

## Narrating Transcultural Encounters and Return in Akufor Aneneba's *The Land we Leave Behind*

### *Abstract*

Cultural contact is an inescapable aspect of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to migration. For both voluntary and involuntary migrants, intercultural experiences are inevitable, and these may place them in a state of constant transformation and reconstruction. Unfortunately, migration is still a kind of one-way traffic, witnessing the flow from indigenous cultures to metropolitan centres. As these smaller cultures come in contact with the alleged superior cultures, they are subsumed under the guise of globalisation. African cultures are particularly vulnerable because many of its people migrate to Western countries in search of better life conditions in addition to those who were forcefully dislocated during the days of the slave trade. As they encounter these superior cultures, their selfhood is endangered. However, this feeling sometimes has a latent effect as it provides avenues for these migrants to break the cultural distance. This brings the major argument in this paper to the point where the diaspora is not just a place where people seek refuge to attain dreams; it also provides a pathway where displaced subjects reconcile with their cultures and histories. This argument is built around how the different encounters and experiences foster their reattachment to their home cultures. This will be investigated in Akufor Aneneba's *The Land we Leave Behind*.

**Keywords:** Encounters; cross-culture; migrant; reconstruction; return; transformation

### 1. Introduction

Today's world is witnessing a gradual disappearance of tribal/indigenous/aboriginal cultures due to the aggressiveness of Western civilisation/globalisation with the help of migration. Migration in itself is a major issue in postcolonial literature, the reason why Ashcroft et al [1] incorporate it in their definition of postcolonial theory as being one of the major experiences of colonised peoples which should feature in their discussions. This is because slavery and the slave trade saw many people, particularly of African descent, dislocated from their homelands and relocated to foreign lands. Even after the slave trade and colonialism, the world still witnessed an influx into Western countries, of people from Latin America, Asia, and Africa, who are considered less economically stable. Such movements lead to diaspora contexts where cultures meet and interact with each other though sometimes, the interactions are difficult because of the differences in practices. That notwithstanding, it is mostly through this contact with new people and places that issues of identity become another vital subject of discussion in postcolonial literature. Talking about identity, Tomlinson says it is "...something people simply had as an undisturbed existential possession, an inheritance, a benefit of traditional long dwelling with the past ...it was not just a description of cultural belonging; it was a sort of collective treasure of local communities" [2, 269]. Identity was thus acquired at birth; unfought for; a treasure that was altered by displacement as migrants had to experience and adapt to the new realities of a change in geographical location. In these new locations, the identities of migrants are transformed through processes of reimagining, reconstructing, and renegotiating. Such transformations are facilitated by intercultural contacts and experiences whereby individuals who are faced with foreign cultural experiences feel homeless at some point and are therefore forced to make a shift from their original selves. This is particularly true of the African migrant who has almost lost their identity to European civilisation through colonisation, and who faces the threat of complete annihilation through globalisation. In less acute cases, these subjects are faced with a double consciousness, which becomes problematic

when it degenerates into some kind of internal conflict wherein the civilisations (European and African) that have come to define them, do not seem to find a common ground for reconciliation.

However, Bhabha [3] says that by virtue of their displacement and dislocatedness, postcolonial subjects have several traits that combine to give them new identities, which he terms hybrid identities. Gilroy [4] celebrates this process of transcultural dynamism, which according to him, keeps the black political culture open. But Kuortti and Nyman [5] deny the complete subjection of postcolonial subjects to hybridity as they bring out the fact that some indigenous communities lay claim to an essential originality from whence they want rights and restitution. Whatever the case, with rising globalisation, cross-cultural and intercultural contacts are unavoidable, and as earlier mentioned, these contacts review the perceptions of other cultures vis-à-vis one's own; depending on the types of experiences and interactions which may either reinforce or further disconnect a sense of belonging. Literary writers have given different representations of these experiences of transcultural contacts that either reinforce or distort a sense of belonging and/or identity, particularly of Africans. Amongst them are NoViolet Bulawayo in *We Need New Names* (2013), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Americanah* (2013), Nkemngong Nkengasong in *God was African* (2014), and Imbolo Mbue in *Behold the Dreamers* (2016). These writings are narratives of return, whether physical or psychological, which portray Africa as being both a place of cultural origins and a modern world space where a homecoming creates a link between the present and the future using the past. These writers present characters who struggle to make sense of the American society from the backdrop of American culture and end up falling back to their cultural origins as springboards from which to understand themselves and others.

Critics have also taken an interest in narratives of migration. Bimbola [6] specifically observes that most migration stories end with a return migration and whether by choice or by force, the return migrants readapt and readjust to the home situation. Using Adichie's characters in *Americanah*, she notes amongst other things that for return migration to be effective, they must engage in a closure with the host environment while loving the home milieu despite the odds. These odds are linked to the spectral presence Africa's violent past which sometimes provokes a journey of no return. Yet migrants in such situations are burdened with issues of memory and identity. This burden is however transformed into "building a familial and communal life that connects them to their place of origin" [6, 98]. Adebayo [7] continues to explain that memory plays an important role in inclusion or exclusion in narratives of belonging as it combines with imagination to form what he terms a trans-local connection. According to him, migration spaces create, negotiate, and alter forms of transnationalism and hyphenated identities while at the same time promoting a transnational black solidarity that can be transformed into a planetary humanism. Aneneba [8] presents a protagonist who is transformed by his experience with slave descendants in America and the Amazon of Brazil, and who tries to conquer the boundaries of space and history to understand and reconcile with his cultural world which has hitherto been decimated. In doing this, the book also presents the reactions of these slave descendants to a renewed connection with their homeland as they interact with the protagonist from Africa. Therefore, how Africans become disconnected from their cultures, how their encounters and experiences in the diaspora help reshape perceptions of themselves, and how they create a cultural balance through return will be central to the discussions.

The study employs an interpretative and analytic research methodology built on a postcolonial framework to examine how transcultural encounters, orchestrated by migration, affect individual and collective cultural identities particularly in diaspora contexts. The research method is essentially basic, which consists in textual analysis and library research, in an

attempt to uncover the processes through which migrants' identities are transformed. As such, the researcher critically examines two major perspectives on these encounters: disconnection as a consequence and return as a solution.

## 2. Transcultural Encounters and Cultural Disconnections

It is common knowledge that African cultures, education, language, and religions faced threats from the imposition of Western cultures and civilisations. These impositions created boundaries based on oppositions between superior/inferior, civilised/primitive, self/other, etc, which boundaries still have a firm grip, and have remained canonical in interrogating and problematising African cultural systems. This has led to a permanent rift between the West and Africa, particularly when it comes to religious beliefs. Christianity, which was one of the greatest weapons of colonialism, has since then maintained its position of manipulation and domination given its ascribed superiority, which I dare say is also based on its monolithic nature, its ability to persist in many regions, and perhaps, its universal standard of applicability. Contrarywise, African religious practices varied in their sophistication from culture to culture, with no documented codes (though they all are similar), and no single appellation, but which nonetheless formed the basis of the definition of their very existence, and on whose teachings, they have evolved and thrived. Those who were shipped away to the new world held on to whatever they retained from these practices as a means of maintaining a connection with home amid pressures from dominating religious lore. Conversely, those who remained on the continent, were tricked and brainwashed into believing that these practices were heathen and primitive; and so, they thought and believed. The result was an almost total embrace of Western religious practices and civilisation as a panacea to the challenges they faced. Of course, this new tide of life automatically created a dichotomy of superior Christianity and inferior African traditional religions; pitting Africans against the West and mostly against themselves thereby slowly eroding the foundation of their definition as a people.

*The Land we Leave Behind* introduces readers to a Tchou community that has been invaded and overtaken by Christianity. The meeting of these two different cultures is not one of mutual accommodation but rather of displacement and substitution. Massa Michael, Jonathan's father, regrets how evangelisation is radically damaging the fundamental structure upon which the Tchou society is built. Sometimes, this is done through brutal force as is the case experienced by the neighbouring village where the priest destroyed family shrines under the pretext that the people were paying allegiance to the devil, suggesting therefore that the god of Christianity is the right one while any other is unacceptable. This singular incident is enough proof that Western religion came to dominate and erase rather than compliment African religious practices; and in their vulnerability, the people embraced it and gradually got disconnected from their ancestral belief systems.

Jonathan, the protagonist of the novel, falls prey to this ascribed superiority of Western culture. He assumes that years of acquiring a Western education have equipped him with enough knowledge to question and discard certain beliefs associated with his people. One of such beliefs which he questions is Bitterleaf's (the rain man) ability to hold rain from falling. Studies in meteorology show that when the natural conditions have been met for rain to fall, nothing can stop it. In as much as this has been scientifically proven, do not scientists of today shift the weather by simply pushing the clouds that cause rain? But this art was known to Africans a long time ago and it is what Bitterleaf uses to stop rain from falling. However, because this art is performed by Africans, it is prejudicially far from being considered science. Jonathan acts on this bias that has been ingrained in the minds of the Africans themselves not to trust their own science and detaches himself from that part of his

community who think that the rain forest is a laboratory which produces local traditional medicine stronger than many manufactured medications from the West. By virtue of his acquisition of Western formal education, Jonathan thinks he commands proficiency and bicultural competency to fit in the new global culture, if there is any such thing. But this new personality is false because it is based on a silencing of the original self – a self that is rooted in cultural identity. He is in a position of “shutupness” as Laing [9] describes it - a position that projects a masked figure that conceals a split personality beneath. When the prejudices that accompany the intrusion of Western culture on Africans are not perceived and/or are ignored, what results is a disconnection of these Africans from their cultures and even from themselves.

Disconnection was also arguably facilitated by colonial discourses, which have imprinted themselves on the sand of time, even centuries after their inception. These discourses no doubt established white hegemonic boundaries and created unequal power relations based on binary polarities such as self/other, white/black, superior/inferior, and good/evil. On each of these binaries, the Africans were on the undesirable side, adding primitivity, irrationality, and ignorance to their lot. Their cultures, languages, religions, and education were effaced and replaced with “canonical” varieties. Religion is the most glaring of these cultural attributes that were suppressed. The church that was implanted in Tchou cynically distanced the people, at least those who accepted to be assimilated, from cultural practices that were native to them. Father McDonald enforced the values of Christianity with impunity, opposing them to core traditional values. In trying to dissuade Massa Michael from taking a second wife, which ties strongly with Tchou culture, Father McDonald gives him a long sermon on the Christian position vis-à-vis polygamy. Amongst other things, he compares it to slavery; a form of human subordination and bondage and a vector of immorality, which ironically was perpetuated by his kind. To father McDonald, “the Christian culture being introduced to this part of the world is *sine qua non* to uplifting the moral fibre of the people and building a society based on equality and respect of individual rights” (8, 41). Being of European origin, the priest makes his judgement from the prism of Western colonial/canonical discourse which equates religious binaries such as good/evil, God/devil, and light/darkness amongst others to the coloniser and the colonised, respectively, thereby keeping these latter groups on the negative side of humanity. In trying to move to the positive side, they are somehow compelled to relinquish their own humanity and adopt that of the coloniser. Being one of the strongest weapons of colonial domination, religion is still used today, albeit ironically, to brainwash victims; transforming them into a new class of European-oriented people while alienating them from their cultural environment and needs. Some hurriedly discarded their traditional belief systems and embraced this new form of religion and consequently putting themselves in a situation of cultural disconnect.

Cahoone [10] writes that the non-Western world has been influenced and shaped by the culture of the modern West, which has “injected its own civilization into the indigenous cultures of non-Western societies” [10, xi] through colonisation, trade, and ideology. When this happens, the indigenous people are entangled in a kind of double consciousness and confusion about whether to remain in their cultures or align with the world. But the desire to be in line with the world or becoming global outweighs the wish to remain steadfast in their cultures. This choice is made not because indigenous cultures are less reliable but because of the overpowering arrival of the dominant culture. This strong presence of Western culture in part accounts for Jonathan’s quick dissociation from those of his people who still think their cultures and environment provide everything they need to sustain life. His attempts at becoming global therefore come with a tacit denial of the values of his people, which translates into the risk of losing his self and cultural consciousnesses.

In shunning the cultural system that raises him, Jonathan is in other words buying modernisation and/or Westernisation. Even if given the opportunity to choose, he would quickly take sides with the West by virtue of its ascribed superiority and the negativity that accompanies discourses on Africa. What naturally follows is a withdrawal from his original cultural space and the surrender to a new and alien culture that promises great, prestigious, and fulfilling experiences and achievements, albeit, superficially. Such a fragile existential conception of the West still pervades the African mindset and contributes greatly to destabilising connection with homeland culture.

Furthermore, cultural disconnections are made easier in diaspora contexts principally because the victims have lost touch with their ancestral or home cultures. For this reason, Brah [11] clarifies that diaspora “addresses the global condition of culture ... which seriously problematises the subject position of the native” (11, 114). It is therefore difficult to determine who or what is native in diaspora conditions. The case of Africans who were shipped across the ocean for servitude was and is still very particular. Their displacement resulted in a cultural shift since the little they could retain from their original cultures had to struggle for survival in the new environment and in the course of this struggle, traits were lost. Joachim, the Afro-Brazilian in the novel explains how they, as slave descendants, have had to struggle amid acclimatisation processes until they are left with little of their original African culture. Even as symbols of that culture, the people were gradually merged into the new current with the passage of time. Brah further observes that “a culture that is alien in a new environment may eventually fall prey and gradually metamorphose into something not quite as pure as it used to be and may eventually self-extricate...” (11, 115). Through no fault of theirs, the descendants of enslaved people experienced an acute form of cultural disconnect as a result of Western contact in the form of forced migration and colonial/imperial control.

Still in relation to disconnections in diaspora contexts, Aneneba brings together Jonathan and Gracey and their family to show how this works among African Americans. By the same process as the Afro-Brazilians, the African-Americans have lost connection with their ancestral land and thus their home cultures and have almost completely imbibed Western thinking and ideology about African people; pushing themselves towards a kind of cultural loathing. The very embarrassing question Gracey asks Jonathan as to why the practice of idolatry is still very prevalent in Africa demonstrates the bias with which Africa is regarded even by its own descendants. This question is prompted by the continuous derogatory labels given the Africans and their practices, which makes it conscience-free and unproblematic for those whose ancestors are from this part of the world to see things through Western eyes. The religious practice of Africans is termed heathen first because of prejudice and second because those who term them so do not understand what is hidden beneath such beliefs and practices.

Like his sister Gracey, Edmund also asks Jonathan an awkward question, seeking to find out if it is true that in African cultures, fathers get their sons to marry the girl of his choice and from a family he chooses. Like in Gracey’s case, this question is impelled by a lack of knowledge of home culture. They do not understand how home institutions function and so will buy any narrative that is sold to them by the Westerners. And unfortunately for Africans, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Western culture is still measured as superior probably because of its rapid transfer, the bastardisation of African cultures, and consequent difficulties for Africans to maintain a unique cultural identity. Though sometimes there is truth in some of these accusations, most times, they are presented with pejorative undertones that leave no room for the exploration of the rationale behind them.

The situation of Gracey and Edmund can be understood with respect to their belonging or being born in a third culture. In describing third culture children particularly, Pollock and Van

Reken [12] note that “home culture” ironically is one of the places they feel out of touch with even when they learn the basic traditional values. This is because they have not lived long enough or have not even lived there to understand the hidden layer of this culture. It is however true that people who experience different cultures have a wide range of meaningful experiences, but their sense of belonging to their home culture may be shattered. Culture in itself is linked to people, land, and a collective history thus living in a land or among people with whom one does not share a collective history often leads to a feeling of cultural disconnection and **unbelongingness**.

From the foregoing analysis, we deduce that the ever-existing rift between African and Western cultures **has** greatly contributed to the disconnectedness Africans experience from their cultures. Many Africans are transitioning from a traditionalist system to a global cultural system or what has been termed globalisation. This system, critics have noted, is dystopic as it still shifts perspective to Western culture. According to Mikhail & Ainuddin, [13] globalisation is an illusory way for Africans to create a balance **between** their socio-psychological system and that of the West. The perception of Western culture as high-class is still prevalent thus moving African cultural inclination to the West. The adoption and acceptance of Western culture, together with the blend of the traditional and the modern have stripped African cultures of their purity. Nonetheless, culture still remains the only way through which Africans can forge an identity, and though they have no choice **but** to follow the tide of Western culture and civilisation, this must be reconciled with the ethos of African cultures. It is from this premise that I will discuss ways of finding a balance between home culture and Western culture in the section that follows.

### 3. Cultural Return

Ward et al. [14] point out two dimensions of individuals' **reactions** to exposure to heterogeneous cultural influences. They may either resist becoming, or may give in to being multicultural. This means that after coming in contact with other cultures, an individual may reject the influence of that culture as alien and thus retreat to their culture of origin or they may synthesise these different cultures to build **bi-cultural** and/or multicultural personalities. Whatever the case, the type of reaction to cultural **contact** depends highly on the experiences the individual has with the new culture. Generally, the transcultural experiences/encounters are stifling, which push many individuals of African descent to rethink their positions vis-à-vis their home cultures and the “supremacist” cultures. However, with the current global disposition, it is almost impossible to return to a pure ancestral culture and so these people look for possibilities to create a balance by reconnecting to the ancestral land while at the same time adopting some of the Western cultural aspects that are impossible to discard. In other words, Africans have to adjust to the new realities whether in advantage or disadvantage of contact with the West. Characters in *The Land we Leave Behind* struggle, each in their own way, to make sense out of the confusion and threat of being subsumed by self-imposed metropolitan cultures.

Massa Michael's conversation with Father McDonald on polygamy gets him reconsidering the intentions of Christianity on the native people of Tchou. When the Father rebukes him for wanting to take a second wife while still married to the first, he challenges the Father with three salient questions viz: “Doesn't Christ intercede between Christians and God the way my ancestors intercede for me in front of the same God?” What makes [your] path to God morally acceptable and mine not if our ultimate goal is to reach the same immortal God?” “wasn't the death of Christ on the cross somehow related to the fact that his teachings were a direct

affront to those of the existing kings at the time?" (8, 43). The first question presupposes the commonality of the concept of intercession associated with many religious beliefs. If this is the case, then it may just be better to go for intercessors, in this case, African ancestors, who can identify their own and call them by name. Referring to the second question, I infer that who or what that intercessor is, does not determine the credibility or (non)acceptability of one religion over another. This question also intimates that if the ultimate aim of Christianity is to reach God, then the route one takes is not a factor of this goal. The third question raises doubts on the reliability and supremacy of Christianity since even those from whose culture it emanates did not believe in the "Messiah".

These questions may or may have not been intended to challenge or discredit the universality of Christianity but they nonetheless point to the possibility of finding a common ground between belief systems of which African traditional religions are part. To Massa Michael, imposing a Christian-oriented teaching on people who pay allegiance to strongly held beliefs is a calculated attempt to violate and efface the precepts on which these people have evolved and defined their very existence for all time. Jonathan says of him:

My dad felt compelled to live a life that keeps the wishes of his ancestors alive. In his reasoning, imposing a Christian oriented doctrine was an attempt to stamp out his own culture and anathema; obliterating what has come to define his own very existence and that of his people, past, present and the future. And to him, there was no fillip in going against the ingrained canons of his culture. (8, 43)

The more Massa Michael understands this, the more he feels obligated to stick to the norms of his culture. His conviction becomes stronger after his discussion with his friend, Pa Barmassa, on the conflicts that have been generated with the coming of Christianity. They both agree that looking back on their culture puts them on a better pedestal to appreciate and better deal with the philosophies of other people. Massa Michael leaves the church but he does not take his wife along in his rejection of Christianity, and neither does he withdraw Jonathan from the Western educational system that came with it. Accepting education for his son is a way of opening up to other cultural entries which might have a significant positive impact on the life of his family.

As Jonathan consumes more of Western knowledge, so too does he drift away from his native belief systems. However, studies take him to the Amazon of Brazil where he has a remarkable experience of sameness with the slave descendants there. Meeting Joachim and other people of African descent gives Jonathan another look at his ancestry. Marvelled at the way these people have kept the African heritage alive, while he from Africa is disconnecting from it, he begins undertaking a journey of reconnection. He goes down memory lane and reflects on his father's reminders of his cultural responsibilities when he was leaving home for the Americas. Massa Michael cautions him never to wander away from the customs and traditions of his people, and particularly reminds him to sell his culture to other people. It then dawns on him that his culture too needs to have a stall in the world market and it will be interesting and significant to place it at the junction of world cultures. But Jonathan has to first of all reconcile with his home culture, which he achieves through a spiritual connection with his ancestors and 'distant relatives' in Brazil. His visit to the graves of Joachim's forefathers and feeling an electric impulse at the touch of each headstone gives him an instant connection to a past that he has all along tried to shun, but which now becomes ecstatic and gratifying.

It is this encounter with his 'relatives' on the other side that strengthens Jonathan's resolve to defend his culture at all times and hopes for the intercession of Oshun and Mami Wata, the

goddess and deity of love, respectively. Acknowledging the influence of African deities in his life as opposed to honouring the stature of Mary as per the demands of Catholicism extend to a renewed interest and reconnection to his African spirituality. This new awareness is noticed in the way he defends African traditional religious practices when taken to task by Gracey and her brother. In response to accusations of idol worship, he muses on the injustice with which African religious practices have been perceived and judged before now. What Africans do is not very different from what Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, and even Christians do; for do Catholic Christians not adore the stature of Christ, Mary, and other saints? The question is: what makes these practices *en vogue* in some cultures and heathen in others? It is all a misconception and Africans, who are the victims, are increasingly becoming aware of these prejudices and are returning to their native cultures. This does not however mean a complete rejection of the West, but as Jonathan himself says, there needs to be a balance of the cultural values of the people who **come** in contact with each other. However, it is important for Africans to first of all reconstruct an authentic identity through a return to their ancestry. This way, they will be able to confront Western influence from a specific reference point.

For the **Afro-Brazilians**, the precarious hold of slavery automatically disconnected them from ancestral Africa but they managed to keep some traditional beliefs from the Yoruba, Benin, and general Bantu practices. These cultural memories, according to Jain [15], help migrants to construct the present and establish a link with the future. This way, dislocation is never really permanent, and holding on to these memories in an alien environment becomes very significant in the process of cultural belonging. Such memories kept the *candomblé*<sup>1</sup> alive even with the overwhelming presence of Catholicism. As Falola [16] notes, the *Orisa* and *Babalawo* (both gods and diviners of Yoruba origin) were as important to the Afro-Brazilians as Catholic saints (16, 290). However, the shrines of these gods and deities were headed by priestesses because the men had to work in the plantations. These priestesses of the *candomblé* tended to the sick, prayed to the gods, gave offerings to the deities, and poured libation to the ancestors as is typical of shrine heads in ancestral Africa. Worthy of note is that these African-derived religions have been instrumental in the formation of Afro-Brazilian cultural identity and resistance against historical and social seclusion. As part of this project, these people maintained **the** oral African tradition of handing down family history and ancestral lines to younger generations. Joachim gets knowledge of traditional medicine from his **great-grandfather** who was a great herbalist in plantation days. Interestingly, Joachim is able to fuse traditional and modern medicine and **build** an outstanding medical facility for maximum **healthcare** delivery to people of all races and classes. Thus, despite lost ties with the ancestral land, and having to face life from the Western perspective, the Afro-Brazilians succeeded in creating a cultural balance **against** the backdrop of cultural memories, that enabled them to be at peace with themselves and with their environment.

In addition to their ability to keep African traditional practices, Jonathan's presence among them reinforces their sense of belonging to the African world. From the touch and excitement of the children to the numerous questions from Joachim about 'home', Jonathan became the missing link to their past. They experience a kind of spiritual transformation that is reinforced and facilitated by the understanding of the name Lahnuka among the Afro-Brazilians. Jonathan traces the origin of this name to the Nuka clan in Tchou, his home though weathering processes have smouldered it from Alaah-Nuka to just Lahnuka. Being the principal identity marker, the name cannot be overemphasised as the path for a psychologically mediated cultural homecoming. Even before the arrival of Jonathan, the Afro-Brazilians created a sort of "diasporic imaginary", a term used by Mishra [17] to describe migrants' homelands. He sees it as a fantasy structure; a make-believe land, which the migrants create as a result of feelings of alienation, **unbelongingness**, and loss. Whether

physical or psychological, these structures represent the ideal homeland where migrants find comfort. Creating these imaginary homelands and experiencing homeland itself, give the people a stronghold of their origins which is then used as a springboard from which to better understand and make sense of the cultures that have come to define their beings.

Just like their Afro-Brazilian family, African Americans need a reconnection with their motherland in order to make sense of the present situation. Though centuries have passed and African Americans are being slowly absorbed into 'mainstream' American society, these slave descendants still have an unprecedented desire to attach to their home culture. Thus, when the situation presents itself in the form of the marriage between Jonathan and Gracey, they grab it with growing enthusiasm. First, the opportunity that is offered for the African American family to journey to Tchouland is presented as a situation in which Africa, to the African Americans, is not just an imagined homeland constructed on memories of their original homelands and/or inherited ideas of home as Rushdie [18] would describe it, but an actual location where return is palpable. And when they finally visit, it is to maintain a physical connection. Second, the union between the two families also serves as a reminder of a history that was almost denied them, but which nonetheless must be told in its entirety. When both families spot the tomb of slaves who died before they could be ferried off to the "new world", they go there to pay their last respects, those that lay beneath this tomb represent the ancestors of both the continental and diaspora Africans. Aneneba expresses this in the following words:

As they bend backward and say their ancestors were from our part of the world, we may also look the other way and say, some of our 'ancestors' are in their part of the new world.... If there is anything worth salvaging, there should never be any turning back. (9, 166)

Thus, there is proof of a shared ancestry that connects the Africans in the text both to themselves and to each other, and which also reinforces their sense of cultural identity and belonging to Africa. As Hall [19] posits, to have a cultural identity necessitates a primordial touch with an unchanging essential core that binds future and present to the past in an unbroken line (20, 4). This line is maintained by reviving interest in, and acknowledging the presence and power of the ancestors who are found both at home and in the diaspora and through whom return is made palpable.

## **Conclusion**

Aneneba's narrative in *The Land we Leave Behind* provides a platform for understanding the implications of Africa's contact with the West both at home and in the diaspora. This contact had devastating consequences on the Africans as they witnessed physical dislocations and a resultant cultural loss enabled by modernity and globalisation. This loss and disconnection were reinforced by colonial discourses, slavery and the slave trade, diaspora contexts, and the vulnerability of African cultural systems. However, Aneneba also suggests ways of understanding and rethinking the kinds of connections people of African descent establish in home and foreign environments. Though generally characterised by loss, the African diaspora still has a chance to reconnect to its cultural origins despite centuries of disconnection. This can be achieved through holding firm to and keeping memories of ancestry. For those at home, there is a pressured need for cultural revalorisation to withstand the viciousness of globalisation. For both Africans at home and in the diaspora, there is an urgent need to understand the malicious logic of the dominant culture and rethink their positions in a global cultural context. This will pave the way for a return to the homeland as a specific reference point and cancel the presumption that Africa lies in the past in as much as it is a place of

cultural origins. The above analysis also serves as an arena for the debate on the global effects of migration on the identities and cultures of descendants of Africa and opens up new avenues for understanding the relationships between Africans at home and in the diaspora.

**Note**

Note 1. The Candomblé is a mixture of beliefs and practices from the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria, the Fon of Dahomey, now Benin, and the Bantus.

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