

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

SS 1

WEEK 2

DATE: 15th January, 2024.

AFRICAN PROSE: “So The Path Does Not Die” by Pede Hollist

PLOT

So The Path Does Not Die is fundamentally a story of love and the belongingness of people and place. Finaba's (or later known as 'Fina' by her adopted family) life revolves around her interrupted FGM (female genital mutilation)/ initiation process in her village. In the novel, the deadly practice of FGM is a coming-of-age event where a girl finally becomes a woman and 'belongs' to the people of the village. Fina's parents loathed this practice but her grandma strongly supported it. After Fina's family is shunned from their village due to an abominable act by her father to save Fina from this deadly practice, they move to Freetown (Sierra Leone's capital) with heaps of curses on their heads.

In Freetown, Fina endures hardships in all aspects of her life – family problems, university struggles, ethnic group discrimination (as she's Fulani which is known to be in the minority), just to name a few. When Fina finally escapes Sierra Leone to the United States, though she matures beautifully and becomes relatively successful thanks to her determination to be happy and independent, she faces a new set of struggles: immigration woes, Africans vs. African-Americans vs. Caribbean concerns, the myth of the American dream and cultural alienation. For some reason, all the painful lessons Fina experiences seem to be tied back to the night of her interrupted initiation process. She somehow feels she does not 'belong', even when she finally finds true love. To Fina, Sierra Leone seems to be the only place where she thinks she would feel valued; a place where she feels she'd be 'on the right path' in life.

Finaba's return to Sierra Leone, illustrates that her journeys towards self-constitution and recovery, though enriched by her experiences in Freetown and America, are still incomplete. This return leads her to encounter Mama Yegbe (the old woman Finaba thinks is Baramusu) – the apotheosis of Baramusu – listen to the story of Mawaf (the small girl victimized by the civil war and moving along with the blind Yegbe), and give birth to Dimusu-Celeste (a symbolic act of regeneration, but also a manifestation of the cultural hybridity she has been through, a fact reflected in the combination of the child's African and Western names). By her return, Finaba gets to prove Cammy right: there is no past to return to. She finds the social and cultural fabric of Talaba in ruins, completely shattered by the civil war. This complete destruction of what was once home also symbolizes a disconnection to a cultural past. There was no place and no one to atone to for her father's desecration. No Talaba to come back to. Her next attempt to re-connect to her past by her frantic search for Baramusu also proves futile. With this reality of a lost past now facing her squarely, she decides to invest her time and energy on the present and future – Mama Yegbe, Mawaf, the children of the Center and Dimusu-Celeste. This resolution finally frees her from the burden of the past. But that past is recast in a new light in the stories of Mama Yegbe and Mawaf.

Mama Yegbe is the symbolic representation of Baramusu in the novel. Both Baramusu and Yegbe are custodians of Talaba culture, but through their iteration of the same message of female communal bonding in different contexts – circumcision in Baramusu’s case and war in Yegbe’s case. It is in this sense that Yegbe’s blindness at the hands of rebels and Mawaf’s story of multiple rapes, forced pregnancy and the death of her baby and drug abuse, and Captain’s incestuous sexual acts with her and her sister, connect and resonate with Finaba’s experiences of otherness. Finaba finally reaches the knowledge that her situation is not unique. Although this path of violence against women does not seem to die. She can find personal fulfilment by dedicating her life to the course of women and their liberation, and working to unite broken families.

THEMES

So the Path Does Not Die addresses issues of **ethnicity, sexuality and gender**, exploring attitudes towards **female circumcision, identity and belonging** through the life of a feisty, young African woman as she makes her way through the world, balancing the weights of **tradition and modernity**.

SETTINGS

The settings of the novel are Freetown, Sierra Leone’s capital and Washington Metropolitan Area.

CHARACTERS

Some of the characters in **So The Path Does Not Die** are Sidebe - a diamonds trader, Aman - Fina’s African-American best friend, Cammy – Fina’s Trinidadian fiancé, Mawaf – the child soldier’s wife, Bayo – Ama’s Nigerian beau, Baramusu – her grandma. Both Baramusu and Yegbe are custodians of Talaba culture.

HOME WORK

1. Summary the plot of “**So The Path Does Not Die**” by Pede Hollist in six sentences.
2. Explain the roles of Finaba in “**So The Path Does Not Die**” by Pede Hollist.