

RESEARCH PAPER

Dream as a Gateway to the Collective Unconscious: A Jungian Interpretation of Ato's Dream in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*

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ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a psychoanalytical exploration of Ato's dream in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, intricately framed within Carl Jung's theoretical construct of the collective unconscious. Ato's journey to Elmina and Cape Coast – historical sites of the transatlantic slave trade – signifies inherited trauma within the collective unconscious. These locations transcend personal experience, embodying ancestral and historical pain. Through Jungian archetypes, the dream reflects Ato's psychological transformation as he grapples with suppressed aspects of his ancestral past. The coast in the dream symbolizes the threshold between conscious and unconscious, revealing Ato's confrontation with his darkness and post-colonial identity. This dreamscape, charged with historical meaning, illustrates the tension between individual and collective identity, portraying Ato's inner journey toward self-discovery amid the enduring shadows of colonialism.

KEYWORDSAto, Collective Unconscious, Culture, Dream, Psyche, Slave TradeIntroduction

Afro-Americans in the Diaspora often harbor misconceptions about Africa, which leads to dissatisfaction among Africans on the continent. These Africans, secure in their sense of belonging, are not preoccupied with asserting a universal brotherhood. The situation is further complicated by the high aspirations of educated Africans, who, contrary to outdated stereotypes, lead modern lives with global connections (Asiedu, 2008, p, 8). They may find it frustrating when their identity is misrepresented based on superficial appearances and a lack of deeper understanding. This issue is intricately linked to the historical context of the "progression from slave society into the era of imperialism" (Gilroy, 1993, p, 73). The traumas of this history, while seemingly unimaginable, have not been silenced. Instead, the remnants of these painful legacies continue to shape historical memory and are deeply embedded in the evolving core of Afro-Atlantic cultural expression.

In family homecoming plays, such as Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, psychological complexes—whether maternal or otherwise—emerge as central themes. These plays advance the narrative and shape the characters' psyches, leading to profound emotional tensions and revelations. The psychological forces, rooted in family dynamics often manifest dramatically, unearthing suppressed emotions, unresolved conflicts, and inherited emotional patterns that influence character behavior and interactions. The return to the family home, a recurrent motif in these plays, activates complex psychological states

related to childhood and familial relationships. This setting symbolizes the "dependent state of family identity as well as childhood roles and dynamics" (Reynolds, 2019, p, 77). The family house becomes a realm where "parents still rule," and second-generation characters are "forced back into a deferent relational state" (Reynolds, 2019, p, 77). This reimposition of familial hierarchy can incite significant conflict, as adult children may view their return as an unnatural regression, resisting the return to a state of dependency and its associated negative implications. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ato's dream vividly illustrates this tension. The ghost symbolizes the haunting power of tradition and the past, compelling Ato to confront his choices. His dream reflects a deep-seated fear of losing his autonomy and being ensnared in a life governed by familial hierarchy and cultural obligations.

Ato's dream of traveling to Cape Coast or Elmina is infused with profound symbolic resonance, intricately intertwined with the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious. These coastal locations, deeply connected to the transatlantic slave trade, serve as symbolic intersections of the conscious and unconscious realms. In the context of the dream, Ato's journey transcends mere physical travel, becoming a symbolic exploration of his psychological landscape. The historical and cultural weight of these locations evokes the inherited trauma associated with the slave trade, compelling Ato to confront and integrate aspects of his shadow self. This engagement with trauma is aligned with Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, which he defines as a "species-typical repository of ancestral history and memory accumulated over evolutionary time" (Walters, 1994, p, 286). The collective unconscious encompasses a reservoir of ancestral memories and historical experiences that have shaped human behavior and self-consciousness through evolutionary history. Jung posits that this collective unconscious is composed of various archetypes – universal categories of experiences, figures, and situations that have persisted across generations. These archetypes influence the formation of psychological complexes, which in turn affect human behavior and consciousness. In this way, Ato's dream serves as a conduit for accessing and addressing these deep-seated, inherited psychological patterns.

The collective unconscious constitutes a distinct dimension of the psyche, fundamentally separate from the processes of the personal unconscious. Unlike the personal unconscious, which consists of elements that were once conscious but have become forgotten or repressed, the collective unconscious does not retain personal experiences. As Jung elucidates, "The collective unconscious has never been conscious in a person's mind but is installed inherently" (Jung, 1936, p. 99). Jung first introduced the term "collective unconscious" in Symbols of Transformation, characterizing it as a form of "supra-individual universality" (Jung, 2014, p, 177). He argued that the collective unconscious serves as the origin of the spirit, or Geist, which manifests through archetypes - "primordial images and primary forms" (Jung, 1936, p, 413). These archetypes, which constitute the collective unconscious, are universal symbols that, while they may vary in their cultural and personal manifestations, are fundamentally derived from this shared psychological reservoir (Gallagher, 2021, p, 1). In The Dilemma of a Ghost, Ato's dream vividly illustrates the influence of the collective unconscious on psychological conflict. The dream exposes deep-seated cultural and ancestral tensions that arise as Ato attempts to reconcile his African heritage with his experiences in the diaspora. This symbolic struggle highlights how the collective unconscious functions as a universal counterpart to the personal unconscious, containing "mental patterns, or memory traces, which are shared with other members of the human species" (Sultana, 2022, p, 1). This framework encompasses archetypes and instincts – innate, unlearned drives that shape psychological behavior across individuals.

The archetypes of the collective unconscious are fundamental psychic instincts or innate elements that provide a framework for intuitive ideas and shape perceptions. These archetypes manifest as symbolic images or figures that reflect various facets of the psyche within a person's dreams. The unconscious uses archetypal imagery in dreams and mythology to "connect with the psyche and drive one to achieve adaptation with the inner world by invoking their instincts" (Gallagher, 2021, p, 5). Archetypal dreams, characterized by their intensity and frequency, often arise during crucial phases of psychological development. Among these archetypes, the self stands out as the most significant, representing the totality of the personality. While complete realization of the self may be unattainable, individuals continually strive toward it throughout their lives. This archetype guides individuals towards self-realization through the maturation of the psyche, aiming for "integration of the personality, and to overcome selfishness, arrogance, careerism, and fear" (Gardiner, 2015, p, 32).

In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ato's dream compellingly illustrates the impact of the collective unconscious on psychological conflict, exposing profound cultural and ancestral tensions. Ato's quest to reconcile his African heritage with his diasporic experiences is symbolically depicted through this dream. This study aims to explore Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, which he describes as "a universal version of the personal unconscious, holding mental patterns, or memory traces, which are shared with other members of the human species" (Sultana, 2022, p,1). Jung's theory encompasses archetypes and instincts—innate, unlearned drives that shape human psychology. The research focuses on understanding the intricate interplay between individual and collective memory, particularly, in the context of Ato's dream set against the historically significant locales of Elmina and Cape Coast. Additionally, it addresses the reasons behind the apparent neglect or ignorance of this crucial aspect of Ghana's history. By applying a Jungian perspective to Ato's subconscious journey, the study aims to uncover the layers of historical pain, silence, and darkness embedded within the cultural narrative.

Literature Review

In *The Symbols of Transformation*, Carl Jung delves into the symbols and impulses arising from the unconscious, illustrating the role of myths and dreams in mirroring the individuation process and psychological evolution. He traces the origins of the psyche to ancient roots, asserting that "the mother of all things is the root stuff" (Jung, 2014, p, xxiv). Jung posits that individual consciousness is merely a manifestation of a deeper, perennial source, suggesting that collective unconscious is a universal heritage inherent in all individuals. This universality explains why mythical images recur across cultures and epochs. "It is an entirely natural proceeding to relate mythologemes, which may be very far apart both temporally and ethnically, to an individual fantasy (dream) system" (Jung, 1989, p, 34). Jung's analysis of dream symbols reveals unconscious conflicts and the individuation process, shedding light on Ato's internal struggle. In Ato's dream, the ghost and his indecision between Elmina and Cape Coast symbolize his quest for psychological integration and the reconciliation of his Westernized self with his Ghanaian heritage.

Judy B. Gardiner proposes that the fragmented nature of dreams represents the collective unconscious's quest for wholeness. In his article, "An Entangled Dream Series: Fragmentation, Wholeness, and the Collective Unconscious," Gardiner suggests that the interaction between the collective unconscious and the symbolic language of dreams marks a transition from personal to transpersonal realms. This evolution signifies a shift from a microscopic, personal perspective to a macroscopic, transpersonal worldview, encompassing concerns for the survival of the species. The concept of "cosmic dreaming" (Gardiner, 2015, p, 32) emerges, reflecting a global awareness that reveals the

interconnectedness of individual and collective destinies. Ato's dream, therefore, is not merely a search for personal resolution but an acknowledgment of his place within a larger cultural and historical context. This realization underscores his journey to integrate his identity with a broader cultural heritage, illustrating the dream's role in connecting the self with a greater whole.

In her paper, "Family Myth, the Symbolic Realm, and the Ancestors," Marica Rytovaara delves into the profound influence of family myths and ancestry on the formation of both individual and collective psyches. Rytovaara explains that family myth serves as a bridge between individual consciousness and the collective unconscious, showing the influence of ancestral symbols on both cultural and personal narratives. These symbols, embedded in our psyche, mediate between past and present, influencing our actions and decisions. As Rytovaara notes, ancestors provide answers to the enduring questions of existence: "From whence do we come, who are we, and where do we go," thus interconnecting past, present, and future (Rytovaara, 2012, p, 617). She posits that ancestral experiences, influenced by cultural shifts, significantly impact our mental frameworks. For Ato, these ancestral symbols illuminate his struggle to reconcile his contemporary, Westernized life with his Ghanaian heritage. His dream thus becomes a space where ancestral wisdom and cultural memory intertwine, offering profound insights into his identity and sense of belonging.

Ama Ata Aidoo's The Dilemma of a Ghost presents a complex encounter between the Afro-diaspora and Africa, where the unresolved legacy of history is embodied in Ato's family through their meeting with a figure who is not truly a stranger. Rogers Asempasah and Samuel Ato Bentum in their article "In search of a post-transatlantic slave trade dwelling and conviviality: rethinking Ghana's 'Year of Return' with Ama Ata Aidoo's The Dilemma of a Ghost (1965)" argue that the play "radically reimagines 'home' as a prerequisite for identity and sociability" predating the transatlantic slave trade, questioning the possibility of Afro-diasporans creating a genuine home in Africa. Aidoo critiques the myth of home and returns, revealing that the slave trade has rendered conventional notions of "home" obsolete. As Asempasah and Bentum note, the "frequent disillusionment" of Afrodiasporans stems from a "naïve or mythic figuration of Africa as home" (Asempasah et al, 2023, p, 6). Africa, viewed as a symbol of purity and origins, assumes that Afro-diasporans can reintegrate without causing cultural or ethical disruption. However, this ideal is complicated by feelings of disconnection, grief, and confusion as descendants of enslaved people navigate conflicting identities. For Ato, an American returnee, his ties to both Ghana and the West, coupled with his family's expectations and his wife's foreign identity, create a sense of alienation, challenging traditional notions of home and belonging.

Material and Methods

Framed within Carl Jung's theoretical construct of the collective unconscious, Ato's journey to Elmina and Cape Coast—historical sites of the transatlantic slave trade—signifies inherited trauma within the collective unconscious. Ato's dream is an attempt to confront the historical silence, serving as a subconscious exploration of the unspoken and unacknowledged facets of cultural narrative. Consequently, the dream emerges as a metaphor for the intricate interplay of communal memory and the challenges of reconciling with a history both consciously and unconsciously inflicted.

Results and Discussion

In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ama Ata Aidoo crafts a poignant exploration of the soul's torment, as embodied in Ato's dream of confronting a ghost at Cape Coast and Elmina

Junction. This spectral encounter, laden with historical and cultural symbolism, serves as a mirror to Ato's inner conflict - a struggle between the pull of tradition and the allure of modernity. The dream stands as a metaphor for the greater tension between his Western education and lifestyle, and the ancestral obligations bound by his Ghanaian heritage. Ato finds himself suspended between two irreconcilable worlds: one governed by familial duty and the reverence due to the elders, whose wisdom, as the Dangme proverb declares, "emits a richer odor" (Sanka et al, 2013, p, 94), and the other marked by the siren call of individual liberty and progress. In Ghanaian culture, the elderly are venerated as the repositories of wisdom, their words bearing the weight of generations. Ato's Western perspective, however, places him at odds with this tradition, deepening his alienation and heightening his sense of discord. The wisdom of the elders, steeped in time-honored customs, stands in stark contrast to Ato's newly acquired modern outlook, magnifying his struggle to navigate these conflicting realms. Through the lens of Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, Ato's dream may be seen as a manifestation of his psychological turmoil. The ghost, the crossroads, and the evocative landmarks of Cape Coast and Elmina are not mere elements of the dream but symbols of deeper significance. The ghost embodies the voices of Ato's ancestors, whispering of cultural legacy and ancestral duties, while the crossroads represents the critical juncture at which Ato finds himself, torn between two divergent paths. This dilemma reveals his incapacity to reconcile his African heritage with his Westernized identity, thus encapsulating the tragic discord at the heart of his existence.

Modern mass society rapidly embraces innovative developments, yet it also suggests that as one descends into synaesthetically mediated altered states of consciousness and archetypal imagery, one simultaneously expands outward into a larger collective social field. Jung (1955) posits that "individual archetypal imagination makes conscious what compensates for collective social distress" (Jung, 2014, p, 550). Thus, immersion in imaginative states of consciousness involves a deeper connection to the social realm, surpassing what is possible in ordinary consciousness. As Ato delves into his unconscious mind, he encounters symbolic imagery that reflects the broader socioeconomic challenges of his community, such as the tension between honoring tradition and embracing modernity. His dream, beyond personal introspection, acts as a metaphor for the larger postcolonial struggle with identity, emphasizing the intertwined nature of societal issues and individual dreams. This dynamic illustrates how individual psychology resonates with collective concerns. As Hunt observes, "There is hardly a return to anything biological, racial, or phylogenetic, but rather a picking up of a broken cultural thread for its renewal and restatement as psychology" (Hunt, 2012, p, 88). Therefore, Ato's dream symbolizes the interaction between personal psychological conflict and the collective regeneration of cultural identity.

In Act Three of *The Dilemma of a Ghost,* Ato and Eulalie spend a weekend together when Ato has a strange and symbolic dream. Two children sing:

"One early morning When the moon was up Shining as the sun, I went to Elmina Junction. And there and there, I saw a wretched ghost. Going up and down Singing to himself 'Shall I go to Cape Coast, Or to Elmina I don't know, I can't tell. I don't know" (Aidoo, 1965, p, 28).

Throughout Africa's ethnic diversity, dreaming is regarded as a sacred gift passed down through generations, a powerful experience that connects individuals to their ancestors and their cultural identity. Ato's dream serves as a narrative device drawing on the dynamic and transformative aspects of cultural heritage. This resonates with Jungian theory, which posits that dreams can reflect and transform collective experiences. Dreams, according to African traditions, can serve as both sources of protection and places of psychic healing, where "dream-selves travel out of bodies, and sorcerers, gods, goddesses, spirits, and the dead physically enter the dreamer's presence" (Dione, 2018, p, 33). In this way, dreams transcend chaos and can connect the dreamer with the highest sacred authority. Ato's dream, which pits his inner self against historical traumas, mirrors the fluidity of cultural identity and its impact on both, personal and societal narratives. The locations of Elmina and Cape Coast, deeply rooted in Ghana's colonial history and the slave trade, embody these historical intersections. As Oppong notes, "The encounters of Cape Coast and Elmina with Europe bear similar features" (Oppong et al, 2018, p, 38), highlighting the inextricable link between the individual's subconscious and broader historical legacies.

Ato's dream in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* encapsulates the profound cultural tension between Ghana's reluctance to confront the legacy of the slave trade and Ato's fear of making decisive choices. As he shares his dream with his uncle, Ato remarks, "Afternoon sleep always brings me afternoon dreams, horrid, disgusting, enigmatic dreams. Damn, this ghost at the junction... Did it go to Elmina or Cape Coast? And I used to wonder, oh, I used to wonder about so many things then. But why should I dream about all these things now?" (Aidoo, 1936, p, 29). Although Ato did not personally experience or witness the horrors of the past, it is his collective unconscious that surfaces in the dream, evoking his curiosity and confusion. The conflicting narratives of Ghana's history highlight --- that the legacy of the slave trade continues to shape contemporary notions of identity and understanding. Drawing on Carl Jung's distinction between the "spirit of the depths" (the unconscious) and the "spirit of the times" (waking consciousness) (Spano, 2013, p, 4), Ato's internal struggle can be understood as a clash between his deeper unconscious cultural roots and the modern, Westernized identity he has adopted. His dream, featuring the ghost and its indecision between Elmina and Cape Coast, represents the "spirit of the depths," signifying the profound influence of ancestral memory and unconscious forces on his life. While Ato may outwardly engage with Western education and lifestyle, suggesting he operates within the "spirit of the times," his unconscious-his "spirit of the depths"continually draws him back to the unresolved tensions of his heritage.

The central dilemma in The Dilemma of a Ghost revolves around the challenge of reconciling with the concept of home, rather than simply choosing between Elmina and Cape Coast. This choice is complicated by the opposing "materialities, mentalities, and histories" (Asempasah et al, 2023, p, 7) that Ato confronts. The play illustrates that home is not a fixed destination but a continual process of coming to terms with a fractured identity, irrevocably shaped by the transatlantic slave trade. Aidoo reveals this through the tensions and conflicts between Ato, his family, Eulalie, and the Ghanaian in-laws. The play explores the intricate relationship between the diaspora and the homeland, emphasizing that home is a dynamic process of negotiating identities influenced by historical legacies. The concept of transculturation, which seeks to bridge ethnic divides, allows individuals to adapt and live harmoniously in a foreign land. As Kaur observes, "Transculturation bridges the gap between these Ghanaian diasporic people and their American counterparts in an ideal living atmosphere" (Kaur et al, 2023, p, 1951). Thus, Ato's dream and his indecision between Cape Coast and Elmina can be seen as a metaphor for his struggle with the evolving notion of home, reflecting his internal conflict between his cultural heritage and diasporic experiences.

Conclusion

Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* exemplifies that literary works reflect and enrich the African legacy. The play's protagonist grapples with issues deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts reflecting the broader struggles African societies face as they strive to preserve their cultural heritage amid societal change. This tension mirrors the collective unconscious of the diaspora. Despite its painful and somber elements, the play concludes on a note of reconciliation, underscoring the need "to transcend history, time, space/place, and culture so as to give way to opportunity, build up an all-inclusive African identity" (Dione, 2018, p, 33). This approach fosters a renewed, diverse dialogue between Africans and African Americans.

In Jungian psychology, archetypes represent innate psychic instincts that shape our perceptions and interactions with the world. These archetypal images or symbols emerge in dreams and mythology, connecting with the psyche and guiding adaptation through instinctual drives (Gallagher, 2021, p, 5). Ato's dream of Cape Coast and Elmina exemplifies this concept, functioning as a journey into ancestral history and collective trauma. The dream's non-linear portrayal of time reflects the psychological impact of the transatlantic slave trade, highlighting its resonance within the collective unconscious. This paper deploys Jungian theories to analyze Ato's dream in The Dilemma of a Ghost, examining the historical consciousness of Ghanaians and the marginalization of this dark chapter of history. The play's setting in Elmina and Cape Coast, coupled with Ato's dream, holds significant implications. The end of the slave trade from Ghana's discursive memory prompts questions about what remains hidden beneath the surface – namely, the repressed historical traumas and shadow aspects of the collective unconscious. Ato's dream is interpreted as an attempt to confront this historical silence, serving as a subconscious exploration of the unspoken and unacknowledged facets of cultural narrative. Consequently, the dream emerges as a metaphor for the intricate interplay of communal memory and the challenges of reconciling with a history both consciously and unconsciously inflicted.

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