

## Fluid Identity in Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*

*This research work explores how the identity of American President Barack Obama is fluid and multiple in the age of globalization in his autobiographical text *Dreams from My Father*. Obama, in his autobiography, presents his fluid identity formation—through race, religion, and heritage—with the passage of life. Firstly, he is the mix of white and black in terms of race. Secondly, his mindset is influenced by the trio-religion; Christianity, Muslim and Hindu since his childhood. Finally, it shows his relational identity questing for his inheritance land, Kenya. In order to justify the claim of the research, the researcher mobilizes the theoretical concept of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative*; Linda Anderson's *Autobiography*; and Stuart Hall's *Who needs identity? Question of Cultural Identity*. The autobiographical theorists emphasize that identity is not fixed rather it is unstable, multiple and contextual. In this way, Obama exemplifies himself as a quintessential modern hybrid man.*

Key Terms: identity, fluid, hybrid, culture, inheritance, and racism.

This research project analyzes the multiple identity of American president Barack Obama in his autobiographical text *Dreams from My Father*. Obama, born from American mother and Kenyan father, shows his identity building process as he grows up as a young boy. Ever since his color consciousness struck his mind, his quest for identity moved ahead—a journey from a small child to a young Obama, and America to Kenya searching for inheritance. While moving ahead in the journey of his quest of identity, he gets his identity not as fixed and stable rather multiple and complex in the postmodern age.

The traditional outlook of identity has been changed and seen through the new perspective after the surge of post-modernism. Theorists like feminists, linguists,

cultural philosophers, and new-historicists challenge the traditional myopic view of identity that identity is single and fixed. In *Of Grammatology* Jacques Derrida believes that identity is constructed through the language and language itself is slippery and fluid producing ambiguous and multiple meaning. Likewise, critics like Stuart Halls, Linda Anderson, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson work on the idea of fluid identity and claim that identity is situational, plural, fractured and in flux.

Barack Obama is the living legend of America who became the first black president and forty-fourth president of United States in 2008. After the hundred years of Emancipation Proclamation in the American Constitution, he became the first black president. So, it is believed that he fulfilled Martin Luther King's dreams. Obama has written many famous books like *The Audacity of Hope*, *Of Thee I Sing*, *Change We Can Believe In*, *Barack Obama in His Own Words*, *State of the Union* and many more before and during his presidential tenure. Obama has penned on the themes of peace, racial identity, global environment, and political satire. Appreciating his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between and among people, Nobel Committee awarded him Nobel Peace Prize in 2009.

Obama's *Dreams from My Father* published in 1995 is an autobiographical text written solely on his struggles he faced and the narratives how he became a self-made man, an American. This autobiography has been divided into three sections: Origins, Chicago and Kenya. In the first part, Obama searches his genealogy and quest for identity. Obama's father, Sr. Obama, came to Hawaii pursuing graduates from Kenya and kept in touch with an American girl, Ann Dunham, in Russian language classes. As the time went by, they got married and gave birth to a son. Sr. Obama bequeathed his own name to his son. When Jr. Obama was two years old, his father left Harvard for his doctor of philosophy. They could not meet for a long time

due to the family conflicts and Sr. Obama returned to Kenya for the service of government. Thereafter, father became a myth for Obama.

He moved with his step-father in Indonesia where he had faced so many lacks and poverty. Obama accompanies his mother, Ann Dunham, wherever she moves; he, being a drifter, cops with trio-religion—Hindu, Muslims and Christian— and which largely shapes his consciousness that welfare of human organism is the primary concern of every religion. As the age passes by, Obama searches for his identity through the white color of mother up to the age of ten years but then he could not devoid of his blackness. Black became acute in his mind.

In the next section, Obama struggles much to stand himself in the hubbub of city. He works for community organization, brotherhood and welfare of Illinois. He continues his searching for his own identity, different from the crowd of people. Obama invariably tries to decrease the distance between White and Black merging the both, whether in organization or church. Being a lawyer, he focuses on the black empowerment and human rights. Simply, he follows the balanced policy and wants to abolish the color discrimination from the American society.

Similarly, in the last section “Kenya”, Obama could not keep his eyes close from his father's myth and correspondence went on. As the days passed, Obama's intense desire of visiting inheritance and Kenya intensifies. Despite the fact that he is an American, he cannot forget his root and inheritance by simply trying to forget. Soon after, he reaches Kenya with his half-sister, Auma. In this way, journey from first world to third world, culture to nature and a child to a full-grown-up man determines his mind settings as hybrid man which is the epitome of modern development. On this background, this research paper scrutinizes his fluid identity formation— through cultural, race, American and relational identity.

Many critics have examined *Dreams from My Father*. Most of them have penned on the issue of black identity, cultural identity, transnational identity, his exceptional Americanism, and autobiographical truth. Similarly, some scholars have seen this autobiography as a strategic move for his presidential candidacy, though this book was published in 1995. Georgian Banita in "'Home Squared': Barack Obama's Transnational Self-reliance" posits the issue of transnational and American exceptional identity. In this regard, Georgiana Banita writes:

I will continue establishing some features of Obama's ethnic and transnational Self-positioning in contradistinction to the autobiographical persona of James Baldwin (Obama's forerunner in the global mapping of African American identity)--a comparison that has much to tell us about the ways in which life narrative can help constitute political agendas. Finally, this essay will define Obama's self-reliance not in opposition to the transitional to the transnational scope of his writings, but as a key to his vision of American exceptionalism in a new globalized world. (27)

These lines patently echo the fluid identity: black, transnational, political and typical American. In the new globalized world, American identity or multiculturalism has been an emerging identity. Banita argues that reason behind writing this autobiography is to attract both white and black voters in his behalf. In similar way, Banita avers, "*Dreams* eludes the traditions of immigrant and African American life writings in which issues of identity politics, self-reflexivity, and self-representation are central and hotly debated" (29). In fact, these lines reinforce his multi-faceted identity. Obama visits different parts of the world--Indonesia, Kenya, Chicago, Washington D.C --making his home and hearth. Therefore, he is fed by multi-cultures

in his life.

In "Slumming Self-Making in Barack Obama's *Dreams From My Father*," David Mastey examines how this text persuades the White audience. As a white critic, Mastey says, "*Dreams* contribute to the stable identity that Obama lacked as a relatively unknown figure Chicago politics, a foundational image that voters could use in future elections to evaluate his behavior... *Dreams* therefore demonstrates a personal and political self-making" (490). Mastey portrays Obama's *Dreams* as self-making process among the voters. Obama, as Mastey believes, has been successful to make a stable identity or image in the mind of American voters whether it's black or white.

Another critic, Aubrey Malone in "O'Bama" presents Obama as American hero and strong President. In the review, Malone expresses, "I've just finished reading the two books written by President Obama--it feels funny calling him that-- *The Audacity of Hope* and *Dreams from My Father*. They testify to a man of great vision and great character, but also great common sense" (73). By reading the books of Obama, Malone delivers positive and appreciative comment. More importantly, he sees Obama as one of the great leaders in the American history.

Rone Walters in "Barack Obama and the Politics of Blackness" posits the issue of Obama's color. In pertaining to the book *Dreams from My Father*, Walters views that "it's virtually the story of journey into functional blackness" (8). This grounding on 'blackness', according to Walter, gave Obama requisite sensitivity to the problems of Black Community and strategies used to address them. Though this black became political and controversial during the elections campaigns. This "political blackness" provided him enough awareness to draw the votes from both white and black community in the presidential election.

Similarly, Julie Rak in "Insecure Citizenship: Michael Ignatieff's Memoir Canada" presents Obama as public figure, though he was not elected as president of United States. When *Dreams from My Father* published in 1995, it gave the big-push for Obama in the public arena to create his image. Julie Rak, in this sense, appreciates, "In the United States, *Dreams from My Father* by Barack Obama is no ordinary political memoir about a politician's career in the public eye, and not just because Obama wrote it before a politician. The book has been credited with convincing some of its readers that Obama should become a public figure" (1). According to Rak, this text is a futuristic and visionary, which largely shapes the mind of readers and ultimately paves the way for public figure.

In this way, most researchers have focused on the issue of identity—particularly black, political and transnational identity. In the one hand, some critics primarily emphasize on the political strategy of favoring votes in the presidential election. In the other hand, critics see Obama as one of the powerful and great public figures in the United States. Showing departure from afore-mentioned researches, this thesis explores the multiple, plural and fluid identity of Obama in his autobiographical text *Dreams from My Father*. Similarly this research's thrust lies in the closer examination of Obama's identity from the autobiographical point of view. Obama is a public figure in the world and it is very important in the sense that public figures' autobiographical writings are believed to be truthful and real.

Regarding the identity, Linda Anderson residing in the light of Roland Barthes defines, "The 'I', on which both the subject's and autobiography not to a subject but to its own placing as signifier within language or in a chain of signifiers" (13). First Anderson focuses on the slippery nature of language as every text is woven through the language. She moves ahead claiming that as language is ambiguous and chain of

multiple meanings in the same way identity is not fixed and singular. Later, Barthes' notion of 'the death of author' reinforces the idea of plural identity because reader is the one who creates meaning, not the author and different readers go through the text from different 'eye' or outlook.

Anderson, through closer look, elaborates the identity in the streamline of Philip Lejeune and avers, "There must be identity between the author, the narrator and the protagonist" (2). Lejeune argues that autobiographical text should have the same person as author, narrator and protagonist. In this autobiographical text of Obama, all the elements, whether author, narrator or protagonist, embodies Obama himself. In narrating his quest for identity leads him to the ultimate origin of his forefather.

According to Lejeune, the autobiographical text "establishes a "pact" between narrator and reader that "supposes that there is *identity of name* between the author" (Smith and Watson 140). In other words, Lejeune asserts that there must be bond, what he calls "pact" between author and reader to create meaning or identity.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* explores identity as one of the important autobiographical acts and say, "Autobiographical acts involve narrators in "identifying" themselves to the reader" (32). Indeed, identity is formed on the basis of narrator and his/her implication, differentiation and identification. Watson and Smith simply define, "Identities are marked in terms of many categories: gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, generation, family genealogy, and religious and political ideologies, to cite the most obvious" (33). It shows that there is no fixed parameter to measure someone's identity rather there are multiple ways. Watson and Smith argue that identity is a discourse. So, it is constructed. Similarly, both authors make clearer by showing the role of context in the identity formation:

But Social organizations and symbolic interactions are always in flux; therefore, identities are provisional. What may be a meaningful identity, on one day or in one context, may not be culturally and personally meaningful at another moment or in another context. Think, for instance, of how many identities you cycle through in the course of a day, identities linked to gender, national citizenship, work status, sexuality, class location, generational location, ethnicity, and family constellation. (33)

The given lines prove that context determines someone's identity. So, there is no fixed identity rather it is constructed on the basis of the situation and circumstances. In *Dreams from My Father*, Obama narrates his life along with his dynamic identity. Biologically, he is the by-product of white mother and black father. He is raised with his Gramps and Toot in American culture. So, he is an American but he cannot avoid his smooth black skin. In this sense, he is African-American.

In this context, Obama writes, "My identity might begin with the fact of my race, but it didn't, couldn't, end there. At least that's what I would choose to believe" (111). In fact, Obama clarifies that his identity is not only limited with the race rather goes beyond the race. The ability to choose is one distinct way that Obama challenges racism. He does not feel proud of being "Black" or "White," Rather he stresses that individuals can choose their own identity. Obama moreover avers, "I ceased to advertise my mother's race at the age of 12 or 13, when I began to suspect that by doing so I was ingratiating myself to whites" (xv). Obama shows his acute sense of African-American identity and racial division in the country. Obama opposes the racial discrimination by showing that race is not only identity but instead it depends upon someone's belief.



Another important element in shaping the identity is location which is known as relational identity in the autobiographical study. Furthermore, it goes beyond the border. Obama recollects the bygone days, “We stopped at the common, where one of Lolo’s men was grazing a few goats, and a small boy came up beside me holding a dragonfly that hovered at the end of a string” (34). The lines echo his childhood days in the Indonesia with mother and step-father, Lolo. He learns many things about the third world—primarily poverty and their lifestyle and helps to shape his background and consciousness. Obama mentions, “She had always encouraged my rapid acculturation in Indonesia: it had made me relatively self-sufficient, undemanding on a tight budget and extremely well mannered too” (47). Obama stands every hardships and difficulties and adjusts in the Indonesian culture and pace. In fact, he is different from other American children in the sense that he sees the third world from their own eyes instead of American point of view.

In terms of relational identity, his pining for ‘home’ is very emotional as the future President of the United States returns Kenya and seeks his “roots”. The root is one that connects his father, his heritage, and his future. Throughout his life, there had been something of a disconnection between Barack and his identity. In the text, Obama describes a similar explanation he receives from family members on the concept of home:

There’s your ordinary house in Nairobi. And then there’s your house in the country, where your people come from. Your ancestral home. Even the biggest minister or businessman thinks this way. He may have a mansion in Nairobi and build only a small hut on his land in the country. But if you ask him where he is from, he will tell you that that hut is home. (369)

Obama here shows the emotional significance of motherland or home. The concept of “home” and “belonging” illustrate the blurring of borders, resulting in feelings of connectedness and enabling fluid identities.

He plunges into the deepest and most remote villages seeking out those who knew his father, Barack Hussein Obama, the best and ultimately he stands between the graves of his father and grandfather:

I realized that who I was, what I cared about, was a matter of intellect or obligation, no longer a construct of words. I saw that my life in America—the black life, the white life, the sense of abandonment I’d felt as a boy, the frustration and hope I’d witnessed in Chicago—all of it was connected with this small plot of earth an ocean away, connected by more than the accident of a name or the color of my skin. The pain I felt was my father’s pain. My questions were my brother’s questions. Their struggle, my birthright. (430)

The trip to Kenya provides insight into Obama’s identity. It ends up answering difficult questions that plagued him growing up. These questions could not be answered because of the lack of perceived unity in his life. Reestablishing connections with his roots, he began to understand that he is an extension of his father and his heritage. His identity became real and tangible. It no longer existed in artificial social or academic constructions. In reclaiming his "birthright", Obama is able to understand what previously got away from his grasp.

Pertaining to the black identity, Daniel Stein in his article “Barack Obama’s *Dreams from My Father* and African American Literature” reveals the concept of American selfhood, quest for his identity and heritage and black male identity. Therefore, focusing on the heritage of Obama, Stein writes:

Obama's search for his Kenyan father, who left the family when his son was two years old, whom Obama only saw once for a few weeks when he was ten, and who died when Obama was twenty-one, with the search for a viable narrative of his life, for a way to make sense of his transatlantic heritage. Integral elements of this search are core themes of African American letters; the quest for self-discovery vis-à-vis social constructions of race; the search for ancestors, the meaning of home, and power of dreams in the struggle for racial equality. (3)

Here, Stein seems to be explaining the core theme of the text along with genetic and social identity emphasizing on the racial equality. Indeed, the quoted lines explicate the plural identity of Obama in the search of his heritage and inheritance.

Stein raises the issue of black male identity analyzing the reference of famous black personalities and their works viz. Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy (1945) and Native son (1940)*, W.E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Stein claims that feelings of alienation lead the young Obama to place frequently depicted in black autobiographies and the library as a source of personal enlightenment and intellectual growth. Furthermore, Stein argues that Obama lauds the literature on an aesthetic level, and "while he recognizes its emotional urgency, he is unable to fit his own experience into this tradition because it focuses too much on the *problems* of race (anguish, self doubt, self-contempt, withdrawal), and not enough on potential *solutions* (its redemptive power as well as hopes and dreams)" (5). Stein shows the departure from the traditional black writers in comparison to Obama. Obama is seen through the new glass here who insists on the solutions of racism. More importantly, Obama emphasizes on the character but not in the race.

Obama, in this context, expresses, “I never emulate white men and brown whose fates didn’t speak to my own. It was into my father’s image, the black man, son of Africa, that I’d packed all the attributes I sought in myself, the attributes of Martin and Malcolm, Dubois and Mandela” (220). In these lines, it seems that Obama is moving beyond his adolescent fears and perceptions. As an adult, he has learned that loyalty is not about the racial divide, but about character. He also learned that role models should not be chosen for their race, but rather for their personal characters. In fact, what a man does is important rather than his race and origin. In other words, action matters much but not his race. Obama, similarly, gives the title ‘Dreams from my father’ for his autobiographical text, though his father becomes myth in his whole life. He aggrandizes father in that he has learnt an overriding guideline from his father’s assertion:

You might have told him that these instruments carried with them a dangerous power, that they demanded the different ways of seeing the world. That this power could be absorbed only alongside a faith born out of hardship, a faith that wasn’t new, that wasn’t black or white or Christian or Muslim but pulsed in the heart of the first African village and first Kansas homestead—a faith in other people. (429)

The lines show that belief is far beyond the border of religion, colour, and geography. What Barack Obama has been today is the result of maintaining his father’s faith and philosophy. Therefore, Obama always focuses on the humanity and balanced policy between black and white.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Published in 1987, Gloria E. Anzalduo embodied an important break from the mainly male-dominated chain of “traditional” Chicano writers and inspired a generation of women to write about their

experiences as border-crossers with hybrid identities. Anzaldua traces her own identity fluctuating in and out of the border—the hybridity of her own identity. To put it more clearly, Anzaldua focuses on the “intersectional identity”, identity not only additive but also commonality. Accepting her new hybrid identity, she writes, “Soy un amasamiento, I am act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and creature of light, but also creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meaning” (Anzaldua 81). Anzaldua, here exploits the image of the dough or “el amasamiento”, in which various ingredients mix to give something new as result. In the same vein, the “new mestiza’s” indicates her own identity at a racial, cultural, social and sexual crossroads. Indeed, she is the result of the mixing of two races and she receives the cultures and races of various worlds, including the Mexican, the indigenous, the Spanish, and the Anglo-Saxon.

Obama is mixed race or ‘miscegenation’ by birth but on the other hand, his identity is also between the abstract border of Kenya and America. Even religious “I” is multiple and formed with his past experiences of trio-religion, Hindu, Muslim and Christian. His forefathers, from Luo tribe, belong to the Muslim religion and culture. Regarding the Hinduism, Obama knows when he arrives in the Indonesia:

That’s Hanuman,” Lolo said as we circled the statue, “the monkey god.” I turned around my seat, mesmerized by the solitary figure, so dark against sun, poised to leap into the sky as puny traffic swirled around its feet. “He’s a great warrior,” Lolo said firmly. “Strong as a hundred men. When he fights the demons, he’s never defeated. (33)

The lines make clear that he is accustomed to the Hindu norms and values in the street of Djakarta. He learns about the god, Hanuman. Likewise, by religion he follows

Christian. He loves the Christian hymns:

I'm so glad, Jesus lifted me!

I'm so glad, Jesus lifted me!

I'm so glad, Jesus lifted me!

Singing Glory, Ha-le-lu-yah!

Jesus lifted me! (292)

He loves hearing the hymns that lauds about Jesus. Obama assumes himself as the descendent of Jesus. In fact, there is the conjunction of trio-religion—Hindu, Christian and Muslim, as his forefathers are. All in all, it is clear that his religious identity is also multiple, intersectional and hybrid.

Karin Van Bommel's "Obama Made in Kenya: Appropriating the America Dream in Kogelo" sketches the African-American identity and the positive overtones of his presidential victory over his own heritage, in the Kenya. Bommel explains that the appropriation of Barack Obama provides possibilities for personal identification, causing feelings of pride and stimulating reflection on cultural identity and social condition. Bommel says, "Expressions of kinship feelings with Barack Obama—Obama is my brother—are frequently heard" (69). Millions of Kenyans express their wishes and excitement over this event. Furthermore, he quotes, "Obama is considered to be a son of Luo people, and here ties create identity, a sense of belonging home soil, [,] and blood are everywhere [,] symbolizing his Kenyan roots" (71). These lines reveal Obama's roots and history from where he originated and inherited. In fact, this is his African identity. Moving ahead from African identity, Bommel states, "Do you know that OBAMA is short for "Originally Born African Managing America?" (76). The acronym of OBAMA, as he appropriates, signifies that boundaries are flexible and events generate new meanings in new contexts. Obama, here, has been African

American in true sense.

Stuart Hall in *Questions of Cultural Identity* sheds light on the experience of identity, which describes the social process, a form of interaction and an aesthetic process of the cultural identity. Hall's concept of identity is the culmination of "the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpelate,' and speak to us or hail into place as the social subjects of particular discourse" (5). Hall classifies the cultural identity as the collective subject matter of particular place. Wastson and Smith also cite the Hall's words in pertaining to the identity, "identity is a production which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (34). Hall emphasizes on the fact that identities are constructed in terms of time and place. In other words, identity is the dynamic process which keeps on changing in of spatial and clock dimension.

In a similar way, Obama's identities are changed at times with pace of time and place. To begin with, his first social identity, exemption from his color and anatomy, is a basketball player in his college in Los Angeles but it has double implicit meanings. First, basketball is associated with his father as he writes, "Two weeks later he was gone. In that time, we stand together in front of the Christmas tree and pose pictures, the only ones I have of us together, me holding an orange basketball, his gift to me, him showing off the tie I've bought him" (70). In fact, basketball is the last souvenir gifted by him which pulls him into his bygone days and memorizes his history, more precisely his origin. Secondly, through the basket ball, Obama intends to convey a strong message of racial harmony between black and white, severely criticizing the racial discrimination, to the American world. In fact, Basketball shows the combination of white and black referring to the same ground. To clarify this, Obama states, "We weren't living in the Jim Crow South, I would remind him. We

weren't consigned to some heatless housing projects in Harlem or the Bronx" (81).

White people exploited the blacks in the history by making apartheid rules but Obama strongly believes that such mind set should be no longer in American society and people. His balanced policy between black and white seems significant to establish the humanitarian value and equality—more precisely, regardless of color, class, religion, nationality, the notion of we are all humans. In this way, his identity, as Hall argues, keeps on changing in the course of time.

Another important social identity, he gets, is the community organizer which paves the way for another identity, i.e., first black editor of review of law. Obama says, "That's what I'll do, I'll organize black folks. At the grass roots. For change. And my friends, black and white, would heartily commend me for my ideals before heading towards the post office to mail in their graduate school applications" (133). He, in fact, has played important role in black empowerment and social change through the community organizer. In other words, his work as a community organizer led him to recognize that supporting others is the best way to repel racism and Obama decided to something proactive to help others who are victim of it. Later, Obama finds peace through his involvement and immersion at Trinity United Church of Christ. This allowed him to unearth a spiritual core that could be used to racism. In reading the scriptures of religion at the church, Obama was able to find a sanctuary from the condition of racism.

While doing the social work largely in the African-American communities, despite many hardships, he finds more psychological satisfaction and gets his work as way to fully understand his identity. In the process of working with black communities he raises the voice of voiceless and expresses, "In the sit-ins, the marches, the jailhouse songs, I saw the African-American community becoming more



than just the place where you'd been born or the raised" (134). Being a lawyer, he feels proud to fight on behalf of black people and finds more satisfaction than in any work. He expresses the struggles of black people in the very emotional tone. To some extent, he finds the solace what he was intending from his heritage and inheritance. Above all, he develops not only the racial identity and the social identity, but also the political and personal identity through his helping hands.

In the similar fashion of Hall, Richard J. Lane depicts, "Performative autobiographics: the creation of identities that exist in performance, that challenge the fixed notion of the self and of subjectivity, and that are new each time the story is performed" (452). Lane, very clearly emphasizes on the multiplicity of identity as it changes in every reception. Likewise, second wave autobiographical theorist, Gusdorf emphasizes the creative dimension of autobiographical writing. For him, "It is "art" rather than "history", As art the autobiographical act always fixes that which is in process, making it a cultural artifact" (Watson and Smith 125). Gusdorf challenges the traditional myopic view of autobiographical meaning. Instead he argues that it is always in the process and creative act. The very thrust of creative aspect insists on the creative process of identity which is constantly in the dynamic path.

Dealing with identity, Smith and Watson provide four kinds of identity: the ideological "I"; the narrating "I"; the narrated "I"; and the real or historical "I". In any autobiography it has its own ideological identity. First, Smith and Watson define:

The ideological "I" is at once everywhere and nowhere in autobiographical acts, in the sense that the notion of personhood and the ideologies of identity constitutive of it are so internalized (personally and culturally) that they seem "natural" and "universal"

characteristics of persons. Yet changing notions of personhood affect autobiographical acts and practices, as do the competing ideological notions of personhood coexisting at any historical moment. For the ideological “I” is also multiple and thus potentially conflictual. (62)

Here, ideological “I” comes intermittently through his culture, history and notions. It has been natural phenomena that ideological identity is worldwide and common. In *Dreams from My Father*, Obama establishes his ideological identity through the lenses of racial harmony and his uphill struggle to be a charismatic leader of the nation. Obama, in this context, states:

In 1983, I decided to become a community organizer. There wasn't much detail to the idea; I didn't know anyone making a living that way. When classmates in college asked me just what it was that a community organizer did, I couldn't answer them directly. Instead, I'd pronounce on the need for change. Change in the White House, where Reagan and his missions were carrying on their dirty deeds. Change in the Congress, compliant and corrupt. Change in the mood of the country, manic and self-absorbed. Change won't come from the top, I would say. Change will come from a mobilized grass roots. (133)

The lines clearly echo the political identity of Obama and his appeal for the change of American society from the bottom to top. In the other hand, by critiquing the corrupted ruling system of Regan, Obama includes himself in the presidential race and shows his fair political ideology. More importantly, Obama wants to abolish the racial discrimination by following the balanced policy in terms of color.

“The “I” available to readers is the “I” who tells the autobiographical narrative. This “I” we call the narrator or the narrating “I”. This is “I” who wants to

tell, or is coerced into telling, a story about himself (59), explain Smith and Watson. In fact, the narrating “I” refers to the present author who is narrating his events for readers. Moreover, authors say “This narrating “I” usually, though not universal, uses the first person referent” (60). Indeed, this is tradition of writing autobiography with the application of first person narrative. Even this text is also written with use of first person “I”. In this sense, Obama asserts, “There was so much to tell in that single month, so much explaining to do; and yet when I reach back into my memory for the words of my father, the small interactions or conversations we might have had, as impenetrable now as the pattern of my genes, so that all I can perceive is the worn-out shell” (66). As we know that memory is one of the important autobiographical acts while writing the autobiography. Here, he talks about the nostalgia of his father but he is talking in the present situation. Therefore, these lines exemplify the application of narrating “I”.

Similarly, Smith and Watson elaborate about the “Real” or “Historical “I” and affirm, “This is the “I” as historical person, a person located in a particular time and place” (59). Both author focus on the historical part, “eye” and “I”, of the autobiographical text. In *Dreams from My Father*, Obama presents history of American segregation on the one hand and his heritage and colonialism of Kenya on the other hand. Regarding the segregation, Obama mentions the black feelings and emotions:

Did you dislike yourself because of your color or because you couldn't read and couldn't get a job? Or perhaps it was because you were unloved as a child-only, were you unloved because you were too dark? Or too light? Or because your mother shot heroin into her veins...and why did she do that anyway? Was the sense of

emptiness you felt a consequence of kinky hair or the fact that your apartment had no heat and no decent furniture? Or was it because deep down you imagined a godless universe?. (194)

In the lines, the use of rhetorical question is very symbolic and satirical which expresses the frustration, pains and unbearable circumstances due to the racial bigotry. Similarly, the quoted lines portray the lack of economic, social, and political power of black people in the American society. This is the long history of black people which Obama intends to change from the grassroots.

Furthermore, Obama talks about the history of Kenyan colonialism while stepping on the land of heritage and inheritance: “Truth is usually the best corrective,” Rukia said with a smile. “You know, sometimes I think the worst thing that colonialism did was cloud our view of our past. Without the white man, we might be able to make better use of our history” (311). Through these lines, Obama sketches the effects of colonialism in the Kenya and how their history has been destroyed and manipulated by the white man. As matter of fact, the quoted statements show the historical eye in his autobiography. To this theme, Obama adds:

He told us of Kenya’s struggle to be free, how the British had wanted to stay and unjustly rule the people, just as they had in America; how many had been enslaved only because of the color of their skin, just as they had in America; but that Kenyans, like all of us in the room, longed to be free and develop themselves through hard work and sacrifice. (70)

Obama sketches the bitter reality of history; how black people were treated in both the United States and Kenya. There was no difference at all except enslavement. During the colonial period, British made them a commodity and sold in the different markets

of the world. Wherever they reached, they were no more than commodity. These lines have particular pertinence in the sense that these are spoken by the father of Barack Obama. His father explains the history of Kenya in front of his classmates. Thereafter, his father's dreams becomes his own that racial divide is the very critical problem since the history of Kenyan heritage and it should be no more in the days to come. Therefore, it seems that Obama always succeeds to follow the racial harmony in every stage of his life.

Another "I", Smith and Watson delineate, is the narrated "I" which "is distinguished from the narrating "I" (60). Furthermore, the narrated "I" "is the object "I", the protagonist of the narrative, the version of the self that narrating "I" chooses to constitute through recollection for the reader." (60-61). Here narrating "I" is the current subject whereas narrated "I" becomes the object for the narrating "I" and on the basis of narrated "I", narrating "I" moves ahead in the autobiographical writings. In this context, Obama exemplifies:

The children of farmers, servants, and low-level bureaucrats had become my best friends, and together we ran the streets morning and night, hustling odd jobs, catching crickets, battling swift kites with razor-sharp lines-the loser watched his kite soar off with the wind, and knew that somewhere other children had formed a long wobbly train, their heads toward the sky, waiting for their prize to land. (36-37)

The given lines denote that the narrator has started his narrative with childhood memories. In fact, this memory is the narrated "I" which has worked as the object for the current story teller. Through the eyes of adult man, Obama writes his bygone days of flying kite, catching crickets and involving in peculiar jobs with his friends.

Concerning the narrated "I" and narrating "I", second wave theorist, Olney

expresses that in autobiographical writing, self-reflection is process, which is never ending rather than essence. Therefore, Olney writes that “life narrative creates “metaphors of self” (Smith and Watson 125). In autobiographical writing, Olney believes, that autobiography is “a structure of self-reflection in which the narrated “I” and narrating “I” are interlocked” (126). Here, Olney shows the interconnections of narrated “I” and narrating “I” in the autobiographical writing. In this context, Obama talks about the deep relationship between the narrated “I” and the narrating “I”:

Often, as I listened to these stories, I would find myself reminded of the stories that Gramps and Toot and my mother and my mother had told stories of hardship and migration, the drive for something better. But there was an inescapable difference between what I was now hearing and what I remembered, as if the images of my childhood had been run in reverse. (156)

The lines explore the comparison between past and present and how are they interdependent each other. Obama finds difference between the past narrations and the present situations. It shows that both “I” are very important in the autobiographical writing to generate the meaning of the text.

As memory is an element of the autobiography, *Dreams from My Father* is imbued with memories. The author Obama throws back himself over and over in the text. He starts his narration remembering the past, “A few months after my twenty-first birthday, a stranger called to give me the news” (66). There is the massive use of memory in the text. Furthermore, Obama provides the use of memory:

But when I think back on my own childhood, I remember some really good times. I remember going to Blackburn Forest with my folks to pick wild berries. I remember making skating carts with my cut

buddies out of empty fruit crates and old roller skate wheels and racing around the parking lot. (177)

The rhetorical use of the term ‘remember’ clearly echoes the politics of memory. In fact, he has immortal nostalgias of his juvenile time. It seems that he had very cozy and favorable environment in his home. However, the quoted sentences demonstrate the use of adequate use of memory in the autobiography.

Most importantly, president Obama represents the modern hybrid man, the man of multiple cultures. In the terms of religion, race, and cultural backgrounds, he is very different from other American children. He has learned many things from Indonesia, Kenya and different cities of United States. In the same vein, Dolisane-Ebossè, Cécile in “*Dreams from My Father*, by Barack Obama, Trans. in French as *Les Rêves De Mon Père*” posits the issue of multi-culturalism of Obama and contends, “In this autobiographical narrative, a cross between a family saga and life stories from childhood to adulthood, the narrator, Barack Obama, bequeaths to us, in hybrid fashion, the legacy of a spiritual journey, a self-questioning—in short, a question for maturation” (190). Cécile, here, focuses on the hybrid identity of Obama and his heritage journey—his journey from childhood to adult, American to Kenya questing for his identity. Furthermore, Cécile says, “On the socio-cultural level, this is a hymn to multiculturalism. There are encounters with other cultures and a strong desire to establish roots” (192). Indeed, Cécile emphasizes on the collision of cultures. The collision creates the environment and situation of multi-culture. Cécile’s focus is exactly on the part of Obama’s mixed-culture condition.

To put it more clearly, Cécile affirms, “This search for his path is hardly an ending search for ancestral purity, rather a desire to fill a void. It is that thirst for plural forms of knowledge that will make him, a hybrid, a cultural *mètis* who goes

beyond the biological to reach the fluidity of roads towards the multiple” (192). Cécile argues that it is difficult to get pure heritage and inheritance in the age of multiculturalism. It is the process of reaching towards the multiple signifiers of identity. In the analysis, Cécile says that it is a romance with a happy ending with his marriage and gathering of his three families, a beautiful saga that the narrator wishes for all people on earth: a victory for love over the dark forces. Finally, Cécile contends that the saga of Obama is educational and humanistic.

In a nutshell, Obama presents himself as modern hybrid man in his autobiography *The Dreams from My father*. In the three section of Obama’s autobiography, his identity keeps on changing. In the first section ‘origins’, Obama writes about his father’s as myth and how he originated from the mix of American mother and Kenyan father. In this sense, biological sex is the mixed race, miscegenation resulting from white mother and black father. Similarly, he follows the god, Jesus. But his mind is affected by the Hinduism in the streets of Indonesia where he learned about the mighty god Hanuman. As a matter of fact, his forefathers are Muslims. Indeed, there is the combination of three religions. Therefore, he has plural identity in terms of religion as well. These are exactly in the side of Sidone Smith and Julia Watson, and Anderson’s emphasis of identity.

The way Sidone Smith and Julia Watson explicates about the four different “I” in the autobiographical text, in the same way Obama’s saga also can be analyzed from different ‘I’ or eye. Obama talks about the colonial history of Kenya and his heritage in this autobiography in terms of historical or real ‘I’. Likewise, through the analysis of ideological ‘I’, Obama presents his struggle to stand as good political leader in the United States. Regarding the narrated ‘I’ and narrating ‘I’, both are interconnected to each other. As narrated ‘I’ indicates the young or past ‘I’, it is the object of narrating



or adult 'I' explains the narrated 'I'. Even this text is imbued with the nostalgias of childhood and bygone days. He mentions every difficulties and hardships he had faced during his childhood in the street of Indonesia. In truth, his identities are shaped by those childhood memories.

In the next section, Obama continues forming his social identity working as community organizer. In this phase, he succeeds gaining the political identity. He stands in the social forums for the sake of society; raises the voices of voiceless people. Through the community organization, Obama vehemently rejects the racial discrimination and focuses on the balanced policy and black empowerment. It seems that his balanced policy has got success in his political life as well. His identity is very dynamic which keeps on changing as Hall exerts his argument in the context of identity. He becomes a basketball player, community organizer, political leader, and the editor of the law review.

Finally, Obama moves to Kenya searching his heritage and inheritance. When he goes there, he feels as if he is grasping his full identity. Residing in front of the gravestone of fathers, he knows the true meaning of home and belonging. In this way, the place, religion and cultural shift indicates that he has multiple and 'fluid identity'-- black, American, ethno culture and relational or transnational. In fact, he is the embodiment of modern hybrid man—combination of culture, American norms and values and nature, inheritance—in the age of multiculturalism. In this way, Barack Obama, through the narrative of his multiple and unstable identity, emphasizes on the peace, humanity and equality of every human being regardless of race, religion and class.

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