

AT THE CROSSROADS OF VERSE AND VULNERABILITY: KOFI AWOONOR'S POETRY IN THE CONTEXT OF RISK SOCIETY

ŞİİR VE KIRILGANLIĞIN KAVŞAĞINDA: RİSK TOPLUMU BAĞLAMINDA KOFİ AWOONOR'UN ŞİİRİ

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Yakut AKBAY

Dr.Öğr.Üyesi

Ankara Bilim Üniversitesi

yakutakbay@gmail.comORCID ID: [0000-0003-1557-232X](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1557-232X)

ABSTRACT

This article explores the intersection between Kofi Awoonor's (1935-2013) poetry and the sociological concept of risk society. The research is particularly built around Awoonor's collection of *Rediscovery and Other Poems* (1964). In the collection, which explores displacement, fragmentation, and uncertainty, Awoonor portrays the intricate structures of postcolonial societies. The study argues that Awoonor's poetry describes the socio-political landscape of postcolonial societies, which intersect with the anxieties and threats that define the human condition today. The research employs the concept of risk society, introduced by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1944-2015) and characterised by the concerns and uncertainties caused by globalisation and the associated environmental degradation. Hence, the study focuses on the concepts related to risk society, such as reflexive modernisation and the manufactured risks characteristic of modern society. Awoonor draws attention to the tensions between tradition and modernity to illustrate how indigenous peoples attempt to cope with the transition from the colonial period to the postcolonial world and the challenges of rapid social, political, and cultural change. The article explores the convergence between the above concerns and the subsequent consequences of decolonisation and its impact on the indigenous peoples of the postcolonial world. Incorporating the concept of risk society into a postcolonial reading of Awoonor's poetry allows us to understand the vulnerabilities and uncertainties faced by indigenous peoples in the transition from colonial subjugation to postcolonial agency.

Keywords: *Awoonor, culture, postcolonial, reflexive modernisation, risk society*

ÖZ

Bu makale, Kofi Awoonor'un (1935-2013) şiiri ile sosyolojik risk toplumu kavramı arasındaki kesişimi incelemektedir. Araştırma özellikle Awoonor'un *Rediscovery and Other Poems (Yeniden Keşif ve Diğer Şiirler)* (1964) adlı şiir koleksiyonu üzerinde odaklanmaktadır. Awoonor, yerinden edilme, parçalanma ve belirsizlik temalarını ele alan bu koleksiyonda, sömürge sonrası toplumların karmaşık durumunu ele almaktadır. Bu çalışma, Awoonor'un şiirinin, günümüz insanlık durumunu tanımlayan kaygı ve tehditlerle kesişen postkolonyal toplumların sosyo-politik manzarasını yansıttığını savunmaktadır. Araştırma, Alman sosyolog Ulrich Beck (1944-2015) tarafından ortaya atılan ve küreselleşme ile buna bağlı çevresel bozulmanın neden olduğu endişe ve belirsizliklerle nitelendirilen risk toplumu kavramını kullanmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, çalışmanın odak noktası, refleksif modernleşme ve modern toplumun karakteristik özelliği olan üretilmiş riskler gibi risk toplumuyla ilgili kavramlardır. Awoonor, yerli halkların sömürge döneminden sömürge sonrası dünyaya geçiş sürecinde yaşadıkları hızlı sosyal, siyasi ve kültürel değişimlerin yarattığı zorluklarla başa çıkma çabalarını, gelenek ile modernite arasındaki gerilimlere dikkat çekerek ortaya koymaktadır. Makale, söz konusu kaygılar ile dekolonizasyonun ardından ortaya çıkan sonuçlar arasındaki kesişimi ve bunun postkolonyal dünyadaki yerli halklar üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Awoonor'un şiirini postkolonyal bir okumayla, risk toplumu kavramını da dahil ederek ele almak, yerli halkların sömürge boyunduruğundan postkolonyal faillığe geçiş sürecinde yaşadıkları kırılğanlıkları ve belirsizlikleri daha iyi anlamamıza olanak tanımaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Awoonor, kültür, postkolonyal, refleksif modernleşme, risk toplumu.*

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INTRODUCTION

“Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change.”
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, 1818

In postcolonial contexts, poetry has played an essential role in shaping cultural and political debates, giving voice to diverse experiences and challenging the legacies of colonialism. Within this tradition, Kofi Awoonor (1935–2013) stands out as a significant African poet whose work explores themes of cultural displacement, social instability, and the quest for identity in rapidly changing modern societies. His poetry, rooted in both indigenous traditions and contemporary literary forms, provides a valuable perspective for understanding the complex negotiations of postcolonial African identities. When considered alongside Ulrich Beck’s concept of the risk society, Awoonor’s poetry promotes an interdisciplinary approach that links postcolonial literature with global sociological discussions, particularly on issues such as environmental degradation, political unrest, and cultural dislocation. Both Awoonor’s poetry and Beck’s risk society address the destabilising effects of modernity and the human quest for continuity and stability in a swiftly evolving world.

More generally, postcolonial African poetry has made significant contributions to cultural and political discourse, both within African societies and beyond. It provides a platform for diverse voices, questioning dominant narratives and exploring the challenges of colonial and postcolonial experiences. Through vivid imagery, symbolism, and metaphor, African poets¹ illuminate the ongoing impact of colonial history on African communities. Their works also engage with indigenous languages, oral traditions, and cultural symbols, challenging the dominance of colonial languages and Eurocentric literary forms. By blending traditional African poetic structures with Western literary traditions, these writers preserve the universality of poetry while enriching it with vernacular themes.

This experimental approach, however, has not been without controversy. Critics argue that such experimentation risks importing the “art-for-art’s sake” implications of Western poetry, thereby threatening indigenous traditions and eroding cultural authenticity (Burt, 2017, p. 140). On the other hand, others remind us that “praise songs and prayers and spells have poetic forms too, which can be replicated, or troped, or hybridized” (Burt, 2017, p. 140). Indeed, these traditional compositions, distinguished by their rhythmic structures, repetition, and metaphor, remain lyrical celebrations of individuals, deities, or communities. By drawing from such sources, African poets preserve the richness of oral traditions while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of poetic expression.

The Anglophone African poet Kofi Awoonor exemplifies this dynamic synthesis. Recognised as one of the most remarkable poets of his generation, Awoonor’s innovative experimentations bridge the gap between traditional African oral forms and modern literary techniques. His poetic voice is distinguished by lyrical intensity, rich imagery, and inspiration from his native Ewe² oral tradition. Awoonor incorporates Ewe phrases and proverbs into his English-language poetry, preserving the rhythm and essence of his mother tongue while also appealing to global audiences. In doing so, he negotiates the dual demands of local authenticity and international literary recognition.

Awoonor’s work consistently treats themes of exile, death, and longing, “both a longing for death as an end to pain and a longing that is death by its nature,” while also revealing “his child-like faith in the mystery and awe of supernatural things, of their presence, if not their tangible appearance” (Tucker, 1976, pp. 46, 48). For him, tradition and continuity lie at the heart of African literature. He maintains that African writers “have assayed consciously or unconsciously to step out on the long journey of the restoration” (Awoonor, 1974, p. 671). The task, he assures his readers, is not tied to a

¹ For some of them, see the works of Hadrawi (1943–2022), Kofi Awoonor (1935–2013), Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001), Christopher Okigbo (1932–1967), Mazisi Kunene (1930–2006), and Niyi Osundare (1947–).

² The Ewe are an ethnic group on the West African coast whose approximately four million members live in south-east Ghana, southern Togo and neighbouring parts of Benin (Appiah & Gates, 2010, p. 454).

particular regime or condition but is instead part of “a process of [a] fragmented world, of seeing the world from the African view” (p. 671). Through this vision, Awoonor affirms the enduring power of African poetry to respond to both local realities and global crises, grounding its strength in tradition and cultural continuity.

1. Scholarship on Globalisation, Risk, and Postcolonialism

Awoonor’s poetry reflects the unstable position of African nations in the face of transnational forces. His description of the cultural displacement, economic exploitation and decline of traditional values to which post-colonial societies are exposed can be read as a consequence of modernisation and industrialisation. Zygmunt Bauman (2000) uses the metaphor of “liquid modernity” to describe contemporary society in contrast to the stable, fixed structures of earlier phases of modernity, which were characterised by stable social institutions and fixed identities (pp. 7-8). Liquid modernity, Bauman argues, is defined as “a world in which these structures are increasingly dissolving and being replaced by uncertainty and flexibility. People must constantly adapt to changes in the global economy, cultural influences, and technological advances, and feel insecure and fragmented” (pp. 9, 163).

Paul James’s arguments, on the other hand, are built around the relationship between globalisation and localisation. James (2006) notes that “our world is experiencing powerful processes of globalization that are contributing to reconstituting the local” and that “globalization is making people more aware of the meaning of local embeddedness” (p. 44). In *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism* (2006), the author argues in favour of a perspective that sees globalism, nationalism and tribalism as interwoven and recurring elements of human history, rather than as separate phases, one superseding the other (p. 4). James criticises reductionist approaches that treat globalisation as the dominant force undermining national and local identities. Instead, he shows how nationalism and tribalism persist and adapt in response to global changes. By illustrating how globalism affects both Western societies and the postcolonial world, he asserts that globalization does not entirely dissolve old identities or create a homogeneous world; on the contrary, it reshapes power structures, paving the way for localized reactions that seek to reclaim autonomy and security (p. 268).

In his seminal work *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), Appadurai argues that globalisation produces uneven and fragmented cultural experiences that involve “a general break with all sorts of pasts” (p. 3). He points out the fact that “globalization is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even localizing process” and it “does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization” (p. 17). Appadurai (1996) emphasises the importance of historical context in understanding any cultural phenomenon noting that history is “ruthless” because it does not allow for oversimplification or universalisation; the experience of every society is rooted in its specific historical circumstances (pp. 17-18). He asserts that localities are not isolated; rather, they are shaped by and contribute to global processes (p. 18). Appadurai’s renowned concept of deterritorialization, described as “one of the central forces of the modern world,” addresses the disconnection between culture and geography and is closely related to contemporary issues in postcolonial societies (1996, p. 37). He situates globalisation within a historical framework, specifically demonstrating how colonialism facilitated many of today’s global connections.

The effects of globalisation are also explored in Bill Ashcroft’s foundational book, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), which examines its relation to bigger issues of postcolonial culture. The book discusses how the colonial legacy continues within the global system, emphasising the vulnerabilities of postcolonial societies. Ashcroft highlights that “in the context of globalization, analyses of local cultural production and specific social and historical developments are becoming more and more important” (p. 210). The author (1989) asserts that “postcolonialism brings to cultural studies its own well-established concepts of diversity, particularity and local difference,” as “the global term ‘culture’ only becomes comprehensible as a multiplicity of local ‘cultures’” (p. 210). Accordingly, postcolonial studies, as articulated by Ashcroft, provide critical concepts such as diversity, particularity, and local difference that are essential for understanding and addressing the inequalities and risks in the global arena.

Taken together, the arguments of Bauman, James, Appadurai, and Ashcroft demonstrate how globalisation and modernity generate instability, fragmentation, and new forms of risk, while also reshaping local identities and postcolonial realities. These theoretical perspectives provide the conceptual groundwork for examining how such global processes are represented in literature. In this context, Kofi Awoonor's poetry is particularly significant, as the poet addresses these socio-political issues, exploring the vulnerabilities and uncertainties of postcolonial African societies. Moreover, Awoonor explores the impact of colonialism on African societies, drawing on the realities of post-independence Africa. It is therefore necessary to examine the extent to which the issues raised in his poems are crucial to understanding modern African societies within the risk society in which globalisation and modernisation create new forms of global risks. In this regard, a postcolonial critique of Awoonor's poems provides a rich interdisciplinary approach that combines literary and sociological discourses.

2. Risk Society as a Framework for Postcolonial Analysis

Risk society can be defined as a term by which modern society organises itself in response to risk. It is utilised as a sociological concept closely associated with important authors of modernity, such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. In his seminal work *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1986), Ulrich Beck defines the concept of risk society "as a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself" (p. 21). He argues that "risks, as opposed to older dangers, are consequences which relate to the threatening force of modernization and to its globalisation of doubt" and that "they are politically reflexive" (Beck, 1986, p. 21). Beck directly connects the concept of risk with the concept of reflexive modernisation or reflexive modernity. Modernization, as Beck argues, means "surges of technological rationalization and changes in work and organization, but beyond that, it includes much more: the change in societal characteristics and normal biographies, changes of lifestyle and forms of love, change in the structures of power and influence, in the forms of political repression and participation, in views of reality and in norms of knowledge" (p. 50). He believes that the social processes of industrialisation and modernisation are associated with effects that were perceived as catastrophic by the majority of humanity, both in the nineteenth century and today (p. 51). Both epochs involve significant and dangerous changes in human living conditions that occur in connection with certain phases in the development of market integration, productive forces and property and power relations (p. 51). Each time, there can be significant material consequences, in that, there was material impoverishment, poverty, hunger and overpopulation in the past; whereas today, the natural foundations of life are threatened and destroyed (p. 51).

Anthony Giddens, on the other hand, in *Making Sense of Modernity* (1998), describes the concept of risk society as "a society increasingly preoccupied with the future (and also with safety), which generates the notion of risk" and "a world which we are both exploring and seeking to normalize and control" (Giddens & Pierson, 1998, p. 209). Giddens adds that although the concept offers a negative connotation, risk society can also be seen "in a positive light, in terms of the taking of bold initiatives in the face of a problematic future" (p. 209). In addition to the purely social issues addressed by Beck and Giddens, the concept of risk society is treated from the point of view of environmental issues characterised by political implications. It is also noteworthy that compared to Ulrich Beck's theory of reflexive modernisation, Anthony Giddens (1990) prefers to use the term modernity in the context of risk society. He describes modernity as "inherently globalising," and that "the unsettling consequences of this phenomenon combine with the circularity of its reflexive character to form a universe of events in which risk and hazard take on a novel character" (p. 177). Giddens goes hand in hand with Beck and argues that modernity brings disruptive changes to societies that can be unsettling because they undermine traditional ways of life and create uncertainties. He explains that in pre-modern societies, risks and hazards were usually seen as external and natural. In contrast, in modern societies, many risks are created or exacerbated by human activity and thus take on new forms. John Dryzek traces the emergence of environmental discourse back to industrialisation. In the *Politics of the Earth:*

Environmental Discourses (2013), he suggests that “environmental discourse begins in industrial society, and so has to be positioned in the context of the discourse of industrialism” (p. 14). Based on this discourse-centred approach, the author argues that “the politics of the emerging risk society is organized around the environmental risks which industrial society has generated, but with which it has shown itself incapable of dealing” (Dryzek, 2013, p. 178). Dryzek (2013) believes that a risk society in which “the dominant institutions of industrial society lose their legitimacy in the eyes of the public” contributes to the uprising of a whole series of new, interconnected democratic institutions (p. 179).

The above discussions demonstrate how the relationship between the concept of risk society and postcolonialism is intertwined. They illustrate how colonial history, cultural norms and environmental factors influence risk perceptions in postcolonial societies. Beck and Giddens’ theory of risk society is based on the idea of the production and management of risks, especially risks associated with technological and environmental change. In a postcolonial context, these risks are unequally distributed and reflect the historical inequalities that emerged during colonial rule. On the other hand, Giddens discusses the reflexive nature of modernity, in which traditional social structures and identities are constantly questioned and remodelled. Likewise, postcolonialism explores the identity crises that arise from the imposition of foreign cultures and values during colonisation. Furthermore, in postcolonial societies, the blending of indigenous and colonial cultures leads to complex identity negotiations. This cultural hybridity can be seen as both a risk and an opportunity that represents Giddens’s idea of reflexivity. The interrelation between the concept of risk society and postcolonialism paves the way for postcolonial societies to negotiate their roles and interests in dealing with environmental risks and injustices rooted in the colonial legacy. In addition, this framework helps to illuminate the tensions between tradition and modernity, illustrating how indigenous peoples are coping with transitioning from colonialism to a postcolonial world, facing rapid social, political and cultural changes.

3. The Intersection between Kofi Awoonor’s Poetry and Risk Society

Kofi Awoonor established his poetic style by experimenting with the verse forms of his native Ewe culture. His first collection, *Rediscovery and Other Poems* (1964), which forms the backbone of this study, was published in Nigeria in 1964. In this work, Awoonor deals with displacement, fragmentation and uncertainty, thereby meditating on the challenges faced by post-colonial societies. The book begins with poems that point us in two directions, towards a reconciled past and a future with new challenges and new possibilities (Anyidoho, 2014, p. 18). *Rediscovery and Other Poems* (1964) is an impressive collection that captures Kofi Awoonor's exploration of African identity, cultural heritage and the socio-political realities of his time. Through his innovative blend of traditional and modern forms, Awoonor creates a powerful poetic voice that is both personally and collectively meaningful. The poet explores the effects of colonialism and the struggles of postcolonial identity, which agrees with Ulrich Beck’s notion of living in a state of heightened awareness of risks. In *Rediscovery and Other Poems* (1964), these risks include cultural disintegration and the impact of Western hegemony on African societies.

Rediscovery and Other Poems (1964) begins with the poem “My God of Songs was Ill.” The poem was written in free verse, which does not adhere to a specific rhyme scheme, and consists of several stanzas of varying length. Awoonor employs repetition as a peculiarity of oral poetry to create a rhythmic quality. In the poem, the speaker crosses the river while the canoes are empty and the boatman is away (Awoonor, 2014, p. 688). Awoonor models the poem on an African dirge, describing his god of songs as “groaning and crying” with illness and to heal him, he takes him to the juju priest.³ Awoonor’s use of the imagery of “my god of songs” symbolises cultural or spiritual decay, indicative of the modern individual who embarks on risks without traditional guidance. It is evident in the speaker’s journey undertaken alone, which conveys a sense of isolation and displacement. Kofi Awoonor was the first major poet who “drew in his early poetry on dirges and other Ewe oral traditions to chronicle the damaging impact of colonialism” (Okunoye, 2017, p. 39). This poetic technique contributes significantly to conveying the poet’s pessimistic tone, which prevails from the beginning of the poem.

³ In Ghana, the juju priest is a “mixture of doctor and priest,” who serves as a mediator between “his patients or congregation and the spirits” (Levy, 2002, p. 77). He listens to the problems of the suffering person and then “works his magic to the drumming, singing, and dancing of his assistant priests” (p. 77).

The absence of the juju priest and the subsequent waiting outside the hut symbolise the uncertainty and the need for authority in dealing with contemporary problems. The act of knocking and entering with his backside symbolises humility or an unconventional approach to the search for wisdom: “So I walked in with my backside / with my god of songs crying on my head / I placed him on the stool” (Awoonor, 2014, p. 689). The act of “placing [the god of songs] on the stool” signifies an attempt to maintain respect and continuity, even though the nature of that respect is questioned and redefined. On the other hand, the above line suggests that the poet is grappling with the need to adapt traditional beliefs to a new context.

Beck (1992) asserts that reflexive modernisation “confronts and tries to accommodate the essential tension between human indeterminacy” and “the inevitable tendency to objectify and naturalize our institutional and cultural productions” (p. 6). Beck’s argument is based on the idea that the unquestioned belief in progress and scientific rationality is called into question by the fact that “science,” “progress,” and “democracy” are beginning to crumble and dissolve in the reflexivity of modernisation (1992, p. 14). He advocates for a continuous process of critical self-examination and reflection within societies, which involves revising the underlying assumptions of progress, science, and rationality, recognising their limitations and potential risks. A similar process of questioning and disillusionment with established traditions and beliefs can be observed in Awoonor’s “My God of Songs was Ill.” The illness of the “god of songs” symbolises the weakening or failure of traditional cultural and spiritual certainties. Just as Beck describes the disintegration of fundamental concepts, Awoonor depicts a crisis of traditional belief systems. Nevertheless, Awoonor’s poem implies a journey from a state of suffering to one of healing. This suggestion is rooted in the past tense usage of “was,” indicating that the illness is no longer a current condition. By stating “was ill,” the title immediately introduces the idea that the god of songs has experienced illness but also hints at the possibility of recovery by the end of the poem when he states that “my god burst into songs, new strong songs / that I am still singing with him” (Awoonor, 2014, p. 689). In the closing lines when the juju priest advises the speaker to “take [his god of songs] to [his] father’s gods, the poet implicitly emphasizes the relationship between individual identity and collective heritage. Moreover, by taking his personal “god of songs” to the collective gods of the ancestors, Awoonor could be suggesting that personal growth is rooted in cultural background. The dual suggestion of simultaneous pessimism and optimism that pervades the poem forms the basis for exploring themes related to suffering, resilience and possible regeneration.

In “Rediscovery,” Kofi Awoonor deals with such postcolonial themes as loss and community belonging. The poem is permeated with a sense of personal and collective reflection. The poet explores the themes of returning to one’s roots, rediscovering cultural heritage and reassessing the impact of colonialism and modernisation on African identity. The form and structure of the poem also contribute to the content. Typical of Awoonor’s work, the poem was written in free verse, allowing the poet to express his thoughts and feelings freely and fluently. In comparison to “My God of Songs was Ill,” “Rediscovery,” as the name suggests, carries a more optimistic tone and the lines “the fishermen carry their nets home,” “the gulls return to Bird Island” and “the children’s laughter gives way to night” reinforce this idea (Awoonor, 2014, p. 696). Kofi Awoonor (1975) once observed that “it is one of the most interesting ironies of history that English colonialism aroused the earliest nationalistic sentiment and anti-colonial rhetoric on the African continent” (p. 185). Moreover, the poet is particularly preoccupied with “the image of the African, especially the propensity of Africans to adopt foreign lifestyles to the detriment of their own” (Glover-Meni & Akakpo, 2020, p. 55). “Rediscovery” is in line with Awoonor’s point of view since the poet is committed to the search for meaning despite all adversity to reclaim the cultural heritage: “There shall still linger the communion we forged / the feast of oneness which we partook of / There shall still be the eternal gateman / who will close the cemetery doors” (Awoonor, 2014, p. 696).

Beck (1992) argues that reflexive modernisation leads to social change through critical consciousness and that “the centre of risk consciousness lies not in the present, but in the future” since

in the risk society, “the past loses the power to determine the present” and “its place is taken by the future” (p. 34). He defines the cause of current experience and action as “non-existent, invented, and fictive” (p. 34). In “Rediscovery,” the process of transformation is expressed in the poet’s journey towards cultural and personal renewal as he confronts the impact of modernity and colonial history. It is no coincidence that the poet concludes the poem, much like Awoonor’s previously explored poem – “My God of Songs Was Ill,” with the idea of rebirth. The poem ends on a hopeful note, with the speaker envisioning a future where cultural identity is fully embraced and celebrated: “It is the new chorus of our forgotten comrades / and the hallelujahs of our second selves” (Awoonor, 2014, p. 696).

In light of Giddens’s concept of manufactured risks, it is remarkable that these risks in postcolonial societies are embedded in the experience of colonisation. Discussing Africa’s present predicament, Rodney (1996) observes that the nature of the colonial state “that had evolved over the colonial period was not specific to any particular agrarian system;” on the contrary, “its specificity was, rather, political; more than anything else, the form of the state was shaped by the African colonial experience” (p. 23). He explains that it was designed primarily to serve the needs of the colonial powers, focusing on control, exploitation of resources, and maintenance of authority over the colonized populations. Subsequently, this led to economic underdevelopment, political instability, cultural identity conflicts and environmental degradation. Awoonor’s “The Weaver Bird” is an illustrative example that addresses the destructive impact of colonialism on indigenous cultures and environments. Awoonor deliberately employs the leitmotif of a weaver bird, known for building complex and communal nests, to suggest the disruption of natural harmony by a coloniser, metaphorically represented by a weaver bird. The poem describes how the traditional way of life and local customs are tampered with and overshadowed by the colonisers’ culture. In this respect, Giddens’s concept of disembedding mechanisms explains in a relevant way how modernity is changing social relations, leading to both new opportunities and new risks in the modern world (1990, p. 141). Giddens (1990) argues that these mechanisms require new forms of trust and contribute to the reflexivity of modern societies (p. 144). In “The Weaver Bird,” Awoonor describes how traditional social and cultural relationships were removed from their local context and replaced by foreign systems, leading to environmental degradation, cultural loss and social alienation. The destructive effects of this colonial disembedding are described as follows: “They say it came from the west / Where the storms on the sea had chased away the seagulls / And the fishermen dried their nets by lantern light” (Awoonor, 2014, p. 697). The reference to being unable to “join the prayers and answers of the communicants” suggests a disconnection from traditional spiritual practices (Awoonor, 2014, p. 697). Undoubtedly, colonialism imposed Western religious beliefs and practices on indigenous cultures, leading to the marginalization or suppression of traditional belief systems. Accordingly, in the poem, the inability to participate in communal rituals symbolizes the disruption of indigenous spiritual practices under colonial rule.

The dramatic effects of cultural and environmental degradation are further emphasised at the end of the poem when the speaker suggests that the indigenous people will continue to defy new ways in order to preserve their native way of life: “We look for new homes every day, / For new altars we strive to rebuild / The old shrines defiled by the weaver's excrement” (Awoonor, 2014, p. 697). In the line “We look for new homes every day,” the poet connotes the forced migration and resettlement due to colonial policies and in a broader sense, this line signifies the ongoing search for a stable and authentic cultural identity in the postcolonial context. Additionally, the search for “new homes” points to the search for a sense of belonging and security that has been lost as a result of the cultural and social disturbance caused by colonial rule. The act of striving to rebuild “new altars” highlights the resilience and determination of postcolonial societies to restore their cultural practices and reconnect to their heritage and identity. On the other hand, “the old shrines defiled by the weaver's excrement” can be interpreted metaphorically as the desecration of indigenous spiritual sites by colonial encroachment. Colonial powers viewed indigenous belief systems as primitive or backwards, leading to the destruction or profanity of sacred sites and practices. Therefore, the image of the weaver bird’s excrement defiling the old shrines symbolises the degradation and contamination of indigenous cultures and traditions by colonial influence. Similarly, the use of “excrement” emphasises the sense of disgust and violation felt by the colonised as well as the dehumanising nature of colonial exploitation.

According to Early (1975), “song is not only the mode of much of Awoonor's poetry” but “it is also a theme and a value” (p. 56). Indeed, Kofi Awoonor’s poetic legacy is rich in elegiac and ritual rhythms that convey “the oral tradition of African village songs, with their various communal forms, themes, and functions” (Early, 1975, p. 54). Inspired by Ghanaian culture, Awoonor incorporates elements of indigenous dirges into his poem “Songs of Sorrow,” in which the speaker laments the misfortune that has befallen his people and blames his dead ancestors for their inability to protect their heritage. Similar to Beck and Giddens’s concept of risk society, characterised by uncertainties and risks caused by social changes, the lines “And Kpeti’s great household is no more, / Only the broken fence stands” stand as a metaphor for the collapse of traditional structures in the face of modernisation and social changes (Awoonor, 2014, p. 701). In addition, the lines “And those who dared not look in his face / Have come out as men” point to a shift in social roles that destabilises old systems and paves the way for the emergence of new social identities. However, as the speaker laments, “returning is not possible. / And going forward is a great difficulty,” which serves as a recognition that the past is irretrievable and irrevocable (Awoonor, 2014, p. 701). In the frame of Giddens’s reflexive modernity, “Songs of Sorrow” points out the ongoing process of social change and individual adaptation in response to the challenges of modern life.

Reading closely Awoonor’s poems from his collection *Rediscovery and Other Poems* (1964), it is worth emphasising that “the old culture remains for Awoonor a source of renewed vitality” (Early, 1975, p. 56). Nonetheless, Awoonor recognises the rapid social changes in Africa brought about by technological progress. When asked what should happen to such fundamental values as African traditions, African communal life and the general spirit that drove African societies long before the arrival of the white man, Kofi Awoonor sees a simple answer: “One has to adjust one’s self to the thinking, the way of life which has almost died, to marry it to this new technology” (as cited in Pieterse & Duerden, 1972, p. 30).

CONCLUSION

Based on Kofi Awoonor’s *Rediscovery and Other Poems* (1964), Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens’s concepts provide a framework for understanding the challenges of modernity and its implications in a postcolonial context. In exploring the intersections between Beck and Giddens's theories on risk society and reflexive modernity with Awoonor’s *Rediscovery and Other Poems*, it becomes clear how the cultural and existential risks are linked to the legacy of colonialism and the postcolonial search for identity and autonomy. Awoonor’s *Rediscovery and Other Poems* captures the essence of Ghana’s struggle with its postcolonial identity and represents a society that needs to rediscover itself after the withdrawal of colonial powers. The poet addresses cultural displacement, the search for identity and the search for meaning in a world irrevocably changed by colonialism. Awoonor’s poetry can be read as a reflexive response to the risks and uncertainties of the postcolonial situation thus mirroring the issues identified by Beck and Giddens. The intersection of Beck and Giddens’s theories with Awoonor’s poetry is most evident in the shared focus on the consequences of modernisation. This can be explained by the fact that the concept of risk society is characterised not only by the environmental and technological risks highlighted by Beck but also by the risks associated with cultural loss, identity fragmentation, and socio-political instability. *Rediscovery and Other Poems* portrays a society in which the traditional ways of life have been disrupted by colonialism, and in which the reflexive modernity described by Giddens becomes a tool for making sense of these disruptions.

Awoonor’s work illustrates a society in constant dialogue with its past, reassessing and reinterpreting its traditions in the light of contemporary realities. This reflective process is crucial for a postcolonial society that wants to reclaim its identity and find a way into the future. In the poem “The Weaver Bird,” for instance, Awoonor uses the metaphor of the weaver bird to depict the destructive effects of colonialism on African cultures while emphasising the potential for regeneration and renewal through a conscious preoccupation with the past. The socio-political risks of the postcolonial condition

are another point of convergence between Beck and Giddens's theories and Awoonor's poetry. The end of colonial rule brought about political instability and the challenge of building new structures. Awoonor's poems capture the uncertainty and volatility of this period, expressing the need for a reflexive approach to nation-building, aptly illustrated in the optimistic tone of the poem "Rediscovery," which concurs with Giddens's emphasis on the role of reflexivity in handling the challenges of modernity. On the other hand, the interaction between tradition and modernity in *Rediscovery and Other Poems* is evident in the attempt of indigenous peoples to preserve their cultural identities amid the rapid changes brought about by globalisation. This perspective highlights the resilience and vulnerability of African indigenous communities in the transition from colonial rule to today's postcolonial realities. To summarise, Awoonor's exploration of environmental hazards, cultural identity and socio-political instability illustrates the postcolonial applicability of Beck and Giddens' theories. Moreover, his poetry contributes to the ongoing discourses in postcolonial studies that address the unwavering struggles and resilience of African societies in the face of contemporary global issues.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL / PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study. There are no participants in this study

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