

# Never Cut the Rope: Returning Home to Heal and Rebuild in Pede Hollist's *So the Path Does Not Die*

by

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## Abstract

This work argues that modernity and globalization has affected the concept home in Africa in such a way that many African people relocate to foreign countries, settle there as citizens, and forget their homes and that some who return encounter problems of disintegration, identity crisis and alienation; and some are unable to adapt or be fully integrated at home because of their preference for foreign cultures. In this paper, Pede Hollist's novel *So The Path Does Not Die* is used to discuss the conceptions and misconceptions of home and return, and concludes that in spite of a seemingly erosion of the African concept of home via the preference for of foreign lands and cultures by many Africans, a sojourner in a foreign land can still return home and contribute positively to rebuilding and healing the home land, although it may have been devastated by greed, and a quest for power.

## Introduction

The novel, *So the Path Does Not Die*, presents the experiences of Finaba, the protagonist, as she grows from innocence to maturity in a journey that takes her from her village, Talaba, through Freetown and Koidu all in her home country, Sierra Leone, to America and back to Sierra Leone with a brief visit to Nigeria. Greater part of the action takes place in Sierra Leone and America. Her experiences in the various cities and relationships are used by the novelist to explicate the concept of home and return from different perspectives. The novel belongs to the literary style referred to by Isaih Ilo as a "...a consummate representative of an emerging post-indiginist... in which an African [writer] creates out of engagement with the present reality of his present environment instead of in response to by-gone colonial experience" (41).

The concept and importance of home is entrenched in Finaba's young mind early in life by her grandmother, Baramusu, who admonishes her severally never to cut the rope, an idiomatic expression for bonding and unity in the family. It underscores the importance of working together to build the home and by extension, the society. Unfortunately, this rope is snapped when her father aborts her initiation and desecrates the land and her mother disrupts the cleansing of the desecrated land. Finaba's family is cursed by Baramusu, her grandmother:

...if Amadu and the child Finaba do not ask your forgiveness, and if they do not wash out the mucus and wax that has clogged their ears, may they never find peace. May they never know peace. May they never know the comfort of a home! May their insides wither so that no fruit may come from anything they touch and do...." (13).

Finaba's life throughout the novel is filled with problems and obstacles that seem to obliterate peace and her ability to be at home. Consequently, she believes that her grandmother's curse was following her and robbing her of happiness even when she realizes that her "grandmother took an advantage of [her] youthful desire to belong, not to be the odd one out" (152), she sticks to her injunction of never to cut the rope.

Her problems started with her mother's opposition to her daughter's initiation, but Baramusu warns her that the "...ways of the white man bring only trouble. The path you and Amadu have chosen for this child will lead to nothing but trouble"(2). These words seem to have come to reality as the story unfolds with Finaba encountering different kinds of troubles almost all the way. Baramusu's insistence on initiation for her grand-daughter with her age-mates is to ensure that she becomes a fully integrated member of their community. She wants Finaba to be at home. Home in this context is the familiar home where one lives with one's family, relations and friends and where they work together for the common good of all the members of that home. She advises Finaba never to cut the rope, meaning that she should imbibe their values, live according to their cultural practices and work together with others for the well-being of the community. Hence her insistence that life is about people working together.

The action of the novel therefore revolves around Finaba's attempt not to cut the rope, to be at home, and to work together with other people, at various times in her life. Unfortunately, this desire seems to elude her at every point, each time she gets very close to being at home. It appears that her grand-mother's curse haunts and follows her throughout as she encounters pains and disappointments at the doorstep of happiness and success until finally, she settles at home in Sierra Leone to work together with others in the task of healing and reconstructing the bodies, psyche, and souls of her people, devastated and traumatized by the civil war.

She returns searches for her grandmother, probably for atonement, but it is vain. However, she encounters another old woman, takes care of her traumatized body and soul as well as that of other victims of the civil war in Sierra Leone. Only then is she able to feel that she has not only returned home but is at home.

Pede Hollist is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Tampa, Florida, and he is from Sierra Leone. *So the Path Does not Die* is his debut novel, but he has published three short stories, "Going to America," "Back Home Abroad" and "Foreign Aid". Foreign Aid was on the shortlist for the 2013 Caine Prize for African Writing while *So the Path Does Not Die*, is adjudged "one of the best novels both in terms of theme and the craft, but especially in terms of the craft, to have come from the West African region in recent times"(Kamarah 1). It won the African Literature Association's Book of The Year Award for outstanding book of African literature, 2014, in the creative writing category. His novel was adjudged by the Association as being "...quite a significant contribution to African writing" (Citation during the award).

## **Never Cut the Rope**

In this novel, the author explores the concept of home and return using a female protagonist, Finaba Marah whose name was later shortened to Fina for ease of pronunciation by members of the Heddle family with whom she lives after her father's death in Freetown. She was born in Talaba, a village where she grows up with the belief that a girl who does not go through the ritual of female circumcision is not truly a woman and therefore will never fit into or be a part of their community. Such a woman does not belong so is not and will never be at home. At an early age, her grandmother teaches her the values of communal life. Using the illustration of the bird-scaring rope in farms, "where the big ropes and little ropes work together to protect the farm from the birds" (5). She therefore entrenches in Finaba's young mind, the importance of working together for the well-being of the community. According to her while addressing her grand-daughter, "life is when people work together. Alone, you are just an animal. So do not cut the rope...never cut the rope...Remember, Never cut the rope" (5). She repeats this injunction to stress the importance of being at home in the community by working together with other members of that community.

Baramusu uses the myth of Musudugu to further illustrate the importance of belonging to a community and adhering to the cultural norms and values of the community, the myth highlights the disastrous effect of defection by a member of the community, not just that person, but also on the entire community. The idea of not cutting the rope is therefore stressed in the Musudugu story which Baramusu tells her grand-daughter. In the story, KumbaKarbo cuts the rope, leaves the other women, ignores the advice of the leader of the women, and decides to "work alone". Consequently, she becomes an "animal" and her action destroys the entire Musudugu town.

Finaba's excitement at being part of the community, at not cutting the rope, and of "being able to give strength to others and draw some from them" when she needs it (6) is dampened by her mother's refusal to allow her to be initiated and excised. Fortunately, her mother travels so her grandmother takes her to the *fafei* (initiation forest) to join her age mates for the initiation but her father storms into the forest, flouts the tradition that debars men from the venue of the initiation, drags Finaba and takes her to the hospital for examination and treatment. Amadu, Finaba's father's entry into the forest to snatch his daughter from initiation and abortion of the initiation and excision is an abomination in the land so the land must be cleansed. Also, his action denies Finaba of an opportunity to belong, to be a real woman, to marry, to trust her age mates and for them to trust her. She loses, most importantly, the chance of not cutting the rope and being in a position to work together with others for the progress of the community. She feels inadequate and incomplete as a woman but is incapacitated.

Her parents' refusal to allow her to go for the initiation is not just out of conviction of its dangerous effect, an influence of modernity and Western ways, but because they had lost their first daughter, Dimusu, in the process of initiation. They are not therefore ready to take the risk with Finaba despite the diviner, Pa Yatta's revelation that Finaba and her late sister are special children, *Denkileni*, born leaders who have come to show the way. The diviner insists that "...their work is for the good of all. They teach through their examples" (11). This means that Dimisu's death was not a consequence of the initiation but divine will. Baramusu accepts this verdict and tells Nabou, Finaba's mother that "the ancestors sent your first born here and decide to take her away" (4). Amadu and Nabou are not convinced so Finaba's circumcision is aborted at the risk of 'cutting the rope' and desecrating the land. Amadu is aware of the gravity of his offence so, to avert the wrath of the community, and on the wise counsel of his kinsmen, he elopes with his family to Freetown. Fina is therefore uprooted. The rope is cut. She yearns to go back to Talaba and reconnect with her age mates and her grandmother. This yearning propels greater part of her action throughout the novel.

In Freetown, she lives with her family but her father's sudden death forces her to cut the rope with her nuclear family as poverty compels her to live with the Heddles, from where she goes to Crowther College (CC). At the college, for the first time, the abortive circumcision comes alive as she goes to Kizzy to negotiate for his assistance in her Organic Chemistry. In what seems like a premonition, she sees a vision and feels the presence of her late father and grandmother. Her father tries to discourage her from going ahead with her plans, urging her not to "take the easy path" but to "submit to Allah's will". Fina insists that she needs to pass her examinations so must go ahead with her plans. Her grandmother chides her father and insists: "She is on the path you carved for her the night you snatched her from the *fafei*...you see the rotten fruit you and Nabou have sown...your deed brought nothing but suffering for you and your family" she beckons on Fina...follow the path of our people. Do not cut the rope" (46). Fina ignores this vision and warning and goes ahead to Kizzy's house where she is raped by Kizzy, she runs back to her mother, devastated and drops out of school.

Luckily, she gets an employment at Koidu from where she eventually realizes her dream of going to America with the help of her boss and friend, Meredith. In America, she works relentlessly and very hard not to cut the rope as she sends money constantly to her mother and sister. Her major dreams are to make enough money to set up her younger sister, Isa, in a business and to open up a centre to take care of women who have suffered because of circumcision (103). Her mother dies and she clings tenaciously to her sister even when it is clear that her sister is taking advantage of her generosity and that Isa's unending demands is putting a strain on her relationship with Cammy and her happiness. She insists that Isa is the only family she has so does not want to cut the rope. Although at a point she cautions herself that she has "the right to some personal happiness.... with this man who made her feel alive and valuable" (97), she is unable to stop despite Cammy's candid observation that she is encouraging Isa and her boyfriend to be lazy and indolent. She continues to meet Isa's selfish demands even on her wedding day when Isa calls with her endless demands for dollars. Isa does not ask her about the wedding or how she is, but money, money, money. She obliges because she does not want to cut the rope.

Throughout her stay in America, she recalls, periodically, Baramusu's injunction that she should never cut the rope and her curses after her father's desecration of the *fafei*. This culminates with a dream of the night of her aborted initiation, on her wedding day. It is like a premonition that hangs over her like a cloud so much that it affects her countenance but she could not discuss it with anybody. Intuitively, she takes the divorce certificate of an earlier turbulent marriage with Jemal to the church as if she expected him. Indeed, Jemal shows up in the church to lay claims on her as his wife. The marriage with Cammy is truncated. After this aborted wedding to Cammy, she feels that truly her grandmother's curse has been following her. She cries and recalls:

"Baramusu said I should never cut the rope and that alone I was just an animal. Did I listen? No! I have spent most of my life living alone, cut off from or running away from my people. And today, I just tried to cut the rope by trying to marry Cammy (153).

After this incident, she resolves to go home and indeed goes home. Her first task at home, Sierra Leone is to search for her grandmother, a search that would enable her "connect the past to the present and future... [mend the] lack of continuity, wholeness, and belonging she felt had been her undoing since that fateful night" (234). In her resolve not to cut the rope, she visits Pa and Ma Hedde's household in Freetown to reconnect with a home she lived in as a teenager. After the visit, she leaves for Talaba, her village, the main destination for her return and healing. Unfortunately she gets to Talaba but discovers only ruins.

She returns to Freetown to work together with people, finally living out her grandmother's injunction that "...you survive best when you can give strength to others and draw some from them when you need it"(6). She lives with the old woman, Mama Yegbe, her daughter, Dimusu-Celeste, her adopted daughter, Mawaf and finds the peace that eluded her all her life. The novel ends on a hopeful note as Cammy is likely to join them to ensure that the rope is not cut.

The idea of not cutting the rope is also reflected by the novelist when Glen returns home to Cammy, his father, for the donation of a kidney. Her adopted parents, Anne and Nicholas Gibson remarks "We knew that he'd one day want to know about his homeland and we did not want it to be a strange place to him" and Anushka his mother commends them for keeping him connected to "his roots". During the conversation, Fina observed that the joy of their common experience showed that "They had a place which connected them, a place to which they all belonged" (226). They did not cut the rope.

## **Home and Return**

The idea of home and return is presented early in the novel, in the prologue using the myth of Mudusugu, which is recounted frequently in Talaba for the inculcation of moral values, education and edification of the younger generation. This myth is also relevant for instructing women, especially the young girls, on the importance of belonging to a home, to a community and abiding by its traditional norms and values. According to Baramusu, it is one of the stories that "make us women"(4). Mudusugu is a mythical town which represents a true peaceful home, a "...place of harmony, of singing and dancing, but most of all, of sharing and caring"(iii). This peaceful and harmonious community was inhabited by only women and was guarded by the Virgin Girl, the daughter of Atala the Supreme. The Virgin Girl's protection is guaranteed as long as no woman allows night to "cover a man" in their town so women are not barred from sex or sleeping with men but that the man must leave before nightfall. The rule dictates that any pregnant woman who gives birth to a male child is allowed to bring him but must send him away "to his father any day he could stand up and pass water without soaking his feet" (iii). The women continue to enjoy their lives until the birth of Kumba Kargbo, who is said, was not an ordinary child, "for she forced her way out of her mother's belly, feet first". (iii). Before Kumba becomes a full woman, she starts questioning the existing rules and insists on letting "darkness cover a man" in Musudugu.

The leader of the Musudugu women tries, to no avail, to instill the importance of preserving their communal life in the town on Kumba but she is adamant. The Leader then presents Kumba with the option of leaving since no one is compelled to live in the town. She however reminds her that those who left returned because they discovered that life is not about material acquisition but about being at home and at peace with oneself and with the community.

She advises Kumba: “Life is about seeing yourself as part of others and being ready to share in their pain. When you understand that, then and only then, are you ready for life here” (v). Kumba defies the older women, resolves to flout the rule but decides on an inquest to find out why night must never cover a man in Musudugu in compliance to dictates of the Virgin Girl.

In her quest, she meets Atala the Supreme who does not provide the answer but asks her to “journey into the self. True knowledge lies deep within the self ”(v). At this point, the complex concept of home is presented in this dialogue between Atala the Supreme and Kumba:

Karbo: “And then I’ll be able to return home”

Atala: “Not return home but to be at home... “Home is not a place, like a village. To be at home means knowing one’s self and sharing that self with others”....Journey into self. See what fruit it bears. Only then will you know who you are. That knowledge will be your true home”(v-vi). Kumba is confused but having carried her search to the Supreme Being, she returns to Musudugu without realizing that the knowledge she garnered in her sojourn has enlarged her so much that she becomes a monster trampling on everything in sight- humans, animals, houses and other things. The town is destroyed and those who escape her destruction fled. Kumba, wept as she see the destruction and havoc she caused. It’s too late. The home is destroyed. In addition to the physical and familiar concept of home as a birth place people learn also that to be at home, the individual should work for his/her well-being and that of the society at large. Kumba was selfish so destroys herself, her home, and her society.

## **Home in Talaba**

Talaba is a little village that is at the verge of modernity through which the novelist presents another concept of home. In the village, we see what we could refer to as an African home with the nuclear family that copes with the influence of some members of the extended family as well as the community. This concept of home is highlighted in the relationship between Baramusu and her son’s family. Baramusu, insists that Finaba will only belong truly to the community and be at home if she goes through the rituals of female circumcision but Finaba’s parents hold a contrary view. She admonishes Finaba severally and continues to explain the need for her to be at home especially to Finaba especially shortly before the latter’s aborted initiation. She insists “you survive best when you can give strength to others and draw some from them when you need it...life is when people work together(6)”. This is the general African concept of home where there is unity and everybody works together for common good. Baramusu who, as an elder, speaks mainly in proverbs, advises her granddaughter further: “A wise woman walks through the high grass where the elephant has already trod... So the path does not die, do not follow footprints in the sand”(3).This statement re-enforces the title of the novel and Finaba works tirelessly throughout the novel to ensure that the path does not die. In Talaba, a female becomes a woman and be at home only by being excised if not, she is ostracized, she does not belong and is not a part of the community.

Amadu's truncating of her daughter's initiation ceremony is seen as an abomination and to forestall the wrath of the community, he runs to Freetown with his family where he dies shortly after settling down in his own rented apartment. This could be seen as a consequence of his decision to cut the rope and the subsequent curse from his mother that he will never know the comfort of a home. This concept of home which offers peace, unity and togetherness is shattered when Finaba's father disrupts her initiation ritual the protagonist seems to turn away from the well-trodden path. Consequently, with their relocation to Freetown, the family loses the peace and tranquility of their home in Talaba and for Finaba, it is not clear if she will ever "go back home" or to her grandmother Baramusu. One may conclude that she experienced a true sense of tranquility in her life only in her early years in Talaba and later when she returns and settles in Freetown. This perhaps explains her nostalgic recall of home and the yearning to return to it which seems to influence her actions, and imbues her with a sense of purpose that carries her through the enormous challenges and problems she encounters throughout the novel.

She returns to Talaba after her sojourn in America but her home like Musudugu is no more. She is led by a guide through an overgrown footpath back to the place that was once her home, where the ... little hamlet of Talaba once stood. She looked around for where it all started. But all she could see was scorched earth-charred pieces of timber and metal; crushed and rusted aluminum cans, cooking pots and pans; torn and bloodstained clothes, odd sandals and gaping shoes; a tinned and browned forest submitting to her gaze; a rice farm disfigured by craters and trenches, yielding a harvest of skeletons overturned trucks, their wheels in the air, and other broken rusted machines of war. The remnants of a place where homes once stood and lives flourished...there was no place and no one to atone to for her father's desecration. No Talaba to come back to (229). But, in spite of this gloomy picture, she does not give up but resolves to find Baramusu.

## **Home in Freetown**

In Freetown, Finabah and her family try to settle down and be at home but this is short-lived as her father he dies shortly after he rented an apartment and they settle in their own home. His boss, Pa Heddle offers to take care of his family but after a while, derelicts in this duty. However, he magnanimously offers to help in training Finaba so brings her to live with his family to alleviate the burden of homecare for her mother. Here, Finaba's name is shortened to Fina for easier pronunciation because it is foreign to the Krio lips. Unfortunately, she loses the sense of home in this family. Although Edna, one of Heddle's daughters tries to help her feel at home, his wife and son, Ade, behaved on the contrary. Consequently, Fina does not belong to this home. She recalls for Edna, several years later after her aborted wedding with Cammy, "...at your home, your mom made me feel like the odd one out..."(152). The recollections in this scene which includes her alienation at Crowther College, where she is rejected, and made fun of because she is a Fula reinforces her belief that her grandmother's curse was potent.



## **Home at Crowther's College (CC)**

Fina continues her search for home and hopes to find a home at college but is alienated. She lost the sense of home with the Heddles family because she is a foster daughter/sister but hopes to be at home in the college, since college is a place of freedom, of knowledge, of tolerance and truth. She looked forward to it as a place where she will obtain the necessary education that would enable her travel to America. Unfortunately, her dream of being at home is again shattered as her physical appearance and ethnic background becomes a hindrance at Crowther's College (CC). Although she is very beautiful, her slight overbite and discolored teeth earn her derogatory nicknames like "*Finabontit*," and "*Finakaktit*," (Fina with the protruded teeth). She also experienced an unimaginable ethnic stereotyping, oppression and subjugation in Crowther's College. She becomes an outsider once again as hostilities, violence, segregation and subjugation of her tribe affects her relationship with other students. She is forced out of school after she unwittingly walked into Kizzy's house one stormy night to negotiate for assistance with her Organic Chemistry and he rapes her. She stays awhile with her mother in Freetown and plans to get of Sierra Leone and go to America where she expects to be free, to be at home, to be accepted as a human being.

## **Home for Meredith Frank**

However, after her self-banishment from CC, she is employed by a Missionary health agency where her boss, an American lady, Meredith Frank treats her like a friend. Meredith is so humble and unassuming that Fina notices that she "displayed nothing of the class-consciousness and superiority" she found in the Heddle household and at Crowther College; "nothing of the self-satisfied arrogance of ... some of Meredith's compatriots..."(53). Meredith had lived in Sierra Leone with her missionary parents and relocated to America later but never felt at home in America, the country of her birth. She speaks a near-perfect Krio and dresses like Sierra Leoneans. Her concept of home is not necessarily that of one's birth place but anywhere she feels at home. She, therefore, accepts America as her home by birth and passport but insists that, deep inside, she is a Sierra Leonean. She recalls that she "felt out of place" in America where, while her fellow students talked about "making money, living in big houses, and driving fancy cars" her main preoccupation was to return to Sierra Leone to "stroll along Lumley Beach, and dig [her] and dig her toes in its wet sand" (53). However, she leaves finally for America later to marry Chip Monroe

## **Home in America**

Fina's dream of living in America, a country where everybody is free to exist without any fear of ethnic hostility or initiation status is fulfilled with the help of Meredith or Silbe Kakay, she is not sure. However in America her dream of being at home is crushed as she faces another form of segregation based on race.

Through her arrival in America, the novelist tries to contrast the American intense capitalism, exploitation and individualism with the Talaba communality reflected in the belief that life is about working together with other people. Fina's longing for home increases daily as she encounters the challenges of living in an alien land. In her desire to be at home in America, she is forced into a marriage with a drug addict, Jemal, to enable her obtain a Green Card. She obtains the Green card, divorces Jemal and works very hard at odd jobs and at odd times to make enough money to support her family in Sierra Leone and herself. She is determined to live the American high class life and succeeds in making enough money to buy a new car, and a beautiful house in an upscale neighborhood yet, feels "...unsatisfied and unfulfilled" but when she eats African food, she feels satiated. It gives her the "wholeness, fullness, completeness which she sought but which the green card, the townhouse and car" could not provide (91).

Luckily, she meets Aman and form a bond of friendship that brings them together frequently and in the process, Fina meets and falls in love with Cammy, a surgeon. This relationship blossoms and leads to marriage proposals and preparations for a wedding. Unfortunately, her aborted initiation and her desire not to cut the rope still haunt her and affect this relationship. For instance, sometimes, arguments about circumcision mars their togetherness and the outbreak of war in Sierra Leone increased the already bad situation as she struggles to pay her mortgages and maintain her sister, Isa, and her family, while preparing for her wedding. Fina's obligation to Isa puts a stress on their relationship and in spite of Cammy's advice that they "need to find work,...[and] start the tradition of self-support..."(112), Fina continues to oblige her sister and in the end, the marriage is aborted like the initiation ceremony. She becomes very depressed and nostalgic:

I wish I could go back to my village and sit in the shade of the baobab tree. I want to hear the mosquitoes whine in my ear. Then I'll slap at it, miss, and give myself an ear-ache....I want to smell *ogiri* and palm oil, feel mango juice drip down my fingers as I lick it off. I want to play on the farm, pull the bird-scaring rope, and watch the birds flutter away...I wish I had been able to say goodbye to my mother and Baramusu,... my father snatched me from the initiation bush. That's a taboo. ...my family never went back to Talaba and we have never made amends formy father's action. Now's a good time to go and set things straight, right?" (171).

Thus, she decides finally to go back to home to make atonement and maybe, be at peace with herself, and be at home.

Cammy's concept of home is contrasted with that of Fina. He believes that home is anywhere as long as one is comfortable. This is akin to the concept of home presented in the prologue by Atala the supreme.

Cammy is from Trinidad but grew up and lives happily in America. He feels that Fina's hold on the past, and insistence on going back to Talaba is utopian and insists that "...back home is a memory, a canvas of good times stitched together to cope with present realities. ...nothing but seeking refuge in nostalgia." (213).He declares: "Ah want to be more than Trinidadian, American or Nigerian – more than even a black man. I want to be bigger than one place and one culture!" (213).His idea of home comes true in the hopeful end of the novel that indicates that he will likely join Fina in Sierra Leone and be at home with his new family because "this was a path he could not let die" (280).

## **Return to Heal and Re-Build**

The novel is about healing and rebuilding. Meredith Frank is the first character in the novel who returns home to heal and rebuild. She leaves her comfort zone in America and returns home to Sierra Leone, to run a missionary clinic where she assists people in the little town of Koidu. Her job is stressful, frustrating and exhausting caused by "heat and humidity...over heated van...no fuel, no electricity...overcrowded streets... bribery and corruption"(54). In spite of the stress, she does not give up but continues her work of healing until she falls in love with Chip Monroe who takes her back to America for their marriage. Her relationship with Fina helps to heal the latter's traumatic experience at Crowther College and increases her resolve " ...never to involve herself in any corrupt practices and always to do the right thing"(55). She lives out this resolve especially in her encounter with the rich, corrupt diamond merchant, Sidibe Kakay.

Another homecoming and healing is encountered in America where the returnee is healed but his return also generates another form of healing. Cammy's son, Glen,though adopted by another couple needs a kidney from a close relation. He returns home to his father who agrees and donates a kidney to save his life. In the course of this return, Cammy's past is rebuilt and he is healed of the guilt of murder he has borne for several years.

Many Africans who settle in America see nothing good in Africa as they "love and adore the individuality... freedom...convenience, coziness and economic opportunities" (129) in America. However because of the novelist's insistence that the path should not die, he presents characters who oppose this general condemnation of Africa by African immigrants. Hollist does not pretend that African countries do not have problems. He acknowledges that problems abound but that those who have the opportunity of Western education and development should return to help in building Africa. He insists, through the graduate student, that Africans should go back to help their countries instead of staying back to "...gladly put up with insults, racism, and ignorant Americans... That's trading dignity for comfort" (131).In line with this, Bayo completes his studies in America, secures a plum job with the prospect of securing his green card on a platter of gold. He accepts the job offer but opts to receive his green card at the U.S Embassy in Lagos to enable him see his parents, who he had not seen in seven years.

His mother was ailing and he needs to represent his family in a chieftaincy “ascension dispute” as demanded by his father (141). He does not want to cut the rope, but on his return, he discovers that “...things are bad back home. A few live like royalty. The rest make do with little or nothing”. He therefore decides to contribute his “little bit to change things because he can’t just turn his back on his country” (205). He declares: “Whatever our motives, going back involve sacrifice...When I return, I must have given up a good income and a whole lot more”. He returns home to teach in a university and also sets up a clinic in his village in an effort to heal and rebuild. His action explodes the myth about “America as a place that turns people’s heads and makes them slaves to their desires” (203). He insists that Nigeria is not a den of lions and rogues but “a home to 150 million living breathing human beings” (198) who he can interact with and together they will build a better society. He demonstrates that one can only help to build a better society when one is prepared to make some sacrifices and at the same time hold people accountable for their misdeeds.

Fina decides to stop “running away from place to place trying to belong.”(152) and returns to a Sierra Leone devastated and traumatized by an awful and ruthless war. In this return, she is presented as “a healer, a compassionate soul, a caretaker of her people, a role that she chose for herself and fulfils”. (Barya 2014). She realizes that “ugliness is plentiful in the world” and decides to be the “...balm to soothe the ugliness in the world” (240) by returning to heal and rebuild. She sets out to find her grandmother to make atonement, and more importantly “to connect the past to the present and future” to make up for the “lack of continuity, wholeness, and belonging” she felt had been her “undoing since that fateful night”(234). This search is in vain as she discovers instead, “the remnants of a place where home once stood and life flourished ...No Talaba to come back to” (329). However she is consoled by the discovery of an old woman Mama Yegbe and a young girl Mawaf, and takes care of them and other “...kids with mangled limbs and mangled minds...the ones without limbs and without minds” (279). There is no physical home to return to, but a home as presented in the prologue “knowing one’s self and sharing that self with others”. Fina sees herself as part of others and shares in their pains. She realizes this through her work with an NGO which reunites children separated from their families or places those orphaned by war with new families” (261). Fina works with Svetlana Nordstrom and her team to heal and rehabilitate the people as well as to re-build war-devastated Sierra Leone.

Fina tells her daughter the Musudugu story and Dismusu-Celeste retells the story from time to time showing that the rope is not cut. It also reflects the novelist vision of a possibility of building a better future on a viable foundation of the past with everyone working together for a common good “... to build a new Musudugu” (282), a new society. The novel ends as Fina picks up the phone dials Edna apparently to rebuild their relationship and heal the wounds of the past.

## Conclusion

The thematic thrust of the novel is of national and international relevance as the novelist explicates that concept of home and return, oppression, ethnic discrimination, racism and the devastating effects of civil war on the individual and the society. The language is simple, contemporary, with vernacular, proverbs, slangs, imageries and other figures of speech that are well integrated to propel that plot and aid character development. The vivid description of incidents and events in the novel is so realistic that the reader seems to be “with Finaba, the main character, seeing the country through her eyes, trusting her intuitions and confusions, immersing in her world and search for home”. (Gordon 2014). For instance, Mawaf’s recounting of her experiences during the war is so graphically presented that it gives an insight into the atrocities committed by soldiers during the civil war in Sierra Leone. The prologue is used effectively not just to foreshadow the events of the novel but looms ominously in the life of the protagonist throughout the novel as she tries not to be like Kumba. Kumba in the prologue refuses to listen to voice of reason and cut the rope, she destroys herself and home on return. On the other hand, Fina does not cut the rope, she returns to heal and rebuild. She is able to achieve this because she journeyed into herself and realizes who she truly is like Atala advised Kumba. This knowledge differentiates her from some a character like Kizzy, and other Africans who see nothing good in Africa. Such characters if they ever return will never be at home.

Fina’s circumcision was aborted on the initiation nights by her father, an abomination. Her mother worsens the matter by disrupting the cleansing that followed. The family is cursed by Fina’s grandmother. This curse seems be potent because shortly after the family settled in their own home Fina’s father died. In her foster home, she is not at home because of Ade’s pranks and other avoidable incidents. Her hope of finding a home, at College is shattered by the ridicule of her discolored teeth as well as the mockery and violence against her ethnic Fulani which is seen as an inferior and illiterate. The climax is her rape and violation by Kizzy and she drops out of school. In America, her happiness and hope of being finally at home with her marriage to Cammy is destroyed by Jemal. She returns to Sierra Leone and is finally at home.

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