

Who Am I: Identity Construction in Pede Hollist's So The Path Does Not Die

Juliana Daniels

Department of English Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana, PO box 25, Winneba, Ghana

Abstract

Though 'identity' has been extensively discussed in many circles of scholarship, the current winds of migration and association by identity makes a further inroad into the need for more research into identity construction even more imperative. Anti-Semitism, racism, ethnic segregation, religious fanaticism and gender discrimination are all tenets of the quest for and the guarding of identity. African literary texts, as fictional replication of life, therefore become ideal avenues for the examination of identity formation processes and characteristics amongst Africans. The array of factors that militate against the being a woman in terms of gender and sexuality and how women navigate the roadblocks are amply depicted in African literary works. This paper, therefore, seeks to bring issues of identity construction into a sharper focus in relation to African women in Pede Hollist's fictional societies. It also adds to the concretization and clarification of issues relating to subjective, ethnic identity formation and symbolic identity construction as part of the identity negotiation and renegotiation narrative. It purposes to do this by examining Pede Hollist's *So The Path Does Not Die* through the lens of Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation theory, and the subjective, ethnic and symbolic identity construction frameworks as articulated by Helena Grice (1998). It concludes that the principal African women in the novel assert their symbolic ethnic identities by negotiating and re-negotiating various other identities. Eventually, as part of the process of gaining a composite subjective identity, they re-negotiate away from the NEW WAYS identity back to the OLD WAYS identity where they experience harmony and happiness as the outcome.

Keywords: Identity Negotiation, African Literature, Feminism, Gender, Migration

DOI: 10.7176/JLLL/68-05

Publication date: May 31st 2020

1. Introduction

The question of who we are, where we are from or in some cases what we often gain relevance when we want to lay claim or deny some origin that relates to us in some way. Diyaiy and Saleh (2013) believe that "individuals and societies always search for an identity that gives meaning to their existence" (2). In recent times, people have been either welcomed or rejected, accepted or expelled from one place or the other because of how they respond to the question of who they are. Indeed, in whichever way one chooses to respond to the question of who they are, the response is the person's subjective identity. The inability to respond invariably means a case of identity crisis which Diyaiy and Saleh (2013) refer to as "the idea of rootlessness and un-belonging" (4). Weedon (2004), in his book *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging*, refers to identity as necessary to the postmodern man:

The desire to be from somewhere, to have a sense of roots and a feeling of belonging are key features of the quest for positive identity in postmodern, post-colonial societies. The current popularity of genealogy and family history point to this need, as does the marketing of family names, crests and the like. It is also manifest in the popularity of tourism concerned with roots and heritage. (p.85)

Pede Hollist in the novel, *So The Path Does Not Die*, attempts to depict the complexities involved in identity construction and the very essence of being at home and not merely being home in the African milieu. The novel projects the centrality of family to the identity of the African. Hollist emphasizes the essence of returning to one's roots, an act referred to as *Sankofa* in Ghanaian phraseology, by exploring the power of African oral tradition, the wielding power of the family and the elderly concerning identity construction of the young. It does not hesitate to demonstrate the thorny implications of ethnicity, poverty, mobility and migration to African identity construction.

In literary criticism, human realism is core to plot and thematic progression. It is, therefore, justified that Gardiner (1981) asserts that "Identity is a central concept for much contemporary cultural and literary criticism". Though 'identity' has been extensively discussed in many circles of life, the current winds of migration and association by identity makes a further inroad into identity construction even more imperative. Anti-Semitism, racism, ethnic segregation, religious fanaticism and gender discrimination are all tenets of the quest for and the guarding of identity. In the view of Grice (1998) the fact that we still talk about identity and how we discuss it signposts the point that "identity matters" (p.2). African literary texts, as fictional replication of life, therefore become ideal avenues for the examination of identity formation processes and characteristics amongst Africans. Francoise Lionett (1995), as a case in point, avers that 'fictional works make concretely visible the networks of influence and the question of identity that are central to the debates over authenticity and postcolonial culture' The

array of factors that militate against the being of women on the continent and how these women navigate roadblocks are amply depicted in African literary works. This depiction underscores the argument by Mercer (2001) that identity “only becomes an issue when it is in crises, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is placed beside the experience of doubt and uncertainty” (503). In this paper the crises of the *self* against the society in the quest for identity by the female characters in Pede Hollist’s novel, *So The Path Does Not Die*, is examined.

This paper, therefore, seeks to bring issues of identity into a sharper focus with African women Hollist’s fictional context. It also seeks to add to the concretization and clarification of issues relating to subjective, ethnic identity formation and symbolic identity construction as part of the identity negotiation narrative. It purposes to do this by examining Pede Hollist’s *So The Path Does Not Die* mainly through identity negotiation theory proposed by Stella Ting-Toomey in 1986. The study interrogates the identity (s) desired by the female characters in the novel with a focus on the boundaries that the characters must scale to attain their desired identity. The answer to the question of how these characters navigate these boundaries that are often predicated upon markers of gender, ethnicity, geography and nationality is also sought. Essentially, an identity construction hierarchy is established in the novel. Hollist’s text is purposively chosen because it is preponderant with characters who are engulfed with the quest for the ‘self’ and those who crave to belong, to have an identity.

1.1 Identity Negotiation Theory

The etymology of a word is often the best source to turn for the meaning of a word. The term ‘identity’ originates from the Latin word *identitas* which is also formed from the Latin word *idem*. *Idem* means *same* thus identity means “sameness of a person or thing at all times in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else” (Simpson and Weiner 1989, p. 620). According to Gardiner (1981), the term ‘identity’ has become a cliché without necessarily becoming clear. She further indicates that identity is “paradoxical in its meaning in the sense that it means both sameness and distinction”. This means that one can claim identity by association or by dissociation. In the view of Gardiner (1981), the meaning of the term is still vague. She adds that the vagueness and contradictory nature of the meaning of ‘identity’ “proliferates when it is applied to women”. Perhaps because a woman must not only show a biological identity as a female, she must satisfy a cultural description, racial description and ethnic description amongst others. The multiplicity and complexity of African women’s route to identity formation is the pre-occupation of this paper. The latency of memory in the formation of the African identity and how this complicates the characterization of Hollist’s central female characters are privileged.

Ting-Toomey’s identity negotiation theory is the pivot on which this study stands. It highlights the essence of both socio-cultural group membership and personal identity as key to successfully developing a high-quality inter-group and interpersonal relations. The theory also proposes that dialectics of identity security such as vulnerability, and identity inclusion issues often associated with the paths to adaptation by migrants and refugees, other self-perception and other-perception motivational factors need to be understood and applied in context (Ting-Toomey 2015). Ting-Toomey (2015) also posits that in social theory, social or socio-cultural identities may include ethnic membership identity, social class identity, family roles issues whilst personal identities may encompass unique attributes that is related to the individuated self in relation to that of others. Therefore, an individual arrives at a composite identity by obtaining group membership, relational role, and individual self-reflexiveness. To this end, how the African female characters arrive at a composite desired identity through the various socio-cultural and personal experiences as well as inter-group and inter-personal experiences is examined. The term negotiation is used in this paper to refer all the verbal and non-verbal communications between and amongst parties. This form of negotiation is often aimed at “maintaining, threatening, or uplifting the various socio-cultural group based or unique personal based identity images of the other” Ting-Toomey (2015).

Grice (1998) tries to simplify the vagueness of the term ‘identity’ when she posits that identity is the interface between subjective positions and social and cultural situation. She philosophically argues that if identity is marked by what one is or does, it is equally determined by what one is not or does not do. Perchance, Grice is looking at the term from the perspective of its origin and characteristics. Hence, identity as a subjective positioning means that identity is a choice made by an individual. One can, therefore, decide to be identified with this group or not. This is without losing the fact that in some cases, identity can be ascribed and imposed on a subject. The social and cultural situation referred to by Grice (1998) earlier, points to the nature of the group one chooses to claim or reject. The constant interface between subjective positions and social and cultural situations account for identity manufacturing, regulation and claim or rejection within a cultural sphere. Concerning the cultural sphere within which identity operates, Grice (1998) adds that often, the nature of our everyday cultural practices such as eating, speaking, celebrations and writings amongst other cultural practices delineate and constitute our identity. Grice further argues that cultural practices are ideal signifiers of identity because they differ from one group to another. Sometimes cultures may have similarities but often what dissociate one from another are the distinguishing features. Thus, it is agreeable that cultural practices are good signposts for the determination of identity because

as Grice (1998) puts it, “they often set the boundary between one group and another” (2). The cultural restriction, she adds, also means that not all identities are available at any particular time for members of a group. She further indicates that identities are shared by a group often either by self-identification or what she terms ‘forced belong’ (2). In other words, a person may belong to more than one identity at a time. It is the collision of these plural and contingent identities that result in identity crises. Identity crises happen often because one’s claim to an identity is determined by regulations. Sometimes, Grice (1998) suggests, marginalized identities are impossible to escape. Such marginalized identities include gender categorization, disabled people, people of colour, gays, and lesbians amongst others. In this paper, therefore, the boundaries of groups are identified by cultural practices and gender categorization. How the African female characters in the novel negotiate cultural boundaries to carve their various identity are key to this discourse.

1.1.1 Ethnic Identity

Jean Phinney (2003) notes that both terms, identity and ethnicity, have varied definitions and measures across studies. These definitions and measures are often inconsistent with each other thus making their comparisons tedious. She further asserts that “ethnic identity is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one’s identity, or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group” (p, 63). The term *Ethnic* emanates from the Greek word *ethnos*. It means *nation or people (group)*. *Ethnic*, therefore, means a group of people who share a common cultural descent. Ethnicity, in the view of Grice (1998) means “a common phenomenon in a cosmopolitan postcolonial Africa where groups of people who share cultural descent are not hard to find”. She also refers to an ethnic group as a community of similar people whose membership extends affirmative sentiments to its members. Hence, one’s ability to identify with an ethnic group is dependent upon the group’s borders that define it. It is given this tendency that Gates and Appiah (1995) posit that as a result of an emerging post-essentialist or better put, a non-essentialist concept of identity, individuals are increasingly exhibiting the agency to adopt, adapt or abandon ethnic identities. However, Weinreich (1986) argues that indeed ethnic self-identity is not a static process but a continuously changing one that is directly dependent on a social context. Therefore, we can have individuals staying away from situations where they think their identity is contested, threatened, mortified or castigated. On the other hand, such persons seek out and brook contexts that favour their identity state. Such fluctuations in identity construction are referred to as the identity in this paper. Mary Waters (1990) is also of the opinion that ethnic identity is “a social process or a dynamic and complex social phenomenon”. She further asserts that ethnicity is not a biological orientation. She, therefore, proffers that ethnicity markers include language, physical appearance, food, recreation activities, and cultural rites of passage. The depiction of these markers and how African female characters in the text navigate them in the process of their identity formation forms the pivot of the discussions in this paper.

1.1.2 Symbolic Identity

Symbolic identity is the identity that one lays claim to. Joan Riley (1885) describes symbolic identity as “a project of accentuating and laying claim to a particular ethnic identity. In the opinion of Grice (1998), certain factors can impede symbolic identity. Such factors include migration and diaspora. Both, she adds, can alienate ethnic subjects from ethnic roots which determine their identity. About the diaspora, she indicates that war and conflicts, poverty, famine and colonization are among the factors that create diaspora. In other words, identity is not only a process but a fluid one which is highly driven by the dynamics of social, political and economic exertions. Gender and ethnicity are the two identities she describes as insecure. In Hollist’s novel, how the female characters carve their symbolic identity is examined. The influence of war, ethnicity, diaspora, migration and gender as factors that impede symbolic identity is also analysed. Migration as an impediment to symbolic identity occurs when assimilation is difficult and the sustenance of ethnic group identity, subsequently, becomes problematic. Thus, the main objective of this paper is also to identify the identities that African women in Hollist’s *So The Path Does Not Die* seek out, claim and sustain and which ones they resist and why. It also seeks to examine the factors that foster or hinder the nature of identity they form and the identity formation processes experienced by these characters. Ultimately, the study of Hollist’s novel from the perspective of identity formation is intended to either corroborate or challenge the identity formation processes outlined in the literature.

1.1.2.1 The Text: *So The Path Does Not Die*

Hollist’s heart-rending novel opens with a prologue that forecasts the identity formation challenges experienced by its central character, Finaba (also known as Fina). It privileges Finaba’s transition from childhood to adulthood. It opens with a fierce familial contestation between Baramusu, her grandmother, on one hand, and her parents, Naubu and Amadu, on the other. The clash is precipitated by the couple’s vehement opposition to Fina undergoing circumcision. Circumcision is an integral part of womanhood rites in the village and therefore a symbol of the Talaba womanhood identity. Dimusu, the eldest daughter of the couple attains this ethnic symbolic identity but her death afterwards is a dog whistle to the metaphorical wiping away of Talaba village and ethnic identity from the lives of the younger generation. Baramusu’s desperate effort to get Fina circumcised irrespective of the stiff

opposition from the parents is Hollist's echo of the ongoing clash of generations in Africa and their desired cultures. The halting of Fina's womanhood rites and the subsequent physical alienation of the family from the village redirects Fina's character formation from one based on the roots of ethnic identity, also called OLD WAYS, to one based on the city way of life, NEW WAYS. Fina's travel to America for greener pastures complicates her already complex identity construction plot. Without a *self* and a solid ethnic root, Fina realizes that she has no identity. It is her quest to find her 'self' and identity that brings her back home to post-war Sierra Leone. Even though her village, the symbol of her ethnic identity is wiped out by the war, the new Freetown embraces her. It allows her to put her memory of her roots in practice. Thus, she begins to share with Isa, her sister, Mawaf and Mama, all war survivors. It is in sharing and caring for these and others that Fina discovers her *self*.

1.1.3 The Discussion

Hollist indicates in his prologue that subjective identity precedes any other identity construction. However, subjective identity is attained through knowledge and understanding of one's roots. Therefore, the core conflict of his main story rests in Finaba's guardians trying to construct an ethnic identity for their ward even before Fina realizes her subjective identity. Consequently, we witness competing identities struggling to hold claim to Fina's ethnic or group identity.

The identity clash that ensues is between Baramusu, the custodian of the old ways of womanhood on one hand and Fina's parents (Nabou and Amadu), the advocates of the new ways of womanhood, on the other. The ethnic identity markers of the people of Koinadugu is what Baramusu refers to as "our way" (1). This *way* is the cultural practices of the people. Thus, the cultural boundary of the Koinadugu womanhood identity is that a woman must not carry *manhood* in between her legs. In other words, a woman must undergo womanhood rites which include female genital circumcision to become a *musu ba* to share in the Koinadugu womanhood identity. A woman must marry, have children and be able to take care of her husband and children. A woman must preserve the ways of her people (2). *Ways* is used in this novel to mean culture and "a woman must take care of her husband so that the family does not crumble, she must belong, become a woman and the initiation will make her so", according to Baramusu (2-3). The identity markers of Nabou and Amadu's *new ways* of womanhood contradicts that of Baramusu's to a large extent. The boundaries of this modern womanhood identity are that there is no gender segregation in matters of education. A woman must go to school, work and earn as much as her male counterparts. She *may* marry and have children but must be able to do whatever she chooses in addition to that. She must go to school and "learn new ways, just like the sons" of the village (2). Female circumcision is not a requirement as Nabou herself is not circumcised and therefore the reason Baramusu says she carries manhood in between her legs. As indicated earlier, subjective identity refers to an individual's understanding or knowledge of his or her 'self' whilst symbolic identity refers to one's claim of a particular ethnic identity. Consequently, what we have in this part of the story is a crisis identity where two subjective and symbolic ethnic identities compete. According to Grice (1998), crises identity occurs when there is a collision of competing identities. Finaba thus experiences crises identity because she experiences the collision of her grandmother's and her mother's identity competing with each other.

In the opinion of Grice (1998), one of the characteristics of identity is that it is shared by a group often either by self-identification or what she terms 'forced belong' (when it is ascribed to a fellow). Nabou confesses that "Finaba is just a child" (2) that is why she should not be rushed into Baramusu's idea of womanhood. Baramusu, however, thinks that Fina's "breasts have come" and men have already started to notice (2) therefore "Finaba is ready! The initiation will make her a woman – "(3). Beneath these reasons for the divide in opinion between the two women is a greater one, Dimusu, Nabou's older daughter died after she was cut. According to the narrator, "It was a death that widened the divide between generations" (9). Besides, the narrator indicates that both parties have a different interpretation of Dimusu's death:

So when Dimusu died after her initiation, Baramusu believed the child's death was a lesson to her people that they were straying from the old ways. Nabou and Amadu, however, saw Dimusu's death as a warning that initiation was harmful. It was a divide they would never close and one that, at different times, Finaba sought to understand, to bridge, but which mostly left her confused and uncertain. (11)

In both cases, there is an issue of the formation of identity by "force belong". The opinion of Fina has not been sought by either party, especially when the narrator indicates that Finaba is confused and uncertain. In this state, Finaba is without a subjective identity. With her parent's disagreement, her sense of a loss of identity is established in narrator's description of her reaction to her mother's declaration that "Finaba will *not* go to the initiation" (3):

Outside the window, Finaba ground her fists into the sunbaked earth. Now she will not belong, will not be able to dance and sing with the other initiates, will not have people in the village cheer and tell her that she is beautiful and brave. If her age mates ever allow her into their circles, she will always be the outsider, the one who will not be trusted, and the one never fully

to understand what makes and binds women together. No one will like me, and no man will want to marry me... my age mates will never trust me. I will be the one who does not belong, who is not a woman...(3)

Fina may not have a subjective identity but she is eloquent about the ethnic/group identity she desires, the symbolic ethnic identity which she feels incapable of fighting for. It is a drifting identity as a result of her parent's decision thus her lamentation: "Why is mama doing this to me? (4). Fina's situation is supported by Grice's assertion, earlier that cultural restriction in identity formation also means that not all identities are available at any particular time for members of a group. In Fina's scenario, she is a member of the village but she risks the womanhood identity if she is not initiated. In her view, such a consequence leaves her without an identity. It makes her an outsider. It shatters her quest for identity by sharing and belonging. It denies her the symbolic identity of a *musu ba*, a complete Koinadugu woman. To Baramusu, the initiation will lead to Finaba's subjective identity and then lead on to create a cultural identity for her:

Like life, initiation is a journey into the unknown. Here, you come face to face with the unknown – about the initiation, the forest, and yourself. How you deal with them will tell you a lot about yourself and your age mates. (6)

Baramusu's path to identity formation is an inverse of Phinney (1990, 2000) who proposes that subjective identity is the start point of identity formation and that it is what eventually yields social identity which is also dependent on ethnic group association. Nabou and Amadu's process of identity construction rather lends credence to the stance by both Atala and Phinney.

1.1.3.1 Identity crisis: negotiation and renegotiation

The conflict in Finaba's identity construction stems from the differences in the identity formation processes suggested by Baramusu on one hand and Fina's parents on the other. With the conflict of the plot in Hollist's story well set, it is worth finding how the two identity construction processes battle out. What imprints are these schools of thought able to leave on Fina's psyche as she grows? Eventually, how does Finaba negotiate the colliding identities to arrive at a subjective identity and a symbolic ethnic identity? Of interest, at this juncture, is also to find out which of these two identities she attains first and the consequences thereof. It is Baramusu, the more passionate of the two parties, who takes the bolder step to accentuate her identity and transpose it on her granddaughter who is consenting. Baramusu believes that "life is when people work together" (6) hence Fina must not cut the ropes, not let the path die. This, in her opinion, is only achievable by being initiated, by belonging. This undergirds her circumvention of the parental obstacle that she faces by grabbing Finaba into the forest for the rites whilst Nabou is out of the village:

But a week later when Nabou had travelled out of the village, Finaba rippled with excitement when Baramusu grabbed her, covered her mouth, and led her into an edgy, early-morning forest, alive with trilling birds and crickets. Finaba knew her grandmother was taking her to the fafei, the initiation house, and she was happy. She was on her way to becoming a woman. (6)

Baramusu's untying of Finaba's *lappa* is a symbolic act. In the prologue, the tightening of the single *lappa* meant the bonding of a group of people. As a result, when Baramusu rather unties Finaba's *lappa* we immediately get the impression that Fina is about to be separated, loosen from a group to which she has loosely belonged until this age.

As a narrative technique, the beginning of the initiation is only a foil to the resolution of the conflict in the novel because just as Fina is cut in the forest, Nabou and Amadu arrive to snatch her away and out of the Talaba Village into the city, Freetown. Thus, even though circumcision takes place, the concluding rites that would have yielded Fina's symbolic ethnic womanhood identity are stalled. In the preamble to the second chapter of the novel, Hollist refers to the stalling as the "DEATH OF AN AGE..." Fina's subsequent eloping with her parents is marked as the "BIRTH OF A NEW AGE." (7) in the novel. The indelible mark of the Talaba traditional identity process is left on Fina to the new world. How she meanders that path with this mark forms her identity negotiation strategies. Immigration into the city is the first step of identity negotiation strategy chosen for Fina by her parents. The family of three flee the village amidst curses from the village women. Hence Fina arrives in the city without a symbolic Koinadugu womanhood identity. Instead is faced with a NEW AGE woman identity which she must negotiate as Amadu, her father tells her:

Here, we can do whatever we want, Amadu explained to Finaba outside the front door of their new home. Finaba was sitting on his lap and Nabou by his side, Here, you can choose your path, like them, he said and pointed across the street to a group of scraggy girls gathered around a street pump, splashing water on themselves. No one will make you feel like an outsider because you're not an initiate. Here, you'll be the same as those girls. Here, you belong. Freedom to choose one's path was the anodyne her parents used in times of difficulty (16)

Amadu and Nabou are certain they have chosen the right path for their daughter. However, the death of Madu soon after their arrival in the city is a further complication of Fina's quest for the new age identity. It heightens the

suspense leaving the reader to wonder what happens next to Fina. It also ushers in a further complication of the plot because even though in the city, Fina is labelled a Fula, psychologically she felt she is not a complete Fula woman because of the stalled womanhood initiation. With Amadu's passing Nabou is unable to provide the leadership and support they assure Fina on her journey for identity. At the death of Amadu, Nabou is pregnant with another child and without a meaningful job. She is compelled to give Finaba out to a foster family. Finaba is left to negotiate this new path to identity by herself. Poverty, therefore, drifts Fina further away from her only source of support in this new path.

Aside from immigration, one other issue that quickly becomes problematic for Fina's identity negotiation is assimilation into the new Krio dominant city. She does not only find herself in a new city of a new life, but she also finds herself with a new family, the Heddles. They become her foster family, "a household consisting of sixteen-year-old twin girls Taiwo & Kehinde; fifteen-year-old Ade, and twelve-year-old Edna, a year younger than Fina" (19). According to the narrator, though the couples receive Fina like "royals receiving a lowly subject... Auntie Matty and Pa Heddle did not treat Fina any differently than their biological children. However, in a household of five children... being the outsider, Fina was always at a disadvantage" (19). The gradual deterioration of her relationship with the Heddles signposts problems with assimilation. She learns that even though she lives in the house, she is unable to meet the standards of practices in the house. This later results in her inability to identify with her foster family:

...Fina made repeated passes of iron over the ash before she noticed what has happened... Ade discovered the damage before Fina could fix it, and he vowed to revenge. Later that day, Fina returned to her room to find one of her dresses ripped from hem to collar and the only photograph of her mother torn up into small pieces... You're careless, Fina. It was the same carelessness that made you break my Tudor porcelain vase and put bleach on my indigo skirt. When are you going to make yourself useful in this house? (21)

From the excerpt, Fina is unable to negotiate the identity offered by the city and the Heddles. She is treated as an outsider who must serve in exchange for care. The total dissipation of any effort to identify with the Heddle occurs when one of Fina's friends gets herself impregnated by Pa Heddle. Meanwhile, "they made the swelling disappear but not before rumours floated into the Heddle household to sully her friendship with Edna and make life uncomfortable" (31). It is therefore not surprising the relief Fina has when she enrolls in college. We learn from the narrator that "although only ten miles separated her collage from the home of the Heddles, Fina felt as if she had travelled a world away from the Heddles household... The Heddle home had become a prison. Crowther College [CC] provided liberation" (33). CC was supposed to provide the escape Fina longed for. She looked forward to assimilating successfully this time, especially with the beauty she wore which the narrator describes as stunning:

Fina was a beautiful Fulamusu the day she steps foot on the CC campus. Hers was not the kind that stunned and made one stop, look, and go "wow"! Her beauty was courteous. It invited one to contemplate, even study, it like a work of art: the bronze skin tone, highlighted by charcoal-black, braided hair and slender, elegant neck; the smooth, broad forehead, the thick contoured eyelashes that shaded her lowered brown eyes, the pointed nose, and the fleshy round lips. A slight overbite was her only quirkiness (33)

Fina's stunning beauty adds to the confidence with which she confronts the task of assimilating well at CC and making strides in constructing her *new world group identity*. However, the difficulty in assimilation started with her first verbal abuse from her roommate who does not take kindly to Fina's intrusion into her love life:

Who do you think you are? You think because you were raised in a Krio household so you have become one of them? Talk about not knowing where one comes from and taking on airs and graces. (36)

Here, the issue of knowing one's self before attempting to claim a group identity is reiterated. Fina is reminded that she must know that living with Krios or even like them does not make her a Krio. She must find who she is and live it. In the view of the narrator, Memuna's outburst paralyzes Fina. Hollist uses Memuna as a voice to caution Fina that she has not fully attained the identity of Nabou's new free world yet. Thus, she realizes that ethnic division on campus is indeed widespread and she still did not belong. It is an attestation of the assertion of Bonnie TuSmith (1994) that the claiming of ethnic identity is extensively bound up with gaining the security that derives from membership of a group. Here Fina faces the reality that she cannot guarantee the security of Krios on campus. Her beauty and Fula ethnic identity threaten her successful negotiation into the CC cultural identity.

Grice (1998) notes that ethnic identity works dialectically, in both a positive and negative way. Sometimes the distinctiveness of an ethnic group may be desirable, at other times it may bring with it unwelcome discriminations as is the case of Fina's Fula identity at CC. At another occasion at CC, Fina's Fula identity is mocked by a jeering mob after an athletics meeting on campus. Weinreich (1986) argues that indeed ethnic self-identity is not a static process but a continuously changing one that is directly dependent on a particular social context. Therefore, we can have individuals staying away from situations where they think their identity is

contested, threatened, mortified or castigated. Such is the experience that greets Fina at CC. Her Fula ethnic identity is castigated:

Fina could have dealt with the mockery of those among her people who wore watches but couldn't tell the time, with the mimicking of the infelicities of Fulas speaking Krio... What upset her were the focus and venom of the crowd. Disrespect, even hatred, and a sense of superiority lurked straight at her; in the fingers and tongues that pointed at her... The orgy continued behind her until she and Kemi disappeared into her hall room (37)

Fina's disappearance into her hall room eventually proves inadequate in her effort to stay away from situations where her Fula identity is castigated. According to the narrator, the hatred for her kind (Fula) is "fueled perhaps by the socio-economic climate in the capital city at the time and the latent resentment of her beauty" (37). Also, "the government says illegal Fulas and Nigerians are taking work away from Sierra Leoneans" (38). The dispensation in which Fina finds herself at this juncture attests to the fact that her negotiation after the migration is not going well. She despises the city that made her people foreigners in their own country... tears stung her eyes (39). At least, it is certain to her that identity is not always available to members of a group. Fina is a Sierra Leonean but she cannot claim a Sierra Leonean identity in Freetown because she is Fula. Irrespective of the difficulties in sustaining her symbolic ethnic Fula identity, Fina is determined to achieve a better life for her ethnic group. "She simply had to work hard and earn enough money to insulate her family from the discrimination and hostility she was now witnessing..." (39). The solution, in her view, is to travel to America which she eventually does. This decision also corroborates the assertion by Grice (1998) that poverty is among the factors that create diaspora and immigration, and these threaten ethnic and symbolic identity.

1.1.3.2 Negotiating identity: Symbolic Diaspora and Immigrant Identity This part of the paper examines how Fina negotiates poverty-driven migration and diasporan identity. The America Fina flees to presents her with its cultural boundaries but it is the harshness with which her first employer sensitizes her on the American culture that takes her by surprise:

No, what the fuck are you doing, African? Juanita the owner of the academy spoke through clenched teeth... If that's how you people treat your kids, that's not how we do it here. Pack your bags and leave now!... Pray he is too dumb to tell his mother or your African ass could be sitting in jail for a long time... We don't tie up our kids like animals... Crazy bitch

Juanita's response to Fina's error at work, tying a child to a chair, does not only set the boundaries for the American cultural identity for Fina, but it also denigrates Fina's African identity in the process. In America, Fina's Krio identity submerges beneath her African identity. Her African identity becomes her symbolic identity. Juanita's castigation of Fina's symbolic identity creates awareness and alertness that makes her avoid, as much as possible a repetition. However, another incident that makes Fina feel that her symbolic identity is undermined is when Cammy's neighbour, Leroy Mckinney, implies that by looking good Fina looks more American done African. The remark evokes Fina's defence of her symbolic identity and her negotiation away from the NEW WAYS identity that she fails to attain:

Ya sure got some good moves, sista, he said as Cammy served... Meet Leroy McKinney, my neighbour, Cammy explained to Fina, who did not particularly like either the implication or tone of McKinney's comment. You don't look like no African... Oh? How does an African look? Well I mean you look different. More American, like a sista. Know wha'am saying? No, I don't. you mean African like half-naked with dried-up prunes for breasts, carrying a load on my head and a child on my back (94)

Fina's vehement defence of her African identity speaks to the fact that one is likely to avoid or rebut an attack on their ethnic symbolic identity. It is for this reason that Fina picks a tiff with Cammy for his criticism of female circumcision also known as female genital mutilation (FGM). She is combative in defense of the people who practice it and those who undergo it for two main reasons. First, she seems to believe that those who go through it do so out of ignorance and those who carry it out do so because they don't fully understand its harmful implications. Their focus of both parties, in her view, is to preserve the culture and propagate it. Also, she seems to think that if others can practice it in the name of religion, Africans must be left to also do so in the name of culture. Fina's posture is a defense of her symbolic African and Krio cultural identity. At this point, Fina acquires a dual identity; Krio and Africa. Both are symbolic to her hence, her frantic effort to guard and defend them as she prepares a defense in wait for more barney from Cammy:

She would begin by explaining a village girl's longing to know about the secrets of womanhood, to become a woman, and to walk in rhythm with other women. Then she would share the description her cousin, an initiate, entrusted to her about some of the wonders of womanhood. After that, she would ...explain the paradox of loving a grandmother who put her through the pain and loving the pain that made her a woman... (103)

The cause of this nostalgia is her dislike for American food and her craving for African food. Thus, food

becomes a key cultural boundary that Fina is unable to surmount:

...most of the time, Fina accepted compliments about her neighbourhood and tasteful furnishings with grace, though she did not care about either. She was certainly happy to own a piece of America, and she understood the townhouse was an investment, but once she had got over the euphoria of a new purchase, she found herself unsatisfied, unfulfilled, the same way she felt after dinner at some exclusive restaurant. Invariably, she returned home after these dinners and, no matter how late, microwaved some frozen palm base soup and ate until she felt satiated. Wholeness, fullness completeness – what she sought and what the green card, townhouse and car had failed to deliver (90)

The townhouse, plush dinner tasteful furnishes and the wealth she enjoys are symbolic of the identity her parents sort for her. Ironically now she realizes that this identity of the new ways does not bring her fulfilment. She still relishes instead in the identity of the old ways epitomized by the palm base soup that makes her feel satiated. She concludes her point of view by being emphatic on her decision to renegotiate her symbolic identity aspirations back to Baramusu's old ways. She believes that this will enable her to realize her subjective identity:

Cammy, I want to make a difference. She said it with quiet insistence. Instead of arguing, you should be doing something about circumcision here and I should be doing back home... I want to go back home and open up a centre for girls and women who have suffered because of this operation (103)

1.1.3.3 Re-negotiation Symbolic Ethnic and Subjective Identities

Hollist's pairing of Aman and Fina is an effort to compare and contrast their identity negotiation and re-negotiation patterns. Thus, unlike Fina who migrates into the diaspora due to poverty, Amanzin also called Aman found herself in the diaspora under the forced migration of her ancestors during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Both, however, carve their symbolic identity around being African. What they both miss is a subjective identity. To Aman, Africanism is her symbolic identity as the narrator indicates:

Amanzinga Al-Quarta was proud of her African heritage. She did not learn about Africa – Olduvai Gorge, Egypt, Cleopatra, and Nubia – only during Black History Month. She did not wear Kente cloth and kaftans only to attend African art shows, festivals, and Sunday church services. She did not celebrate Kwanzaa only to assert her difference or make a political statement. She did not plan a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to the Motherland to discover her roots. No! Amanzinga was not an occasional African. She was an African for all seasons (77)

According to Gardiner (1981), one can claim identity by association or by dissociation. In the case of Aman and Fina, they both negotiate their symbolic identity by associating themselves with the African identity and dissociating themselves from the American identity. Thus Aman, for instance, lays claim to the African identity by practising African customs and cultures. She even changes her name from Laquandrista to Amanzinga to reflect the African royal identity she claims. From the extract above, she even prefers to wear African clothes to American ones. Name, food and clothing become the African cultural boundaries which Aman renegotiates with ease.

Whilst Aman dresses like an African and takes on an African name in her re-negotiation of identity, Fina stages her renegotiation back to the OLD WAYS by first accepting her increased financial obligation with zeal. Buoyed by the twin mantras that she should not cut the rope and that life is about working together with other people, Fina makes a conspicuous attempt to earn and save money. This is how she accommodates her ever-increasing financial obligations (111). Even when Cammy complains that she is too engulfed with issues back home, Fina does not hesitate to restate, emphatically, her return to the identity of the OLD WAYS:

Isa is my sister, my only family, Cammy, Fina retorted, extracting herself from his probing hands and staring at him in disbelief. What I own is hers. What she owns is mine. That's our tradition (112)

Hollist's emphasis on the value of Fina's identity negotiation is given support with the introduction of Bayo, Aman's fiancé. Bayo's insistence on return home after his studies and his frantic effort to convince Aman let him is a voice supposed to augment Fina's bid to return home. Bayo's reference to the folklore from his father and the use of nest instead of home, for instance, is an echo of the idea of traditional African culture referenced as *home*:

A bird that does not leave its nest to find food for fear it might lose its way back home will surely starve to death. The food it finds from flying into the unknown is what gives it the nourishment and strength to find its way home (201)

The joy of reconnection and reclaiming an identity is privileged in the dinner organized by Edna to bring this colony of Africans in the diaspora and their quest for African identity re-negotiation to the table. The harmony in the decision to return home to Africa is epitomized by the costume of Edna, the hostess, "She was dressed in a contemporary three-piece Kente-cloth, Buba, Sokoto pants, and hat, all of them embroidered in gold" (207). The meals served were as though intended to tune the taste buds of the guests to the culinary of African traditional cuisine. After all, according to Grice (19), everyday practices such as food, clothing, festivals, songs, dance and

others make up one's culture and the boundaries of cultural identity. To let his characters identify with the African traditional identity, therefore, Hollist makes them eat African food and dance to African music at the meeting. Once the atmosphere for claiming an African identity is set, Aman is the first to declare her desire to return to Africa, "Aman spoke up for the first time. "I want to go to Africa ... someday," she added" (212). Cammy's response to Aman reflects how the diaspora can create identity loss. He, therefore, warns Aman that going home is different from being at home just as Atala the supreme warned Kumba in the prologue. He reiterates the very fact that identity is not always available to all members of a group:

It depends, Aman. If going home to Africa is about going back to your roots and becoming authentic, yuh no different from these two, and you'll be disappointed. Africa is not available to you or them. (212)

The truth remains that after a long surge in the diaspora by her ancestors, Aman may have lost her African identity because she may not be able to imbibe in the cultural boundaries. However, Hollist also reminds us of the point that identity is essential to one's dignity and confidence formation begins with subjective identity. It is for this reason that Aman does the DNA confirmation and determine her ancestry, "Well my African past is not imaginary because last week I earned that I come from the Kru people in Liberia & Ivory Coast". (212). Even when Kizzy reminds her that identity is not just about knowing where one comes from, Aman reveals the negotiation of a subjective identity by indicating that "it's all about belonging, knowing that I have a past to own, ... The very past that which these two want to return to but which Cammy says does not exist. Even if I have no past to recover, at least I now know where it once existed" (212). Even when Cammy tries to highlight the fact that Aman has twenty-seven per cent white blood, Aman indicates that identity is a subjective choice either by association or dissociation or for her, she doesn't care what the percentages are. She has always wanted an African identity and she has it. The test points her to a specific African people, culture, and place. She relishes in her new symbolic identity when she says, "I belong somewhere. I am no longer defined just by my colour" (213). Kizzy's agreement with Aman on the need for identity is insinuated in his reaction speech on the point that colour is not a deterrent of identity, rather it is the acceptance of culture and the practicing of it when he says, "You can be a hundred per cent African by genes and yet be a hundred per cent European byways" (213). In the case of Aman, she had a subjective identity and now she just claims a symbolic ethnic identity. With Aman's symbolic identity successfully re-negotiated, she declares her readiness to return to Africa, to return home. Her revelation spurs others on to reach out to their roots and appreciate it for what it is. It does not only enable Cammy to reveal that his DNA analysis shows that he is from Yoruba in Nigeria, it enables him to appreciate that Fina, her fiancé's, desire to return home is a genuine one.

1.1.3.4 Being at home: Identity realization Being at home, as indicated by Atala in the prologue, is being with a group, sharing in their pain and caring for them. Being at home, in this paper, also means having a symbolic ethnic identity. However, as Atala also indicated, symbolic identity begins with having a deeper knowledge of the *self*. This need explains, perhaps, why Fina combs the world in search of knowledge that is deeper and a home where she feels comfortable. She negotiates and re-negotiates varied identities in the process. None gives her the satisfaction she desired but at least like Kumba in the prologue, her experiences enable her to understand who she is and what she wants. This knowledge culminates into her subjective identity. It is only after finding her subjective identity that Fina fully imbibes in her symbolic ethnic identity when she returns home to Sierra Leone. Her agency in supporting war survivors and sharing in their pain suggests her identity realization and the consciousness to share with others.

Hollist's pairing of Mawaf and Mama Yegbe with Fina is the writer's bid to exemplify the realization of Fina's subjective and symbolic ethnic identity as a Sierra Leonian and an African, Mawaf and Mama Yegbe are both victims of the war. In the case of Mawaf, the memory of how she shot and maimed Mama Yegbe does not seize to traumatize her. The sight of the old woman also reminds her of her horrible experiences as a rebel and a war wife to Captain, the rebel leader. It is Captain who ensures Mawaf's identity transformation from a civilian conscript to a rebel: "Now get the water from the battery and bring some kerosene. Mawaf has a mission to complete before she can truly become one of us" (245). Mawaf, out of the desire to save her life and that of her sister, does all that she is instructed to until she accepted as a member of the rebel group. With the war over, the challenge is to renegotiate out of the rebel identity to that of a civilian again. The memory loss of her civilian identity suggests how imbibed she became in the new rebel culture: "I like Mawaf. It shows I am one of them" (245).

Taking up the vacant job of a deputy director allows Fina to take in Mawaf, Mama Yegbe and to fulfil her dream of caring and sharing. The completion of Mawaf's identity re-negotiation manifests at Aman and Bayo's wedding in Nigeria. The weeklong feast of African culture becomes the point of convergence for all the characters who sought one identity or the other. For instance, in the case of Fina, "The days brought back vague memories of similar activities in Fina's childhood. She felt warm content and connected" (265). According to Ting-Toomay (2015) There are three identity negotiation competence outcomes. These are the feeling of being understood, the

feeling of being respected, and the feeling of being affirmatively valued (4). The warm feeling Fina has supposes, therefore, her attainment of identity negotiation competence. The contentment implies fulfilment realized after knowing one's self, being at home and sharing in the African identity. As for Mawaf, it is at the wedding that Fina first notices Mawaf's full recovery of her old identity as a non-rebel young woman. Mawaf "was at ease with the young women, and she seemed to have taken a particular liking to Aman" (265). For Cammy, the gathering is an opportunity to return to his roots too. The long walk on the Nigerian beach and the washing away of Cammy's footprints in the sand by the sea is Hollist's symbolic depiction of Cammy's final acceptance of his African identity:

When he and Glen turned back to wave one last time before they disappeared into the plane, he saw the mother of his daughter, the woman with whom he had danced those calypso songs, and he knew he would come back for this was a path he could not let die. (280).

1.1.4 Conclusion

The happy ending of the novel, where Cammy, Fina and their daughter, in addition to Mawaf and Mama Yegbe happily share a home three years into their new identities is Hollist's voice on the fact that identity is important, it does not only give one a peace of mind, it unearths the good in an individual. It satisfies the core assumption of identity negotiation that posits that human beings in all cultures desire positive identity affirmation in a variety of communication situations (Ting-Toomey 2015). Hollist also shows that indeed for any meaningful identity to be forged one must first gain a composite subjective identity. The subjective identity of Fina is that she wants to be an African in the traditional sense. Sometimes two or more identities may collide as the OLD WAYS OF BARAMUSU clashed with the NEW WAYS of Nabou and Amadu. It is also noted that identity formation is fluid, so we have Fina and others trying to negotiate one identity or the other at one point in time or the other. The literature that immigration and diaspora impede identity formation is also evident as, after migration to the city, Fina loses the traditional identity Baramusu initiates for her. Mawaf also loses her civilian identity with the migration into the bush during the war. She only re-negotiates and recovers that identity after the war. Aman and Cammy lose their identity due to immigration and diaspora. It is refreshing to know that eventually, all these characters assert their symbolic ethnic identities by negotiating various other identities. They all negotiate away from the NEW WAYS identity back to the OLD WAYS identity where they find harmony and happiness. However, they achieve symbolic ethnic identities by first gaining a subjective identity; realizing who they are; finding the *self*.

Reference

- Diyai, A. S. and Saleh M. H. (2013) The Quest for Identity in African American Women's Drama from Harlem Renaissance to the Present An Overview. *Researchgate.com*
- Grice, H. (1998) *Negotiating Identities: An Asian American Women's Writing*. UK: Manchester University Press
- Gates, H. L. and Appiah, K. A. (1995) 'Introduction', *Identities* Chicago: Chicago University Press (p.1)
- Gardener, K. J. (1981) 'On female identity and writing by women' in *Critical Inquiry* (p.347)
- Lionnet, F. (1995) *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press
- Mercer, C. (2001) *Theories of Racism*. NY: Routledge.
- Marsh-Lockett, C. P. (2015) *Black Women Playwrights: Visions on the American Stage*. NY: Routledge
- Phinney, J. S. (2003). Ethnic identity and acculturation. In K. M. Chun, P. Balls Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.), *Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research* (p. 63–81). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10472-006>
- Phinney, J. S. (2000). Identity formation across cultures: The interaction of personal, societal, and historical change. *Human Development*, 43, 27- 31. doi:10.1159/000022653
- Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 499-514. doi:10.1037/0033- 2909.108.3.499
- Riley, J. (1885) *The Unbelonging*. UK: Women Pr Ltd.
- Simpson, J., and E. Weiner. 1989. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (2015). Identity negotiation theory. In J. Bennett (Ed.), *Sage Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence*, Volume 1 (pp. 418-422). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Waters, M. C. (1990) *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Weeden, C. (2004) *Identity And Culture: Narratives of Difference And Belonging Issues In Cultural Studies*. UK: McGraw-Hill Education. ISBN 0335200869, 9780335200863
- Weinreich, P. (1991). Ethnic Identities and Indigenous Psychologies in Pluralist Societies. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 3(1), 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097133369100300105>