes oral literature a major tool for the creation of myth and community.

In the first chapter of this thesis I will explore the position of oral literature in the perpetuation of the Akan cultural myth with the express purpose of exposing specific gender discrepancies inherent within its form. These gendered myths were highly influential in the creation of a modern nation-state of Ghana whose social and political environment is the major inspiration for Aidoo’s work. Following this survey, in chapter two, I will position Aidoo’s construction of *Anowa* as a performative critique that dismantles the myth of the Akan gendered identity supported through indigenous oral literature and perpetuated in West African written works. Aidoo argues that gendered myth, fashioned through a cooperation of traditional orality and colonial indoctrination, entraps the African woman, represented as Anowa, in an inescapable prison. In Chapter Three, I will offer a critical analysis of the themes, symbolism, and performative results manifested in the Miami University production of *Anowa*, which served as my directing thesis.
CHAPTER ONE

Oral Literature and Cultural Nationalism

I had sensed vaguely as a child living among adult females that everything that had
to do exclusively with being a woman was regarded as being dirty or definitely setting
them apart in some uncomplimentary way or another.

A girl’s first menstrual flow was celebrated after a whole week of confinement.

We know now that the “celebration” was really a subtle broadcasting of the fact that
she was ready for procreation, and interested parties could start thinking of coming
forward to bid to be partners in that holy enterprise.

And once you, the young man, had been bold enough to go forward and take her off
her mother’s back, you could also take it for granted, you had acquired

A sexual aid;
A wet nurse and a
Nursemid for your children;
A cook-steward and
A general housekeeper;
A listening-post;
An economic and general consultant;
A field–hand and,
If you are that way inclined,
A punch-ball. Aidoo Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves

The form of dramaturgical research and analysis provided in this chapter gives an
opportunity for the reader/spectator to evaluate Anowa, the dramatic work, as a product
of its indigenous culture. The implied dilemma in Anowa, involves the entanglement of
traditional and colonial culture within the Akan community at large, and its effect upon
the woman as subject. This play not only serves as a critique of the encroachment of
Western influence upon Ghanaian identity, but also an acknowledgement of the
negotiation of the Akan feminine identity by men who benefited from colonial exchange.
In her essay, “Decolonizing Culture: Towards a Theory For Postcolonial Women’s
Texts”, Ketu Katrak recognizes oral literature as a sight of ambiguity within the West
African culture. In the following quote she notes how women writers have used oral
techniques as a form of commentary:
The use of oral traditions itself is a tactical strategy in the decolonization process. Women writers have played a significant role in the use of traditional forms and in radically revising literary forms such as the novel, short story and drama that assume new forms in the postcolonial historical time and space – the basis, for instance, of oral testimony, for a modern, written drama; the use of proverbs, riddles, historical facts for a modern, written novel. (172-173)

Ultimately, by employing the dilemma tale structure to subvert traditional oral practices, Aidoo comments upon the imposition of oral forms upon the African social character, specifically in relation to African women. Therefore I find it necessary to offer and in-depth survey of the forms of oral expression prevalent in Anowa as well as an exploration of the ethnic, social, and political influences of the time in which Anowa, the character, and Aidoo are subjects. This exploration reveals that Aidoo’s choice to set this play almost a century before it is written poignantly exposes the fallacy of progress in the life of the modern African woman.

**Akan Double Descent: A Matrilineal Masquerade**

In the traditional Akan social milieu the gendered identity functioned in a more complex form than in most West African societies that were strictly patriarchal. The model of the double descent Akan matrilineal system is particularly intricate, but is fundamental to understanding specific power yielded to women. In this section I will offer an examination of double descent in relation to the Akan/Fanti communal structure, which illuminates the expectations and positions of women in the world of Aidoo and Anowa.

Oral histories of Akan speaking peoples illustrate the Akan migration from northern regions. There are accounts of the Akan traveling south from Mesopotamia into Africa. The early kingdom of Ghana existed between the eighth and eleventh century between the Senegal and Niger rivers on what is now western Mali and southern Mauritania, but it is doubtful that the Akan existed in this area. Twi, the language of the Akan, is currently spoken mostly along the west coast of Africa from southeastern Côte d'Ivoire across southern Ghana, Togo, Benin, and on to southwestern Nigeria. The Fante, the ethnic group that Aidoo and Anowa belong to, were said to have migrated out from
what is now the Ashanti region in modern Ghana to their present coastal habitat in the 13th or 14th century.

The social system of the Akan begins with the smallest unit and evolves as follows: family, clan, tribe, ethnic group, the city-state, and culminates in the nation. The concept of extended family is paramount, and marriage, at the helm of preservation, unites two clans instead of two individuals. The matrilineal system of inheritance defines it so that a person belongs to the clan of their mother, which is a social group with a common ancestress. Tribes are defined as people of different clan backgrounds who form communities with common languages or dialects of Twi, i.e., Fante, Asante, Akyim, etc. When tribes come together an ethnic group is formed. “An ethnic group has, therefore, been defined as a large aggregate of people in tribes who exhibit a high degree of linguistic and cultural homogeneity, achieved over a long period of interaction.” (Kyeremateng, 15) The Fante are a sub-section of the largest ethnic group in Ghana the Akan. Arguably, the Akan have eight clans, which can exist in different tribes.

Akan view procreation as the mixing of a woman’s blood with the man’s spirit/semen during sexual intercourse. This union ensures the future of ancestral worship. Any marriage that does not beget children is regarded as taboo, and grounds for divorce. At birth, rituals are performed over several days before a child is granted a name. Since the Akan practice a matrilineal social structure, a child belongs to its mother’s family, because of the belief that blood is thicker than water (semen). Descent and kinship exist along matrilineal lines. Authority in practice, resides in the uncle (mother’s brother), however it is the female responsibility to maintain the home and lineage. If she dies or is barren the family becomes extinct. The Father’s contribution of semen is made to account for the Nton system. This patrilineal arrangement states that the semen discharged through the sexual act gives sustenance to the baby. Therefore the children of the father are expected to have his characteristics and share a spiritual bond with him.

There are no specific rites of passage for young men and women once they reach puberty. However, once a young woman has her first menstrual cycle, there are a series of rituals, which her family undertakes followed by a ceremony that announces to the community that she is of childbearing age and she is expected soon after to marry. Marriage among the Akan is considered a union of the two clans, so the members of each
group investigate the background, values, and integrity of the parties in question. Nkyeremateng states:

The woman’s advantage in marriage lay in the point that at the performance of the marriage rite, it was stressed that whatever positive outcome of the marriage, including children, were the entitlements of the woman and her clan, while the husband bore the brunt of all the negative attendants. (73)

This idea becomes intriguing and both revealing to the reader when he later states:

In a matrimonial home the wife was held accountable for the well-being of the husband. If he lived blissfully to a ripe age she took the praise, but if he dies early, especially, under suspicious circumstances she was the first suspect. (83)

In relation to the importance of procreation, if either party dies without having produced children, it is seen as a disgraceful death, and traditionally there are rituals enacted so that the deceased person’s spirit may not walk the earth again.

The traditional religious practices of the Akan vary amongst each group. For the Fanti specifically, their Gods are large in number and correspond to the natural elements of each community. The spiritual and religious path of a child is signified through their father or the Nton system. Nton and Ntoro are associated with lakes, rivers, and the sea. The Nton and Ntoro are regarded as children of the sea and they derive their spirits from them. This idea passes to the idea of the patrilineal Nton arrangement, because the father is said to pass his semen/spirit/ntoro/water, into that of his child. The relationship called Nton and Ntoro in Akan exists between the children of a man and those of his brother. This kind of spiritual relationship exists between the paternal ancestor and is descendents.

Each Nton fares under one of the six sons of Odomankoma, the creator of all things. The Akan world is metaphysical not spiritual, and the sacred state of the Akan is inhabited by humans, ancestors, gods, and spirits. According to E.K. Bruffi, “There is a legendary lore that after creation Odomankoma (Nature) went far into the sky, and left his six sons on earth to take care of man; that if man needed anything he should pass through any of the six sons of God to him.” (10) The six sons are associated with water, and reside in rivers, lakes, and the ocean. Another accounts states that:
He (Odomankoma) manifested his power through a pantheon of gods (abosom) each of which is supposed to exercise authority in some area as a deputy of the Supreme God. Below these gods are lesser spirits (good or evil) that inhabit and animate items like trees, rocks, groves, caves, rivers, or lakes or sea. These gods communicate with people through priests/priestesses who become possessed during which time they answer request, or cast spells on worshippers. (Kkyeremateng 91)

Although it is recognized that women wielded a certain amount of power, that power was strictly tied to being the securer of the future of the lineage, and the supporter and caregiver of her children, husband and brothers. Furthermore, rarely did a woman yield power outside of the private space of the home, unless she occupied the position of queen mother or priestess.

**Oral Literature in the Akan Community**

The moral and ethical consciousness articulated in Akan oral literature functions much in the form of Biblical narratives, instructing the people of the values and deeds exemplary of a good citizen, while warning them of the consequence of sinful acts. The practice of elders, healers, professional storytellers, parents, and community and government officials utilizing various forms of orality to reinforce or reprimand the character of subjects of all ages further instills the comparison of the oral expression to holy-writ.

Aidoo makes reference to the plight of Fanti women in her essay “Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves,” from which the epitaph at the beginning of the chapter is taken. It is not only from experience and the talk of the woman in the village that Aidoo learned of these prescribed roles for women. It is weaved into the Akan/Ghanaian cultural fabric. In her dedication to *Anowa*, Aidoo states: “To Aunt Abasema, who told a story a sang a song.” Aunt Abasema is Aidoo’s mother who told her the disobedient daughter tale often. Aidoo’s *Anowa* is a significant twist upon the theme.

Oral literature exists in a myriad of forms. It has been used to explain the origin of the universe and man, to assert nationalistic or patriotic feelings, to create a space for all beings in the communal structure be it central or liminal, and to socially condemn
subjects that do not fulfill these strictly prescribed roles. In essence, oral literature serves to conceive, create, and codify the myth, which a culture stands upon. This myth which has been termed a “cultural model, expressing the way in which man wants to shape and reshape the civilization that he himself has made.”

The unquestioned origin of many myths applied in orally based societies perpetuates a belief of universal truth. However, the various examples and treatments of the same folktale, dilemma tale, and proverb, etc. speak first to the elusive truth of the narrative, and second to the danger that occurs upon the scripting of these stories for an outside audience. The examination of the subject position of the speaker/writer is imperative to the notion of engendered cultural myths. In his work, *African Oral Literature*, Isidore Okpewho, notes several occasions in which a well-known folktale was documented for collection. In each situation, the story varied strongly based upon the social demographic, cultural/economic standing, and disposition of the storyteller/performer. This revelation is significant when one begins to deconstruct the supposed objectivity of written fictional and non-fictional accounts of cultural and community.

One must also recognize that contemporary scholars are reinserting the woman into oral literal history, with the recognition that ethnographers of the colonial period bore their own preconceived assumptions of gender which heavily influenced not only the racialized documentation of African culture, but also affected their choice to only interact as well as conduct business with males. In her work, *Womanism and African Consciousness*, Mary E. Modupe Kolawole devotes a chapter to examining the erasure of women as producers of oral literature. In the following passage she discusses some overlooked forms in the Akan community from which Aidoo constructs her works:

> Akan story-telling with the famous intricate weaving of Anansi’s web of stories is elderly women’s domain. In addition, queen mothers interpret the rich poetry encapsulated in drum language. Women move from the original communal structure by adapting the oral genre to women’s needs.

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Women use oral literature and exclusive female genres to condemn and social problems, immorality, unfaithfulness and idleness—and to make demands. (77)

Works like Kolawole’s that examine the position of women as producers of oral literature are rare. Unlike Kolawole, many writers and critics have sought to attack the prevalent negative images rather than offer examples of the limited alternatives that exist.

In her work, *Daughters of Anowa*, Mercy Amba Oduoye\(^\text{10}\) examines the nature of what she calls “folktalk” and its implications on the life of the West-African woman, mainly of Akan and Yoruba descent. Oduoye defines folktalk as the myths and folktales prevalent in the West African oral culture. She distinguishes folktalk from the esoteric nature of proverbs stating that “the very drama of folktales and myths being passed from one generation to another makes them memorable.” (19) Oduoye like Aidoo validates her Akan heritage as a viable perspective in her inquisition of the influence of oral literature on women. She stresses personal experience as the origin of her critical analysis. She argues for the influence of folktalk on modern African life in the following passage:

> When folktalk is about the origin of the earth, of people, of animals, and other aspects of nature, and of social institutions, what some call myth could be called folktales or even legends by others. Folktalk as such, has general currency in Africa. Myths and folktales shaped and continue to shape social relations, even under modern political systems. (19)

Following this quote, Oduoye questions the location of orality as a device in the development of modern gendered norms. Recognized by many as devices to instruct, folktales are described as, “an effective educational tool, if not a yardstick, for rise to adulthood on the right foot. Story-telling…helps children to sharpen their intellectual facilities and also grow up to be responsible members of the society.” (Asihene ii) This ideology stresses that good social character functions to preserve the communal identity, read, folktales and proverbs also serve to express disdain at individual expression.

Oral literature is paramount in expressing the ways in which man and woman can express their roles. Anowa is replete with references to oral forms and myths that are integral to the development of the gendered identity. Aidoo recognizes that the prevalent oral literature that represents the African woman in a positive or constructive role depicts the woman as mother, wife, sister, or daughter in support of an autonomous male subject or male centered communal structure. She is even more aware of the negative depictions passed down in oral forms. She interrogates these assumptions throughout *Anowa*. Below I will survey three forms of oral literature represented in *Anowa*, creation myths, folktales, and proverbs. Additionally I will analyze their depiction of women, and treatment of male and female relationships.

**Creation Myths**

Akan creation myths vary greatly, and in rare documentation is the creator referred to as a woman. In certain creation myths, the Akan creator, functioning under various names such as Onyame/Nyame, Onyankapon/Nyankapon, and Odomankoma, is said to have two daughters Asaase Afua, the earth goddess of fertility and procreation and Asaase Yaa, also known as Aberewa, goddess of barren places on the earth. The two daughters function in this creation myth to show the two kinds of woman/earth, she/that who is fertile and can produce goods for prosperity, and she/that who cannot, and must bear the brunt of hardship. It is also written in some cases that Nyame also has two sons, an obedient one who is given the fertile land to prosper and a disobedient one who is force to till the barren unforgiving land. In other versions, Asaase Yaa and Nyame exist equally and are worshipped as supreme Gods autonomous of one another. Nyame is still regarded as the ruler of the heavens, whereas Asaase Yaa is praised as the keeper of earth and material things.

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11 These metaphors serve to instruct young male and female community members from a very young age of the benefits of obedience. Note that when the young man’s actions determine his accruements including the kind of woman he will live his life with.

12 Significantly however, this second form exists more in the Ashanti tradition where the queen mother shares as much power as the Asantehene and has as much say in affairs as does the paramount chief. However, the actual existence of queen mothers who have power in the affairs of the state and other autonomous women are extremely rare, as stated earlier and most women are regulated by the expectations of their clan and home.
Folktales

From a very young age folktales are the most common form of social education for children along with physical competition and coordination games. The most commonly known form of the folktale in Akan oral literature is called *Anansesem* (Ananse’s tales). The very nature of the Ananse stories establishes patriarchal underpinnings in the Akan cultural cosmology. Anansesem dominates the Akan cultural landscape and “[are] used to validate culture by justifying ritual and institutions, it also functioned to educate the youth into accepting established patterns of behavior, that is, social and moral.” (Kyeremateng 88)

The eminence of Anansesem in the Akan culture is further exemplified by the symbol of Ananse as a trickster. In variations of the origin of these tales, folktales originally belonged to God (Nyankopon/Onyakopon) and they were called Nyankosem or God’s tales. With his wits, Ananse the spider-man succeeds in acquiring the tales from God. In some cases Ananse utilizes the help of his wife and mother, in other renditions he does not. In all instances God, impressed by Ananse’s wit and cunning, willing surrenders his stories to Ananse to be dispersed throughout the world. In the majority of the tales, Ananse uses means of trickery and deception. In limited cases he is punished for his actions, but in the majority of these stories his wit is lauded as ingenious. Anansesem are full of stories where Ananse confers on the same level with Nyame, or outwits other men or animals to win his daughter. This transfer of power from God to man who uses trickery as a tool for his aggrandizement is rather ironic in relation to similar characteristics negatively attributed to the women in these tales, who then end up serving as the victims or pawns at the hands of Ananse’s deceit.

Robert Pelton in his text, *The Trickster in West Africa*, explores two Ananse tales which I will summarize: In the first story Nyame (God) offers his ninth daughter to the man who can clear his garden that has become overgrown with nettles, without scratching from the sting of the nettles. Ananse succeeds by picking the garden and masking his scratching in gestures of praise of the women walking by. When Nyame’s

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daughter finds out, Ananse’s scheme she plans to tell her father. Ananse asks that the secret remain a “sleeping-mat confidence”. Upon her refusal he pours water his wife while she is sleeping and accuses her of wetting herself, which he will make public. When she asks him not to press the situation, he forces her to keep his secret also, thus ending with the moral, “sleeping mat confidences are not repeated.”

In the second story Ananse is a gardener and his wife Aso will not help him clear the ground, remove weeds, or plant the seed, stating that “a women ‘taboos’ these things,” although at harvest time she is willing to help reap the harvest. Ananse digs a hole into which he puts the harvest. He tells his wife he will die in eight days and is buried with the harvest. After mourning for eight days Aso goes to find the crops gone, and curses her robbers, and Ananse calls up from the grave telling her to stop complaining for he has only eaten what is his own. Thus lies the two morals, “For ever since the Creator created, never was there a woman who did not help her husband” and “When anyone at all is engaged on any work and he asks you, help him.” (Pelton 38-40)

The previous passages are notable when one understands that the “anyone at all”, is relegated to man. It is against custom for Akan men to embark upon female affairs, yet the summary of both tales tell you that not only must the woman follow her man in his wishes, taking on his work and her own to survive, but also that the goings on of their relationship remain exclusive to the private domestic domain and she has no right to express her discontent outside of that space. Pelton recognizes the use of the Ananse tales to shape the Akan cultural myth and categorize the gender roles in the society. In his summary of the societal influence of Anansesem he offers the following astute commentary:

Now in these stories Ananse shapes human society in several ways. He socializes the earth through farming; he establishes both the inner intimacy and the outer socioeconomic working of marriage; he likens the sharing of work to the creation of life; and he domesticates the force that males persist in seeing as the vastest, most threatening, most essential irruption of nature into culture—woman herself. On the one hand he joins together the institutions of the market, agriculture, and marriage, and on the other, he separates the marriage bed from the claims of lineage and
jurisprudence. Similarly, he restores harmony that Nyame intended to exist between a husband and wife in their daily work, and indeed becomes a model for social cooperation. Yet in all these things the force that moves him is not obedience, but self-interest. The source of his transforming power is his capacity for deceit. (40)

In contrast, women in many folktales are remonstrated for actions milder and less selfish than those of Ananse. These women, as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters are expected to be supportive silent laborers in relation to their male counterparts. In many folktales a husband’s downfall is at the hand of his wife, who is often ignorant of the pending consequence of her action, thus implying that her deceptive act is an innate response. Currently, thoughts are still expressed among members of the Akan ethnic group, that if a man dies young it is because his wife starved, poisoned, or used witchcraft to kill him. Various folktales instruct the astute young man to never share the secrets of his wealth and good fortune with his wife, because her gossiping, jealousy, or carelessness will destroy the potency of his gift. And if a couple remains childless, it serves as grounds for divorce upon the assumption that the wife is barren. (14)

The folktale most important to this study is the one most commonly referred to as “The Disobedient Daughter” Tale. There are many versions of this folktale in West Africa and other regions of the continent. The theme in this folktale is that girls should not be strong-willed in matters of a spouse or marriage.” (Oduyoye 43) The tale most often involves an independent young woman who will not marry any of the suitors brought forth by the community or her family. While at a remote location, she meets a young stranger or outcast whom she informs her family she will marry. In most cases, at the marriage ceremony or on the wedding night the groom reveals himself to be a dangerous animal or a demon in disguise that kills the young lady and/or her family, causing her clan disgrace.

There are also versions in which the young woman leaves the village with her groom and travels so far away that she loses contact with her parents, and is absent at their funeral. This version is prevalent amongst the Akan where a woman’s displacement

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14 These statements were beliefs shared with me numerous times by men and women of Akan descent while traveling in Ghana, and through informal interviews in the United States.
from her clan is taboo and she is either expected to live in her mother’s compound or nearby. Variations of this tale impress upon young women the correct conduct in relation to love and marriage. It also instills the notion that the young woman’s family is always the best judge of her future and what’s best for the clan.

Proverbs
Aidoo weaves within Anowa the metaphoric and symbolic realm of the proverb. She plays the proverb against itself as she recognizes that its tactic severely limits the communal and universal concept of women. While recognizing the impact of this oral form on the women of the community, it is imperative to again note the function of documentation and dissemination of particularly chosen narratives during colonial and postcolonial times, and its subsequent affect upon the further degradation of the community.

Proverbs suffer greatly under the imperial microscope for several reasons. Once again the indigenous narrator/deliverer of the quotation subjectively influenced the structure and form without question by the ethnographer. Second, proverbs in many cases are related to specific folktales serving as conclusions to them or only evoking true meaning once they are bound to the tale. Third, the translation of a proverb is extremely problematic. In many cases the poetic language, which functions as one of the primary aspects of the proverbs potency, is lost in translation while the proverbs meaning is compromised. Fourth, in an effort of many researchers to conduct a comparative analysis, proverbs as well as other forms of oral literature were diluted or compressed to alleviate seemingly minor differences, which may have illuminated major cultural differences amongst communities.

Proverbs can be defined as “short, popular, oft-used sentences that use plain language to express some practical truth that results from observation. (Oduyoye 55) In reference to many African communities proverbs are often considered male domain. Okpewho states, “In many traditional African societies, older people (especially men) are considered better qualified to use proverbs than other members of the society…” (230) This view may not apply in the Akan community, where the older woman is given a
prime position in the community or clan. In the following chapter I will offer a more in depth analysis of the proverbs in Anowa and their relation to the Akan cultural myth.

**Dilemma Tales**

By far, the most important form of oral literature fundamental to the structure of Anowa is the dilemma tale. Aidoo employs this method, usually exclusively employed in men’s public affairs, to question the foundation of her community and culture. Traditionally dilemma tales were riddles, structured often like conundrums. They point out that in human affairs there are often no simple answers, but only difficult choices. In his book *African Dilemma Tales*, William Bascom states:

[Dilemma tales] are prose narratives that leave the listeners with a choice among alternatives, such as which of several characters has done the best, deserves a reward, or should win an argument or a case in court. The choices are difficult ones and usually involve discrimination on ethical, moral, or legal grounds…The narrator ends his story with the dilemma, often explicitly stated in the form of a question, to be debated by his listeners. (1)

An example of a popular dilemma tale is as follows: Three brothers go on an expedition. In their travels they come across a wise old man who gives them each a gift. The first son receives a magic mirror to see into the future, the second son receives a magic carpet that flies, and the third son receives a potent herb that can restore an ill person to health. Having received the gift the first son looks into the mirror and sees that their father will die the following day. The second son retrieves the magic mat to fly them back to their father, and the third son gives the father the magic elixir that restores his health. Which son has done the greater deed?

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15 It is important to note however, that while young men can attain eminence through their actions and deeds after puberty, most women in the community will not be given the opportunity to gain communal prominence until they are beyond childbearing age, and usually only when they have survived the men of their generation in their clan. This is the only reason in which you will find elder women in the Akan community as bearers of the communities’ narrative and respected storytellers and mothers.

The recognition of the narrator as a subjective facilitator/interpreter is a critical structural component of the traditional dilemma tale. In some instances the narrator, as authority figure and respected member of the community, determines the correct solution, thus performatively situating further assumptions of correct character. Even when the dilemma tale is answered, the conclusion can result in heated debate. Bascom notes:

Their special quality is that they train those who engage in these discussions in the skills of argumentation and debate and thus prepare them for participating effectively in the adjudication of disputes, both within the family lineage and in formal courts of law. (1)

The previous passage underscores the very conundrum of Aidoo writing and publishing a dilemma tale in Ghana in 1965 and 1970. The foundation of the dilemma tale being centered in the debate of legal, social, moral, and ethical affairs silently designated it as men’s domain. This may not need to be said, but it is that which is invisible and unspoken that, when exposed, reveals the truths of the community. In early examination and neglect of Aidoo, her critics took for granted the unquestioned sacred myths of her culture that she interrogates in the writing of Anowa. These myths were being fossilized by indigenists during colonialism, and any critique was recognized as a jab at the already raw nationalistic drive in the community.

**Ghana in Turmoil: Conflicts of The National and Postcolonial Identity**

Post World-War II Gold Coast, soon to be christened Ghana, was fertile ground for change and evolution. This land, which had been subject to European invasion since the 15th century, became fully colonized by the British in 1871. During this brief period of overt control there were steady demands for a change in the social and colonial infrastructure. The Gold Coast economy began to boom during World War II from the production of goods for the war effort, but during and after the war, Ghanaians did not benefit from this wealth. All of these factors led the Gold Coast and other African colonies on the road towards independence.

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17 This factor is especially instrumental in understanding Aidoo’s employment of the Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-And-Pepper. She employs two narrators whom question one another’s wisdom and final say in matters.
Despite the unrest growing amongst the Ghanaian masses, the colonial system was still well entrenched after the war. The British were fortunate to hold their posts due to traditional rulers, local partners and professional classmen who benefited from the colonial lifestyle and trade (Osei 36). It was in this time that the United Cold Coast Convention was inaugurated in 1947. As Ghana’s first political party, The UGCC operated under the British government and pushed for independence in the shortest time possible. The founding members of the UGCC were old members of the youth movements, and the majority of the members were lawyers who sought independence in order for them to gain the power that the British would cede. According to Adu Boahen:

The leadership of this party never changed and it therefore remained as it began, a conservative and moderate bourgeois or elitist movement drawing its support mainly from the traditional rulers and their elder, the professional classes and the disgruntled private businessmen. Indeed the party itself would most probably have remained and essentially elitist or bourgeois urban party but for two events. These were the appointments of Kwame Nkrumah as its General Secretary in December 1947 and the disturbances of 1948. 160

Since the majority of the members of the UGCC were unwilling to give up their posts and practices, they elected Kwame Nkrumah, a young Ghanaian intellectual educated in the US and England, as their general secretary. It was obvious once he arrived in Ghana that his socialist political strategy was perfect for the fight for independence. On his tours rallying for people to join the party, Nkrumah’s gift of speaking coupled with mass knowledge of his humble beginnings endeared him to the masses.

With increased tension and violence between the people and the governing administration, Nkrumah’s popularity began to grow. His growing power and appeal to the masses made the members of the UGCC uncomfortable. They found his ideas and work with masses too radical. This dilemma resulted in the UGCC demoting Nkrumah from general secretary to treasurer, and in 1949 he broke apart and started the Convention People’s Party. The CPP quickly gained followers and became a serious threat to British colonial rule, unlike the UGCC whom seemingly ruffled the feathers of the colonial government just enough to keep the population pacified. The CPP appealed to the
farmers, city workers, teachers, and servicemen who were not included amongst the elite. They staged sit-ins and held rallies, which demanded the government release their rule. The CPP gave the colonial government the ultimatum, “Self Government Now or Positive Action” (Osei 44). In the midst of this unrest the colonial rule allocated a committee that restructured the colonial framework and developed a system that advocated self-government under British rule. During the election of 1951, the CPP won 34 of the 38 seats and 4 went to the UGCC.

“Nkrumah and other leaders…set a fast pace for the economic and social development of the country. These steps convinced the mass of the people more and more of the significance of the CP slogan, ‘Seek ye first political independence, and all other things will be added to it.” (Buah 160) However, the road to independence was long and arduous for Nkrumah and the CPP, largely due to consistent resistance from the UGCC, and other political parties that began to spring up from different ethnic groups and regions throughout the Gold Coast. Another issue that impeded independence was the question of land distribution amongst the colonizers. It was not until March 6, 1957, the anniversary of the signing of the Bond Treaty that the Gold Coast was acknowledged as a sovereign nation, and adopted the name Ghana after the ancient empire in Western Sudan. Nkrumah’s reign as president began with a festive air and ended with a coup in 1966. His achievements have not been surpassed by any subsequent Ghanaian president, and the unrest and political instability in Ghana has been ever present since independence.

From Nkrumah’s position in office in 1951 until 1966 he oversaw several projects that were going to propel Ghana to the status of economic independence. He developed relationships with other African countries and African diasporic groups in hopes to rebuild the Pan-Africanist movement, which would lead to the independence of all African nations and people. On the domestic front he made a vast contribution to the social conditions in Ghana. Nkrumah also made serious advances in the realm of industry and agriculture by establishing the Ministry of Housing and establishing better healthcare for the country.

The largest social growth was in education. Nkrumah instated policies that in the area of education enabled the country to become more independent and since then has
been abolished. The idea was that literacy and education was the key for Ghanaians to prosper in the global economy, and existed as a part of the Accelerated Development Plan of Education which “prepared the ground for the expansion of the third cycle institutions which included the polytechnics, advance teacher training colleges, the universities and schools and institutes for professional training in medicine, law, accountancy, and administration.” (Buah 177) It was under this system that Ama Ata Aidoo was educated. Although in the educational system the ratio of men to women was devastatingly apparent, Aidoo was granted an excellent education because her father, like Nkrumah, and Kwegyir Aggrey, a noted Ghanaian educator and nationalist believed that, “to educate a woman rather than a man was to educate a whole nation.” (Odamtten 12)

The many advances propelled by Nkrumah were halted when he was overthrown by a coup d’etat in 1966. Between 1966 and 1969, Ghana was led by three military regimes until Dr. K. A Busia was inducted as prime minister. Busia was one of Nkrumah’s leading opponents and had fled Ghana in 1959, only returning after Nkrumah was ousted. Busia’s victory at the polls was short-lived, and he lasted in office only three years. Due to corruption in the government the people of Ghana again became and subsequently began to lift up the memory of Kwame Nkrumah. Busia was overthrown in 1972, the same year Nkrumah died of cancer in Rumania where he sought exile, and once again Ghana was positioned under military-police rule with several leaders until the elections of 1979.

The identity of the Ghanaian citizen reflected the instability in government. Like so many other countries affected by colonial boundaries, the ethnic identity of the Ghanaian was rendered utterly ambiguous. Previously unrelated ethnic groups were suffering under the persuasion of the government to release their indigenous identity and create a unified Ghanaian identity, which one had yet been able to identify. Specifically, the Volta Region, which was acquired in the latter days of the British control, felt extremely alienated within the newly independent country. The majority of the varied ethnic groups in the country suffered from a combination of traditional rivalry and newly acquired British haughtiness at the hands of the Akan, whom were the largest ethnic group in Ghana as well as the most culturally assimilated. The Akan who had created a
slow amalgamation of culture were to determine a large amount of the “traditionally Ghanaian” authentic identity.

Although the Akan were the least subjected by the move towards nationalism, it can be argued that Akan women suffered a stronger jolt in the early days of independence, noting that, “Postcolonialism…begins from the very first moment of colonial contact, it is the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being.” (Ashcroft 117) The move towards a reassertion of African autonomy did not include the African woman. This especially affected Akan women, as traditionally matrilineal subjects.
CHAPTER TWO
Anowa, The Forever Displaced Subject

As the main character in the focus of this thesis Anowa is positioned as the quintessential postcolonial subject, a continuously displaced woman who has no safe space to express her alterity. Ama Ata Aidoo specifically employs this tactic by placing Anowa in multiple settings that reap the same disastrous results. This choice to repeatedly change Anowa’s physical whereabouts impresses upon the audience that the alteration of geographical positioning is not enough to rectify a subject’s oppression; there must also be a change in the communal ideology.

Aidoo further illustrates the need for an ideological shift through her construction of Kofi Ako, Anowa’s husband, who leaves their village with Anowa as an outcast and creates his own economically successful community by blending the cultural practices of the traditional Akan and the colonial British. Although Kofi has altered his place in space he, and those around them, have not shifted their communal beliefs and practices. Kofi’s external wealth coupled with his internal destruction become a symbol of the chaos that ensues upon one’s assumption that modernity is the answer to traditional inconsistencies. The initial and alternative lifestyles chosen by Kofi and Anowa fail to mask their inner conflicts; they actually serve to accelerate the path to their inevitable devastation. Furthermore, by marking the multiple ends to this dramatic text tragic for the community-at-large as well as the main characters, Aidoo reinforces the declaration that the ideas and practices of the whole community must change in order for all subjects to be embraced.18

In each section of the play, orality and communal ideology are affirmed and interrogated to illuminate the barricades that Anowa must face throughout her life. The playwright keenly begins this drama after Anowa has reached puberty and rejected the local expectations of performed womanhood; she ends it after Anowa, in consistent refusal to acquiesce, is held responsible for the suicide of her powerful husband and therefore the destruction of the good name of the village. The legend of the disobedient daughter precedes her existence and in the end claims her as one of its own.

18 This idea is a major theme in her first work Dilemma of a Ghost.
Based on the research in chapter one, I am arguing that the combining performative nature of traditional orality, its cultural antecedents, and the encroaching British colonial influence upon Anowa’s community-at-large prevent her from finding a safe geographical space to assert her altermity. This literary analysis assists my directorial research by illuminating the major themes and subtext affecting the world of the play. A clearer understanding of the cultural practices and aesthetic expressions of the characters in specific relation to time and space offer keen insight into the visual images and symbolic metaphors that need to be elevated from the page onto the stage.

In this process of looking backward, Aidoo troubles the current postcolonial African identity that is forced to balance the unequally yoked culture of modernity and tradition leading to a state of ambivalence. Paramount to this study is the African woman who is faced with the complexities of European influence and traditional customs while expected to uphold the fluctuating status of daughter, wife, and mother. Anowa is a woman who has transgressed the boundaries of womanhood through outspokenness and refusal of tradition. When she is presented with the socially predetermined alternatives, such as priesthood or joining the nouveau riche, she rejects those categories also. Ultimately Anowa’s options are so limited that her true disobedience is the refusal to fit inside a circumscribed network.

Although the recurring pattern of shifting from margin to center is paramount in postcolonial/postmodern discourse, I would also argue that the basis of the African, especially Akan community is one of migration and continually shifting centers. Akan history is rooted in the migrations of marginal subjects who sought to make homes in which they could live according to their beliefs without conflict. This understanding disrupts the notion of a universal African identity. Despite the need in nationalist discourse for an ancient and unwavering existence, communities are always in flux; marginal members of established communities seeking to find a peaceful habitat developed most surviving ethnic groups. Through Anowa, Aidoo cites that in most cases the founders of a newly established community continue the practices of marginalization

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19 This is Aidoo’s first and only play set in the nineteenth century, at the height of British occupation.
20 This is part of the reason for the many linguistic sub-groups under the Akan umbrella.
21 This idea of a universal African identity was the basis of Pan-African and Black nationalist thought although each groups beliefs of how to actively incorporate the unity was quite different. The Pan-African model was most (in)famous during Nkrumah’s tenure.
to which they were once subjected. More specifically she asks whether there is a modern community in which a woman can be central.

The troubled journey of this displaced subject is presented by The-Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-And-Pepper, whose function as narrator(s) introduce Anowa’s marginal position early in the play, and are a critical component of this postcolonial dilemma tale. Aidoo presents The Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-And-Pepper as traditional raconteur/narrator, solidifying their position as interpreters of Anowa's experience and well as adjudicators of her value. The symbolism of their name, spices of opposite taste yet equal importance, exposes the tools of interrogation in the dilemma tale. By having two voices of the opposite sex with equally sound opinions and observations, Aidoo impresses the need to rethink notions of power, voice, and agency through this fundamental character that serves as mediator between performance and audience.

**Prologue: A Shifting Community**

The Old Man and Old Woman, The-Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-And-Pepper, introduce the world of the play, a community in flux at the intersections of tradition and modernity, in this first section of the drama. Depending on the spatial and temporal circumstances of the production, the prologue informs and interrogates the audience about the customs and beliefs inherent in a community. Specific to this analysis, its dialogue discloses a community that imprisons gendered subjects within codified expectations. Women are to be immobile receptors and sites of cultural production, and those who transgress these boundaries are erased from plain view and re-inscripted into myth.

Ingrained in the prologue are traditional Akan creation myths, folktales, proverbs and the overarching thematic device of the dilemma tale. Aidoo uses these techniques juxtaposed against the harsh realities of the slave trade to subvert the supposition of a traditional utopia. Integral to this introduction is the personification of nature in masculine and feminine forms as a clue into the cultural essence of woman and manhood. The masculine figure of Odomankoma, the creator, has given *man* the best pieces of the

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22 Recall that in some instances the narrator, as authority figure and respected member of the community, determines the correct solution, thus actively predetermining future conclusions of correct character.

23 The play was written with a West African audience in mind, however Aidoo’s dialogue and dramatic action also serve to initiate an unfamiliar viewer with customs and beliefs of her people.
earth, which is personified by Assaase Efua, a goddess who "gives of herself to them that know the seasons." Aburabura the "beautiful lonely mountain [that] sits with her neck to the skies" is an immobile sculptured admiration. (65) Like Odomankoma, the active Nana (chief) Bosompo, God of the sea, can "have his angry moments and swell".

The engaging phrase, "But bring you ears nearer, my friends, so that I can whisper you a secret", is a crucial transition from the previous mood of reverence. In this jolting shift, The Old Man alerts the audience of the tragic history of the community due to the selfish deeds of its men. This section is important on several levels. It establishes this community specifically as the Fanti, once marginal subjects who migrated to create a new center; it gives the audience a brief history of the colonial interaction that resulted due to fear of the loss of that center from threat of the more powerful group;24 it implicates the place of the men as perpetrators and benefactors of the Atlantic slave trade; and most importantly it establishes Kofi, Anowa’s future husband as the descendant of these men, and therefore forgivable for his fatal flaw.

The inclusion of the Old Woman serves to create a myriad of contrasting literal and visual images. The-Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-And-Pepper introduce us to Anowa's complex predicament in the following exchange:

OLD MAN. …But what shall we say of our child, the unfortunate Anowa? Let us just say that Anowa is not a girl to meet every day.

OLD WOMAN. That Anowa is something else! Like all of the beautiful maidens in the tales, she has refused to marry any of the sturdy men who have asked for her hand in marriage. No one knows what is wrong with her!

OLD MAN. A child of several incarnations, She listens to her own tales, Laughs at her own jokes and Follows her own advice.

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24 At this period in history, the Fanti were repeatedly forced to defend their coastal territory from the more powerful Akan group, the Ashanti, whom lived inland.
OLD WOMAN. Some of us think she has just allowed her unusual beauty
to cloud her vision of the world.

OLD MAN. Beautiful as Korado Ahima,
Someone's-Thin-Thread.
A dainty little pot
Well-baked,
And polished smooth
To set in a nobleman's corner.

OLD WOMAN. Others think that her mother Badua has spoilt her
shamefully. But let us ask: Why should Anowa carry herself so
stiffly? Where is she taking her 'I won't, I won’t’? Badua should
tell her daughter that the sapling breaks with bending that will not
go straight. (68)

We are immediately aware that Anowa's audacity perplexes the elders of the
community. She is represented as an individual who is seemingly oblivious to communal
values. Despite this, she has the external attributes of a prize wife, which makes her
subversive nature more repellant. This dialogue between The Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-and-
Pepper firmly establishes Anowa in the likeness of the "disobedient daughter”. Aidoo
also chooses to use contrasting language patterns to express the conflicting views of
Anowa. The Old Man illustrates Anowa in verse using metaphor and symbolism to
compare her to beautiful objects and goddesses. His language mythologizes while the
Old Woman, on the other hand, speaks in biting declarations. Her blunt prose positions
Anowa as a disrespectful teenager, who due to lenient rearing, is traipsing all over the
value system of her family and the community-at-large.

In the middle of this debate, Anowa’s mother Badua interrupts the scene
exclaiming, “Perhaps it was my fault too, but how could she come to any good, when her
name was always in the lips of every mouth that ate pepper and salt”. (68) This

25 In the Akan, and larger West African community, this story is so common, that there need not be much
elaboration. However, the personification of this mythic character begins with this debate between the
elders in the community. The Old Man, who speaks in verse, speaks of Anowa in metaphor and
symbolism, whereas the Old Woman seeks to debunk any myths about this fallible creature by grounding
all of his metaphysical illuminations with critical insight. The woman is warning the audience that if this
"disobedient daughter” is not disciplined it will be the fate of the community
seemingly random outburst is important to the progression of the play and my thesis. With the reappearance of The-Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-And-Pepper at the end of each phase, Anowa’s every action is consistently magnified, deconstructed, and analyzed against normative Akan womanhood. As the play progresses we find that the communal influence prevents her family, her husband, and finally Anowa herself from understanding her true character.

At the conclusion of the prologue, The Old Man and Old Woman exit with the following seemingly unrelated phrases:

OLD MAN. It is now a little less than thirty years
When the lords of our House signed that piece of paper-
The Bond of 1844 they call it-
Binding us to the white men
Who came from beyond the horizon.  \(^26\)

OLD WOMAN. And the gods will surely punish Abena Badua for refusing to let a born priestess dance!

The effect of the above statements is two-fold. The latter alerts the audience immediately to the idea of "fate". We are aware that Anowa has been called to a liminal, yet vital position to the community’s balance, a priestess. Her mother, whose family is responsible for the ultimate well being of the child and the clan, has ignored this calling. The former tells us that we are experiencing a shift in the Gold Coast’s relationship to the outside world. These pieces of information are paramount dilemmas in Anowa’s development. By offering these given circumstances, Aidoo immediately erases the preconceived idea that this disobedient daughter is acting strictly out of selfishness and deviance. She insists that the audience question the spatial, temporal, and cultural influences upon the life of this troubled subject.

**Phase One: In Yebi**

Phase One of this work is important on various levels. It further initiates the outsider to some of the cultural and social practices of the Fanti/Akan people. More

\(^{26}\) This alerts the audience that we are around the time of 1874, the year in which the British officially claimed the Gold Coast as a colony, claiming complete sovereignty.
specifically it clearly delineates the familial structure in this matrilineal village. We understand the expectations of Anowa as daughter and only child, and through the illustration of her mother Badua we recognize the role she is expected to fill upon marriage. The inclusion of her father Osam outlines the role of the father in a child’s rearing as well as the delicate balance that exists in the decision-making processes of an Akan daughter’s future.

In the initial exchange between Badua and Osam, Aidoo re-employs the technique of debate crucial to the dilemma tale. Badua views Anowa’s calling as a priestess as something beyond the realm of humanity, read taboo, stating, "They become too much like the God's they interpret." She believes that her daughter should be "a human woman" who marries, farms, has a bundle of children, and can possibly be a captain in the army "when the time is ripe". Osam, recognizing his delicate position as father, is well aware of Anowa's gift of dancing and insight, but also knows that any rumor of his intervention is punishable, especially if the results are tragic. As Badua's only child, Anowa’s responsibility is two-fold. (1) She must carry on the lineage; (2) she must conduct business and tend to the needs of the clan as her mother and uncles get older. The obvious dilemma is that either path Anowa takes the community’s flow will be disrupted.

The shock experienced by Badua and Osam at Anowa’s announcement of Kofi Ako's proposal and her acceptance is based on the knowledge of the communal structure examined in the previous chapter. In true “disobedient daughter” fashion Anowa states, "I have found the man I want to marry", followed shortly thereafter by "Kofi Ako asked me to marry him and I said I will, too." The first level of shock is at Anowa's subversion by choosing a man she would like to marry. Secondly, Kofi has proposed to her in the way of the foreigner.27 This recalls the Old Man’s declaration in the prologue of Kofi as one who shares a "common sauce-bowl" and "depends for [his] well being on the presence of the pale stranger in the midst." And although Kofi is one of the members of the "disparate breed", he is careful to stress that, "Kofi was, is, and always will be one of us."28 Consequently, it is evident by Badua’s reaction, that Kofi is recognized as a disgrace in the community. He is regarded as vain, indolent, and has ruined his

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27 In the traditional manner Kofi’s uncles would have propositioned Anowa’s uncles in order to begin the negotiation of marriage.
28 See prologue pages 67-68.
inheritance of prime farmland due to neglect. Badua coins him a "cassava-man", one with a watery head, the last choice of a respectable family for inclusion into their lineage.

In the final scene of Phase One, Anowa who is newly married, is packing angrily amidst Badua’s banter that, "Other women certainly have happier tales to tell about motherhood." (77) She berates Anowa's choice to marry Kofi Ako and predicts an unsuccessful marriage. Anowa refutes, "Have I not told you that this is to be my marriage and not yours?" eschewing the traditional ideals of marriage and family in the community. Badua predicts that Anowa and Kofi will leave Yebi to embark on a new life and come back in "rags and nakedness.” Anowa rebuts that she will not return to Yebi "for a long, long, time", and that she is going to help Kofi "do something with his life." Upon Badua’s incessant chiding Anowa explodes, "Please, Mother, remove your witch's mouth from our marriage." (78)

This last statement sparks the intervention of Osam. It is evident that Anowa must leave the house, as she has overstepped her boundaries as daughter. Badua's anger may seem to be a result of Anowa's marriage and disrespectful rebuttals, but is magnified by Anowa’s choice to leave Yebi. As I stated in chapter one, it is a disgrace for a woman to leave her clan and live as an outsider in another land. She is tied by blood to her clan and their physical space. Any separation is an ill omen to the lineage’s well being. Anowa’s labeling her mother a witch is the highest form of disrespect for a woman, and the power of this seemingly melodramatic naming coupled with her choice to leave foreshadows the play’s complex conclusion.

On the other hand, as an independent person, Anowa knows that the only way for she and Kofi to prosper is to leave and begin life in a community where they may work and live peacefully outside of the super-imposed identities the people in Yebi have placed upon them. The community’s influence upon Anowa and Kofi's identity is captured in the conclusion of Phase One. Upon Osam's questioning of Anowa's intentions, Anowa states the she is leaving due to Badua driving her away. In response to Badua’s incredulity she states:

ANOWA. […] Who does not know here in Yebi that from the day I came to tell you that Kofi and I were getting married you have been drumming into my ears what a disgrace this marriage was going to
be for you? Didn't you say that your friends were laughing at you? And they were saying that very soon I shall be sharing your clothes because my husband will never buy me any? Father, I am leaving this place.

[……………………………………………………………………………….]

BADUA. Let her go. And may she walk well.

ANOWA. Mother I shall walk so well that I will not find my feet back here again.

Anowa’s life in her community and clan is disconcerting for all involved. She has been the source of tension between her mother and father for years, leading to strained relations with Badua’s family and Osam. Furthermore, Anowa’s independent ways have been a main source of gossip in the community. Finally in refusal of the one custom that her parent’s had hoped would alter their lives, she chooses her own husband, one of whom the clan/community disapproves. Anowa has refused not only to marry in the traditional sense, but also to bear ridicule. She knows that it impossible for she and Kofi, both outcasts, to prosper in their home village. And even as a married woman in Yebi Anowa’s choices remain limited. Thus at the conclusion of this phase the two outsiders are journeying to create their own center.

**PHASE TWO: On The Highway**

The title of Phase Two, On The Highway, symbolizes the various paths that Anowa and Kofi have available to them in this period of their lives. From the opening scene with Anowa carrying twice the load as Kofi, we are aware of the gross differences between this husband and wife. As the phase progresses it is evident that although the two are on the same road physically, their ideological differences have caused them to travel divergent and conflicting paths. These dynamics are illuminated because we are privy to look into Anowa and Kofi’s life after several years of marriage and outside of the confines of their original community. As the scene begins we are aware that the couple has worked to create their fortune through the mobility of nomadic life. Although they have done well, they seek freedom of choice for conflicting reasons. Kofi wants to recreate a traditional community combined with colonial values with him at the center.
Anowa, on the other hand, works hard to create a comfortable family, where all are included on equal footing and contribute accordingly to the prosperity of group. Although it is in this phase that Anowa experiences the least restrictions, her freedom is deterred by the invisible always present communal influences upon she and Kofi, which is illuminated in their incessant debates.

The first scene also introduces the audience to Kofi, whose insecurity and idleness juxtaposed against Anowa's confidence and diligence is blatantly obvious. Early in their dialogue, Kofi masks his true intention to create a life of leisure behind a concern for Anowa, claiming that the trading life is not good for a woman, stressing "not even a woman like [Anowa]." Kofi is obsessed with Anowa's exceptional characteristics. When Anowa, in contrast to Kofi, is excited about working diligently to complete their task, he teases her stating, "You ought to have been born a man." (84) This seemingly light joke is expressive of the expected limits of performed womanhood in Anowa’s society and its growing influence upon Kofi as their marriage progresses.

The above comparison recalls within Anowa a major theme in the play, the fact that they are childless. When Anowa suggests the traditional alternative, that Kofi marry another woman, his refusal provokes an argument between the two about their differing beliefs. This moment is essential because it reveals that Anowa will accept and suggest traditional practices if she feels it is for the success of the community as a whole, while Kofi’s cause for resistance is ambiguous. As Anowa sleeps that night, Kofi contemplates his feelings about he and Anowa’s confrontation stating, "Anowa truly has a few strong ideas. But I know she will settle down. Anowa I shall be the new husband and you the new wife." (87) It is evident that Kofi believes that he can mold Anowa into his dream companion. Furthermore, this monologue acknowledges that he believes since neither has fit into the acceptable cultural standards of man and womanhood, he is planning to incorporate a way of life that veers further away from traditional custom.

The major conflict of the play erupts when Kofi announces to Anowa that he has decided to procure slaves. Anowa, misinterpreting Kofi’s ultimate goal, adamantly opposes the choice and reintroduces the idea of marrying a second wife. Kofi, incensed by Anowa's admonishment, assumes that Anowa is simply trying to once again be strong-willed. Anowa argues that the slaves are useless in their trade and Kofi ties Anowa’s
declaration to her flesh stating that she is, "only talking like a woman." (90). Since Anowa's statements are in no way related to her gender, Kofi’s rebuttal is especially revealing of the pre-conceived ideas of womanhood that Anowa is consistently attempting to escape. In earnest, she asks Kofi to explain, “and how does a woman talk? I had as much a mouth in the beginning of this trade as you had. And as much head.” Kofi's reply is a long rant of weightless excuses that are evidently words he has adopted from his conversations with others, concluding with the same gendered argument to assert his superiority:

KOFI AKO: […………………………………………………………………]
Anowa, who told you that buying men is wrong? You know what? I like you and the way you are different. But Anowa, sometimes you are too different. […] I know I could not have started without you, but after all, we all know you are a woman, and I am the man. (90)

The argument ends with Anowa asserting that gender should have nothing to do with the fact that buying slaves is "wrong" and "evil." In this pivotal dialogue Aidoo implies that Kofi is developing his argument from discussions with others. Therefore he demands to know from where Anowa is stealing her opposing views to which she replies, "Are there never things which one can figure out for oneself." Kofi misreads this statement as Anowa calling him a fool, and accuses her of believing and behaving as if she is superior. It is clear by this point that Kofi wishes to retain the traditional practice of the husband as head of the household who has the only say in all of their public affairs and the final say in their private ones.

The concluding scene of this phase exposes the schism that has fully developed between Anowa and Kofi. Although they are traveling together on the same road, their lives have taken opposite paths. Kofi, having procured slaves against Anowa’s wishes, passes through the forest flanked by male attendants. His wealth is apparent in his garments and jewelry. Anowa follows them, in her same clothes from Yebi, idly twiddling a stick. This visual composition strongly alerts the audience that not only did Kofi ignore Anowa’s wishes, but also that Anowa has not resigned to Kofi’s choice.

In the midst of another debate, Kofi suggests that Anowa is lonely because of their childlessness, and insists on buying female slaves to keep Anowa company. In a
climatic outburst Anowa fiercely opposes being the benefactor of another being's bondage. Anowa discloses that she, like the slaves, is a wayfarer "with no belongings here or there." (96) Kofi is appalled at Anowa's taboo self-realization, asserting that Anowa is comparing herself to those who "belong to other people." Anowa asserts that a wayfarer may also "belong to oneself." (97) Anowa knows that like the slaves, she is an eternal outsider, but unlike the slaves, as long as she is true to herself she can never truly belong to the community in which she is subjected.

Kofi embarks on a long tirade espousing the positive aspects of the wayfarer's life in their culture. This moment in the play seals their schism. Anowa's vocal denunciation of the intimacies of slavery and servitude both on land and abroad, are beyond her place as wife and more insightful than Kofi is willing to digest. He shakes her violently exclaiming, "Where else have you been but here? Why can’t you live by what you know, by what you see? [...]" To which Anowa replies, “It seems as if this is how they created me.”

Kofi questions himself and his manhood because of his inability to control Anowa recognizing that any other man "would have by now beaten her to a pulp, a dough. But I can never lay hands on her…I cannot even think of marrying another woman." (98) He recognizes that despite all of his affluence and "power" he cannot assert the basic expressions of masculinity expected of the men in his culture. He attributes his "inabilities" to Anowa exerting supernatural powers over him, falling victim to the rumors of the community. In one last persuasive attempt, Kofi engages Anowa with his love for only her, and begs her to be happy with their wealth "which countless women would give their lives to enjoy for a day.” Recognizing the futility of entreating Anowa with riches, he reaches out into her weakest point assuring her that they will one day have children hoping she should then be content, to which Anowa responds with "a hard grating laugh.” (99)

**PHASE THREE: THE BIG HOUSE AT OGUAA**

Phase Three represents Anowa's incessant quest for inner peace and respite. The name “Big House” signifies upon Kofi's creation of a living space similar to that of the main plantation house in historical colonial literature and history. Oguaa is the traditional
name for Cape Coast, the largest trading and slave port on the Atlantic. Therefore, the setting of this last phase implies the full integration of colonial ways of knowing. Symbolically, this house serves as an asylum or prison for Anowa. The physical design of the set coupled with the dramatic action serves to increasingly alienate her. In this act you find that Anowa’s last tactic is to try to revert to a more traditional lifestyle that she once rejected. In total contrast, Kofi has embraced and incorporated the most selfish cultural practices of the traditional and colonial communities. He is a trader of gold, with a multitude of slaves who do his work for him. Because of his riches he has proclaimed himself a chief by dressing in Akan royal clothing and greeting visitors in a lavishly decorated Victorian style throne room. And in the semblance of ultimate assimilation, he has hung a picture of himself on his mantel in English military regalia next to a portrait of Queen Victoria.

Anowa enters the final phase, after a lavish procession of Kofi, his slaves, and his excessive possessions of wealth. She once again appears in stark contrast to the abundance of her surroundings. Dressed in the same clothing she has worn throughout the play, Anowa is bare-foot, haggard, unadorned, and appears more like a wayfarer than any of Kofi's attendants. It is obvious that she has been drastically affected psychologically, emotionally, physically by the presence of slaves in her home. The audience member recognizes throughout this last act that Anowa’s aging is due to mental anxiety rather than overwork. Aidoo posits Anowa in a series of monologues in the beginning of this act to illustrate her frustration. This choice also reveals that the only way in which Anowa may fully express her beliefs is in isolation.

Anowa’s first monologue addresses her initial understanding of colonialism and slavery in her community. Recalling a conversation with her grandmother as a child, she remembers being scolded for her questions about the relationship of her people to Europeans. Anowa’s grandmother tries to quells her curiosity stating, "A child like you should not ask questions", " what devil has entered you child", "You frighten me child, you must be a witch child", "all good men and women try to forget, they have forgotten." (106)

The remembrance of the dream that follows the conversation with her grandmother clarifies the root of Anowa's aversion to slavery. In her nightmare, Anowa
becomes a large woman with a round stomach, from which poured her people, who were destroyed by “people who came from the sea”. She described them as "many giant lobsters, boiled lobsters, each of which keeping its lobster head and claws." These lobster people ground Anowa's people on mound of stone, which caused them to burst like a "ripe tomato or swollen pod." (106) Anowa's interrogation of her grandmother, and subsequent dream acknowledged and remembered the taboo of slavery that they refused to "have in their mouth", or acknowledge their complicity within. Anowa recounts the village’s reaction in the following statement to the audience:

ANOWA. I was very ill and did not recover for weeks. When I told my dream, the women of the house were very frightened. They cried and cried and told me not to mention the dream again. For some time, there was talk of apprenticing me to a priestess. I don’t know what came of it. But since then, any time there is mention of a slave, I see a woman who is me and a bursting of a ripe tomato or a swollen pod. (107)

The village women’s reaction to Anowa is comparable to Kofi’s obsession with Anowa speaking of things that she could not “know”. Anowa’s gift of insight has been troubling to her community since she was a child. This unsolvable nightmare that has lived with Anowa for years is replayed everyday in her home when she is brought face to face with slaves.

Anowa continues to search for answers later in the act in a “dialogue” with the portrait of Queen Victoria that sits opposite the one of Kofi. Anowa questions the similarity of their place in society stating, "Maybe in spite of the strange look of you, you are a human woman too eh? How is it with you over there? Do you sometimes feel like … I feel as if you shouldn’t have been born?" Disillusioned, Anowa is exasperated with the portrait's lack of response and dismisses her. Her questions are evidence of the desperate need to find out whether her plight as woman is universal, and she must therefore resign to it. Furthermore the portrait captures the identity of the Queen in Anowa's eyes. Although as a woman Anowa feels that the Queen might suffer as she, she also notes that people who look like this “Queen” are the root of the chaos her community is experiencing. What she may not recognize is that her shifted role as Kofi’s
wife is largely due to Kofi's influence by the values of the subject of the portrait on the mantelpiece. Anowa's desperation is expressed fully as she cries about her predicament in relation to other women of other lands who are nothing and "know this from the day of their birth." She exclaims, "Why didn't someone teach me how to grow up to be a woman," (112) acknowledging that her actions and statements had to be gendered in order for her to be accepted.

Anowa's infinite sense of exile is expressed even more dramatically in her final dialogue with Kofi that builds up to the climax of the play. Kofi, masquerading in royal Akan regalia, chides Anowa for her difference, while disguising his fear of her. By now Anowa is rumored to be a witch, and as she interrogates Kofi about his assumptions and inferences of her abnormality she discovers Kofi's personal priest has influenced his belief of this slander. Her realization forces Kofi to reveal his plan to send Anowa back home to her family in disgrace, and childless. When Anowa refuses to go and attempts to bring forth a traditional trial, by asking the community elders' advice, Kofi threatens to brand her a witch. He is confident in this assertion for he knows that Anowa's position as his wife is the only thing that has prevented her from being destroyed by the accusations of witchcraft.

In fact it is Anowa's gift of insight and intuition, mistaken as witchcraft that enables her to free her inquisitive bondage. In the midst of her incessant interrogation she recognizes that it is Kofi, not she who has given up on them having children. Anowa asserts that Kofi's manhood has been swallowed by the "devil" of colonialism, however she recognizes that this discovery does not free her or Kofi from their communal constructs. Kofi, her only true hope of freedom, has totally succumbed to the ways of the outsider. Anowa knows that as woman, worker, and egalitarian, she will never be able to exist peaceful in this evolving consuming society. Kofi confirms Anowa's assumption by committing suicide, and Anowa recognizing that she is also doomed drowns herself. Despite the knowledge of their individual actions, Anowa is blamed for the death of she and Kofi.

Anowa and Kofi's death signify Aidoo's declaration that neither are truly able to live freely in the world of the play. She recognized however, that because of his masculinity Kofi was able to mask his difference with alternative forms of expression not
available to Anowa, who could only determine her worth in relation her husband and/or community. As one who refused to do so, "Anowa is a figure who disrupts the very foundations on which patriarchal dominance depends." (Davies 70) Anowa's space in traditional culture has been erased, and regarded as taboo and an ill omen. Her body within the traditional myth disrupts the solace Africans find in the creations of a pre-colonial utopia. Through Anowa, Aidoo gives brief agency to that barely visible spirit in the minds of those who have erased the abject bodies from their written histories, and displaced their own individual identity in the drive for national prominence. In essence, Aidoo begs that the audience member ask, “How has myth predetermined my physical presence?”

Throughout my reading of Anowa as a postcolonial subject, the traditional and colonial engendered myths of womanhood fortified in the three separate phases trap her in an inescapable prison. The power of myth upon real women is encapsulated in the drafting of this work as a variation of the extremely popular culture folktale of the disobedient daughter. Ultimately there is no place for Anowa's “identity” to go because she will always be read against the ideals of normative femininity, which is based on a desire to uphold a specific masculine centrality. The culture in which she is born, the one into which she is forced, and any other community in the specific space and time of the play is unsafe for Anowa to be Anowa.

In conclusion, Aidoo asserts that the shift from margin to center can never occur for women in current homogenous communities. The influx of colonialism only offered an alternative identity for the African male who may not fit the traditional African paradigm. In essence, through this literary analysis I am asserting that from birth Anowa's identity is endangered. Through a close reading of community, identity, and migration, Aidoo positions the African woman as the lowest colonial/postcolonial subject, the subaltern. In essence, not only can she not speak, there is no space for her to exist, except as the mythic character predetermined for a tragic conclusion.
CHAPTER THREE  
FINDING THE ABSENT POTENTIAL: A Director’s Journey

As a director, I have always been drawn first to character driven plays that illuminate common people’s experience at a pivotal moment in history. When I read a play I ask several questions: What is the story? Whose story is it? Who else’s story is it? How can all of these stories be illuminated outside of the text? What historical fact did I not know or has been expanded by my reading this play? What issue did I believe I understood before I read this play? What research do I need to do to really understand this play? The less I know or understand, or the more my previous knowledge base is disrupted, the more I want to begin to delve into the process of telling this story. Once I begin to research the world of the play, the pieces that strike me are those that I hope will give the audience to whom I am presenting a jolt in their current perceptions about a person(s), place, or event.

The wealth of knowledge that I gained from my onsite dramaturgical research in Ghana was essential to the success of Miami University’s production of Anowa. My cultural experiences were most evident in the design elements of the play, and were deeply beneficial in a rehearsal process where I served as the medium between the world of the play, the production team, and the student actors. In this chapter, I will address how my research and experience in Ghana were used to influence my initial concept, the production design, the rehearsal process, and subsequent directing choices. The two theoretical approaches that provided the rubric for my research process before, during, and after my trip to Ghana were Sandra Richard’s theory of absent potential, and Victor Turner’s concept of “ethnodramaturgy”.

In her work, “Writing The Absent Potential: Drama, Performance, and the Canon of African American Literature,” Sandra Richards illuminates the opportunities a director may take to exhume subtext or intimate alternative meaning in a dramatic text/performance. This process visually explicated hidden cultural signifiers assumed on the page and often left dormant in the resulting performance. She states:
I want to engage one of the fundamental challenges constituted by the folk insistence upon the importance of performance and the literary inheritance of a written, hence seemingly stable text. I will argue that in confronting this challenge, one must write the absent potential into criticism; that is in addition to analysis of the written text, one must offer informed accounts of the latent intertexts likely to be produced in performance, increasing and complicating meaning…

The genre of drama, with its component of embodiment through performance, simply spotlights issues of meaning, particularly those related to reader response, implicit in other branches of the clan. (65)

During initial readings of *Anowa*, I was reminded of my inept ability as an African-American to fill in the assumed cultural signifiers. Inherently, I knew there was more of a story to be told on the page than what was evident to my African-American slanted reading. It was evident that Aidoo, writing a historical drama in a crucial time in modern Ghana’s evolution, was developing an allegory for her West-African contemporaries. However, I was not able to position myself within Aidoo’s world or point of view as I am able to when reading *The Crucible* or *Dutchman*. Furthermore, the theoretical and historical texts available for research narrowly inform the reader about the Ghanaian subject’s social and emotional experience during these pivotal shifts in history, much less offer a woman’s perspective about the personal effects of the drastic changes in Ghana’s history. She remains one to be scripted, rather than the scribe.

Richards suggest, “We pay more attention to one site where the anonymous folk occasionally meet the identified craftsperson or artist. In that world of performed drama, one has an individually authored, partially recuperable text, in which the imprint of the vernacular may remain strongly palpable.” (68) She clarifies the meaning of the “folk” in African American drama as “the masses of working, underemployed, or unemployed people who do not share the aspirations of the bourgeois American mainstream.” She further states that the “folk” identity is not static. Throughout history the definition of “folk” has evolved and changed. Similarly, in various cultures the portrait and documentation of the folk varies. Aidoo’s work is centered on Ghanaian people,
generally women. Some may be in the rural villages or urban centers of Ghana. Others may be in Europe or The United States. The unifying factor in her stories is the influence of change upon the characters’ life.

These dilemmas that are constantly altering subjects and the subsequent community-at-large’s experience are identified by Victor Turner as social dramas. In his text From Ritual to Theater: The Dramatic Seriousness of Play, Turner argues that social dramas and stage dramas continually intersect. He believes that social dramas, the confrontation that occurs within a communal group, provoke change beyond the initial resolution by altering the group’s relationship and/or structure. I would argue that it also reforms the ritual, myth, and performance of the community. This is turn affects the community’s self-perception.

Aidoo’s Anowa is a staged drama based on the folktale of the disobedient daughter\(^{29}\), which is a result of the oral transmission over time of a social drama that has occurred in the Akan community. This social drama caused community members to develop a cautionary tale that simplifies this complex cultural dilemma, and in turn predetermines the community’s reaction to similar acts by any strong-willed inhabitant in the future. Aidoo’s choice to deconstruct this tale, which in essence is an act of social drama itself, while assessing the historical factors that may have influenced that choice, again forces the community to reassess it’s perception. Wilentz notes:

> Inherent in her works is her concern with the gender roles imposed upon the members of her society. In her major works she reaches back to inform us of women’s roles throughout West Africa before the colonial era and compels us to envision another place for women incorporating this past in the future…For Aidoo the secret of how African women can function in the present is linked to a greater understanding of the past. (4)

Anowa in the 1870’s is struggling against a detrimental structural shift in her community. This shift is catalyst to the turbulence of Aidoo’s world at the time this play was written. Aidoo is implying through Anowa, that the answers her culture seeks to heal their wound are found by going back to the root of the problem.

\(^{29}\) See Chapter One of this these for detailed discussion of the disobedient daughter folktale.
This view of life in which the present is in constant creative interface with the past, re/members the principle of Sankofa. Sankofa is one of the most popular Adinkra symbols, a form of aesthetic expression integral to the Akan worldview. Its symbol is a mythical bird whose head is facing in the opposite direction looking backwards. The corresponding proverb “Se wo were fin a wosan kofa a yenkyi”, translates to “return and fetch it. There is nothing wrong with learning from hindsight.” Kofi Anyihodo offers a poignant definition of the Sankofa principle in relation to Ghanaian culture:

This view of a national tradition in the arts is appropriately captured in the now ubiquitous mythological figure of Sankofa: ancient proverbial Akan bird, constantly reaching back into the past even as it flies sky-bound into a future of great expectations, mindful always that an incautious leap into the future could easily lead to a sudden collapse of dreams. In the Sankofa bird, Ghanaian culture has found its most complex and most recurrent expression of the nation’s favorite guiding principle of development. (5)

In Anowa the main character, like Aidoo, is concerned with “remembering and examining her people’s history—particularly, African diasporic ruptures stemming from the slave trade and European colonization— as well as her people’s complicity in the dismemberment of the continent.” (Eke 63)

When Aidoo began writing, women were less publicly influential in the Akan/Ghanaian community as they had been in the traditional infrastructure. Furthermore, the primary role of women in the community in Ghana’s traditional structure is rarely cited in historical literature. Therefore, I decided to use Sankofa as my unifying motif for my journey into Aidoo/Anowa’s world, recognizing that Sankofa also serves as a cultural reminder of the past, re/memorbing the meanings of specific bodies and their actions. Sankofa is Aidoo remembering her past. Sankofa is Anowa remembering her past. Sankofa is me, the director, re/memorbing the folktale and other orality and its imprint upon their lives. Sankofa is timeless, infinite and ever-present. Its symbolism, meaning, and consequence have no origin.

Before leaving for Ghana, I presented my idea to my production team, cognizant that their knowledge of the culture of Black Atlantic much less Ghana was minute. This allowed the production team several months during the summer to research the Akan
cultural cosmology. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the story of Anowa and explain how I wanted to approach the play. I also wanted to discuss any apprehension the production team may have, since this was the first time any of them were approaching a text of this genre, and find out how I could aid their research while I was in Ghana. I found myself in a precarious position as the researcher/cultural-producer/director of this work. It was very important to tell this culturally specific narrative without appropriating or assuming any factors based on the fact that the said choice was “African”. I was clearly aware that “efforts to craft a new definition of theater based in black folk tradition, problematize questions concerning intended audiences and the production of meaning.” (Richards 73) I explained that I wanted to keep the production of Anowa as visually accurate as possible, considering the obvious cultural, geographical, and theatrical limitations. I noted that this trip to Ghana was of paramount importance due to specific gaps in my understanding of certain cultural signifiers embedded in the world of the play. I hoped this thesis project would educate and entertain without creating more harmful generalizations or imposed subjectivities than were already prevalent for many minorities on this remote campus. I recognized that, contrary to popular belief, I could not just “tell” this story because I was African American and had a profound interest in work of the Black Atlantic. I had been privy to the casualties of a presumed connection between people of color.

One major critical assumption made by American readers/viewers of this text is to side with Anowa, as the tendency in Western ideology is to uphold the individual as opposed to the communal; however with a more in-depth analysis of Aidoo’s progression in the text, and a understanding of Akan culture one can begin to ask if Aidoo is at all glorifying Anowa as Western critics tend to. Critical to any discussion or analysis of this text is that fact that it is a dilemma tale and therefore complex in composition. The very act of offering alternative endings, both equally disenchanting allow one to speculate upon the desperate situation of the colonized subject. Through her portrayal of Anowa, Aidoo illustrates that the subject most adversely affected by the shifts in the Akan society and its relationship with the modern world, is a woman.
My study in Ghana lasted nine weeks. A brief part of my trip consisted of a tour of eight of the ten regions in the country. During my last four weeks I studied the performance techniques of various modern and traditional performing organizations. The majority of my trip was spent in residence in a village in Abura, next to Cape Coast.\(^{30}\) Below I will share how my experiences and research were carried forth in three parts of the production design: costumes, sound, and set/properties. And finally I will illustrate how I combined Richards’ and Turner’s theories to develop a system of rehearsal supportive to the development of a non-western text. I hoped throughout this process to bring the young actor into the foreground by “gesturing towards the folk custom of collaborative, artistic production,” (Richards 72) and giving them the tools to enhance their appreciation of difference through performance.

**Set Design**

A major factor, integral to the set design, is that the space in which Anowa exists is problemmed space. In our limited performing space, the set designer and I agreed upon a symbolic stage design where the specific geographies, with their [meta]physical effects upon the subjects could exist in compliment with the ever-present themes and dilemmas inherent in the world of the play. Aidoo requests that there be two playing spaces, a lower and upper stage or a right and a left. We chose a large stage in the center of the performance space that would create an obvious symbolic separation between the conflicting characters and aid in creating physical and emotional obstacles. The height of the stage, which was about two feet, aided the actor in developing personal challenges, creating sharp transitions, and determining specific movement that alluded to a sense of constant disruption and change.

The set designer chose to keep the palette of the set in neutral tones, utilizing blacks, browns, coppers, tans, beiges, and other earth tones. This subtle background highlighted the colorful palettes in the costume design. To support the symbolism detailed in my directing concept, the stage was repeatedly stamped in the gold Sankofa pattern on the black back wall, surrounding a thatched roof, straw screen, and bamboo

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\(^{30}\) The community Abrafo Odumasi is a Fanti community in Abura about a twenty minute drive from Cape Coast.
fence running around the bottom of the first stage. These persistent scenic motifs and representations, asserted the cultural and geographic specificities of the play, while hopefully reminding the audience that despite the consistent shift in Anowa’s environment, the expectations of her cultural expression are always present. The simple changes in space, time, and material gain only served to mask the inherent problem of cultural displacement.

To bring realism to our symbolic space we included set pieces and properties that were replicas or genuine elements from the Akan environment. The visual experience in the Akan regions of Ghana was a clash of traditional, colonial, and postcolonial elements. The architecture in the urban centers clearly dated back to the British colonial period, with various airy block-shaped cement structures, and a few modern multi-level structures. Many homes in these areas resembled a rectangular compound surrounded by a cement wall. The most prevalent traditional reminder on many of the structures was the presence of Adinkra symbols used to make ventilated windows in the structure, or as borders on the home or the surrounding wall.

In most rural areas bamboos fences replaced the cement gates and the homes were made from wood with thatched roofs and walls of bundled reed. Most families, except for the very wealthy cooked outside of the home on a fire hearth, and washed by hand. One of the lecturers whom we met on the trip stated that those who chose to cook and wash using a stove and washing machine were being purely pretentious and wasting their money.

Another common presence in the rural areas was the positioning of several homes surrounding a communal space where a cauldron or some other sort of other cooking pot sat upon an earthen hearth supported by three rocks. A fire was started in kindling within the rocks, generally using paper. This three-rock formation existed in every community that I visited in Ghana. The earthen hearth is cited in Aidoo’s script, and I collected or visually documented it and all of the objects she notes. Their presence is integral to the visual composition of the play as well as to the main character’s personal journey. Therefore we tried to include as many representations of the indigenous Ghanaian objects as possible.
Phase One, “In Yebi”, reveals the traditional living space in the Akan matrilineal community. The playwright’s choice to set this act in the courtyard, the women’s domain, positions this act as supposed safe space for a woman to be a decision maker and catalyst. The specific debate is about Anowa’s refusal to get married, and the role of Badua’s clan in Anowa’s development. This phase including most of the traditional set pieces and properties I collected or documented in Ghana. The pieces that we incorporated stressed the values of community, family, and the specific duties of its members.

Phase Two “On The Road”, has several motifs running throughout is section. It is an open, natural space of compromise, discussion, and debate. This section of the play serves as a crossroad where Anowa, and Kofi confront several dilemmas and allow the audience to witness their opposing tactics for survival. It also serves as untouched, genderless space where the subjects can express their true nature without the overt imposition of the community’s values. Eventually, the opposing roads taken by the husband and wife foreshadow their tragic future.

In this Phase, where symbolism and meaning evolve in the language and action of the characters rather than in the set, the author uses material items and natural elements to foreshadow the stories progression. Anowa and Kofi are dealing in “skins”. Their burden is very heavy, and Anowa seems to be carrying the brunt of the load, while Kofi idly reaps the reward. To emphasize the impending tragedy, the author also employs a heavy storm that foreshadows their impending future, while causing their skins to stink and rot. The properties master procured huge wide baskets that were three times the width of Anowa, and loaded them down with skins to symbolize the load she would carry. At the conclusion of this phase we find that Kofi has acquired slaves to do their work, but Anowa still carries the symbolic burden of them trading human skin rather than animal skin.

By setting Phase Three in an obviously colonized space, the audience member is alerted of the gross change that has occurred in the passage of time. The assumption that the colonial culture offered no space for Anowa’s identity foreshadows the truth of The-Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-And-Pepper’s predictions. Furthermore, ending the play in the colonial setting prevents Anowa from arriving at the end of this story as the victor.
Placing Anowa alone in Kofi’s room at the conclusion, surrounded by material items that represent the blood and labor of slaves, drives her over the edge. Aidoo is suggesting that the attempt to alter one’s identity can kill the spirit as well as the body.

In our collaboration, we sought to create the opulence of Kofi’s self-proclaimed kingdom on a limited budget. We consulted the photographic text *African Kings* to create Kofi’s image. It depicted various kings in West and Central Africa in both traditional and colonial armed forces costumes. The major furniture pieces that represented Kofi’s wealth in the script were an ornate throne, and a carrier sedan. We could not fit the sedan into our budget (or our playing space). However, we made up for that loss in the processional where the technical director consulted various texts to develop and include replicas of materials that would have been traded by Kofi and the European merchants in the time of the story. The lavish set pieces and props fully communicated the narrative that had transpired in the years between Phase Two and Phase Three.

**Costume Design**

The costuming for *Anowa* was a blend of Akan traditional dress and various ethnically influenced modern prints. The costume designer’s decision to blend the styles served to fully incorporate the traditional form while inserting modern looks that aided in evoking the mood and aesthetic of the play without appropriating the Akan cultural expression.

The clothing that would have been worn in the Gold Coast during the 1870’s was not immediately evident to the basic tourist. In the rural villages, the evidence of modernity existed mainly in the clothing of the community. Men, women, and children wore shirts that advertised everything from Ivy League colleges to American supermarkets and health insurance. In the urban areas, the citizens tended to dress in full Western clothing. The ability to dress as a westerner indicated your social status or your material wealth. The need to appear modern was also expressed in the straight hairstyles the Ghanaian women wore before they began primary and after finishing secondary school. I found that the people did not have a concern for matching colors in the Western sense, but chose prints, shades, and textures that complemented one another. Traditional dress was worn mostly during rituals, performances, and celebrations.
In early discussions with the costume designer, we discussed dressing the Mouth-That-Eat-Salt-And-Pepper, as extensions of the set. This act would signify their symbolic position in the play as expressions of the traditional ways of knowing. Both characters were adorned in traditional adinkra prints, which were worn on special occasions. The fabric was black with gold symbols, similar to the Sankofa background on the set. They both wore them in the style that would be worn to official community functions and traditional events. This style of dress now is common in the Ghanaian contemporary society when community members are attending traditional rituals, funerals, and commemorating culturally historical moments.

Kofi’s dress in the play is constantly changing, symbolizing his growing wealth and status. His style also is symbol of the change in the society-at-large. Aidoo characterizes Kofi in the cast list as “[Anowa’s] man who expands.” (59) In the beginning he is dressed in work clothes, though they are very clean. In the second half of phase two he has changed into the leisure drape costume also worn by the Old Man. This is the style of clothing he wears for the rest of the play. In Phase Three his leisure dress has been changed to a more elaborate kente cloth, symbolizing his wealth and importance. The choice to adorn him in this form of costume clearly states that he is in a constant state of leadership albeit idleness.

Anowa’s costume symbolizes her inner and outer conflict. It represents her variance from her community, inability to find peace, and refusal to submit to the shifting society. Anowa’s costume is a colorful print that actually consists of swatches of many traditional prints placed next to each other in a recurring checkerboard motif, copied, and reprinted on a single cotton piece. This piece of fabric a perfectly embodies Anowa, whose existence in the story is a paradox. Aidoo constructs Anowa as the symbol of the postcolonial subject as well as the carrier of their fate, because of her insight and her unwillingness to forget. She refuses to fit inside the circumscribed network because she insists on discussing her community’s unmentionables. However, she refuses to change when her cultures evolution involves practices that she finds inherently wrong. Her costume represents the diverse people of her community who have been traumatized and erased. In her costume Anowa is varied, colorful, malleable, flexible, but as the community progresses her costume stays the same. Although it still symbolizes her
complexity, it begins to fade, much like the identity of the main character, and in the larger context her community’s tradition. Finally by the end of the story, the costume begins to take on a life of its own, becoming as much a part of how the audience views Anowa as the actor playing the role.

**Sound**

The musical expression of the different Ghanaian ethnic groups was the most varied aesthetic that I found during my research. Sounds that we associate with ethnic performance are heard everyday in the rural villages and in some parts of the city mixing with the urban noise. In traditional and contemporary performances in Ghana the percussion instrument was the primary form of instrumental expression followed by the woodwind. In the directions for *Anowa*, Aidoo states that any African or folk style music may be used. She sights the atenteben, a Ghanaian wind instrument, can be used to symbolize Anowa. She also suggests the use of a bullhorn and the Fontonfrom, a four to five foot tall drum used in an Akan percussion ensemble at specific sections in the play to signify mood and tempo.

So rather than use recorded music or combined elements, I decided to use live accompaniment in the performance. While in Ghana I purchased several instruments that could be used during the performance. These percussive and woodwind instruments created the atmosphere in the play. This allowed the members of the cast to serve as creators, designers, and performers of a major element of the performance. Aidoo structures the drama similar to a traditional communal gathering, wherein the players might act, provide the supporting accompaniment, and fully engage the audience as participators in the story’s unfolding. Furthermore, the inclusion of live instrumentation positions this specific production of *Anowa* in a synonymous manner to that of traditional action theater and/or storytelling where the instruments become a character in their own right.

In the opening of the play, the cast created the everyday sounds of the village in the wings. Prior to the Old Man’s entrance, sounds of the village specify the setting. They improvised children singing traditional songs and playing games, one could hear the sound of drums and bells, and the sound of community members greeting each other and
calling their children home. I hoped that this insertion would specifically set up the early light-hearted mood of this play that changes drastically as the story progresses. Furthermore, I wanted to imply that in a village setting where dramas may be performed for the community or during play, these are the sounds an audience/community member may hear before, during, and after the performance.

There were also several challenges to strictly using live sound in a production. The majority of the performers were beginning actors and/or well entrenched in the Western methodology of “strictly acting”. It was particularly challenging to ensure their comfort as creators and improvisers of sound. There were also specific environmental elements that could have been easily addressed with sound effects but presented more of a challenge when using live sound. Particular to *Anowa* is the heavy thunderstorm in Phase Two. We solved this problem by using a thunder sheet combined with lighting effects. The most glaring obstacle, which seemed small but was integral to the flow of the story, was the need for accompaniment during the transitions when music or sound effects were necessary, yet most of the characters were on stage or preparing to enter the playing space. This challenge was never fully solved due to the fact that the competent percussionists on campus were preparing for their own performance. Luckily, we were able to use a production assistant as well as the ensemble members to provide transitional sound at crucial moments.

**Directing**

Just as *Anowa* tackled the theme of the entanglement of traditional and colonial culture, I found myself in a theoretical dilemma when I was developing my rehearsal process. I knew that it was imperative that I apply several of the rehearsal and performance techniques I learned in Ghana in order to achieve the true results I wanted in this play. However, in the attempt to create a successful end product, I was plagued with the realization of several inescapable truths: I was working with full-time students, most of whom were non-majors and non-actors; I was a full-time graduate assistant; and most importantly my actors and production team had little to no general knowledge about the culture, content, and genre from which this play was written. In hindsight, I recognize
this as a huge challenge for a master’s thesis project, but at the time I thought it was the perfect opportunity for the members of this show to be learning as well as sharing.

I hoped to teach the actors about Akan culture, while allowing them practical experience honing their craft. I consulted Victor Turner’s text, *From Ritual to Theatre* hoping to use it as a guide to integrate the aesthetic forms of rehearsal and performance that I learned in Ghana with the Western model(s) practiced in my program. Turner, an anthropologist, was one of the pioneers of Northwestern University’s performance studies program. He thought that by turning anthropologic ethnographies into play scripts, students of anthropology could begin to comprehend other cultures by immersing themselves in the “culture’s motivational web.” (90) In seeking to form a cogent system of rehearsal I sought out and idea that Turner shares to propel my goal, “An actor who enacts ethnography has to learn the cultural rules behind roles played by the character he is representing…There must be a dialectic between performing and learning. One learns through performing, the performs the understanding so gained.” (94)

During the audition process, I asked the students to go on a musical journey. I then played various forms of music from Classical to hip-hop, percussion, Cuban, and electronica. I hoped to see how the actors reacted to several factors: external stimuli, unfamiliar material, and having to be vulnerable in front of an audience. I carried the prevalence of physical movement into the rehearsal process. Because we did not have the benefit of a drummer during our rehearsals, I opted to use one of Bobby McFerrin’s Circle Songs. I chose this song rather than a traditional recording of African music, because several of the performers were familiar with African dance, yet none of the performers had experienced this form of original composition. I combined McFerrin’s piece with a high endurance physical warm-up using modern movement as its base and including phrases with African influence.

Movement and physical expression are a large factor in acting. In West Africa, the physical movement of the body is paramount in performance. Complete dramas are performed using exaggerated action and gestures in tandem with a percussion ensemble. Some of these pantomimes are easier to grasp than the esoteric language of a proverb or the implied meaning in a folktale. I knew that the audience would find the proverbial
language in *Anowa* challenging, so I wanted to get the actors used to storytelling using physicalization as their primary tool.

To support this idea, I included a pantomime narrative in the play. In the dramatic script, Phase One begins with a pantomime of Anowa and Kofi juxtaposed against another couple. Utilizing Richard’s idea that, “the unwritten, or an absence from the script, is a potential presence implicit in performance,” (68) I decided to insert a stylized pantomime with Anowa and the ensemble as village girls. The young women processed performing an Akan basket dance, singing a traditional song about a mythical girl named Anowa. They then began to enact several of the hand games and songs that young people in the village may play together. The games evolved into a role-play, where the young girls parodied the story’s exposition. Each of the women represented one of the young men that Anowa has refused to marry. This insertion was an integration of one of the improvisations we developed in the rehearsal process. It fit in clearly at the start of the first act, just before Anowa and Kofi’s meeting.

I wanted to include as much traditional performance within the limits of the dramatic script. Therefore in addition to the games, pantomime, and dance that Anowa and the ensemble showcased at the beginning of the performance, I inserted an interlude section at the beginning of Phase III where the ensemble members, playing Kofi and Anowa’s slaves, perform a traditional percussive gourd selection prior to announcing the arrival of Kofi. I included this performance section to present a traditional percussion form that was woman-centered and virtually unknown to American audiences, but may have occurred at the beginning of Kofi’s processional.

The mini-performances and pantomimed dramas that I included were the ways that I chose to employ the theory of absent potential. I attempted to integrate these elements by applying Turner’s theory of ethnodramaturgy to my rehearsal process. In this method of performance, a practitioner is concerned with the ‘fidelity of [the] script to both the described facts and the anthropological analysis of the structures and processes of the group.” (Turner 100) Traditionally cognitive knowledge and sharing have left European and American productions of non-western dramas one-dimensional and seemingly inferior. When the text is performed using the Western model of development,
it leaves so much of the absent potential in the story dormant. Turner, noting the discrepancies that erupt out of these choices states:

In one’s own society an actor tries to realize “individual character,” it takes partly for granted the culturally defined roles supposedly played by the character…These roles are made up of collective representations shared by actors and audience, who are usually members of the same culture. (94)

The method of performing non-western dramas Turner was working toward calls for the practitioner to re-program their perspectives and rehearsal method. When the aesthetic model of another culture’s worldview is understood, it makes our “cognitive knowledge look somehow shrunken, shabby, and inadequate to our new apprehension of the human condition.” (100) Aidoo, as a postcolonial subject recognizes the complexities of her culture’s existence and allows the producer ample room to create strong visual and textual statements with Anowa.

Richards’ and Turner’s theories functioned as instruction manuals throughout my research process. I used their theories to begin to approach my thesis project with a fresh perspective. I found that in seeking to present a non-western work for mainly white American audiences, there was much more one had to be aware of as a purveyor of something that can be seen as truth by unassuming viewers. This reality has caused me to tread more carefully into the space of non-western theatre. I also found that the tools that Richards and Turner propose can be used by a director to approach any work of drama, as well as other realms of performance indigenous to a specific area.
Works Cited


