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Political Narratives and Intersectional Representation: A Critical Reading of Michelle
Obama's *Becoming*

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Letter of Recommendation

This research entitled “Political Narratives and Intersectional Representation: A Critical Reading of Michelle Obama’s *Becoming*” has been successfully completed under my supervision by Radhika Devi Dahal in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English. I would like to recommend this research be examined by an external examiner.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Political Narratives and Intersectional Representation: A Critical Reading of Michelle Obama’s *Becoming*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, by Radhika Devi Dahal has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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Radhika Devi Dahal

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Abstract

*This paper examines political narrative and intersectional representation in Michelle Obama's *Becoming* in the light of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's political theory and Stuart Hall's notion of representation. The autobiography encapsulates Obama's journey from the girl to becoming America's First Lady. Highlighting highs and lows of her life, Obama describes how she transfigured her from becoming 'me to us'. The memoir also depicts how political power transformed her identity and she gradually gained the potential to challenge and subvert the power structures. The research focuses on specifically these questions: What are the factors that affect Obama's early life? How does she realize that there is racism everywhere in the USA? How does she succeed in maintaining her distinct identity despite the racism and political biasedness prevalent in American society? The paper embodies Hardt and Negri's idea of political theory to highlight that by acquiring political power one can emphasize the role of social movements and gain the potential to challenge the submissive power structures. Similarly, Hall's concept of representation has been adapted to present that representation locates the power as it is influenced by the dominant ideologies and can reinforce existing hierarchies. This paper, in this regard, concludes that political power works as a mechanism to bring a desired change in the nation making the sphere full of opportunities for those neglected and subordinated.*

Keywords: representation, politics, power, identity, intersectionality

This paper examines Michelle Obama's *Becoming* from the perspective of political theory. World of politics is changing all the time, and many transformations

have taken place. Personal lives are greatly influenced by political change when a person is under the influence of mainstream politics. This thesis focuses on what Michelle Obama experienced during her childhood and what transformation has taken place in her when she grew up as a woman and ultimately became the First Lady of the USA. The research stresses the impact of the author amidst a political change in her childhood, her college life, being a wife of a leader, and being the First Lady.

On the first reading, one might read *Becoming* as an autobiography since she describes her ups and downs from her childhood through becoming the First Lady. She meticulously explained how she got an opportunity to learn her position as a student at the college and how her position was maintained when she became a popular person. However, her personality was overshadowed by her husband's presidency, as she is known to be his wife. Consequently, she has to maintain her distinct position.

Michelle Obama's *Becoming* deals with the issue of identity, marriage, and political career in very realistic and convincing ways. She talks about the existence of truth without social fears. The author encounters many political problems through which she learns to maintain her distinct identity. The researcher raises the question: What are the factors that affect her early life? How does the protagonist realize that there is racism everywhere in the USA? How does she succeed in maintaining her distinct identity despite racism and political biasedness?

Michelle Obama's early life is affected by the turmoil of political biasedness in her life as she belongs to the black race. She realizes that there is a vast difference between white women and black women in the US, particularly what she learns at Princeton. She is determined to change the old concept of considering black women

as weak. She brings a drastic change in her concept, and she encourages her husband, Barack Obama, to be president so that she can evade discrimination.

Michelle Obama, born Michelle Robinson, grows up on the South Side of Chicago and has numerous fluctuations as she passes through different stages of her life. In the beginning, she feels deserted by white and wealthy families as she grew up in a middle-class family. She had a happy life in her childhood and worked hard to get a good education. Her life was greatly affected when her father suffered from multiple sclerosis. Her difficulty became an opportunity; because of this, she got a homely environment at Princeton. Her entry into Harvard Law School helped her to achieve her goal, including meeting with Barack Obama. Her friendship with him became a momentum in her life because he is a person of optimism, diligence, and humility.

Michelle is heartbroken; the losses prompt her to understand that life is precious and she cannot waste any more time in a job that she doesn't enjoy. Though she is skeptical of politics, she is excited by the opportunity to improve people's lives. Meanwhile, his husband Barack graduates from law school and moves back to Chicago. On the day he takes the bar exam, he proposes to Michelle, and she says yes. Michelle has a difficult time adjusting to the schedule of being a mom and also having a part-time job. Barack, too, experiences some of the sacrifices of parenting: when they are on vacation in Hawaii, Malia falls ill, and Barack is forced to miss a crime bill vote because they cannot fly home while she is sick. He loses a Congressional race as a result of missing the vote.

Barack is also selected by presidential nominee John Kerry as the keynote speaker for the 2004 Democratic National Convention. He gives a rousing seventeen-minute speech demonstrating how he is the embodiment of the American dream,

calling for hope, progress, and unity among the American people. He becomes an instant sensation and wins his Senate race with 70 percent of the vote. After two years in the Senate, Barack thinks about running for President. Michelle, who can already see her own identity slipping away in support of Barack's, is hesitant, but she agrees, knowing that he could help millions of people. Along the campaign trail, Michelle, and Barack face extra scrutiny because of their race.

Michelle starts her initiative by planting a garden alongside Sam Kass, which helps spark her children's health initiative, called 'Let's Move'. She gets large chain companies to promise to cut the salt, fat, and sugar in the meals they market to children, works with schools to provide healthier lunches, and gets networks like Disney and NBC to run PSAs during kids' programs about the importance of physical activity. She gets blamed for focusing on household work rather than focusing on advancing her education and career. Some blame she did not play the role of first lady, as she mentions in her book. Michelle accomplishes a lot of her goals with 'Let's Move' and works on other initiatives like Joining Forces, Reach Higher and Let Girls Learn.

Michelle's contribution to politics is praiseworthy as she campaigns for the presidency of Hillary Clinton. When Donald Trump wins, instead, she is disheartened being afraid that her work would be undone. However, she retains her optimism after the transition from the white house. Michelle asserts that her continuous effort to transform herself and the country for the betterment does not stop. She realizes that nothing is perfect but continuing to grow, and owning one's own unique story, is what 'becoming' ultimately means to her.

Various critics comment on the memoir from different perspectives. Col Sue Pope comments that the book is an autobiography of Michelle who deals with the ups

and downs of her incredible journey from humble beginnings to the magnificence of the White House as America's first lady. Pope asserts: "*Becoming* is an autobiography detailing humble the highs and lows of Michelle Obama's incredible journey from beginnings in the less glamorous South Side of Chicago, to the grandeur of the White House and life as America's first African American First Lady" (2). Pope reflects, "It takes the reader seamlessly through three distinct phases of her life, Becoming me, becoming us and becoming more" (2). Capturing the highs and lows of her journey, the book provides an astounding conclusion inspiring all that becoming is a kind of transformation from one entity to another. It means that one becomes a better person while attempting to do the same for the nation and the whole of humanity at last. Through the vivid storytelling, Obama invites readers to comprehend her journey and emphasizes embracing one's identity and striving for personal growth.

Isabel Wilkerson believes that the book deals with two things: discrimination between men and women and the discrimination between black women and white women Michelle experienced while she was at the college. Michelle underwent several problems including the hierarchy between black women and white women. She was mainly reprimanded while different restrooms were used for white and colored women. Wilkerson explains: "The signs reminded every inhabitant of the very different place of black women and white women in the hierarchy. There were restrooms for 'white ladies' and often, conversely, restrooms for 'colored women'" (2). In other words, "Black women were rarely granted the honorific Miss or Mrs., but were addressed by their first name, or simply as 'gal' or 'auntie' or worse. This so openly demeaned them that many black women, long after they had left the South, refused to answer if called by their first name" (2). Black women were called by their first name while white women were called mostly by Miss or Mrs. They were also

called 'gal' or auntie or worse than that. She clearly noticed that black women were dominated and oppressed by white Americans.

Similarly, Afua Hirsch expresses that Michelle Obama has exposed the ugly side of race, marriage, and ugly side of politics in the book. She has reflected on whatever she experienced in the process of becoming first lady from her husband rather than becoming a good lady on her own. In other words, she has sacrificed many things to be the first lady. Hirsch states:

Her role has never been defined, because, I suspect, to do so would involve the awkward truth – that it's essential to make her husband look good. First ladies both feed into and reflect our patriarchal values, and so, in this world still so intolerant of female domination, making their husbands look good inevitably involves diminishing themselves, and decoupling from their own achievements, so as not to outshine the president. (2)

Women have many problems whether they belong to lower families or higher ones. She has represented various kinds of women. In her childhood, she experienced how people suffer from being poor and black and black women. Later she experienced how women sacrifice their education and career after becoming a mother. She also experienced how women are discriminated against in different places being not only women but also black women, particularly at the college.

The researcher intends to analyze the memoir from the perspective of political theory and wants to show how Mrs. Obama's career is shaped by politics and how she is successful in achieving the goal she targeted for. John S. Dryzek et al. show the importance of political theory in one's life. According to him, humanity is not far from the influence of politics. It regularizes traditions, approaches, styles, and so on

that can be theorized, critiqued, and diagnose the problems of people in society and solve problems. Dryzek et al. assert:

Political Theory is an interdisciplinary endeavor whose center of gravity lies at the humanities end of the happily still undisciplined discipline of political science. Its traditions, approaches, and styles vary, but the field is united by a commitment to theorize, critique, and diagnose the norms, practices, and organization of political action in the past and present, in our own places and elsewhere . . . demands of justice and how to fulfill them, the presuppositions and promise of democracy, the divide between secular and religious ways of life, and the nature and identity of public goods, among many other topics. (4)

Political theorists talk about humanity, justice, equality, freedom, and opportunity for people. They believe that they can change the status and condition of people by studying the present political scenario. They also give emphasis on democracy, the difference between secular and religious life, the nature and identity of public goods, and so on. Likewise, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri talk about class and connect it to class struggle. According to them, there are infinite ways of grouping human beings into classes. They say: “Class is determined by class struggle. There are, of course, an infinite number of ways that humans can be grouped into classes –hair colour, blood type, and so forth –but the classes that matter are those defined by the lines of collective struggle” (104). In this context, they claim, “Race is just as much a political concept as economic classes in this regard. Neither ethnicity nor skin color determines race; race is determined politically by collective struggle. Some maintain that race is created by racial oppression” (104). The general definition of race might encapsulate a variety of forms but if Hardt and Negri are to be considered, race is a byproduct of political match making.

There are many approaches proposed to text by different researchers and scholars. The text is itself a memoir of someone which carries an entire journey of politics and the race of the contemporary society of USA respectively. Tara Lal Shrestha stating Gramscian approach writes:

When Barack Obama was first elected as the US President, various commentators naively declared that USA was entering a “postracial” era, in which skin color and minority issues would no longer matter. Michelle Obama through her memoir *Becoming* shows how wrong the critics had been in their optimism about the downing of ‘postracial’ America. She presents dynamics of dehumanization and racialization being continued in America to impact global black experience and condition of minorities. The bildungsroman story of Michelle Obama, which presents her development of various aspects of life, helps to understand persisting dynamics of dehumanization of minorities in America and beyond. (45)

In the above statement, Shrestha concludes that the memoir also reflects the political trauma together with the many different issues about the struggles behind the political success of Obama and the other left behind. Before so much highlighting about anyone’s achievement sometimes not only an individual, tiny groups, simple mass is not only responsible rather it can change a larger history of already established communities. The concept of victory constructed on the outer surface and the presence of Michelle Obama as First Lady cannot advocate all her identity, but it is hiding many other untold stories which has traumatized her from long ago.

Another political theorist John Stuart Mill sees the role of women to make society. He says that there is nothing women cannot do. It is a bad thing to forbid them from doing anything. Men are not superior to women because men cannot

protect women and they are not in favor of women. Mill argues, “What women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing. What they can do, but not so well as the men who are their competitors, competition suffices to exclude them from; since nobody asks for protective duties and bounties in favor of women” (34). Mill claims, “it is only asked that the present bounties and protective duties in favor of men should be recalled. If women have a greater natural inclination for something than for others, there is no need of laws or social inculcation to make the majority of them do the former in preference to the latter” (34). The quote emphasizes that women should not be forbidden from doing things they are naturally unable to do. It means women are to advance themselves politically. Politics is the only way through which women can ascertain their roles and rights. It also reveals how women's representation in politics is exposed in our society.

Therefore, rather than imposing laws and norms, if women naturally move ahead to accomplish such tasks she is there with no external influences. Moreover, Jean Jacques Rousseau divides inequality among humans into two categories: natural and political. Natural inequality cannot be changed such as age, health, strength, mind, soul, and so on. They are different from person to person. Another inequality is political as it depends on conventions established by certain privileged people. Rousseau argues: “I conceive two species of inequality among men; one which I call natural, or physical inequality, because it is established by nature, and consists in the difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind, or of the soul . . .” (87). Moreover, Rousseau stresses, “the other which may be termed moral, or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention and is established, or at least authorized by the common consent of mankind. . . which some men enjoy, to the prejudice of others, such as that of being richer, more honored, more powerful,

and even that of exacting obedience from them” (87). The extract describes two types of inequality: natural and political, which are based on inherent differences and conventions established in society respectively. This relates to the fact that social rules are determined by political power. Politics plays a key role in society. Naturally, all people are equal but human rules discriminate against them. There is prejudice against certain groups of people. Thus, Rousseau divides people into many categories through which people have different positions in society.

One of the prominent political theorists Georg Lukacs connects the situation of humans with the external and internal world. He defines and explains realism which is based on society. He asserts that reality is related to the external world existing independently from human existence. Lukacs writes: “The basis for any correct cognition of reality, whether of nature or society, is the recognition of the objectivity of the external world, that is, its existence independent of human consciousness” (25). He further argues, “Any apprehension of the external world is nothing more than a reflection in consciousness of the world that exists independently of consciousness. This basic fact of the relationship of consciousness to being also serves, of course, for the artistic reflection of reality” (25). Literature does not operate in a vacuum; it is a social act as well as a social product, veiling innumerable processes which have contributed to its creation. It is rooted in and grows out of society, that is, it is influenced in subject matter as well as in form and technique by the dominant climate of ideas in a given historical period, and in turn influences the society it addresses. Therefore, the study of literature, like any other cognitive pursuit, can be meaningful only in terms of the total picture that provides of Man and society.

Despite the above-mentioned criticism empirically and theoretically, the researcher stresses on how Michelle Obama has undergone numerous problems while

becoming a first lady. She is blamed to be a housewife rather than a professional. However, she has understood the world in her own way, and she has made her distinct identity due to political influence in her life.

Cultural values are also important for people to shape their life when they grow. Michelle Obama has also such experiences in her place. She shares the idea that women come from different parts and practice hymns. From the activities of people, we can understand their beliefs in religion. Obama recalls, “The sound of people trying, however, became the soundtrack to our life. There was plinking in the afternoons, plinking in the evenings. Ladies from church sometimes came over to practice hymns, belting their piety through our walls” (20). Obama’s family perceived the types of people in their locality.

Obama chronicles her past and present life in a beautiful way. She describes everything on par with her cultural assimilation. Though she is American, she unable to understand the culture in full fledged. She explains: “There’s a lot I still don’t know about America, about life, about what the future might bring. But I do know myself. My father, Fraser, taught me to work hard, laugh often, and keep my word” (17). Furthermore, she mentions, “My mother, Marian, showed me how to think for myself and to use my voice. Together, in our cramped apartment on the South Side of Chicago, they helped me see the value in our story, in my story, in the larger story of our country” (17). There are many aspects of adjusting to society such as mental, physical, and psychological. However, cultural adjustment is often ignored. In fact, cultural assimilation is a must for coping with the new society. Obama, who belongs to non-white, may feel still alienated there despite being the first lady there.

What is more, she notices that there is discrimination among people. She gets familiar with history and realizes her tolerance. She sees that women are

discriminated against. Cultural impact plays a crucial role in her life. She compares and contrasts with her present situation based on her experience. One thing she understands is that women are taken differently. It is her feeling of discrimination.

Another difference she finds is that colored people are treated differently. Her words in her memoir reveal her lack of congruence in society. She writes: “Even if we didn’t know the context, we were instructed to remember that context existed. Everyone on earth, they’d tell us, was carrying around an unseen history, and that alone deserved some tolerance” (22). She illuminates, “Robbie, I’d learn many years later, had sued Northwestern University for discrimination, having registered for a choral music workshop there in 1943 and been denied a room in the women’s dorm. She was instructed to stay instead in a rooming house in town—a place “for coloreds she was told” (22). She remembers such a situation many years back when she was young. America is a great country but it may lack the ability to treat all people equally. She has a bitter experience when she notices that blacks are discriminated against and intimidated. She writes, “It was a respectable if not well-paying profession, made up entirely of black men who kept their uniforms immaculate while also hauling luggage, serving meals, and generally tending to the needs of train passengers, including shining their shoes” (22). Cultural variation exists everywhere in one way or another. However, there is condemnable to treat people badly on the platforms, Obama means to express.

Similarly, her family background is distinct from others. She recalls her past days and shares them with her readers. She asserts that she rarely goes to join her neighborhood kids because she did not want her dolls to be touched by them. It means her culture taught her to be individual and personal. Her childhood experiences reveal that she was horrified by the kids’ dynamics moving from one place to another.

Michelle writes: “I rarely chose to join the neighborhood kids who played outside after school, nor did I invite school friends’ home with me, in part because I was a fastidious kid and didn’t want anyone meddling with my dolls” (30). In fact, she writes, “I’d been to other girls’ houses and seen the horror-show scenarios—Barbies whose hair had been hacked off or whose faces had been crosshatched with Magic Marker. And one thing I was learning at school was that kid dynamics could be messy” (30). Although she is American, she has got lots of experiences with people who are marginalized and oppressed for innumerable reasons. She understands how people feel bad when they do not have a sense of affinity in the community they live in.

The cultural study explores diversity and includes gender, race, class, and colonialism. So it seeks to study the connection between different forms of power in relation to culture. It links outside of the academy with social and political movements, workers in cultural institutions, and cultural management. By envisioning of future, Raymond Williams reminds us of a matter of accounting for the present and how it got there. It is only based on such a historical self-understanding that the future may be delineated. Recalling the origins and the historical development of cultural studies, Williams argues: “One cannot understand an intellectual or artistic project without also understanding its formation; that the relation between a project and formation is always discursive; and that the emphasis of cultural studies is precisely that it engages with both, rather than specializing itself to one or the other” (139). Rejecting a reductionist model, Williams argues that the project and formation of different ways of materializing-different ways then, of describing what is, in fact, a common disposition of energy and direction. He exhorts cultural studies to question and historicize itself as formation. To understand the representation and political

narrative there always needs to be a social genus that is cultural studies. Therefore, the institutionalization of cultural studies as an academic discipline represents the reification of what once was a project into a mere formation.

In the memoir, Michelle Obama also focuses on racial discrimination. She observes how mixed-race people are treated by whites. Her psychology tells us about the human rights that are necessary for establishing equality. Obama asserts: “Our neighborhood was middle-class and racially mixed. Kids found one another based not on the color of their skin but on who was outside and ready to play. My friends included a girl named Rachel, whose mother was white and had a British accent; Susie, a curly-haired redhead; and the Mendozas’ granddaughter whenever she was visiting” (31). She adds, “We were a motley mix of last names— Kansopant, Abuasef, Yacker, Robinson—and were too young to register that things around us were changing fast” (31). Her main concern is to see the cultural variation between white and black in her country. She remembers her friends including Rachel and understands the complexities when husband and wife belong to different races and cultural differences.

Obama’s mother’s role in raising Michelle reflects what kind of culture she got when she was a child. Her life seems to be divided broadly into two parts: before marriage and after marriage. Before marriage, she is only a daughter and sister. She looks into society from the perspective of her family background. Politics is away from her. She compares her family to the neighbors. However, after marriage her role is broad. She does not find herself not only a person’s wife but the President’s first lady. Her childhood life has helped her to shape her identity in her later life. Michelle’s mother has played a significant role to look into the world. She learns from her mother to be social. In the beginning, Michelle is intimately attached to her

brother. Fearing that she will be self-centered, her mother helps her to go out and be a friend of other girls. The lines reveal her mother's guidance and father's support to involve in a social manner. It writes:

[My mother] was hoping that I'd learn to glide socially the way my brother had. Craig, as I've mentioned, had a way of making hard things look easy. He was by then a growing sensation on the basketball court, high-spirited and agile and quickly growing tall. My father pushed him to seek out the toughest competition he could find, which meant that he would later send Craig across town on his own to play with the best kids in the city. But for now, he left him to wrangle the neighborhood talent. (32)

Her parents are aware that their children should participate in social functions. Sportsmanship is one of the activities to socialize with them. Her father believes that a person's real talent comes from competition and that sports are the factor to test people.

Michelle adds more about her brother and states that basketball paves the way for exposing him to people. Games encourage people to be confident and social. They can identify themselves as who they are in front of others. Michelle understands the importance of basketball from the beginning. Michelle reveals that basketball helps her brother to approach strangers. He would have a habit of talking to them and socializing. She mentions, "It taught him how to approach strangers when he wanted to snag a spot in a pickup game. He learned how to talk a friendly form of smack, trash-talking his bigger, faster opponents on the court" (32).

As culture is one of the most different concepts in human and social sciences, it has different ways of defining it. According to Stuart Hall, "Culture is said to embody the best that has been thought and said in society. It is the sum of great ideas,

as represented in the classic works of literature, painting, music, and philosophy – the high culture of the age” (2). Hall further argues:

Belonging to some frame of reference, but more modern in its associations, is the use of ‘culture’ to refer to the widely distributed forms of popular music, publishing art, design and literature or the activities of leisure time and entertainment, which make up the everyday lives of the majority of ‘ordinary people’- what is called the mass culture or popular culture of the age. (2)

In recent years, on the grounds of social sciences, culture refers to a way of life of people, communities, nations, or groups. So, culture is contingent on the living way of people.

Class consciousness is also seen in her memoir when she asserts that his father looks with suspicion to rich people. Michelle has a concept that rich people do not have a kind heart to help the poor. Homeownership is important for the rich. She has the psychological thought there is discrimination among people whether they have their own house. From her childhood, she understands the condition of people from different strata of life. She opines:

My father viewed rich people with a shade of suspicion. He didn’t like people who were uppity and had mixed feelings about home ownership in general. There was a short period when he and my mom considered buying a home for sale not far from Robbie’s house, driving over one day to inspect the place with a real estate agent, but ultimately deciding against it. (33)

There are different aspects of cultural values. Cultures are constructed by human beings. Therefore, they change from one society to another. In some societies, the disparity between rich and poor can be negligible while in other societies there can be

a very big gap between rich and poor. Her psychological thoughts are reflected in her later life as she gets married to Barack Obama and experiences politics very closely.

Culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings- the 'giving and taking of meaning' between members of society. Culture is also about feelings, attachments, and emotions as well as concepts and ideas. Hall comments: "The expression of my face 'says something' about who am I (identity) and what I am feeling (emotion) and what group I feel I belong to (attachment), which can be 'read' and understood by other people, even if I didn't intend deliberately to communicate anything as formal as a message" (2). As culture regulates social practices then identity becomes a matter of culture. The severe question 'Who am I?' becomes crucial at that time.

Michelle talks about her paintings with her husband Barack Obama after she became the first lady. Her perceptions are based on the cultures from which she has heralded. She remembers her past as she was a child. She also remembers Barack's past. She feels strange when their paintings are hanging. In the meantime, she fears what impact they will have on the young people. She realizes that the portrait humbles both. Although they are in the supreme position in the US, they remember their childhood and family background. As Hall states, one's identity is known through the faces, her identity is revealed through the humble words she has expressed in the book. The lines read: "There are portraits of me and Barack now hanging in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, a fact that humbles us both. I doubt that anyone looking at our two childhoods, and our circumstances, would ever have predicted we'd land in those halls" (334). Moreover, the lines expose, "The paintings are lovely, but what matters most is that they're there for young people to see—that our faces help dismantle the perception that in order to be enshrined in history, you

have to look a certain way. If we belong, then so, too, can many others” (334). Her cultural background pursues her wherever she goes. She knows from which family she came. She also assimilated that black people are discriminated against in the US. The whites believe that black people do not deserve to get such supreme power and position. She fears that people may think Obamas have forgotten their real grounds.

The author remembers how her family had a good relationship with each other. They would talk about drugs and sex freely. It is their culture. Perhaps they had a bitter experience with the situation when black people were dominated. She remembers that her father was quite frank, and he would tell her that sex is fun. Their cultural values are determined by the experience of their family background. They have learned to make their distinct and dignified their life despite the discriminating behavior of the whites. Obama writes: “As we grew, we spoke more about drugs and sex and life choices, about race and inequality and politics. My parents didn’t expect us to be saints” (34). She recalls,

My father, I remember, made a point of saying that sex was and should be fun. They also never sugarcoated what they took to be the harder truths about life. Craig, for example, got a new bike one summer and rode it east to Lake Michigan, to the paved pathway along Rainbow Beach, where you could feel the breeze off the water. (34)

There is the discrimination between whites and blacks she experiences in her childhood. Cultural domination is one of their bitter experiences. Her brother Craig Robinson had a new bike once and he went along Rainbow Beach. However, he was caught by the police because they thought that he stole it. This is an example of many intimidations of black people that their existence is not taken equally as that of whites.

She has such experience. It may be the reason that she encouraged her husband to do leadership in order for them to show equality as white people.

Similarly, Obama remembers her ancestral background. She does not hesitate to say that her grandfather was the grandson of slaves. She is from the same family. The situation might have changed, her position is better now but the experience of the past haunts her in one way or another. She does not forget that her family were once slaves. Such thoughts affect her political career in many ways. First, she may have psychological thought that it is quite unlikely to be the leader of a powerful country in the world. The second experience might have inspired and encouraged her to get involved in world politics. In this respect, culture and politics are inseparable parts. They cannot be separated from one another. She scribes:

Dandy was from the South Carolina Low Country, having grown up in the humid seaport of Georgetown, where thousands of slaves once labored on vast plantations, harvesting crops of rice and indigo and making their owners rich. My grandfather, born in 1912, was the grandson of slaves, the son of a millworker, and the oldest of what would be ten children in his family. (42)

Her grandfather grew up in a group of thousands of slaves. He had witnessed the people working in the plantations. They were making their owners rich, but they were becoming poorer and poorer. She knows that her family is not untouched by the cultural subjugation by the whites. She believes that culture is very important. It is embedded in the mind, and it is quite difficult to come out of the traumatic feelings. She wishes to give justice to the people by involving herself in politics. In fact, nothing is stronger than political power to change the concept and systems that are not favorable to common people.

Likewise, cultural identity forms around points of difference. It is not fixed; it always remains in the process, which is the process of becoming. Stuart Hall argues, “There is no essence of identity to be discovered rather, cultural identity is continually being produced within the vectors of similarity and difference” (229). Therefore, cultural identity is continually shifting. The system of representation gives meaning to the culture. The same cultural people exchange the same value of icons or words. So, they always get the same meaning. When other culture people view the same thing, the meaning of the same thing becomes different. The meaning is constructed by the system of representation. When the same thing enters in a different system the previous meaning could not function. Meaning is constructed and fixed by code, which sets up the correlation between the conceptual system and the language system. This system is a discourse of representation. By discourse, Foucault means: “A group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about- a particular topic at a particular historical moment. . . . Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language” (qtd. in Hall 44). Whatever she is writing in the book, it is her perception. Perceptions change according to the circumstances. She writes, “I am now at a new beginning, in a new phase of life. For the first time in many years, I’m unhooked from any obligation as a political spouse, unencumbered by other people’s expectations” (46). In fact, she puts, “I have two nearly grown daughters who need me less than they once did. I have a husband who no longer carries the weight of the nation on his shoulders” (46). Obama believes that life changes all the time. Phases of life can start from one status to another status. When she was a child, she understood her life in one way like playing with her siblings, friends, and so on. After she got married, her life changed completely. The way she behaves with others and the way they look at her is significantly different.

In order to understand the culture, we can take that every culture is itself a discourse. It has its rules, regulations, and values through which the society moves. We can take culture as a social text. Hall talks about different locations of culture. He says: “The geographical and social distinctions deployed are constructed but equally they are located historically: in the struggle for power between what has been called the West and the rest” (161). It is natural that people have different perspectives towards cultures because culture is constructed by society and the community. Obama is aware of this. Culture plays a vital role in everything. She remembers how a black woman appreciates another unlike a white appreciates a black. It is due to cultural variation. She talks about a woman named Czerny who was a smart and beautiful black woman. There can have multiple interpretations of her appreciation of the black woman. She wonders how a black woman is so smart and beautiful while whites are supposed to be better than this, as she got experiences in her childhood. Another interpretation involves black people are no less intelligent than others. But they are considered weaker and less intelligent. To describe her, the lines read:

Czerny was a smart and beautiful black woman, barely thirty years old, a swift-moving and lively New Yorker who wore flared jeans and wedge sandals and seemed always to be having four or five ideas at once. For students of color at Princeton, she was like an über-mentor, our ultrahip, and always outspoken defender in chief, and for this, she was universally appreciated. In the office, she juggled multiple projects—lobbying the university administration to enact more inclusive policies for minorities, advocating for individual students and their needs, and spinning out new ideas for how all of us could improve our lot. (67)

In fact, to describe or explain a person whether the person is good or bad is just an interpretation or discourse. There is nothing to do with the color actually. All people are equal in the real way as they are parts of nature and humans. However, cultural and political thoughts have discriminated against people like this. Obama is surprised that the woman is like a mentor for black people. The woman understands the plight of black people and speaks for them. She is outspoken in her sympathy for the black girls. From her, Obama learns that to get justice in the world, people are required to have the same experience. Therefore, cultural variation is not bad at all. Rather it helps people to understand and get equality with others.

As Obama worked for the first time, she compared herself to others. It is due to her cultural variation. She feels independent and confident as she is away from her elder brother Craig. She is no longer attached to him. As she works, she realizes that she is as capable as others. She decides to be silent and try to observe her classmates whether are smarter than her or not. She believes that she is culturally different from others. She thinks that it is necessary for her to prove equal to them. She evaluates herself that she is not less smart than them. Obama asserts: “Now, though, I was just Michelle Robinson, with no Craig attached. At Whitney Young, I had to work to ground myself. My initial strategy involved keeping quiet and trying to observe my new classmates. Who were these kids anyway? All I knew was that they were smart. Demonstrably smart. Selectively smart” (54). She emphasizes, “The smartest kids in the city, apparently. But wasn’t I as well? Hadn’t all of us—me and Terri and Chiaka—landed here because we were smart like them?” (54). It becomes possible due to the patterns of population movement and settlement established during colonialism and its aftermath, the recent generalized acceleration of globalization of electronic communications.

Michelle Obama was very much impressed by Barack Obama because of his distinct personality. She is surprised to know that Barack is fixed in his direction. He is free from any kind of doubt about his life. She believes that Barack had also many fluctuations in his life. However, he seems to be confident and inspiring for her because adversity teaches people to do something in their life. She mentions him:

What struck me was how assured he seemed of his own direction in life. He was oddly free from doubt, though at first glance it was hard to understand why. Compared with my own lockstep march toward success, the direct arrow shot of my trajectory from Princeton to Harvard to my desk on the forty-seventh floor, Barack's path was an improvisational zigzag through disparate worlds. (80)

It is her first experience with Barack Obama. Her psychology is attached to him. It may be because of their similarity of cultural experiences and their similar color of skin. Inwardly, she wished to fight against discrimination together with him. Cultural and political thoughts are the main reasons people are associated with each other.

Moreover, race is to dehumanize people by stereotyping them, by denying them, their variety, and complexity based on their physical, mental, moral, social, and religious varieties, which is a socially constructed notion, where one race is regarded as superior to the other. The term 'Race' classifies genetically distinct groups. Firstly, humanity is divided into unchanging natural types and is recognizable by physical features that are transmitted 'through the blood' and divided between 'pure' and 'mixed' races. In addition, the term implies the mental and moral behaviors of human beings and individual personality, ideas, etc. are concerned with racial origin. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin further explain: "Racism can be defined as a way of thinking that considers a group's unchangeable physical characteristics to

be linked in a direct casual way to psychological or intellectual characteristics and which on this basis distinguishes between ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ racial groups” (199). Race has been attached historically and primarily to one attribute: color and the relationship between ‘race’ and ‘status’ has a long history.

There was a slavery system where blacks were kept as slaves in the USA. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin further say: “The Negro or black African category was usually relegated to the bottom, in part because of black Africans’ colour and allegedly ‘primitive’ colour, but primarily because they were best known to Europeans as slaves” (199). The stereotyped eyes of whites upon the blacks as slaves create problems in ethnic belongingness. She understands the value of women and girls. As she becomes the first lady of the USA, she collaborates with Barack Obama and allocates some budgets for them. Her involvement in politics helped her husband identify the problems of women: “Barack and I were committed to changing the perceptions about what made a young woman valuable to society. He managed to leverage hundreds of millions of dollars in resources from across his administration, through USAID and the Peace Corps, and also through the Departments of State, Labor, and Agriculture” (322). In addition, “The two of us together lobbied other countries’ governments to help fund programming for girls’ education while encouraging private companies and think tanks to commit to the cause”(322). She understands that politics is the only way to uplift the condition of women and girls. She focuses on girls' education thinking that it can reduce discrimination against people based on race, color, and sex.

Michelle experienced various kinds of life from her childhood. She comes from a slave family background. She gets a good education, however, because her father and mother understand the importance of education. Because of her past life

and her attachment to the political and cultural environment, she does not want her children to involve in her world. Even though they are in the White House, she keeps their daughters away from the touch of political influence. She wants her daughters to develop their skills in their own ways. For example, Sasha is a good swimmer and she lets her daughter to involve in her hobby. Michelle writes: “I loved any time I could glimpse my daughters in the context of their own worlds—free from the White House, free from their parents, in the spaces and relationships they’d forged for themselves. Sasha was a strong swimmer, enthusiastic about breaststroke and intent on mastering the butterfly” (290). Moreover, Michelle contends, “She wore a navy-blue swim cap and a one-piece bathing suit and diligently motored through her laps, stopping once in a while to take advice from the coaches, and chatting merrily with her teammates during the prescribed breaks” (290). There is a long journey for Michelle Obama physically, psychologically, and mentally. She comes across various phases of life as she is very close to politics. She experiences racial discrimination from very close. She believes that human beings cannot be the master of their instinct but they become the products of their cultural settings. Political influence is another aspect through which people are guided. This is the reason she is able to guide her children properly with the help of her husband Barack Obama.

Michelle Obama’s experiences are reflected as she grows up with her children. She knows how childhood feelings affect her at a later age. She has a good relationship with her husband. They raise their children with full consent. She reveals that their children need to be away from any kind of biasedness. The couple tries hard to protect their kids from too much exposure to media reports. They know that children need to live in their own ways without the impact of politics. Michelle discloses her children’s secret: “Barack and I did what we could to protect our kids

from too much exposure, declining all media requests for them and working to keep their everyday lives largely out of sight” (315). She stresses, “Their Secret Service escorts supported us by trying to be less conspicuous when following the girls around in public, wearing board shorts and T-shirts instead of suits and swapping their earpieces and wrist microphones for earbud headsets, in order to better blend in at the teenage hangouts they now frequented” (315). She believes that politics is needed to give protection to the people. However, too much exposure to the media and spending time in public life may ruin their private life. She shares the secret that her children move around with less conspicuous dresses. They want to spend their private life as the children of Barack and Michelle not the children of the American President and the first lady. Michelle clearly understands the importance of power which can have both advantages and disadvantages.

Human beings are born, brought up and ultimately die in society. So their relationship with society is lifelong. They can't do activities that hurt the morals of society. Allan Gibbard says, “The key to human nature lies in co-ordination broadly considered” (26). 'Coordination' is one of the many human secrets that eases the lives of humans and makes their lives livable. Organisms like Homo sapiens need to coordinate their actions if they are to survive and flourish in competition with the megafauna of all the living megafaunas. Till today, Homo sapiens are the supreme and the most fitted ones because they have realized the real value of coordination and cooperation. Species like dinosaurs disappeared perhaps because they didn't observe the rules of coordination. They worked to fulfill their individual needs and desires. Besides the lack of coordination, it is no doubt its physiological structure and food habits did not accord with the law of nature.

The sense of coordination is not only limited to one individual to another. Besides, the individual also has to coordinate with society; he has to abandon some of his extreme selfishness for the sake of the common good. Those who neither contribute nor cooperate and give life a meaning other than the common one, according to Alfred Alder, “Not only are they dead; their whole lives were futile. It is as if our earth itself had spoken to them and said, “We don't need you. You are not fit for life. There is no future for your aims and strivings, for the values you hold dear. . . . Be off with you! You are not wanted. Die out and disappear” (11). For Alder, it is the role of society that is stronger and more powerful than an individual. He opines that the thread of an individual existence is anchored in the anchor called 'society'. Society's role is greater for the extinction of an individual existence. So, he who has no respect for society, who doesn't work for the common good, and who works only being guided by his selfish mottos, for such an individual, the society bids farewell forever.

Michelle thinks that her children need to grow in excellent ways. She inspires her children to learn the lesson and overcome the situation from the stories. Stories are sources of inspiration to learn. They can also learn that they are parts of society not the different from their community. She attempts to teach them the importance of school, society, stories, and so on that can guide them in a proper way. The lines read: “These kids had just spent an hour telling me stories that were tragic and unsettling, but I reminded them that those same stories also showed their persistence, self-reliance, and ability to overcome” (313). As the line suggests, “I assured them that they already had what it would take to succeed. Here they were, sitting in a school that was offering them free education, I said, and there was a whole lot of committed and caring adults inside that school who thought they mattered” (313). She has so

much attachment with her children. She listens to her children and interprets the stories to encourage them to fight against adversity. Tragic stories are not bad but the lesson to teach good things. She reiterates that stories can show persistence, self-reliance, and the ability to overcome situations.

To sum up, the memoir embodies the concept of power dynamics that helps in the formation of identity in society. The transformative impact of political power on her own identity and the broader social dynamics highlights the influence of political power in shaping the identity. Entering the realm of politics, one can grapple and power which can be used to challenge the negativity that has been affecting the lives of marginalized individuals in society. The socio-cultural aspects, especially her economic condition and the racial discrimination she confronts make her resemble the hindrances that obstructed her childhood life, shaping and paving the way for the days to come. Though being in the spotlight, one must navigate the complexities, they hold such a power through which one serves as a mechanism for change within society. And these evolutionary changes in one's life encourage one to find strength in their own tasks the way Obama in her memoir is influenced. The way she confronts racial discrimination in her societal sphere, most specifically, even after being the first lady, and the gruesome gaze upon the political behavior of her husband make her realize the irresistible racism in the USA. However, through the political power, she ruptures the inconceivable boundary of racism, at least for herself.

Embodying the idea of representation, one may navigate the complexities of societal expectations and the role of power structures. However, it even helps in shaping individual and collective identities. Nevertheless, humans' actions should align with societal morals allowing one to survive and thrive in a cooperative environment. For this, political power helps in the representation process of the

human being providing individuals from marginalized backgrounds a platform for shared understanding and empowerment. Furthermore, as representation resonates with a negotiation of power one can recognize the role in society and advocate for collective representation, coordinating with individuals for the betterment of the community. So, political power supports altering the dominant ideologies that have affected the growth of marginalized individuals.

In conclusion, the way Obama's memoir picturizes her struggles to construct meaning, and power dynamics, and form an identity in society, reveals that engagement in political power allows amplifying voices, making influential use of policies, and constructing tangible impact on the lives of others. Either it is associated with the struggles a woman of color faces or has to deal with biases, stereotypes, the importance of staying true to oneself and finding ways to represent and assert one's identity within the confines of political power structures. Thus, political power can shape, challenge, and transform one's identity while staying grounded in one's values and aspirations contributing to an inclusive and empowered society.

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