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Quadrangle Migration: Identity and Homecoming in Pede Hollist's *So the Path Does Not Die*

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Abstract

Pede Hollist's *So the Path Does Not Die* is written from a diasporic situation presenting issues such as race, identity, home and exile, culture, self-definition, sexism, romance, and homecoming. These issues constitute the complex, intertwined combination of experiences that afflict and characterize transnational migration. Hollist illustrates how racism affects the identity of Africans in the diaspora and combines with other factors to encourage return 'home'. This paper uses Bhabha's (1994) concept of "unhomeliness" to examine transnational migration and the complex dynamics of race in diasporan existence as presented in *So the Path Does Not Die*, through the life of Finaba: the reasons for her departure from her homeland, her experiences of racism in America, how these experiences affect her self-definition, and how the resulting evolution and acceptance of her identity propel her to return to her homeland. The paper also examines the nature and implications of her return and demonstrates that diasporic return often impacts positively on the development of the homeland. The paper proposes that Hollist's presentation of the complexities of transnational migration, ending in the return, takes the shape of a quadrangle, a twist on the triangular trade, in which migration is forced and there is no return, the migration quadrangle closes with a return. The return in quadrangle migration presented in *So the Path Does Not Die* extends the discussion on migration presented by other African literary authors.

Keywords: Migration, Homecoming, Diaspora, Return, Identity, Race

Introduction

Migration is a perennial issue in contemporary African literature. Buchi Emecheta's*The New Tribe* and *Kehinde*, Ike Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale*, Alasan Mansaray's *A Haunting Heritage*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, and Chike Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, to mention only few, all confirm this preoccupation. The circumstances leading to migration are diverse but most instances of migration are geared towards a desire, by the migrant, for something better than that which exists in the home nation. That desire to improve one's situation motivates the migration in Pede Hollist's *So the Path Does Not Die*. Finaba, the heroine, leaves Sierra Leone for America to escape her discomfort and feelings of inferiority resulting from deeply entrenched culture and divisions in Sierra Leone. Finaba's parents refuse

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to have her circumcised having already lost a daughter, Dimusu, to the practice. Amadu, Finaba's father, defiles the entire village by invading the *fafei* – the circumcision bush, a private female sanctuary – to save Finaba from "the cutting". Following Amadu's transgression her family flees to Freetown, the capital and more cosmopolitan. There, Finaba becomes a "Fulamusu", characterized by stereotypical physical features. She is made to feel inferior by theKrios and other ethnicities that dominate Freetown who regard Fulas as inferior and treat them with disrespect, even hatred, and a sense of superiority. Consequently, with the help of her boss and friend, Meredith, Finaba looks forward to going to America where tribe and physical features will not be used to discriminate against her. Therefore, migration to America in Finaba's case stems from a desire to escape from unhealthy cultural practices and discrimination in the home country – Sierra Leone.

Unfortunately, Finaba finds out that the reality of America differs greatly from her expectations. She confronts a myriad of problems in America: racism, sexism and difficulty in finding job, but she eventually adapts to American life. Although she achieves relative success in America, but she experiences homesickness and feel a disjuncture between the moderately successful life she has achieved and her psychological wellbeing. The disjuncture eventually propels her to return to her homeland in order to "[re]connect the past to the present and future … [mend the] lack of continuity, wholeness …." (Hollist 2012: 234). The return presented in *So the Path Does Not Die* inflect the migration story with the suggestion that a return to the original home is the closure of every migration. These issues are discussed in this paper within the quadrangle that emerges from *So the Path Does Not Die*.

So the Path Does Not Die depicts African diasporic experience as a quadrangle, with four stages: A, B, C, and D of unequal dimensions. The migration quadrangle, as this paper visualizes it, is a pattern of journeys and experiences that best describe the specific patterns of migration and return in *So the Path Does Not Die*. The migration quadrangle demonstrates that transnational migration and its attendant cultural change and self-definitions are not smooth linear progressions but, like evolution, they take irregular paths, all of which result in a cycle of migration and a reconfiguration of one's identity as an individual and a national personality. Unlike the triangular slave trade route, which stripped Africa of its human and material resources and returned manufactured goods, the migration quadrangle involves sojourners who engage in a

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trade of ideas and return home enlarged and ready to invest their learning and experience for the benefit of the homeland.

A – B of the migration quadrangle is the stage of disillusionment and involves the circumstances leading to the migration. B – C is the journey across the Atlantic, the stage of optimism and hope. C – D begins from the arrival in America and comprises the struggle to adapt, the relationship between the diasporic individual and homeland and the relationship between the immigrant and the host country, which, in *So the Path Does Not Die*, becomes a place of transit. This relationship is inflected by race, identity conflict, suspicion, physical and emotional instability and a variety of other factors. After years of battling different immigrant experiences, the diasporic individual inevitably gets to the phase of assimilation, integration, negotiations, and complex cultural combinations that impact negatively or positively on the individual. This phase of integration invariably results in either the loss of self, or the evolution of self-definition. At this point, the heroine has arrived at stage D, the point of cynicism about the place of residence, and optimism for the homeland. D – A, the last stage of the quadrangle, is the return home – a reversal of migration and of the psychology for leaving the home nation. However, the return home is not to the same circumstances the heroine left. The circumstances from which Finaba escapes, and to which she returns, differ greatly. Her return embodies a positive impact on her home nation.

Pede Hollist is a Sierra Leonean who teaches English studies at the University of Tampa, Florida. *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 shortlisted for the 2013 Caine Prize for African Writing while *So the Path Does Not Die*, is praised as "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 2014: 105). It won the African Literature Association's Book of the Year Award for outstanding book of African literature, 2014, in the creative writing category.

Theoretical Framework:

Finaba's experiences in the migration quadrangle as presented in *So the Path Does Not Die* are validated by Bhabha's (1994) postulations about the conditions of cross-cultural

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collisions, in his *The Location of Culture*. This paper applies Bhabha's concept of "unhomeliness" in the analysis of Finaba's experiences presented by Hollist in the quadrangle of immigrant existence. Bhabha (1994: 13) argues that "there is an estranging sense in the relocation of home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation". He explains: "Unhomeliness [is] inherent in that rite of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation", and that the "unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (15). Bhabha's "unhomeliness" describes the displacement that creeps up on Finaba in America. For example, Finaba's life in New York is described as an unfamiliar "chess match of fitting unreliable bus schedules with shifting work schedules and factoring in distance, fatigue, and weather conditions between destinations" (Hollist 2012: 70). This experience of difference and feeling of estrangement are, as Bhabha states, the characteristic conditions of sites of "cross-cultural initiations" (15).

Brief Review of Related Literature

Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2010) attempt a review of Adichie's short stories and conclude that "The black person [in America] is 'the other', and an inferior other at that… [and] Adichie's characters grow to become conscious of their 'otherness'" (201). This paper is of the view that the presentation of a character that grows to become conscious of issues of, particularly, race and difference that surround her in America are treated more extensively by Hollist in *So the Path Does Not Die*. Barya (2014) suggests that in *So the Path Does Not Die*, "Africa – Homeland and Africa – Diaspora meet and clash, reconcile, clash some more, meet and separate, unite and hang in delicate balance". Just like this paper, Barya's description of the problems of cultural collision corresponds to the "unhomeliness" Bhabha ascribes to sites of "cross-cultural initiations". However, Barya identifies the motivation to leave Africa – Homeland as the important focus in *So the Path Does Not Die*, while this paper is of the view that the traumatic experiences of racism, identity and the motivation to return are issues of more important focus in the novel. Iwuchukwu (2018) focuses on the effects of modernity and globalization on 'home', and the search for 'home' by Finaba in *So the Path Does Not Die*. Iwuchukwu is of the view that Finaba is not successful in her quest to find 'home' because her family is cursed by Baramusu. Baramusu's curse on Amadu's family follows Finaba from Talaba

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to Freetown and America. Iwuchukwu insists that "Finaba's life throughout the novel is filled with problems and obstacles that 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…" (187). Unlike Iwuchukwu's, this paper is not only about Finaba's search for 'home', it extends the discussion to the concept of migration, its patterns and consequences, embarked by Finaba from Sierra Leone to America and back to Sierra Leone.

The Quadrangle Migration in *So the Path Does Not Die*

In *So the Path Does Not Die,* Finaba is first displaced by her rural Talaba culture before she encounters the deeply entrenched problem of ethnic segregation arising from postcolonial divisions of African territories. Fulas are regarded as foreigners and the socio-economic situation means that ethnic Fulas are beaten up at random in the city "because the government says illegal Fulas and Nigerians are taking work away from Sierra Leoneans" (Hollist 2012: 38). Finaba rages at the city that makes her "people foreigners in their own country" (Hollist 2012: 39). The situation in Freetown confirms the assertion made by Wilson-Tagoe (2006: 102) that "contrary to our conceptual assumptions, nations, especially those within ethnic settings, are not natural givens but collective projects that may not always be emancipatory or protective of individual freedoms and interests"; in essence, Fulas are "victims of the nation itself". These happenings fuel Finaba's determination to live in America where ethnicity will not matter. Finaba's departure from Sierra Leone confirms Okafor's (2004: 115) opinion that people will readily migrate to "foreign lands when they are confronted with calamitous conditions in their homeland", with the hope that their situations will be better than in their home countries.

Finaba travels to America to escape uncertainty, hopelessness, cultural inflexibility and ethnic bias. The first stage of the migration quadrangle is both physical (from Talaba to Freetown) and psychological (to escape ethnic discrimination). Over the years, she holds tenaciously on to the dream of going to America. Bhabha identifies feelings of displacement and disorientation as characteristic of "relocation and homeland" and conditions of "cross-cultural initiations" but as *So the Path Does Not Die* shows, these feelings also arise from conditions of ethnic divisions. The second stage of the migration quadrangle is B – C, the trans-Atlantic

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"going to America", the journey of hope. Thankfully, its voluntary nature and the advent of jet engines make it a crossing of hope and fulfillment, unlike that of the triangular trade.

The arrival and life in America, C – D, constitutes the third stage of the migration quadrangle. This is a long stage in which Finaba undergoes different experiences and reactions to these experiences. In America, cultural conflict, inferiority complex, fear, economic hardship and, above all, racial discrimination confronts her. However, these problems produce a new relationship between the migrant and homeland. Finaba now views Sierra Leone from a geographical distance but also from a position of nostalgia:

> 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'II slap at it, miss, and give myself and 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 flitter away … I wish I had been able to say goodbye to my mother and Baramusu, …. (Hollist 2012: 171)

Agnew (2005: 15) notes: "The individual living in the diaspora experiences a dynamic tension every day between living 'here' and remembering 'there', between memories of places of origins and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home". Therefore, Finaba suffers the disorienting confusion of cultural difference. Her grandmother, Baramusu's injunctions are deeply embedded in her mind: "Remember this: life is when people work together. Alone, you are just an animal. So, do not cut the rope. Do you hear me? *Never* cut the rope" (Hollist 2012: 5; original emphasis). Finaba is conscious that her solitary existence in America contravenes Baramusu's injunctions and, when her life is overrun with problems culminating in her aborted wedding, Finaba believes that her misfortunes arise from the disobedience of "cutting the rope". Hollist (2012) confirms that "living here" and "remembering there" is a diasporan affliction when he observes that Africans in the diaspora "became most animated when they discussed the one topic of immigrant conversation: back home" (129). Thus, the homeland continues to operate for the individual in the present surroundings, and the disjuncture between the familiar and the new is traumatic – "unhomely".

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The third stage of the migration quadrangle also includes the relationship between the immigrant and host country. This relationship is characterized by the operations of race, identity, suspicion and a variety of other factors. Finaba's experiences in America establish that racial discrimination is one of the major challenges of immigrant life. She discovers that tone of skin colour is an important distinction between people. Finaba quickly realizes that her escape from problems in Sierra Leone to America means: "I just replaced the circles on my back with ones that say black, African, and foreign – no, no alien" (Hollist 2012: 152). The racial ladder is clearly mapped out: whites occupy the top of the ladder; non-black races occupy the middle; and African-Americans, Small Islanders such as Jamaicans and Africans occupy the lowest rungs of the racial ladder. Within the lower rungs occupied by African-Americans and Africans, there is further stratification. Consequently, Finaba's boss in the childcare centre, Juanita, a non-African black woman, shouts: "What the fuck are you doing, African?" (Hollist 2012: 71), assuming that it is Finaba who has tied up the child with a skipping rope when in fact it is one of the other workers. Finaba comes to realize the negative connotations of being African among other blacks. Readers also witness the cultural bias of Africans against other blacks in the scene of Finaba and Cammy's aborted wedding. The cabal of Sierra Leoneans comes to let the foreign Caribbean bridegroom know that they will retaliate if he dares to mistreat their sister. Sierra Leoneans obviously do not regard Caribbeans as Africans or brothers. The same bias exists on the part of the Caribbeans who see that their brother is getting married to this "African gyal" (Hollist 2012: 131) and they refer to "dem Africans" (Hollist 2012: 133) with hostility.

In *So the Path Does Not Die*Hollist illustrates that being black and African in America is essentially characterized by difference. Finaba's boss, Juanita, stereotypes the "sort of thing" an African would do. It is always expected that blacks should be poor, and this confirms that class plays a major role in racism. Finaba works several jobs to fulfill the "American dream", and eventually, she is able to buy a good car and begin mortgage payments on a town house in an upscale neighbourhood. Finaba reports to her friend, Aman, that the house and neighbourhood are "so upscale that twice now the security people have asked me if I live here" (Hollist 2012: 89). The reaction of the "security people" is a disappointment and hostile surprise that a black woman is able to afford such a house. For them, Finaba is an aberration in that upscale white neighbourhood. Finaba's experience further attests to the simultaneous operations of race and

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class which impact greatly on Africans in the diaspora, resulting in all kinds of identity crisis and problems of self-definition.

The issues of identity and self-definition are major maladies of African diasporic life. The ambivalence of being between the demands of two cultures manifests in different ways. At a point, Finaba was afraid of sounding too African. The negative connotations of being black were such that "identifying her place of birth now became fraught with anxiety" (Hollist 2012: 72), eroding her psychological well-being. She exists in that traumatic site of "unhomeliness". Another Sierra Leonean immigrant, Hezekiah Mendelssohn Bacchus, known popularly as Kizzy, manifests a variant of identity crisis. He is described, in the novel, as "one of those immigrants who found himself, came to value his individuality, potential and freedom, in America. He loved, adored, and was awed by his adopted country. His was not a half-hearted love … it was an utter love, the grateful Cuban-exile kind that puzzled and sometimes even frightened the natives" (Hollist 2012: 129). So, Kizzy finds nothing good about Sierra Leone: "I didn't see one good road in the 'hole gad dam country, man. Let's not talk 'bout education …. Am gonna stay right here in good of US of A. Ain't never goin' back" (Hollist 2012: 130). As a result of the negative connotations of being "recognizably" black, Kizzy wants to destroy his African identity in a desperate effort to be American. He becomes a lost individual who is neither here nor there, pursuing the identity that cannot be available to him. Clearly, the effort to assume an identity that is not yours is hard work. It is uncomfortable and traumatic; it is Bhabha's "unhomely" situation.

Living with the tensions and ambiguities of racism and identity issues manifest in several ways; the African immigrant may become so diminished that one may seek to lose identity or develop contempt for the home country as we witness with Kizzy. The individual may also achieve self-definition like Finaba, who recovers from the crisis of the identity she suffers. Her recovery results from self-definition and the evolution of a defined self-identity which enable her to recover from the traumatic situation of being black in America.

This third stage of the immigrant quadrangle also includes the phase in which Finaba has adapted to the requirements of her diasporic home, she has become integrated into an American lifestyle, and is successful within it. The assimilation of Finaba into American social life occurs simultaneously with an evolution of self-identity and self-acceptance; it is a stage of recovery.

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Therefore, it is at this stage Finaba recovers her self-definition and also begins to negotiate her position in the diaspora. When Cammy, her fiancé, reacts to a television report of circumcision as "outrageous and criminal", Finaba challenges him: "It's the double standard and hypocrisy that makes me mad. You respect the rights of Adults in America and Europe to practice circumcision as in the name of religion and personal freedom, but it doesn't cross your mind that Africans are entitled to the same respect" (Hollist 2012: 101). Cammy's reaction illustrates the Western perception of circumcision as a physical mutilation of the female body that implies violence. Although Cammy is originally of African origin, his ancestral history of migration from Africa is within the context of the triangular figure of migration in which there is no return. As a result of generations of acculturation and assimilation of Western life values, Cammy's perceptions are, as one would expect, Western in orientation. Finaba argues that circumcision is not negative for Africans who practice it. Considering the fact that many people in Africa are against the practice of circumcision and some African nations have outlawed the practice, it seems ironical that a modern young woman would defend this practice, more so, as she has lost a sister to circumcision. However, the ultimate message embedded in this controversial argument in *So the Path Does Not Die*, is about cultural relativity, that African attitudes must be accorded the same respect given to European lifestyles and cultural practices. Finaba's argument arises from self-definition and although it may not guarantee a compromise, these subversive negotiations inevitably open up new sites of thinking and operations.

Finaba eventually makes a success of her life in America but happiness continues to elude her because she is never able to lose herself enough to become even "fleetingly American". Although, she gains mastery of the American lifestyle and she achieves success with hard work and grueling time schedules; but her success feels empty and she decides to return to Sierra Leone. But no one is able to understand what seems like a senseless decision. Finaba's friend, Aman, is stunned: "I can't figure out Africans. I don't know of anyone of you who has ever returned … I wonder why you'd want to go back, especially now" (Hollist 2012: 160). Cammy is sure that Finaba cannot be serious; wanting to go back to the "insanity in Sierra Leone" (Hollist 2012: 181), but Finaba defends her decision. She explains that there is a certain stability and peace in knowing what insanity to expect and understanding it. Sierra Leone will hold no hidden surprises for her, unlike America. Finaba articulates her problem with America clearly; the

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mansion, rich food in exotic restaurants, and the new car do not bring satisfaction and fulfillment to her. Her successes leave her "unsatisfied, unfulfilled" (Hollist 2012: 90), but her decision to return to Sierra Leone will bring her "wholeness, fullness, completeness which she sought but which the green card, the townhouse, and car" could not provide (Hollist 2012: 90). This shows that Finaba needs what America is unable to provide to her. The explanation arising from the context presented in *So the Path Does Not Die* is that Finaba's "Africanness" follows her across geographical boundaries and does not depart in confrontation with, and successful adaptation to, Western metropolitan existence. Ironically, every stage of progress seems to increase the self-definition Finaba attains, and the well-structured advantages and certainty of American life, the same benefits that she had hoped to achieve from American existence, lose her attraction.

Finaba's return to Sierra Leone is stage D – A, the fourth and final phase of the migration quadrangle sketched out in *So the Path Does Not Die*. Her return is a reverse migration which is voluntary and, of course, ironic. Finaba is cured of false impressions of America; her eyes are now open to the realities of being black in America, and she recognizes the difference between her illusions and reality. In her undulating journey to self-definition, America loses its attraction and power as she realizes that there is no place like home in spite of all its problems. Home, a place where one is psychologically connected to one's physical reality, is, undeniably, better than a comfortable but faceless existence in which one's identity is problematic and the cultural space is hard to find. So Finaba migrates back to her original nation. This reverse migration suggests that return is the closure of every migration.

Finaba returns having acquired attitudes and attributes that will impact advantageously on her home nation. Therefore, returning to war-torn Sierra Leone, Finaba is determined to contribute towards rebuilding the country. She plans to build a centre for girls orphaned, abused, ostracized or displaced by war; she also plans to continue to help her sister, Isa, take care of her grandmother, atone for her father's transgression and reconcile with her past. However, on arrival, she finds that Talaba has been destroyed by war, and her grandmother is dead but her teachings never depart from Finaba's mind: "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" (Hollist 2012: 3). Finaba is eventually employed as the deputy director of the Waterloo Refugee Camp, where she oversees the rehabilitation of orphans, runaways, and youths traumatized or

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displaced by war. For Finaba, the job is "the opportunity to fulfill her dreams"(Hollist 2012: 256). She dedicates herself to repairing psychologically, emotionally and sometimes, physically damaged youths, gives them "strength" and "draws" joy from them (Hollist 2012: 256). She finds the gradual process of helping youths heal very fulfilling. Repairing the youths is to repair and build the future of Sierra Leone. Finaba does not find a past to return to, but creating a family of strangers, uniting displaced families, and her work at the refugee camp provides her with the avenues to "invest her time and energy on the present and future" (Hollist 2012: 255) of Sierra Leone and indeed obeys Baramusu's injunction of surviving "best when you can give strength to others and draw some from them when you need it" (Hollist 2012: 6).

Conclusion

So the Path Does Not Die presents the structure of transnational migration, ending in reverse migration, in a pattern that can best be described as a migration quadrangle. The quadrangular structure implies that the intersecting issues of immigrant experience are too complex to be linear progressions, but are necessarily irregular squares with varied angles, dimensions and sharp turns. *So the Path Does Not Die* displaces history of illusions and assumptions about transnational migration, as well as about African migrants in America. It enables the emergence of a new understanding, and makes it possible to envisage new futures for transnational migrations.

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