THESIS

NARRATING THE SELF IN A NATIONAL CONTEXT: A STUDY OF BARACK OBAMA'S *THE AUDACITY OF HOPE* AS AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN MATERIAL

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

NARRATING THE SELF IN A NATIONAL CONTEXT: A STUDY OF BARACK OBAMA'S *THE AUDACITY OF HOPE* AS AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN MATERIAL

The question "Why do people write autobiographies?" is quite salient because no form of writing exists in a vacuum, and writing is an instrument of power.

Historically, autobiographical narratives have played a crucial role in political life and campaigns. Political speeches and electoral campaigns have long been replete with stories of individuals who leverage their past "heroic" deeds and their shiny present to justify their candidature and convince citizens of their ability to make life better if elected.

To that end, the crux of this research is to study how presidential candidates in the United States of America tell their life stories, via autobiographies published before elections, as campaign materials to solicit citizens' goodwill and canvass voters. The paper seeks to examine how candidates apply the components of narrative paradigm (narrative coherence and narrative fidelity) and media propaganda strategies to convince the electorate of their abilities to lead the nation, brand themselves as typical representations of citizenship, whilst also introducing and making cases for the ideas and beliefs that underpin their proposed policy agenda.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to every individual and organization across the globe working to bridge the cavernous gap of engagement and communication between the government and the governed in a bid to accelerate sustainable development outcomes.

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For everyone mentioned here, I pray that blessings will abide with you wherever you go and that you all continue to grow and flourish like the Cedars of Lebanon.

Finally, my greatest appreciation goes to God almighty, the Lord of the worlds, whose abundant grace has brought and sustained me this far; hallowed be thy precious name.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Autobiographical narratives have played a crucial role in political life and campaigns. For context, in the Bible, 1 Samuel chapter 17 tells the story of how David lobbied Israelites and convinced King Saul of his ability to defeat Goliath the Philistine. As David made known his intention to confront Goliath in a fight, everyone present at that moment, including King Saul questioned David's ability to face Goliath. Therefore, David replied by reeling off his previous accomplishments as enough reason for his people to believe in him and support his bid to face their common enemy.

According to Atkins and Gaffney (2020, p. 293), the fact that "political leaders are storytellers who tell their stories has become a truth universally acknowledged in politics." Political speeches and electoral campaigns have always been replete with stories of individuals who leverage their past "heroic" deeds and their shiny present to justify their candidature and convince citizens of their ability to make life better if elected. To date, political speeches and election campaigns continue to peddle this narrative sequence. Late John McCain reminds us that he excelled in the American Military and as a US Senator (AP Archive, 2015); Hillary Clinton quips that she, against many odds, succeeded as a Senator and Public Servant (Clinton, 2016); and Mike Bloomberg tries to woo voters by telling stories of how he single-handedly built a global business conglomerate and rebuilt the city of New York from ruins suffered in the devastating 9/11 terrorist attacks (Bloomberg, 2019).

What links all these veteran Republican and Democratic presidential hopefuls is their narrative order. They all try to leverage their previous accomplishments, either in business and or public service, to marshal arguments as regards why they are the best candidates to lead the

country; most experienced to combat the country's common enemies (terrorism, economic recession, global warming, social inequalities, etc.) and or most qualified to help America reach coveted heights (technological advancement, social cohesion, etc.)

Election campaign cycles have now become awash with narratives, in the form of autobiographies, which individuals aspiring for public office exploit to signal their intention to run for office and ultimately situate their life stories in the context of the larger story of their societies in a bid to socialize emotions, develop interpersonal relationships with the voting public and present storified passionate arguments for the deep-seated beliefs that form the basis of their policy agenda (Lepore, 2019).

"Like gods and superheroes, Presidential candidates require origin stories" (Lepore, 2019). Hence, the crux of this research study is to examine how Barack Obama utilizes his autobiography, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* published in the year 2006, to tell his life stories in a bid to solicit citizens' goodwill and canvass voters. Using the narrative paradigm theory as the major theoretical reference, this paper evaluates the overall effectiveness of the autobiography as a media publicity and persuasion tool deployed by Barack Obama:

- to tell stories that make cases for the ideas and beliefs that underpin his proposed policy agenda
- as typical representations of citizenship
- to convince the electorate of his abilities to lead the nation.

1.1 Organization of Thesis

Chapter 1 of this thesis establishes the context of the study, the motivation for undertaking this specific study, and explains the importance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of

relevant literature from research fields that are relevant to the context of this study and discusses the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 3 is the methods section, which includes the cited background of the method, detailed information about the sample/primary data, and discusses the procedures for analyzing the data. In chapter 4, the findings of the study are presented and discussed fully. We discuss the implication, strength, limitations, and future implications of the study in chapter 5. The final chapter which is the reference section lists the research papers that we have drawn insights from to bolster our claims in this study.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Drawing insights from the theories of narrative, narrative paradigm, propaganda, and other relevant fields, this section sets the tone for the arguments and analyses laid forth in subsequent sections to examine and substantiate the claims established as regards how presidential candidates brand the stories they tell within the narrative autobiographies they write, shortly before the election period, as election campaign materials to introduce themselves and their policy ideas to the voting public.

2.1 Narratives

In his book *Consciousness Reconsidered*, Owen Flanagan tells us that "Evidence strongly suggests that humans in all cultures come to cast their own identity in some sort of narrative form" (Flanagan, 1993, p. 198). According to him, human beings are "inveterate storytellers" (p. 198). White (1980), also contends that human beings instinctively depend on narrative to understand the world and make meaning of their experiences. In the same vein, Hardy (1981, p. 1) strongly asserts that the human life revolves basically around narrative and human beings "dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative." Moreover, to emphasize the ideas of MacIntyre (1981), Fisher (1984; 2009) claims that human beings are natural "homo narrans"; storytelling animals. Also, extensive research in the field of psychology supports the notion that human beings primarily rely on narratives to make meaning of their experiences and form worldviews (Shenhav, 2006).

While numerous scholars (Scholes, 1981; Genette, 1982; Prince, 1982; Onega & Landa, 1996; Prince, 1999) have defined narratives in purview of the representation of real or imagined

events in a sequential and or chronological order, Rudrum (2005) argues that even though this intuitive definition of narratives is a constant in narrative studies, "it does not appear to be a sufficient one" (p. 198). Rudrum (2005) then proposes that we "turn to a philosophy of language based on use" (p. 199). According to Rudrum (2005), the only thing that can guide us to make a clear distinction between narrative and non-narrative texts is "a matter of use: how texts or graphics such as these are normally used (consumed, read, acted upon, laughed at, etc.) by members of our linguistic or cultural community" (p. 199). In the same breath, Rudrum (2005) however cautions that the definition of narrative and its delineation from non-narrative texts based on use is somewhat limited as well because narrative "is a dynamic act" which has no "self-identity and ontological fixity" (p. 201). Also, "it does not follow … that any one formula based on one type of language use (representation, in this case) can successfully delimit the frontiers of narrative, given the sheer variety of different uses to which narratives are put" (p. 202).

Given its intrinsic importance to human life and living, narratives have therefore taken pride of place in the fields of humanities, social science, and medical science (Shenhav, 2006). However, despite its ubiquity across different strata of academic discourse, narrative remains a complex concept to define. The concept takes on varying definitions across and within different fields given that, "when a concept is borrowed and transferred from one field to another, the result is usually both the obfuscation of its original meaning and the illumination of previously unseen aspects" (Shenhav, 2006, p. 247). As a result, one can consequently assert that a standard, universal definition of narrative is, and might remain elusive. Thus, one cannot but agree with Schiff (2012) who claims that narrative is an "empty vessel configured for each user who can define the term in any way that he or she likes" (p. 34).

Schiff's (2012) assertion brings us to another important question about narratives, which is, what can we do and accomplish with narratives, or to put it succinctly, what functions do narratives serve? Understanding the functions of narratives requires that we visualize narrative not as a noun but as a verb; to conceptualize it not as a "static entity" but more as a "dynamic process" and "an expressive action, unfolding in space and time" (pp. 35-36). To begin with, Schiff (2012) states that the primary function of narrative is "making present"; to convey our understanding and experiences of life in a meaningful way whilst evaluating both in the context of time (present, past, and future) in collaboration with co-actors. Other functions of narrative include "to establish close bonds, to organize past events, to give color and pathos to our lives, to attribute cause and agency to our experiences, to establish social identity, and even to lie and conceal" (Schiff, 2012, p. 44).

Schiff (2012) argues that it is what we can accomplish with narrative, that is, the meanings and experiences we can articulate with them, that make narrative special, interesting, and pervasive.

2.1.1 Personal Narratives

Stahl (1983) defines personal narrative as the story of the real incidents in an individual's life which is narrated in the first person. According to Stahl, these kinds of stories are personal and are owned by the tellers because these tellers "are the ones responsible for recognizing in their own experiences, something that is 'story-worthy' and for bringing their perception of those experiences together with the conventions of 'story' in appropriate contexts and thus creating identifiable, self-contained narratives" (p. 268). In the same vein, Langellier (1989) states that personal narrative "recapitulates a remarkable action from time past in a linear sequence from beginning, to middle, to end in the attitudinal perspective of the narrator" (p. 247). The phrase "… in the attitudinal perspective of the narrator" from Langllier's conception of personal narrative

lends credence to Stahl's claim that personal narrative is owned and shaped by the teller. It is this ownership of the stories and the ability of individuals to shape these stories as they deem fit that make these kinds of narratives personal.

Drawing insights from the definitions above, personal narrative, for the purpose of this study, is conceptualized as the true story of an individual's life written sequentially from the first-person point of view.

Having explored different definitions of personal narrative and operationalizing it in the context of this study, it is imperative to mention that just as it is with narrative, the concept of personal narrative is ubiquitous, has crossed disciplinary boundaries, and therefore has no stable or universally accepted definition. Langellier (1989) shares the same sentiment by affirming that personal narrative, while rich and diverse, is equally "problematic," "confusing and sometimes conflicting" (p. 244). However, the fuzzy definitional boundaries of personal narrative do not delimit its applicability to this study whatsoever.

Individuals choose to narrate details of their personal lives for numerous, interrelated reasons: "for the pleasure of narrating, the joy of reliving the past, as self-presentation, as a demonstration of communication competence, as a gesture toward intimacy, to bond a social group, to enact a social drama, as "talking to learn," to explain or illustrate a point, and so forth" (Langellier, 1989, 272). However, all of the aforementioned intents and purposes can be subsumed under two major categories: political and social.

To emphasize the political function of narratives, Mumby (1987) posits that personal narratives are not by any means neutral. He claims that the scope of personal narratives goes beyond having an individual tell their story to represent established realities of their lived

experience. According to him, it "is rather a politically motivated production of a certain way of perceiving the world which privileges certain interests over others" (114) which implies that personal narratives are indeed biased and sentimental.

In total agreement with Mumby (1987), Langellier (1989) states that as a ground for meaning formation, personal narratives conform to and perpetuate the pre-established and hegemonic manifestations of reality that eventually lead to "discourse closure" which restricts the interpretations and meanings that can be attached to issues and activities.

> Discourse closure distorts, marginalizes, and misrepresents particular groups so that certain realities hold sway over other competing realities. Thus, all personal narratives are ideological because they evolve from a structure of power relations and simultaneously produce, maintain, and reproduce that power structure. From this perspective, the political function of narrative is neither supplementary, to other perspectives, auxiliary, nor optional. A political function obtains for all narratives, whether or not they contain explicit political content (Langellier, 1989, p.267).

One can therefore deduce from Langellier's statement that personal narratives are rooted in the ideological realities of the societies where they emanate. Hence, the realm of personal narratives is a ground of competition where different stories, each offering subjective ideas about the world jostles to gain prominence and power, whether deliberately or unconsciously, over other stories.

Moreover, equally important is the social function of personal narrative. According to Langallier (1989), personal narrative is the primary mode for constructing, shaping, and transmitting social values and cultural realities. Likewise, Stahl posits that personal narrative is the most apposite vessel for articulating the cultural and traditional inclinations of every society because these stories reenact and showcase individual behaviors in practical terms: "Existentially, the personal experience narrator not only acts or experiences but 'thinks about' his action,

evaluates it, learns from it, and tells the story – not to express his values, but to build them, to create them, to remake them each time he tells his stories" (Stahl, 1983, p. 274). This implies that narrating personal stories is a social action as much as it is a political action. Thus, each personal narrative contributes to and reflects the cultural values of the societies where they emanate.

Besides, Polanyi (1979) notes that for personal narratives to be considered "self-evidently important and true" it has to emphasize "only material generally agreed upon by members of the producer's culture" (207). Polanyi's point further stresses that the act of narrating personal stories is a collective one, a synergistic and enduring interaction between the teller, the listener/reader, and the culture of their society. Thus, no personal narrative can endure outside of their socio-cultural context.

Moreover, Labov (1987) and Polanyi (1985) emphasize the fact that every personal narrative must have an evaluative function to be considered whole. According to both scholars, this evaluative function reiterates that every personal story must make a point: "Speakers tell stories in conversation to make a point – to transmit a message, often some sort of moral evaluation or implied critical judgment – about the world the teller shares with other people" (Polanyi, 1985, p. 187). It is this evaluative component that conveys the significance of the events in the narrative, how those events make/made the narrator feel, what those events mean for them and how those events affect their relationship with other members of their community. In essence, it is only in this sense that personal narratives can contribute meaningfully to the concept of self.

Langallier (1989) further maintains that it is this evaluation component that distinguishes an ordinary report from a personal narrative because unlike what obtains in a report, the narrator of a personal story must convey what the narrated events and experiences mean for them whilst

also "showing how the experience is remarkable in some way - unusual, dangerous, strange" (247). At the same time, tellers of personal narratives can as well exploit the evaluation component to present themselves in a favorable light and accentuate the personal qualities of theirs which are admirable, as an act of self-presentation and aggrandizement. This component of evaluation captures to a degree, the essence of this study which is to examine how politicians aspiring to the office of the president of the United States deploy this evaluation component in the autobiographies they write during the election campaign season to tell stories that:

1. emphasize their admirable qualities
2. present them as typical American citizens who live by American values
3. show that they can lead the country

Consequently, they tell these kinds of stories for the overall purpose of soliciting the goodwill of citizens and canvassing voters.

2.1.2 Public Narratives

Given that politics, policy debates, and social discourse are enacted in the public sphere, politicians who are at the center of these debates and discourse, live a substantial part of their lives in the public arena. Hence, when they write their autobiographies, it is imperative that they include details about the significant events and experiences from their public life and how those events and experiences have shaped their thoughts, ideological standpoints plans, and ambitions for the near and distant future. Therefore, in the scope of political autobiographies, a study of the public aspect of politicians' lives is as important as the study of the private aspect of their lives if we will arrive at a coherent, clear, and holistic understanding of politicians' autobiographies.

Defined as a coherent fusion of “a story of self”, “a story of us”, and “a story of now”, the public narrative is a leadership exercise driven by the need to motivate other people “to join you in action on behalf of a shared purpose” (Ganz, 2009, p. 1). According to Ganz (2009), the “story of self” component emphasizes personal stories that highlight an individual’s experiences and values, what those experiences and values mean, and how those have prepared the teller for leadership: “By telling personal stories of challenges we have faced, choices we have made, and what we learned from the outcomes, we become more mindful of our moral resources and, at the same time, share our wisdom to inspire others” (p. 2).

Furthermore, the “story of us” stresses the beliefs, values, and shared cultural experiences of a community to connect with, appealing to, and socializing the emotions of community members in a bid to garner goodwill and popular support for the teller’s cause: “One way we establish an “us” – a shared identity – is through telling of shared stories, stories through which we can articulate the values we share, as well as the particularities that make us an “us” (p. 4). However, Ganz (2009) emphasizes the relationship between the story of self and the story of us by stating that in the process of constructing one of both stories, the narrator may realize that they have to alter one of both to suit their purpose appropriately.

In addition, similar to the rhetorical strategy, Kairos, the “story of now” recognizes a cause, an existential threat or opportunity - social, political, economic - and amplifies the urgency of that cause to present an argument that moves other members of the community to action and inspire them to support the narrator. However, Ganz (2009) maintains that a “story of now” is not “simply a call to be for or against something” but “a call to take ‘hopeful’ action” (p. 4); which means clearly articulating the benefits of taking urgent action to address the issue at stake, the downsides of inaction and steps that each member of the community can take at the moment to contribute to

solving the problem or actualizing the opportunity, as the case may be. The integration of this urgent call to action, backed with persuasive arguments, in the autobiographies of political candidates is a strategic attempt to prompt citizens to act in a specific way: to support their ideas and action plan and ultimately vote for them.

Moreover, given that "a story of self," which one can also refer to as personal narratives going by the way Ganz (2009) has operationalized it, is a functional aspect of the troika that makes up the public narrative, one can therefore postulate that public narrative flows directly from and is inextricably intertwined with personal narrative. Hence, it is safe to assume that no public narrative will be complete without a personal narrative component.

In the same vein, one can also presume that every personal narrative or "story of self" incorporates some amount of "story of us" – a vital component of public narrative - because as Mumby (1987) and Langellier (1989) posit, personal narratives are embedded in the social context of the communities they are set in, exploit shared cultural experiences to facilitate understanding and acceptance, are influenced by the dominant power structures in those communities, and therefore remain one of the premier means of creating and fostering the customs and values of communities. Similarly, May (2004) opines that personal and public narratives are not mutually exclusive because public narratives "speak to and are employed in the construction of personal narratives" (p. 5). Thus, it appears that there is a thin line between public and personal narratives. An enduring, symbiotic relationship subsists between public (story of us) and personal narratives (story of self) and one cannot endure without the other.

While there seems to be no hard and fast distinction between personal and public narratives, both types of narrative share an important trait. Just as it is with personal narratives, the primary

function of public narratives, according to May (2004) is for the creation and construction of identity which is "grounded in the wish for recognition" (p. 8). Consequently, this focus on the 'construction' of identity to gain recognition is at the heart of this study: the focal objective of this study is to examine how political candidates vying for the office of the president of the United States merge their personal and public narratives into autobiographical narratives that draw insights, stories and parallels between their public and private lives to finetune their image and portray them, and their proposed ideas, as the best fit for the Oval Office.

2.1.3 Group Narratives

Stradling the intersections of personal and public narratives is another narrative genre that we can refer to as "group narrative". May (2004) tries to explain group narratives by stating that "within a country, there are different narratives available for women and men, for the working-classes and for people of various ethnic or cultural backgrounds" (p. 7). In this vein, Peters (1981) operationalizes group narrative "as the interweaving of a number of lives by one writer to show how they interact with each other" (p. 41). Hence, one can conceptualize group narratives as narratives that are exclusive and only identifiable to people who share similar beliefs and experiences which may be based on gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, religion, profession, socio-economic class, or sexual orientation.

The essence of group narratives is to examine the relationship between an individual and the group they belong to (familial, social, cultural, political) to "explore the relationships or the shared ideas and activities of the group" (Caine, 2010, p. 46). Also, Copeland (2015, p. 83) notes that group biography can also unify and amplify the collective experiences, values, and aspirations of members of the same group.

Going by Copeland's (2015) assertion, one may deduce that group narrative can as well be a viable tool for members of marginalized groups, or members of groups that have experienced collective trauma, to make sense of their experience and amplify their voices.

As it has been explained previously, narratives are socio-political, and the experiences of sub-groups within a country/culture are varied. It is therefore not unusual for some narratives to typify the peculiar socio-political experiences or struggles of particular subgroups within a country/culture while excluding the experiences of other groups. Hence, we can have narratives written by a Black person specifically for other Black people; written by one LGBTQ person specifically for other LGBTQ people; written by a single mother specifically for other single women; written by one lawyer specifically for other lawyers, etc. Typical examples of these kinds of narratives include: *Man of Steel and Velvet: A Guide to Masculine Development* by Aubrey Andelin which is described on Amazon as "a book that teaches men to be men"; *How To Make It In The New Music Business* by Ari Herstand written for "other like-minded artists, the ones who want to forge their own path." Moreover, as digital communication evolves, group narrative has been evolving with it and moving into digital spaces. Females In Nigeria is an apposite example of a digital group narrative. The 1.7 million members strong private Facebook group is a female-only digital narrative space where Nigerian women share their experiences and provide support for each other: a popular tagline amongst members is "women supporting women."

Eakin (1999) ultimately posits that, despite its seeming principal focus on community identity, the main character in-group narratives is still the individual even though the individual's identity is constructed and viewed in the context of "an entire social environment" or "key other individuals" (p. 69).

The writing of narratives is a socio-political act just as group narratives, as explained above, have also been proved to be social, cultural, and political tools as well. It therefore follows that identity and group affiliation (racial/ethnic) form an important part of narratives, especially as regards public narratives written by politicians whose lives and ideas are sometimes viewed and scrutinized from the prisms of their racial/ethnic affiliations.

2.1.4 Narrative Persona

Atkins and Gaffney (2020) purport that "a leader usually performs two narratives: one about 'themselves', and the other the 'story' they purport to tell" (p. 293). In the same vein, Lippmann (1922) states that "there are at least two distinct selves, the public and regal self, the private and human. The biographies of great people fall more or less readily into the histories of these two selves" (p. 2). This lends further credence to the argument made by Atkins and Gaffney (2020) that the persona of leaders may not necessarily correspond with the actual person (p. 295). It therefore follows that leaders often have dual personas: a private persona, which is who they are behind closed doors, and a public persona which is reserved for public appearances.

The overarching postulation of this section is that presidential aspirants exploit autobiographical narratives to bolster their public persona and to exhibit that they are fit to uphold the virtues, values, and ethics of the public office they aspire to.

It is worth emphasizing that persona, as conceived in the context of this study, is distinctive from real character; unlike a person's real character, their persona refers to a 'perceived construction' and not necessarily who they are (Atkins & Gaffney, 2020).

Going by Carl Jung's definition of persona as "a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual" (quoted in Kelsey, 2017b: 42), it is clear that leaders often veil their real character and

attitude to adopt one that suits their public agenda in a bid to cop goodwill and or maintain authority. For clarity, it is worthy to state that 'masks' do not necessarily connote a subterfuge or deception: people, especially public individuals wear masks to assume a public persona and to consciously delineate their public/personal personality, often rooted in citizenship and patriotism from their private personality as the expectations of both fronts (the public and home fronts) may diverge sometimes.

One other probable explanation for why leaders wear masks is that public institutions are shaped by cultural influences, ideological conceptions, myths, and archetypal figures (Atkins & Gaffney, 2020); hence, the public has certain conceptions and expectations as regards how individuals occupying positions of power within those public institutions should act, and any perceived discrepancy between what leaders are expected to be in the public eye and what they are might undermine their authority or deplete their social capital. For example, while alcohol is not an illegal substance, it will be unbecoming of a president of the United States or a Supreme Court judge to get drunk in public:

> It is important to emphasize that these 'stories' not only require a coherent plot, but that the protagonist must meet the expectations of their audience. If these conditions are not fulfilled, then the narratives will not persuade. Thus, if a designated 'hero' does not perform heroic deeds (or is perceived as not doing so), for instance, then the narrative - and its credibility – will collapse (Atkins & Gaffney, 2020, p. 296).

However, this does not mean that a president or judge cannot get drunk in the confines of their homes, away from media attention and public glare. This follows logically from Atkin and Gaffney's (2020) notion that only the persona that is performed in public is "politically relevant" (p. 295).

Besides, this "performed persona corresponds to 'recognised' personae, archetypal cultural figures that the politician may intentionally or unintentionally emulate" (Atkins & Gaffney 2020,

p. 295). These cultural archetypes include the healer, the hero, the outlaw, the villain, the sage, the warrior, and the trickster (Atkins & Gaffney, 2020).

In addition, Atkins & Gaffney (2020) also posit that the narratives used by leaders to paint their public persona follow a set pattern:

> These narratives usually follow a sequence (Bal, 2009) involving ideas such as: something has gone wrong; certain characters ('they') are responsible; I/you are not 'them'; some of us have already begun to reflect upon redress; we shall undertake a task; it may be a difficult one; and, with effort/virtue/leadership, we shall restore harmony (p. 296).

Also, this statement reiterates the assertion already established in the *American Politics and American Autobiography* section of this research study that autobiographical narratives written by individuals aspiring to the office of the president of the United States contain a call for political action and revolution.

More so, the kind of persona that a leader cultivates may be influenced by prevailing social, economic, political, and cultural conditions because the value that audiences attach to persona conceptions is not fixed, and the 'performance landscape' is bound to change from time to time as culture shifts, as political and economic fortune changes: "After all, 'strength' may be welcome at one moment, but seen as intransigence at another" (Atkins & Gaffney, 2020, p. 295). A fitting example is how former UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown's failure to call an early general election in the 2010 general election dealt a huge blow to his public image as a strong, brilliant, and adept leader (Atkins, 2015b).

According to Atkin and Gaffney (2020), a classic and typical example of a leader who perfected the art of persona performance is former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher who actively cultivated an effective persona and was widely understood in public as "ruthless, courageous and uncompromising" (p.295).

2.2 Narrative Paradigm

Every political document (including campaign autobiographies, manifestos, political speeches, policy briefs, legislative memos) before anything else, is an argument. Whether it is courting political opponents to support a bill, canvassing voters on a campaign trail, advocating improved funding for a social service, or deliberating with citizens at a town hall meeting, the ultimate goal of politicians and policy makers is not to entertain but to persuade citizens to support a cause, change their behavior or shift their mindset on a social/political/cultural issue. Hence, one can postulate that any political document, written or spoken, is an argument first even if it can be further categorized as a piece of art.

Moreover, to note that all political document makes an argument and seeks to persuade is to agree that rhetoric is an important component to consider in the context of all political communication. As Aristotle and Robert (2004) succinctly put it, "rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion" (p. 5). Besides, in their definition of rhetoric, Aristotle and Robert (2004) further note that rhetoric is the most effective means of persuasion:

> Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not a function of any other art. Every other art can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject matter … But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us (pp. 6-7).

Therefore, the fact that the primary preoccupation of this study is to analyze a campaign autobiography makes it imperative to examine the concept of rhetoric and how it relates to political documents generally and the current study specifically to enhance the scope and understanding of this study.

Charteris-Black (2011) states that the classical tradition of rhetoric according to Aristotle rests on the artistic proofs of ethos, logos and pathos which politicians and any orator for that matter must adhere to if they will succeed in persuading their audiences: "in addition to taking a

stance that was morally worthy (ethos) and proofs to support argument (logos), the successful rhetorician should also be able to arouse the feelings (pathos)" (p. 7).

According to Charteris-Black (2011), politicians and orators who do not adhere to the proofs of ethos, pathos and logos in their speeches/arguments will most likely not be able to persuade their audience because "voters make decisions based on their judgements of honesty, morality and integrity of politicians. These views arise from considerations such as the consistency of actions with words and the efficacy of political arguments" (p. 1). The author notes further that a politician can only persuade their audience, if and only if they are "morally virtuous (*vir bonus*)", that is, if their behavior "met with social approval" (p. 7).

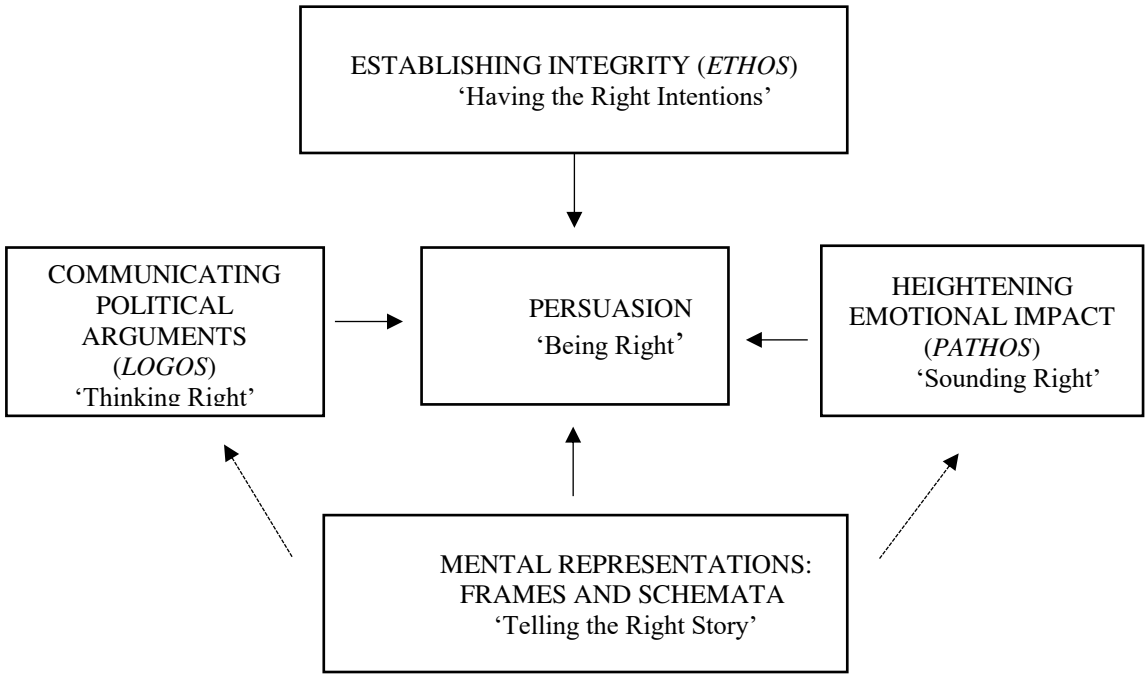

Figure 2.1 *Rhetorical means for persuasion in politics. From "Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor", by J. Charteris-Black, 2011*

While Aristotle and Robert (2004) and Charteris-Black's (2011) assertions that rhetoric is a viable means of persuasion is a valid conception, it is however important to note that rhetoric is not the only credible method of persuasion. The narrative paradigm theory conceived by Walter Fisher (1984; 1987; 2009) does not totally agree with rhetoric claims and approach to persuasion and therefore seeks to reconceptualize and extend same to provide an alternative avenue to achieve persuasive effects and enhance the analysis of communicative speeches and texts.

According to Fisher (1984):

> The narrative paradigm challenges the notions that human communication – if it is to be considered rhetorical – must be an argumentative form, that reason is to be attributed only to discourse marked by clearly identifiable modes of inference and/or implication, and that the norms for evaluation of rhetorical communication must be rational standards taken essentially from informal or formal logic. The narrative paradigm does not deny reason and rationality; it reconstitutes them, making them amenable to all forms of human communication (p. 2).

As stated above, Fisher's (1984) argument slightly negates the claims of rhetoric theory propped on the argument that the means of persuading an audience is to demonstrate that political arguments and policies are based on rationality: "this is what I describe as 'thinking right' because reasonable arguments are inherently persuasive" (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 14).

Fisher's (1984; 2009) narrative paradigm bolsters and lends more credence to McIntyre's (1981) claim that every human being is "essentially a storytelling animal" (p. 201). Hence, to connect narratively with readers instinctively, politicians dip into the pool of shared national stories (values and myths) that the audience is familiar with and weave those stories into their autobiographical narratives to relate their experience and introduce their ideas and plan. The essence of integrating these shared national stories into their autobiographical narratives is to make their interaction with readers personable and give readers a sense of ownership in their narrative all in the bid to garner unflinching support.

The narrative paradigm theory contends that all human discourse contains elements of story-telling - legal arguments, academic lectures, business negotiations, political debates, or scientific experiments – and any form of communication that seeks to affect people's attitude, belief or action must necessarily involve stories (Fisher, 1984, p. 3). Essentially, the narrative paradigm does not deny reason and rationality (Fisher, 1984, p. 2): instead, it is a fusion of "two traditional strands in the history of rhetoric: the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme." By referring to the argumentative persuasive theme and the literary aesthetic theme as "traditional strands", Fisher (1984) contends that the literary aesthetic theme and the argumentative persuasive theme, that is, the idea of using stories as the primary means of persuasion and the idea of using rational arguments as the primary means of persuasion respectively are not a novelty. Fisher's argument is that both strands have been in existence for long but have been used as separate means to pursue persuasion instead of being used complementarily. The major thrust of the narrative paradigm theory is therefore to combine the strengths of the argumentative persuasive theme and the literary aesthetic theme to achieve more forceful persuasive effects.

Furthermore, unlike rhetoric which revolves around truthfulness, evidence, or strength of arguments, the narrative paradigm is concerned with meaningfulness. Fisher (1984) states that persuading people is more about having good reasons and telling compelling, meaningful stories than putting forward convincing arguments supported with copious evidence: this ties to the idea that human beings are storytelling animals by instinct: "the ground for determining meaning, validity, reason, rationality, and truth must be a narrative context" (p. 3).

More so, people's mores, attitudes, and upbringing determine to a large extent, what they accept as 'good reasons' to believe a story. According to the narrative paradigm, all human beings

apply similar rational standards to judge stories. Hence, narrative rationality is a descriptive account of all instances of human communication; it is the critical lens through which people judge and make sense of stories about them and others. In extension, the ultimate tests of narrative rationality are narrative fidelity and narrative coherence; these two tests help determine "what makes one story better than others" (Fisher, 1984, p. 16).

To start with, narrative coherence deals with the internal consistency of stories. It seeks to answer questions like: Do actors behave in a way that is consistent with their character traits throughout the story? Is the story sequential? Does the narrator muddle or leave out important details? Does the story sound probable to the hearer? (Fisher, 1987).

The idea of fidelity on the other hand concerns how the story plugs into the reality of the external world as we know it? The concept of fidelity taps into personal values. It examines whether the story aligns with the hearer's real-life experiences because it is believed that people tend to believe accounts that fit with the way they view the world in terms of values, culture, tradition, and history. Narrative fidelity is the bridge that forms the bond of identification between characters or narrators and their audience; it makes it possible for members of the audience to empathize deeply with characters and see themselves vividly in the story. Moreover, narrative fidelity maintains that an ideal audience exists, and such an audience recognizes the timeless values embedded in stories. Examples of such values are: beauty, wisdom, courage, justice, friendship, and unity (Fisher, 1987).

It is apposite here to mention that narrative fidelity appears to be the link between narrative paradigm and Charteris-Black's (2011) conception of rhetoric theory. Both concepts categorically state that for political communication to be persuasive, the orator has to tell stories that fit the audience's conception of how their society works:

> From a psychological perspective a political leader also needs to convince that he is right by creating mental representations that influence the audience's ways of understanding situations; 'telling the right story' means providing a set of frames or schemata that make political actions and agents intelligible by providing an explanation that fits with the audience's previous experience and assumptions about how the world works (p. 14).

This further bolsters Fisher's (1978, 1984, 2009) claim that the narrative paradigm does not outrightly deny the canons of rhetoric theory but seeks to broaden its scope and applicability.

Overall, to connect with their audience on a higher level, autobiographers seeking to sway citizens, therefore, need to adhere to the principle of narrative coherence by narrating their stories in ways that align with how those citizens conceptualize their world and situate their place in it. In addition, it is equally important that political autobiographers ensure that the stories they tell align with the principle of narrative fidelity by infusing their narratives with common cultural values that hold true for their audience while relating their personal experiences in light of shared mythical themes that will resonate with the audience.

Equally important is to state that the narrative paradigm theory is not without criticism. For instance, Griffin et al. (2019) opine that the narrative paradigm theory denies the rhetoric of possibility and probability because it is premised on the fundamental assumption that stories cannot transcend what people already know and believe. It defies the validity of narrative genres like fantasy or myth which are driven basically by imagination and exaggeration. To discountenance this criticism, Fisher (1985, p. 356) argues that narrative paradigm can be applied to study scientific and technical discourse because this kind of discourse is "a form of literature" and "informed by metaphor (and myth), contains "plots," and is time-bound." Therefore, the narrative paradigm is important to the study of science fiction, fantasy fiction, and tall tales as much as it is instructive for the study of (auto)biographies, fiction, and other believable forms of communication. However, the criteria for evaluating each form of the text might differ because

they belong to different genres. Notwithstanding, the principles of narrative fidelity and coherence applies to them all.

2.3 Autobiography

Given its tempestuous history, one can say that autobiography arguably remains one of the most contested fields of study. Eakin, quoting Paul De Man in Lejeune and Eakin (1989), claims that autobiography is a problematic genre that cannot easily be defined.

> Empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition (viii).

However, given the rise in the study of autobiographies in the past three to five decades, numerous scholars have strived to provide succinct definitions of this genre.

According to Lejeune (1989), an autobiography is a "Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular, the story of his personality." Fowler (1988) also defines it as "the book standing apart from the principal books, an adjunct book, an exercise book in the somewhat shameful art of confession."

Going by both definitions, therefore, one can boldly postulate that an autobiography chronicles the life of the author; their history, experiences, fears, aspirations, values, beliefs, their view of the world, their relationship with society, and the people that inhabit it. It shows how the author has chosen to tell their stories, not only to other people but to themselves as well. As a result, an autobiography should then be written in such a way that it seamlessly blends the writer's previous experiences with their present apprehensions and future ambitions. In essence, autobiographies should creatively tell a story of the author's individual 'self' and not just rehash events and dates. Autobiographies do not only narrate what happened; they also give contextual

information of why it happened, what it represents in the author's past, how it relates to the present and what it portends for the future. In addition, drawing from Brannen (2020), it is possible to postulate that narratives such as autobiographies are 'grand narratives', for the fact that the authors of such narratives give a comprehensive account of the remarkable events and experiences that have shaped their lives over an extended period premised on an appeal to universal and or cultural values. These kinds of narratives are unlike 'small stories' or 'partial narratives' (Brannen, 2020, p. 97) which provide accounts or "present or recent experiences and practices of daily life." Distinguishing autobiographies as 'grand narratives' that thrives on appealing to universal and or cultural values iterates the focus of this study which is to examine how authors of political autobiographies draw from the pool of American myths and cultural values/experiences to brand themselves as perfect presidential candidates and reinforce their political ideas and development plan as what the American society needs to flourish.

However, given that an autobiographical work is a deliberate endeavor to recollect the past and the self from memory, it is therefore undeniably prone to deliberate or unconscious distortions and slips. As a result, the genre has been criticized on the basis of 'truth'. Hence, numerous scholars have discounted autobiography as nothing but fictitious and untrue, propping their arguments on the fact that it also uses the same techniques as works of fiction. However, Lejeune's (1989) "autobiographical pact" addresses this by stating that individuals do not read works of fiction in the same way that they read autobiographies. This is because, an autobiographer, by labeling their work as an autobiography or memoir has entered a 'pact' with readers and made the commitment to narrate their life truthfully. On the other hand, a novelist, by labeling their work as fiction, makes it clear that the work is nothing but make-believe. Also, the distinction between an autobiography and a work of fiction is often marked by the fact that the author and the

narrator/character in an autobiography are the same person which means that the author is telling the story of their own life. However, the author of a novel and the protagonist/narrator of the novel are often different people. This distinction between autobiography and fiction, therefore, means that the legal responsibilities of an autobiographer are quite different from that of the novelist: if an autobiographer misrepresents a person or an event in their work, they can be charged to a law court and sued for libel, slander, defamation of character, etc.

However, no matter how striking the resemblance is between a fictional character or event and a living (or dead) person or event, a novelist cannot be sued for misrepresenting people or events in their work because they do not lay any claim to truth. However, as previously stated, Lejeune (1989) also reiterates that factors like memory problems or the method of narrating may constrain the effort of an autobiographer to capture issues perfectly.

Furthermore, McCord (1985, p. 751) argues that we should not see autobiographies as "attempts to capture or mirror an objective reality or truth, but as efforts to produce a plausible, convincing version of ideas or events, of which there are many other possible versions". In the same vein, Hellman (1980, p. 51) also contends that an autobiography "is the truth as I see it, but the truth as I saw it doesn't have much to do with the truth. It is as if I have fitted parts of a picture puzzle and then a child overturned it and threw out the pieces". Fowley (1988) states that the issue about truth in autobiographies is not the autobiographer's fault because "the life of a man is always larger than the book he writes about his life. From the opening lines, the autobiographer knows that all is approximate. And the reason for this is the language he has to use. Language is opaque".

Like Lejeune (1989), Satchidanandan (2001) tries to settle this concern by stating that once a person starts to read an autobiography, an unspoken pact of trust is established between the writer

and the reader. Thus, the reader has an ethical obligation to call off all forms of distrust and read the author's claims as the truth and nothing but the truth.

In the same way that autobiography has been criticized based on truth, it has also been disparaged based on its relationship with the notion of self. The newfound profound interest in autobiographies according to Olney (1980, p. 23) is due to "a fascination with the self and its profound, its endless mysteries and accompanying that fascination, an anxiety about the self, an anxiety about the dimness and vulnerability of that entity". However, Hetata (2003) dispels criticisms like Olney's by stating unequivocally, that scholars should be mindful of the fact that writing is an instrument of power and there's absolutely nothing wrong if writing is used to reinforce the self and to cultivate unparalleled, far-reaching influence for an autobiographer.

The preceding paragraph presents a perfect segue into a very important question which is, "Why do people write autobiographies?" This question is quite salient because no form of writing exists in a vacuum. According to Spengemann (1980), the overarching reason why individuals feel the compelling need to write their autobiography is "to address the same problem of self-definition that have taxed autobiographers ever since Augustine discovered that the self is a hard ground to plough" (p xiii). Hence, the quest to define the self, for whatever reason, is the primary reason why autobiographers write.

Moreover, Smith and Watson (1996) postulate that "writing autobiography testified to arrival in "America" and the achievement of an "American identity" (p. 5). Both reasons amplified by Franklin hints at the fact that publishing one's autobiography can be an act of didacticism and a way to reaffirm cultural identity.

Besides, Swindells (1995) notes that writing autobiographies, besides being an exercise in self-aggrandizement can as well be used as a tool of protest and advocacy by individuals and groups who have experienced trauma and systemic oppression.

From the foregoing, therefore, one can postulate simply that self-definition, self-preservation, self-promotion, and identity formation are some of the major reasons why individuals author their autobiographies.

Talking about autobiographies written by politicians specifically, Smith and Watson (1996) claim that "political candidates work up compelling personal narratives that project "character" and "values"" (p. 2), because "like gods and superheroes, presidential candidates require origin stories" (Lepore, 2019). Political candidates, therefore, employ their autobiographies as a means for narrating their origin stories; to emphasize their cultural identity, and to showcase how their lives are real-time enactments of the character and values that their communities hold dear.

2.3.1 Autobiography and the American Myth

This section extends the preceding one further by exploring the relationship between autobiography and the American myth and explicating how both components are merged by political candidates in the autobiographical narratives they publish during campaign cycles to further their goal of spreading their political ideas and canvassing voters.

To begin with, Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) claim that settling on a definite definition of "American Myth" is very problematic because, by nature, the myth of society stems from the culture of that society and since cultural values are bound to change as individual and social experiences evolve, it is guaranteed that myths will change as well.

Another reason they gave for the seeming difficulty to agree on a single definition of the American myth is the fact that America is a democratic society that thrives on competition between and within "its individuals and its institutions for the allegiance of the people" (p. 502). Hence, each individual or institution holding power at a particular time shapes cultural values and myths according to its own needs and wishes. Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) however caution that the competition which has become the hallmark of American cultural myth does not in any way water down its power but serves to bolster it further.

Nonetheless, they note that American myths must remain adaptable, malleable, and amenable so that they can continue to accurately reflect "contemporary beliefs" (p. 502).

Furthermore, Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) argue that there is an enduring relationship between the American myth and autobiography because "the language of the autobiographer is the common possession of his culture" and is, therefore "filled with the assumed values of his society." The authors further state that "writing about oneself brings together the personal, unassimilated experiences of the writer and the shared values of his culture" (p. 502). It is in this same vein that Swindells (1995) asserts that:

> However much autobiography is supposed to be about personal life, 'the personal' always stands for something additional to itself. As in John Mayor's notorious 'back to basics' campaign, the private lives of the great and famous are closely bound up with accountability in the public sphere. The personal account provides both the record of the life and also the means by which that life can be held to account. It is because of this accountability that autobiography and biography, probably more than any other written form, have a volatile relationship to censorship and laws of defamation (p. 9).

What the argument above articulates is that in actuality, the experience of every individual in a society is tied together inextricably because they are part of the same culture and all draw from the same value repository. Hence, the actions and inactions of one individual (especially those who

hold a position of power and trust within the society) have the potential to affect the lives of every other person in the society. In essence, lives narrated in the form of autobiography are prone to public criticism.

Examining the history of the American myth, Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) reveal that American myth is rooted in Christian mythology: "an adaptation of Christian mythology to the particular problems of American life, for which it has been both a source and a means of solution" (p. 503). Just like the Christian myth is concerned primarily with connecting the human to the divine, the American myth which is modeled after it seeks to link individuals with the general public:

> This function of myth is particularly important for our purposes, since in autobiography the writer explains his life by depicting himself according to culturally evaluated images of character. As he turns his private experiences into language, he assumes one of the many identities outlined in the myth and so asserts his connection with his culture (p. 504).

Also, as the Christian myth exemplifies the model life as a journey from sin to redemption, the American myth "describes human history as a pilgrimage from imperfection to perfection" (Spengemann and Lundquist, 1965), or more colloquially, a rise from grass to grace, from nothingness to prominence.

In the same vein, Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) further specifically identify this zero to hero component as one of the elements of American myth. Other elements that the authors mention are "the religious overtones of secular success" and "the identification of affluence and worldly reputation with happiness" (p. 509).

The inextricable relationship between American myth and autobiography makes the American myth a potent and necessary tool that anyone who aspires to a position of power in

American society can leverage to define themselves and relate their experiences with those of the other members of their society.

> Like all myths, this one directs individual energies toward a common goal, by evaluating forms of behavior, delineating appropriate roles, and making it generally possible for individuals to relate their lives to a larger pattern of value and purpose, to transcend their existential limitations and to extend beyond their proper selves their sphere of influence (p. 504).

Thus, the postulation that one can extract from the foregoing paragraphs is that political candidates weave popular cultural American myths and values into the stories they tell in their autobiographies to portray themselves as heroes and protectors of American people and values to place their lived experience in the context of the larger American experience and ultimately appeal to the emotions of citizens.

Moreover, given that "every myth has its heroes and its villains, its victors and its victims," autobiographers tend to evaluate their lived experience in terms of "how well they contribute to "progress," however that term is defined at any time" (p. 504). Consequently, this section further highlights that American autobiographers who aspire to the office of the president incorporate stories of prior engagement in public service in their autobiographies to show that they have indeed contributed to the progress of American society.

2.3.2 Autobiography and American Politics

American politics and political thought have considerable influence on American autobiography in the same way that American autobiography actively shapes American politics and political thought. Abbott (1987) contends that studying autobiographies is one sure path towards understanding American political thought and the American society at large. He asserts that by narrating how they have lived and are living their lives, autobiographers are indeed

presenting a template for how other citizens ought to live their lives: "Autobiographers then tell us a story about how we ought to live. Their lives are the evidence; we learn how to be happy, rich, healthy. All this storytelling produces an instruction-manual kind of political thought" (p. xii). To illustrate this point, Abbott (1987) cites as an example, the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin which "tells a story that still captures the imagination of Americans" (p. xii). Franklin's story fascinates American society because it narrates how the man rose to fame from very humble beginnings, whilst also serving as a guide for those Americans who may like to tow the same path that Franklin walked. Franklin himself expressly stated in his autobiography that one of the major reasons for writing is to provide a template for posterity:

> Having emerg'd from the Poverty & Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a State of Affluence & some Degree of Reputation in the World, and having gone so far thro' Life with a considerable Share of Felicity, the conducing Means I made use of, which, with the Blessing of God, so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own Situations, & therefore fit to be imitated (Franklin, 2016, p. 21).

Furthermore, rooted in the heart of all American autobiographies is the idea of change (Abbott, 1987). All autobiographers tell stories of how their lives have changed; how they have gone from "zero" to "hero", from "victim" to "victor", from "darkness" to "light", from "anonymity" to "prominence", etc. American autobiographers recount how a certain event or a culmination of events have caused their old personalities to slide away "like snow off a roof" (p. 189), and given their lives a new lease: "Steffens changed his perspective when he locked himself in a railway car; Malcolm X when he was locked in prison. Family deaths caused the Big Change for three of the autobiographers we have studied (Thoreau's brother, Adam's grandfather, Addams's father)" (p. 188). According to Abbott (1987), this idea of change and conversion embedded in every American autobiography plays a vital role in American political thought given that the change and conversion expressed in autobiographies only shows the American citizenry

that a new, better, and improved way of life and living (whatever that means for citizens) is within reach: "the creation of a new person proves that these forces are not natural and that new institutions can be formed in the name of emancipation" (p. 188). In the words of Abbott (1987), the change and conversion exemplified in the life of autobiographers can be deemed an act of revolution and a call for emancipation. Hence, all autobiographers deploy a call to action in their work to rouse and urge citizens to take immediate action that will effect change within the polity. The change exemplified on a personal level, in the lives of autobiographers, subsequently forms the basis for amplifying political change across the country.

Moreover, Abbott (1987) reveals that the autobiography is the most apposite tool for individuals who desire to shape and influence American politics and political thought as it allows autobiographers to "hustle" their ideas and to show the legitimacy of their ideas by living them out.

In addition, this notion of hustling ideas is also tied to the idea of American autobiographies as an avenue for amplifying political change as mentioned above:

> Each theorist must "hustle" his idea. He must show that the current consensus is unjust, that it ignores in basic ways legitimate answers to the question, "How ought I live?" he must establish that we are unhappy, that we lead lives of "quiet desperation," that we are "indifferent to God," that we are all "crooks," that women are relegated to a "lower plane" of evolution. And what surer way is there to demonstrate our unhappiness and to establish an alternative as well than to write autobiography? That the autobiography, to use Franklin's words, as an account of a life "fit to be imitated" is itself part of the hustle is part of its function in American political thought. For the autobiography is designed to establish the practicality of a political idea that had been ignored as utopian by the legitimizing theory (Abbott, 1987, p. 187).

The parallels drawn between American autobiography and American political thought in this section lends more credence to the underlying claim that this study seeks to examine: it highlights the idea that autobiographies are channels for political candidates to propagate their ideas, roll out their action plans and mobilize popular support for those ideas and action plans.

2.3.3 Autobiographical Characters

Just like every other thing in the world, individuals assimilate and explicate mythical themes in different ways because our experiences differ, and our goals are not similar. Hence, as they write, autobiographers are prone to exploit myths and relate them to their stories in such a way that it suits their experience, personality, and end goal, and as a result, the way that autobiographers portray themselves tend to be different.

The "restless type" is the first kind of autobiographer that Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) identify. According to the authors, the prevailing preoccupation of the restless autobiographer is to, through their autobiography, "search for truth" (p. 509). This set of autobiographers are bent on explicating and analyzing the sacred and esoteric elements of their race in a bid to foretell the trajectory of their collective destiny. A popular example of this kind of autobiographer includes Malcolm X who authored *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* a classical American autobiography that has been described as "the most influential twentieth-century African American autobiography" (Franklin, 1998, p. 11).

From the description provided by Spengemann and Lundquist (1965), the second classification of autobiographers is what one can tag the "fulfilled type". These kinds of autobiographers have "taken the journey prescribed by the myth" and "looks back with some satisfaction" because "he has fulfilled his initial expectations" and by so doing "has enacted the values his society holds sacred" (p. 509). A typical example of this kind of autobiographer is Benjamin Franklin:

> Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world, and having gone so far through life with a considerable share of felicity, the conducing means I made use of, which with the blessing of God so well succeeded, my posterity may like to know, as they may find some

> of them suitable to their own situations, and therefore fit to be imitated (Franklin, 2008, p. 1).

It is the sense of personal fulfillment that this category of autobiographers feel that gives them the push to write an autobiography as a means of perpetuating the sacred values of their society.

The next group of autobiographers is what we can refer to as the "prodigal type," going by the way Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) have described them. This type of autobiographers has gone against the prescribed values of their community and feel some kind of remorse. Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) cite Whittaker Chambers, the author of *Witness* as a valid example:

> What I had been fell from me like dirty rags. The rags that fell from me were not only communism. What fell was the whole web of the materialist mind – the luminous shroud which it has spun about the spirit of man, paralyzing in the name of rationalism the instinct of his soul for God, denying in the name of knowledge the reality of the soul and its birthright in that mystery on which mere knowledge shatters and falters at every step (Chambers, 1952, p. 83).

These kinds of autobiographical characters see the writing of an autobiography as an act of confession and repentance in a bid to beg forgiveness and gain reacceptance into the community.

Closely related to the "prodigal type" of autobiographer is what we may refer to as the "unapologetic type". While the prodigal type acknowledges their mistakes and seek repentance, the "unapologetic type" acknowledge their wrongdoings but instead of repenting, they find justifications for their wrongdoing. Of P. T. Barnum, author of *Barnum's Own Story,* Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) state that: "Barnum refutes charge after charge that he is a humbug, a cheat, and a thief. What have been called his avarice and guile, he insists are Yankee virtues of thrift and ingenuity – all of which he learned from Benjamin Franklin" (p. 511).

Following what we tag the "unapologetic type" of autobiographer is another which Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) expressly refer to as "the socially condemned autobiographer"

(p. 512). The socially condemned autobiographer maintains that their act of disregard and blatant disdain for the values of their society is of no significance as they believe fervently that they are acting per the dictates of some higher calling which other members of their society are too blind and ignorant to recognize.

Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) call the next type of autobiographers "the self-exiled critic" and describe them as "more rational and less subjective" (p. 512). This set of autobiographers have found a higher moral ground to perch on from where they stay detached from the values of their community and pass judgment on all those who follow those values: "the critic will often assert his intellect to emphasize the degree of his detachment from popular belief" (p. 512).

The last type of autobiographer that Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) identifies is the "outsider". Outsiders "care nothing for acknowledged American values" (p. 513) and are only preoccupied with exposing what they believe to be the hypocrisies and idiocies embedded in those values.

While this classification of autobiographers by Spengemann and Lundquist (1965) may appear exhaustive, it is imperative to mention that their list leaves out another very important category of autobiographers which for this study we will refer to as the "marketer type" autobiographer. This growing class of autobiographers exploits the cultural myths of their communities to promote their brand, polish their image and position themselves for a position of power within their community. Autobiographers who belong to this class are often politicians who are seeking public office and the deluge of autobiographies published around election campaign periods in the United States is evidence of the growing popularity of this type of autobiographers: "So far, just about everyone who's declared has written a book, or, let's be honest, has had a book

written – political memoirs that flicker with primal scenes that explain the candidates' rise from obscurity to fame" (Lepore, 2019).

However, despite the marked differences between these stated types of autobiographers, some obvious elements common to all of them include the desire to have their voices heard, the need to define, fix and re-fix the self, and the exhibition of self-awareness, albeit for different purposes.

Besides, we should also note that this autobiography character classification is not rigid but fluid, just like human nature. It is therefore not uncommon for one autobiographer to exude more than one autobiographical character trait in their autobiography. For instance, an autobiographer that is predominantly the restless type might also exhibit marketer type traits by citing the quest to uncover the truth about their community and reshape collective destiny as motivation for seeking political power and influence. Former American President, Barack Obama's autobiography, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* fits this example perfectly. According to Gary Harts, the book presents Obama as "a wise observer of the human condition" (Hart, 2006). Michael Tomaski sums this up by asserting that the book shows that Obama has the potential "to construct a new politics that is progressive but grounded in civic traditions that speak to a wider range of Americans" (Tomaski, 2007).

As aptly stated in the opening of this sub-section, autobiographers tend to utilize American mythical themes in ways that further their intents and purposes. In relation to this study, therefore, what we are trying to establish is that political candidates draw from the pool of American myths and characters to sell themselves as the perfect candidate for the office of the president of the United States. In addition, by alluding to Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* in the previous paragraph we seek to assert that political candidates often draw upon and combine more than one

American mythical character – especially the "restless", fulfilled, and "marketer" types – to portray themselves as worthy candidates and prospective presidents.

2.3.4 Atomization of American Autobiographies

One very salient question that is essential as far as this study is concerned revolves around how the themes and central messages in autobiographical narratives spread across the country in such a way that almost every American knows what these books are about even though many of them may not have bought or read these autobiographical narratives.

Gauging the number of Americans who have bought these autobiographical narratives in comparison with the American population shows that the number of Americans who have bought these books is quite minuscule. For instance, Barack Obama's "*Dreams From My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope* have sold 7.5 million collectively in the U.S. and Canada" (Merry, 2019) which means that only about 2.05% of America and Canada's combined population of 365.79 million have bought both books as at the year 2019. In the same vein, Michelle Obama's *Becoming* which, in its first week of publication sold 1.4 million copies and dubbed the best-selling book in the United States for the year 2018 has, by November of 2020 sold 14 million copies worldwide, which when compared with a global population of 7.8 billion shows that only about 0.0179% of the global population has bought the book.

Going further back in history, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, published in 1965 had sold six million copies in the U.S. up until 1977, which means that about 2.78% of America's 223.2 million population had bought the book up until 12 years after it was published.

The nagging question then is, how does a majority of the American population know so much about the central and peripheral themes of these books if only a tiny proportion of them buy the books?

One probable answer to this question is that majority of the American population who may not have bought these books get to learn about these books via other media channels which authors, their agents, and their publishers leverage heavily to promote these books. These channels of dissemination include book tours, book interviews, book reading events, book signing events, television adaptations, audiobook adaptations, and newspaper/magazine book reviews.

In a 2006 C-SPAN book interview with Bob Herbert which revolved around Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama said of the book:

> The basic theme of the book is that most of the challenges we face - healthcare, education, the problems we face in terms of globalization, foreign policy dilemmas as a consequence of rogue states and nuclear proliferation and terrorism – none of these problems are easy. All of them though are amenable to good decision-making, common sense, practicality, and improvement, and if we can focus our politics around what our common values are and our common ideals are, then it's possible for us to make progress although progress will always be imperfect (GBH Forum Network, 2014, 24:05).

In the Barack Obama example, the themes and motivations of the book are clearly explained. Besides, authors do not appear on one but numerous shows and platforms to promote their work. For example, Barack Obama has been interviewed on *Breakfast Club Power 105.1 FM* (987 thousand views on YouTube as of December 16, 2020), Jimmy Kimmel Live (9.2 million views on YouTube as of December 16, 2020), *Washington Post* (80 thousand views on YouTube as of December 16, 2020), *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* (1.1 million views on YouTube as of December 16, 2020), *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert* (2.5 million views on YouTube as of December 16, 2020), *The Daily Show With Trevor Noah* (2.5 million views on YouTube as of January 24, 2021), and *The Oprah Conversation on Apple TV* (363 thousand views on YouTube as of December), to talk about his latest book *The Promised Land*. Consequently, about 16 million people have had the chance to learn about this book from the YouTube channels highlighted here alone.

Above all, the argument that this section puts forward is that the promotion of autobiographical narratives through traditional and contemporary media outlets leads to the atomization of the themes and subject matters of these narratives on a massive scale to the extent that many Americans, who may neither have bought nor read the book, would have copious information to be able to discuss the narratives effectively.

2.3.5 Propaganda Model

Drawing from Baker's (2006) stance that elites also exploit narratives to maintain their legitimacy and preserve existing power structures, one can assert that some elements of propaganda are present in narratives. This assertion becomes weightier when we also consider Harding's (2012) compelling claim that propaganda often manifests in and influences public and personal narratives. What these ideas establish consequently is that propaganda is an important phenomenon to consider in the purview of studying and analyzing narratives, especially political ones.

Propaganda became a front-burner research subject in the United States during World War I, given the massive impact that the *Committee on Public Information,* set up by President Woodrow Wilson and George Creel had on shaping public opinion and garnering unwavering support for America's participation in the War.

Jowett and O'Donnell (2015, p. 7) define propaganda as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."

The overarching goal of the propagandist is to reinforce the ideas and attitudes they seek to promote, while at the same time working to subjugate thoughts or opinions that oppose those ideas (Lasswell, 1927b). Lasswell (1927b) implies that propaganda goes beyond churning out a

few deceitful messages to sway and influence people momentarily; propaganda strategies must be long-term and well-thought-out. In the same vein, Sproule (1994) further posits that propaganda is only successful and productive if it "persuades people without seeming to do so" (p. 3). Propagandists understand that people are averse to being told what to do or what to think. They, therefore, bury their manipulative techniques under the garb of media sensationalism (Sproule, 1994) to make people believe that they are taking action of their own volition.

Moreover, the ethical justification of propaganda has always been a subject of fierce debate among scholars (Cunningham, 2002). While some researchers opine that propaganda is fundamentally flawed and remains a threat to democracy because it is built on "intentional deception" (Bernays, 1928), others argue that propaganda remains unproblematic despite its manipulative tendencies (Combs & Nimmo, 1993). However, some other researchers, like Lasswell (1948), have established a neutrality thesis of propaganda which brings forth the argument that "propaganda as a tool is no more moral or immoral than a pump handle" (p. 525). Propaganda theorists in the neutrality school of thought believe that propaganda is a malleable tool that can be used to achieve either honorable or ignoble gains, which means that its ethical onus falls on those who deploy it and how it is deployed. Following these ethical contestations, researchers, therefore, have categorized propaganda into types; white, grey, and black. Baran & Davis (2015) define white propaganda as the deliberate suppression of conflicting ideas while disseminating consistent arguments and views that support the cause of the propagandist. On the other hand, gray propaganda is the dissemination of information without establishing its veracity. At the same time, black propaganda (also known as disinformation), like the name implies, is the deliberate transmission of blatant lies.

Propagandists deploy several techniques to achieve their aims, and examples of such propaganda techniques include glittering generalities and plain folk propaganda. According to Shabo (2008), glittering generalities means using statements that have "strong positive correlations" to describe a person while "offering no real explanation" (p. 21), while plain folk refers to gaining public confidence by cultivating the appearance of a regular person because citizens tend to distrust outsiders but have a soft spot for people who are more like them.

The model and techniques of propaganda as explained here foregrounds why propaganda is an important concept to consider in the study of political autobiographies. Given that politicians aspiring to the office of the president of the United States of America publish political autobiographical narratives during their election campaign period to reinforce their public persona, present themselves as fit for office and ultimately canvass voters' support, it is not unusual for elements and techniques of propaganda to be present in their narratives. As aspirants are driven by the impetus to win citizens over, there is a need for them to impress and sway the thoughts and emotions of these citizens. Hence, the techniques of propaganda are viable tools for political office aspirants to deploy in their campaign autobiographical narrative because propaganda's stock-in-trade is the purposeful attempt to manipulate the thoughts, emotions, and actions of a people to achieve the desired result: in this case, the desired end goal of aspirants to the office of the president is to get citizens to support them.

This review of prior literature from the fields of narrative theory, autobiography, narrative paradigm, and propaganda establishes the viability of this study. Up to this present moment, there appears not to be any readily and widely available research study that has sought to examine the autobiographies of political candidates as election campaign materials, not to talk of one that focuses especially on the autobiographies of presidential candidates.

The overarching preoccupation of this study is to examine how presidential candidates aspiring to the office of the president of the United States of America exploit the autobiographies they write before/during the election campaign period as campaign materials to brand themselves as the best contenders for the Oval Office, introduce their policy ideas, and ultimately canvass voters. To effectively examine how political candidates attempt to use their autobiographies to sway readers and win supporters, the following research questions have been developed to interrogate Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*:

2.4 Research Question(s)

1. What narrative paradigm techniques does Obama employ to tell stories in *The Audacity of Hope*?
    a. Does the autobiography exhibit narrative coherence?
    b. Does the autobiography exhibit narrative fidelity?
2. What kind of cultural archetype does Obama assume to bolster his public persona: the healer, the hero, the outlaw, the villain, the sage, the warrior, or the trickster?
    a. Does Obama approach the subject of race from a racial unity or resistance perspective?
3. How does Obama deploy *The Audacity of Hope* to communicate his policy agenda?
    a. Does the autobiography contain calls to political change and action?

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

To study and analyze how aspirants to the office of the president of the United States of America exploit strategic narrative devices, in the autobiographical narratives they author before or during election campaign cycles, to publicize their intention to run for office and introduce their policy ideas to the voting public in a bid to socialize popular emotions and ultimately canvass voters, I will pursue a textual analysis of the autobiographical narrative, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* written by Barack Obama from a thematic analysis perspective.

3.1 Research Objectives

The core contributions of this study to the theory and practice of political communication, election studies, political autobiographies and narratives are:

1. To identify key narrative techniques and strategies deployed by Barack Obama in *The Audacity of Hope* to brand himself as a viable presidential candidate.
2. To describe and analyze how those strategies and techniques are deployed in an attempt to solicit political goodwill and canvass voters.

3.2 Thematic Analysis

Since thematic analysis draws its strengths and procedural approach from the qualitative research paradigm, it is primal to operationalize what 'qualitative research' denotes concerning this study before proceeding to expound upon what thematic analysis means.

To begin with, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) reaffirm that like its quantitative counterpart, qualitative research is a scientific/empirical paradigm of research in its own right, before further defining it as the study of empirical materials – cultural texts, historical texts, interviews, life

stories, etc. - in their natural setting in a bid to interpret and make sense of these materials in terms of the meaning that people ascribe to them.

Nowell et al. (2017) acknowledge that qualitative research is quite complex and therefore requires a rigorous method if researchers are going to mine useful insights from qualitative data sets. Consequently, they propose thematic analysis as a suitable method for meticulously analyzing and interpreting qualitative data.

Peterson (2017) considers thematic analysis as the "most foundational form of qualitative analysis" which gives researchers the liberty to immerse themselves in the data in a bid to exhume emergent themes therefrom, based on the research questions and or hypotheses that the study proposes (p. 1). In the same vein, Clarke and Braun (2017) aptly describe thematic analysis as a method for "identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data" (p. 297).

This, therefore, makes it, to begin with, an apposite method for analyzing and interpreting the data for this study: given that this study is qualitative and hinged on "identifying, analyzing, and interpreting" the strategic narrative devices deployed within the study's primary data.

Moreover, thematic analysis has been adjudged a distinct qualitative analytic method for the fact that it proffers a 'method' rather than a 'methodology', meaning that it is flexible and not confined to any particular theoretical framework and can therefore be applied to deftly analyze and interpret data from an array of theoretical standpoints (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Nowell et al. (2017) also share the same sentiment by stating that thematic analysis is a nimble, agile qualitative research method that exudes unusual theoretical freedom, which means that it is quite accessible, can be modified according to the needs of each researcher and applied across various theoretical endeavors. In addition, the authors argue that:

> Thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights. Thematic analysis is also useful for summarizing key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organized final report (King, 2004) (p. 2).

Furthermore, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) affirm that thematic analysis is one of the most popular methods adopted by qualitative researchers to analyze and interpret qualitative data sets. They posit that it is the "most useful" method available for researchers who are focused on "capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set" (p. 11). Also, Nowell et al. (2017) state that thematic analysis is a seemly qualitative method for analyzing large qualitative data sets. Since the data sets to be analyzed and interpreted for this research study are large, textual, and qualitative, the preceding postulations, therefore, lend further credence to its preferred use as one of the methods of analysis in the context of this study.

It is however pertinent to mention that despite the glowing advantages of thematic analysis, the method is not without shortcomings. According to Nowell et al. (2017), one of the biggest shortfalls of thematic analysis is its lack of "substantial literature" (p. 2), especially when compared with other analytic frameworks like ethnography, phenomenology, or grounded theory. This paucity of substantial literature, in their opinion, might make it a confusing method to use for rookie researchers. Also, they note that the flexibility of thematic analysis, which is considered one of its strengths is a potential weakness as well for the fact that this flexibility has the propensity to breed incoherence and inconsistency in the process of drawing themes from the data set.

These disadvantages are however mitigated in the context of this study. First, I, the primary researcher in this study have undertaken some research projects and completed courses in research methods: these qualifications, therefore, make me much more than a 'rookie researcher'. Besides,

propping this study on empirical research questions and hypotheses ensures that the analytic process remains guided and therefore hardly susceptible to incoherence and inconsistencies.

Moreover, thematic analysis has various versions: there are versions suited for research within the positivist paradigm and there are those that work best when applied for research within the postpositivist paradigm (Clarke & Braun, 2017). For this study, however, one of the versions designed to be used within the postpositivist qualitative paradigm specifically (Clarke & Braun, 2017), the narrative thematic analysis approach is adopted, given that this study is qualitative and predicated on analyzing/interpreting autobiographical narratives. Moreover, this approach will be applied according to the tenets of interpretive thematic analysis which means that the explication of themes and codes will go beyond merely describing what goes on in the data to decipher the implicit meanings buried beyond the data surface and interpret what those meanings represent.

The analytic focus of this version is premised on a coding and theme development process while emphasizing the role of the researcher in the entire analysis and interpretation process.

Narrative Thematic Analysis

The narrative approach to thematic analysis is derived from traditional thematic analysis, it is, therefore, no surprise that both remain strongly connected and tied to each other (Peterson, 2017). To be clear, it is important to state that there are variations of narrative analysis, however, the one referred to in this study is predicated on identifying common themes across the primary data to interrogate the relationship between the narrative process employed within the data and the social, political and cultural context of the narrative environment/setting. Above all, the thematic analysis of this study will be conducted in line with narrative tenets as both resonate with the research focus and analytic conditions of this study.

3.3 Sample/Primary Data

Published in the year 2006, Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* is a public political autobiographical narrative that calls for a politics of mutual understanding from a personal perspective using stories drawn from Obama's personal and professional lives.

This narrative qualifies as a political autobiographical narrative in the context of this research because it fuses the components 'a story of self', 'a story of us', and 'a story of now': the book connects stories about Obama's life with American values and leverages that to make an urgent call to American citizens to take decisive actions on behalf of important shared purposes including education, healthcare, foreign policy, warfare, terrorism, etc.

Mike Dorning (2006) in *The Chicago Tribune* states that the book is "a political biography that concentrates on the senator's core values". Thus, the narrative also fits neatly into the description of the components that typify an autobiography - as previously explained in the literature review section: it chronicles the personal and professional lives of Barack Obama outlines his vision, aspiration, beliefs and core values, his conception of the world, while also explaining his relationship with the American society and the American people. This explains and reinforces Kakutani's (2006) thoughts about the book as stated in a review he wrote for the *New York Times* about the book in December 2006:

> Reporters and politicians continually use the word authenticity to describe Mr. Obama, pointing to his ability to come across to voters as a regular person, not a prepackaged pol. And in these pages, he often speaks to the reader as if he were an old friend from back in the day, salting policy recommendations with colorful asides about the absurdities of political life.

In a comparative review of Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* and *The Covenant with Black America* by Tavis Smiley, Clark

(2008) maintains that *The Audacity of Hope* does a better job of enunciating the American dream than Smiley's *The Covenant with Black America.*

Clark (2008) summarizes the essence of Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* by stating that the book explores:

> The seeming inability for Republicans and Democrats to establish a working consensus to develop policies that will address the everyday reality of "ordinary people"; 2) the need for shared values (e.g., fairness, hard work) to be the "heart of our policies"; 3) fairness of the application of the constitution to today's times and the process by which Republicans and Democrats manage opposing views; 4) the methods utilized by politicians to win campaigns; 5) the advantages and disadvantages of globalization, disparities in education, concerns about unemployment, and the need for universal healthcare; 6) the role that values, culture, and religion occupy in public debate and addressing social problems; 7) the social injustices experienced by minorities, particularly African-Americans; 8) the challenge to ensure that the U.S. foreign policies are fair and equitable; and 9) the change in family structure (p. 222).

Clark (2008) also reiterates that unlike what is obtainable in *The Covenant with Black America,* Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* is more relatable because Obama weaves stories from his personal and family lives into the book and is an extension of his constant message hinged on the notion that "values can inspire people to take action" (p. 233).

Moreover, Atwater (2007) examines Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* by tracing the origins of Obama's rhetoric of hope and discussing how Obama uses this rhetoric to create "a contemporary vision of an inclusive America and the American dream" (p. 121) to draw conclusions as regards who Obama is, the values that drive him, why those values are dear to his heart and important for the entire American society.

More specifically, Atwater (2007) asserts that Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* is "a blueprint for his political career and, in light of his presidential bid, his belief and stand on major issues" (p. 126). While this study does not seek to analyze *The Audacity of Hope* from a rhetoric perspective like Atwater (2007) did, Atwater (2007) however echoes the claim that this study also

makes that Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* is primarily a political document that lays the foundation for Obama's run for the office of the president of the United States of America.

Furthermore, Harrell (2010) analyzes Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* in the context of the American Reclamation Jeremiad, a rhetoric concept which thrives on "a chastising of society because it has sinned … and a warning that calamity is imminent if society does not reclaim its basic values, and a calling to return to the basic values so that society may prevent such destruction" (p. 166). According to Harrell (2010), Obama achieves his jeremiadic intents in *The Audacity of Hope* by fusing together his autobiography, an assessment of American politics, and policy recommendations that have the potential to help America rediscover its lost values. Harrell (2010) further notes that the effectiveness of the jeremiadic rhetoric in Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* is rooted in its use to contextualize Obama's thoughts about America's lost values and what can be done to reclaim the country's mythic mission for the sole purpose of re-establishing and preserving America's common values.

Also, Wilson (2013) examines Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* in the context of the rhetorical concept of ethos to determine if Barack Obama's character as presented in the book is similar to the character that he portrayed as president of the United States of America.

In the same vein, Thompson (2007) examines Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* from a rhetorical standpoint. According to Thompson (2007), Obama's deft use of "inclusive language, self-disclosure, and unique balance of American ideology" (p. v) is a strategic attempt to establish credibility and ethos with readers. Thompson (2007) argues that Obama's persuasive fervor and the resonance of his political gospel in the book are bolstered by his "ubiquitous use of narrative" (p. v). The author opines further that Obama's storytelling ability disambiguates his political message and amplifies his political vision for the United States of America in such a way that the

message resonates with "every type of American regardless of age, gender, or party affiliation" (p. 9).

It is pertinent to state that while it appears that the focus of Thompson (2007) and Wilson (2013) is similar to that of this study, both studies do not share any major similarity with this present study. While Thompson (2007) asserts that Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* is predominantly a narrative document and also examines the book from a rhetoric perspective, the goal of this study is to establish that *The Audacity of Hope* is primarily a political document and to analyze it from the media propaganda and narrative paradigm perspectives. The major difference between this study and the ones outlined above is that this study seeks to counter the notion that the concept of rhetoric and its attendant techniques including ethos, pathos, and logos are enough to persuade audiences. Following the narrative paradigm theory, this study seeks to establish that beyond ethos, pathos and logos, campaign autobiographies also have to deploy propaganda techniques while adhering to the narrative paradigm principles of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity.

The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream qualifies as a perfect sample for this study because it was published about four months before Senator Obama (as he then was) made public his intention to run for the office of the president of the United States of America on February 7, 2007. Furthermore, many of the ideas that Obama outlined in the book subsequently formed a substantial part of his 2008 presidential campaign manifesto. It is based on these coinciding events that I infer that the book was part of a grand campaign plan to build political momentum, drum up popular support for Senator Obama (as he then was) and find subtle acceptance for his ideas before and after his public declaration to run for the office of president of the United States of America. Atwater (2007) shares the same sentiment by expressly stating that

Obama's book is nothing short of a campaign autobiography, "a blueprint for his political career and, in light of his presidential bid, his belief and stand on major issues" (p. 126).

Also, Clark's (2008) observation that Obama infused his central political message with stories from personal and family lives in *The Audacity of Hope* makes the book an appropriate fit for this study because these story-telling components align with the narrative and narrative paradigm concerns of this study.

Besides, *The Audacity of Hope* has arguably become one of the most important political/campaign autobiographies in American history and has even gained significant traction owing to Barack Obama's election as the first person of African American descent to become the president of America. In 2006, the book reached number one on the Amazon and New York Times bestsellers list. The book later won the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work – Nonfiction while its audiobook format won the Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word Album. It has been translated into about thirty different languages including Dutch, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Portuguese, Greek, and German.

3.4 Data Analysis

Analyzing qualitative data from a thematic lens entails keenly studying the primary data, identifying and making notes of the important chunks of data, sorting the identified data into codes/themes, probing the codes/themes for emerging patterns, evaluating these findings in terms of their applicability to the research questions and hypotheses proposed in the study before proceeding to write up the findings generated and interpreting same.

Quoting Thorne (2000), Nowell et al. (2017) state that data analysis is "the most complex phase of qualitative research" (p. 1). The entire onus of rigorously conducting qualitative thematic data analysis rests entirely on the shoulders of the researcher as they are the primary instruments

for analysis tasked with making decisions about how data will be coded, arranged into appropriate thematic constructs, to ultimately decontextualize and recontextualize the data as appropriate. In addition to all of these, the researcher also has to ensure that the process of analysis is thorough and trustworthy to reach a worthy, definitive, and reliable interpretation.

The first step towards ensuring that data analysis is rigorous is for researchers to painstakingly and transparently disclose the step-by-step method and process they follow in analyzing the data so that readers can determine for themselves whether the process is sound enough or not. Hence, this section is dedicated to outlining the process and steps that I will follow to analyze and interpret the study's primary data. According to Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015), the thematic analysis of qualitative research is done in six steps namely: familiarization, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. Details as regards how each step will be approached in the context of this study are outlined below:

Familiarization

The first and most important step of any thematic analysis process is for the researcher to immerse themselves in the data. To engage the data thoroughly and become one with it. Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015) explain that this step involves "reading and rereading the transcripts, … making notes of any initial analytic observations" (p. 230). It is this keen familiarization with data that helps the researcher to move beyond a focus on surface meanings; it propels researchers forward and endows them with the metaphorical 'third eye' to uncover profound insights and interpretation.

In the course of analyzing the data for this study, therefore, I will read the text (primary data) to be analyzed twice over before rereading them a third time in preparation to commence the

coding process. Moreover, as I engage these texts, I will make notes of initial important observations.

Coding

According to Peterson (2017), coding is the basis of most qualitative research analysis processes. It is defined as "the process by which the researcher examines the data and assigns meaning to what he or she sees. The meanings might be linked to actions, ideas, thoughts, impressions, theories, relationships, and so forth" (pp. 1-2).

Peterson (2017) clarifies that while thematic analysis can be deployed alone to engage a study, there exist three basic approaches for coding qualitative data from a thematic analytic perspective namely: emic, etic, and in vivo coding processes.

To begin with, emic coding is an "inductive", "bottom-up" (p. 2) coding approach which prioritizes the derivation of interpretation and meaning from the primary data or the perspective of participants. Conversely, etic coding approaches data analysis and interpretation from a "top-down" (p. 2) approach. Etic coding focuses on how primary data relates to "pre-existing theories and criteria external to the specific scene or study" (p. 2). In this case, the researcher identifies a theoretical standpoint(s) whence the study will be approached before proceeding to form research questions and or hypotheses to establish how the theory(ies) will function in the context of the study. Thereafter, the theories are tested to establish the veracity or falsity of the research questions and or hypotheses presented. Moreover, in vivo coding is another method of coding which is related to both emic and etic coding and can be applied to both coding approaches. In the process of executing in vivo coding, researchers present the exact utterances of their participants as codes instead of inventing codes to represent those utterances. Peterson (2017) however states further that the etic and emic approaches may be used concurrently to code data:

For instance, a researcher might set up a study with a theoretical frame in mind (etic) and intentionally code data into the precepts of that theory. Then, as the analysis progresses he or she might discover that some other interesting things are happening in the dataset and begin a more emic coding process to identify the codes deemed meaningful by the participants themselves or emergent in the data (emic). Likewise, scholars could begin a research study with only a general area of interest in a given topic or context (emic) and in later stages of analysis, particular theories might emerge as relevant, leading the researcher to code with an eye toward those theories (etic) (p. 2).

As stated above, I will apply a concurrent application of the etic and emic approaches in the context of this research study. However, the etic approach is the primary coding approach for this study: data will be coded into the precepts of the narrative paradigm and propaganda models as discussed in the literature review section. The emic approach is reserved as a supportive approach to cater for cases of a 'happy accident' when I stumble on interesting insights that might not fit neatly into the etic coding process.

'Searching' for Themes

Themes in qualitative textual data are not like produce on countertops waiting to be picked by researchers. Rather, it is the researcher's responsibility to find common ties between codes and to create meaningful maps of major patterns emerging in the data. Hence, I will keenly examine codes that emerge to scout for relevant connections between them and merging those in meaningful ways to create plausible patterns of interpretation.

Reviewing Themes

The review process is one of brief hiatus when researchers take a moment to reflect on the themes to be sure that they match with the coded data and the data set as a whole, and to check whether each theme possesses a meaningful, unambiguous central idea.

After the process of searching for and connecting codes meaningfully, I will observe a moment to reflect on the themes in a bid to ensure that they each have clear central concepts and sync perfectly with the coded data. This process may lead to few or no changes. Thus, if new insights are generated in the course of reviewing the themes, I will implement those changes accordingly. However, if I discover during the review process that the themes are flawed or do not fit with the codes, the entire process will have to be restarted from the coding phase.

Defining and Naming Themes

This is the penultimate stage where I will write a summary of each theme and attach a specific name to each. This step further clarifies each theme and sets the tone for the process of writing up the final analysis and interpretation of the study.

Writing the Report

At this point, the stage is set for me to weave together all the points that have been extracted from the data analysis. In this final, all-encompassing write-up, I will connect all themes and draw analytic conclusions across all of them to present a compelling final report.

Additional Procedures

Apart from the standard processes mentioned above, there are other important analytic processes bound to thematic analysis that aid researchers to effectively synthesize and get a full grasp of the data analysis process while also foregrounding the discrepancies that may exist within the themes and codes. Thus, I will employ the additional processes of analytic memoing and negative case analysis throughout the entire analysis process to bolster analysis and ensure rigor.

Analytic Memoing

As I engage with the primary data in this study, free form notes of ideas, brainwaves, and thoughts about the data, theory, or research questions will be noted. Peterson (2017) emphasizes this memoing process as a catalyst for the discovery of hunches. It also aids researchers to connect the dots in the research thereby facilitating the ultimate discovery of nuanced insights, analysis, and interpretation.

Negative Case Analysis

Peterson (2017) asserts that negative case analysis "is an important part of the thematic analysis process" (p. 8). Therefore, as I code the data in this study, information that appears to contradict and conflict with the patterns emerging will be intentionally sought out. Thereafter, I will contemplate how these outliers may become part of the developing interpretation and entire data set.

Also known as playing devil's advocate, negative case analysis is deemed a critical practice in qualitative research which facilitates the formation and revision of hypotheses formed about the research data or phenomena being studied. The upside of this qualitative research approach is that it contributes optimally to the strengthening of analytic rigor in the conduct of qualitative research.

Analytic Tools

Researchers rely on various analytic tools to facilitate effective analysis and interpretation of data. There are a bunch of traditional and computer-assisted devices available for the use of qualitative researchers. As far as this present study is concerned, a mix of manual and computer-based tools will be deployed in the analysis process.

First, the manual devices that I will utilize are different color sharpie highlighters that will be used to mark sections of the primary data that are connected with emerging codes and themes.

On the other hand, I will arrange identified codes into columns while corresponding quotes from the primary data will be organized into rows in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Moreover, the process of analytic memoing will be completed using Microsoft Word. Besides, I will store the aforementioned Microsoft documents in the cloud, on Google Drive, to insure myself against any technological mishap which may affect the documents.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of the Proposed Study

To begin with, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) note that reliability, in the context of qualitative research is subsumed within the concept of validity, i.e., the demonstration of validity in a research study automatically establishes its reliability: a study cannot be valid if it is not reliable. Hence, it is presumed that the demonstration of this study's validity suffices for establishing its reliability as well.

Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) augment their explanation of the concept of validity in qualitative research first by quoting a range of definitions. The definition quoted in Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) which resonates with this study's focus is the one which proposes that ""an account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorize" (Hammersley, 1987, p. 69)" (p. 80).

While the various definitions of validity may be worded differently, one binding link common to them all is the idea that research is valid if it assesses/measures what it sets out to assess, no more no less.

The authors further posit that nothing else is more important than validity in the purview of qualitative research because a research study is of no use if the research data does not represent the purpose of the research in precise terms.

Moreover, there are different types of validity, the most common kinds being: face validity, internal validity, external validity, construct validity, and criterion validity. However, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) affirm that, in the context of qualitative research, only face validity and external validity are oft applicable. Face validity is conceptualized as "the degree to which an indicator for a concept (e.g., question, scale) intuitively makes sense", and external validity means "the degree to which study findings are relevant to other populations and contexts (i.e., generalizability)" (p. 81). It is further noted that face validity suffices to determine the overall validity of an entire study. In this vein, the overall validity of this research study will be deemed well established once face validity is determined.

To establish face validity, researchers cannot rely on measurements and variables given that both are not products suited for qualitative research. Instead, the demonstration of face validity requires the sound judgment of researchers and their reviewers: "Validity [in qualitative research] comes from the analysis procedures of the researcher, based on information gleaned while visiting with participants and from external reviewers" (p. 211).

The most important question now that the concept of validity has been discussed is, how will face validity be established in the scope of this study? The first step towards establishing face validity in this study is to ensure that the data analysis and interpretation processes remain transparent. To enhance transparency, I will create an audit trail/documentation of the entire analysis/interpretation procedures and codebook revisions: I will constantly compare this audit trail with the analytic memo (discussed further above) to check for inconsistencies between ideas and procedures. Besides strengthening transparency, the audit procedure also makes the internal review of processes and their replication possible if the need arises. Also, I will meticulously develop a codebook to document relevant themes and code their meanings. Moreover, as

mentioned earlier, I will as well employ the negative case analysis technique to significantly curtail researcher bias. This involves seeking out and duly reporting any evidence that contradicts the predominant patterns emerging from the data. In addition, wherever applicable, I will extract direct quotations from the primary data to support interpretation to connect what appears in the data with my interpretations. Most importantly, the help of reviewers - in this case, my thesis advisors and committee members - and peers will be sought to keenly observe and check for biases in codes and summaries and to ensure that the application of codes remains consistent.

Above all, it is important to mention that while following the processes outlined above does not automatically mean that a research study is valid, the procedures go a very long way to increase transparency, mitigate mistakes, uncover errors of judgment, and overall makes it easier for other people (reviewers, participants, readers, etc.) to objectively judge the merit of the study.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the theoretical framework and conceptual standpoints previously discussed are meshed with insights gleaned from the primary data to answer the research questions at the heart of this study's enquiry and resolve its overarching objectives. Guided by the study's research method, I answer RQ1 by presenting instances in the primary data where the author leverages narrative paradigm components (narrative coherence and narrative fidelity) and propaganda techniques in the book and examine how the author deploys these strategies to enhance the compelling force of stories told within the book. To answer RQ2, I identify instances within the primary data where the author made references to American myths, values and explicate what these references indicate in the context of the author's political aspirations. To reach an informed examination of RQ3, I present cases where the author advocates for political change and action in the primary data and explain what these calls imply. Consequently, to interlock my findings and forge a holistic analysis of the primary data, I establish relationships between the three research questions and draw inferences therefrom to make claims about how Barack Obama exploits key narrative strategies to brand his autobiography, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, as an election manifesto to garner political goodwill and canvass voters for the 2008 presidential elections in which he was a key contender.

RQ1. Narrative paradigm and Propaganda

As discussed in the review of literature chapter, Fisher (1984; 1987; 2009) argues that for a story/narrative to evoke a persuasive effect, it must pass the test of narrative rationality measured by its adherence to the tenets of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. To pass the test of narrative coherence, a narrative must answer questions like: Do characters act in ways that are

consistent (characterological coherence)? How well does the story compare to other stories that the audience is familiar with (material coherence)? How well does the story "hang together" (structural coherence)? (Fisher, 1987, p. 47). On the other hand, narrative fidelity seeks answers to questions like: Does the story have values? Are these values in tandem with the shared values of the story's audience? Do these values match the actions of the characters? Do these values have positive consequences in people's lives? Do these values match the ideals for accepted social behavior? (Fisher, 1987).

Hence, to test the strength of Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* as a well written instrument of political persuasion and interrogate what makes stories persuasive from a narrative paradigm standpoint, we start by engaging it from the narrative paradigm lens.

Does the autobiography exhibit narrative coherence?

Here, we examine the autobiography to check if it exhibits narrative coherence vis a vis the components of characterological coherence, material coherence, and structural coherence.

Characterological coherence: Fisher notes that testing for this kind of coherence requires us to ask if the characters are believable, consistent, and reliable. In *The Audacity of Hope,* there are three unmistakable categories of characters – the author (Barack Obama), American politicians and the citizens of America. An analysis of how Obama characterizes himself and portrays the government and people of America offers a lot of interesting insights that enhance the characterological coherence and overall narrative coherence of the autobiography.

The author: An analysis of Obama's assumed character/persona in *The Audacity of Hope* is pursued in greater detail in RQ2. Therefore, there is no need to replicate the analysis here.

American politicians: In his characterization of the American politicians, Obama notes that American politicians, and their entities are responsible for fueling America's nosediving economic

fortunes by making simplistic policy decisions, aggravating political polarization by encouraging polemical statements in the public sphere and who instead of finding workable solutions are keen on extending "deflections of criticism and assignments of blame" (Obama, 2006, p. 24). Obama indicts American politicians and their enablers for misguiding Americans and violating the trust that citizens have reposed in them:

> Instead of the "compassionate conservatism" that George Bush promised in his 2000 campaign, what has characterized the ideological core of today's GOP is absolutism, not conservatism. There is the absolutism of the free market, an ideology of no taxes, no regulation, no safety net— indeed, no government beyond what's required to protect private property and provide for the national defense.
> There's the religious absolutism of the Christian right, a movement that gained traction on the undeniably difficult issue of abortion, but which soon flowered into something much broader; a movement that insists not only that Christianity is America's dominant faith, but that a particular, fundamentalist brand of that faith should drive public policy, overriding any alternative source of understanding, whether the writings of liberal theologians, the findings of the National Academy of Sciences, or the words of Thomas Jefferson.
> And there is the absolute belief in the authority of majority will, or at least those who claim power in the name of the majority—a disdain for those institutional checks (the courts, the Constitution, the press, the Geneva Conventions, the rules of the Senate, or the traditions governing redistricting) that might slow our inexorable march toward the New Jerusalem (pp. 37-38).

Obama does not spare the democrats as well in his indictment:

> Instead, we Democrats are just, well, confused. There are those who still champion the old-time religion, defending every New Deal and Great Society program from Republican encroachment, achieving ratings of 100 percent from the liberal interest groups. But these efforts seem exhausted, a constant game of defense, bereft of the energy and new ideas needed to address the changing circumstances of globalization or a stubbornly isolated inner city….
> Mainly, though, the Democratic Party has become the party of reaction. In reaction to a war that is ill conceived, we appear suspicious of all military action. In reaction to those who proclaim the market can cure all ills, we resist efforts to use market principles to tackle pressing problems. In reaction to religious overreach, we equate tolerance with secularism, and forfeit the moral language that would help infuse our policies with a larger meaning. We lose elections and hope for the courts to foil Republican plans. We lose the courts and wait for a White House scandal (pp. 38-39).

While we may argue that Obama is a member of the political class and therefore also culpable in creating the mess he professes that America has become, he tries to tactically absolve

himself of responsibility by forging an argument propped on the notion that he is not one of those politicians undermining America's development. Instead of being like one of those partisan politicians who are "unrestrained in the vitriol they hurl at opponents" (p. 16) Obama notes that he works occasionally "with even my most conservative colleagues to work on a piece of legislation" because he believes firmly "that politics could be different, and that the voters wanted something different; that they were tired of distortion, name-calling, and sound-bite solutions to complicated problems" (p. 17). According to him, it was with the mindset that politics could be different that he "had entered the 2004 U.S. Senate race. For the duration of the campaign, I did my best to say what I thought, keep it clean, and focus on substance" (p. 18).

In essence, the other politicians are the bad guys and Obama has to distinguish himself for him to be able to court the voting public who are already negatively biased against American politicians.

American citizens: In Obama's *The Audacity of Hope*, citizens of America are characterized as victims; victims of the ineptitude of members of the political class who champion "policies that consistently favor the wealthy and powerful over average Americans" and have turned the American economy to one "that exposes hardworking Americans to chronic insecurity and possible destitution" (p. 23). Obama notes further that:

> There is another story to be told, by the millions of Americans who are going about their business every day. They are on the job or looking for work, starting businesses, helping their kids with their homework, and struggling with high gas bills, insufficient health insurance, and a pension that some bankruptcy court somewhere has rendered unenforceable. They are by turns hopeful and frightened about the future. Their lives are full of contradictions and ambiguities. And because politics seems to speak so little to what they are going through—because they understand that politics today is a business and not a mission, and what passes for debate is little more than spectacle— they turn inward, away from the noise and rage and endless chatter (pp. 24-25).

It is however pertinent to note that while Obama characterizes Americans as victims of circumstance, he does not stretch so far as to portray them as helpless victims. While Obama agrees that Americans continue to be shortchanged by politicians, he notes that Americans, in their righteous temerity will prevail over the forces stifling their prosperity:

> I thought about the themes that I'd sounded during the campaign— the willingness of people to work hard if given the chance, the need for government to help provide a foundation for opportunity, the belief that Americans felt a sense of mutual obligation toward one another. I made a list of the issues I might touch on—health care, education, the war in Iraq.
>
> But most of all, I thought about the voices of all the people I'd met on the campaign trail. I remembered Tim Wheeler and his wife in Galesburg, trying to figure out how to get their teenage son the liver transplant he needed. I remembered a young man in East Moline named Seamus Ahern who was on his way to Iraq— the desire he had to serve his country, the look of pride and apprehension on the face of his father. I remembered a young black woman I'd met in East St. Louis whose name I never would catch, but who told me of her efforts to attend college even though no one in her family had ever graduated from high school.
>
> It wasn't just the struggles of these men and women that had moved me. Rather, it was their determination, their self-reliance, a relentless optimism in the face of hardship (p. 356).

Obama's characterization of Americans as heroes pursuing the American dream regardless of the challenges inflicted on them by the political class has resonance with Americans and is accepted by them. This has already been proved by Fisher (1982) who in his study of President Ronald Reagan established that politicians' portrayal of Americans as heroes appeals to their ego and assures them that they can overcome the plethora of challenges they and the country face. It is by touting this mode of characterization that politicians seek to socialize the emotions of the electorate.

Structural coherence: In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama starts by telling stories which point to the fact that America is wounded; that America's "democracy has gone seriously awry" (Obama, 2006, p. 22) and that "the racial and religious tensions within the body politic, and the transnational threats – from terrorism to pandemic" if not checked with tremendous alacrity will push the

country in the abyss. Thereafter, he proceeds to give a detailed exegesis of the cause of the hydra-headed challenges that America faces after which he continues to proffer actionable suggestions as regards how these challenges can be alleviated.

Obama's structural concatenation in the narrative follows thus:

- Statement of the problem - America is facing a myriad of problems
- Causes of the problem - I know the root causes of these problems
- Knowledge of what America needs - I have travelled extensively within America and across the world and have interacted with Americans of different class and therefore know what they want and how to serve them
- Proposed solutions - here are my proposed suggestions for how we can work together to manage the wicked problems besetting America today
- Work with me – I can be that person who puts America back on the trajectory of development, so support me.

Obama's narrative first emphasizes that America has run into countless problems which require urgent attention. Right from the prologue, Obama tells stories that foreground this. He expresses that America's scale of social, economic and political justice has become terribly unbalanced: "I am angry about policies that consistently favor the wealthy and powerful over average Americans, and insist that government has an important role in opening up opportunity to all" (Obama, 2006, p. 8). He bemoans the fact that Americans "no longer seem to possess a shared language with which to discuss our ideals, much less the tools to arrive at some rough consensus about how, as a nation, we might work together to bring those ideals about" (Obama, 2006, p. 8).

As the examples below also show, this message continues to appear consistently across the book. In chapter one (Republicans and Democrats) Obama notes that:

> We know that our healthcare system is broken: wildly expensive, terribly inefficient, and poorly adapted to an economy no longer built on lifetime employment, a system that exposes hardworking Americans to chronic insecurity and possible destitution (Obama, 2006, pp. 22-23).

To further emphasize this, he tells the story of a man named Tim Wheeler who he met during one of his townhall meetings across the country whose

> Big worry now was health-care coverage. "My son Mark needs a liver transplant," he said grimly. "We're on the waiting list for a donor, but with my health-care benefits used up, we're trying to figure out if Medicaid will cover the costs. Nobody can give me a clear answer, and you know, I'll sell everything I got for Mark, go into debt, but I still …" Tim's voice cracked; his wife, sitting beside him, buried her head in her hands. I tried to assure them that we would find out exactly what Medicaid would cover. Tim nodded, putting his arm around his wife's shoulder.
>
> On the drive back to Chicago, I tried to imagine Tim's desperation: no job, an ailing son, his savings running out (pp. 144-145).

Besides healthcare, Obama also notes how partisanship has eaten deep into the fabric of American politics. To illustrate this, he narrates a meeting he had with former President Bush where the president advised Obama to be careful because

> when you get a lot of attention like you've been getting, people start gunnin' for ya. And it won't necessarily just be coming from my side, you understand. From yours, too. Everybody'll be waiting for you to slip, know what I mean? So watch yourself (pp. 46-47).

In the same vein, to drive his point further Obama tells us about a discussion he had with "an old Washington hand who had served in and around the Capitol for close to fifty years" (p. 25). This According to Obama, the "old Washington hand" stated that there is definitely a difference between how American politics was played in the past and how it is played now:

> "Back then, almost everybody with any power in Washington had served in World War II. We might've fought like cats and dogs on issues. A lot of us came from different backgrounds, different neighborhoods, different political philosophies. But with the war, we all had something in common. That shared experience developed a certain trust and respect. It helped to work through our differences and get things done."
>
> As I listened to the old man reminisce, about Dwight Eisenhower and Sam Rayburn, Dean Acheson and Everett Dirksen, it was hard not to get swept up in the hazy portrait he painted, of a time before twenty-four-hour news cycles and nonstop fundraising, a time of serious men doing serious work (pp. 25-26).

The story of this chance encounter with the old Washington hand that Obama tells adds credence to the claim that he makes in the autobiography; the claims that something has gone wrong with American politics. This conversation reminds him of "a time before the fall, a golden age in Washington when, regardless of which party was in power, civility reigned and government worked" (p. 25).

Obama also decries how the American media has become sensationalist, placing public excitement over and above accuracy, civility and objectivity. To illustrate this, he tells us about a TV reporter he knew back in Chicago who

> Was so notorious for feeding you the quote he wanted that his interviews felt like a Laurel and Hardy routine.
>
> "Do you feel betrayed by the Governor's decision yesterday?" he would ask me.
>
> "No. I've talked to the Governor, and I'm sure we can work out our differences before the end of session."
>
> "Sure... but do you feel betrayed by the Governor?"
>
> "I wouldn't use that word. His view is that..."
>
> "But isn't this really a betrayal on the Governor's part?"
>
> The spin, the amplification of conflict, the indiscriminate search for scandal and miscues—the cumulative impact of all this is to erode any agreed-upon standards for judging the truth (pp. 125-126).

Obama further bewails the gradual erosion of core American values. He laments how increasingly difficult it is becoming in America to encounter service providers, in the private and

public sector who are committed to excellence and do their work diligently. He states that his encounters with "competence seem more sporadic lately; I seem to spend more time looking for somebody in the store to help me or waiting for the deliveryman to show" (p. 60).

We see this same kind of story where Obama paints a grim picture of America's situation in remaining chapters of the autobiography. In chapter 5 of the narrative (Opportunity), Obama relates the story of his meeting with some high school students to explain the deplorable state of education in the country, and also bring to the fore how racial discrimination still remains prevalent in the American society:

> In 2005 I paid a visit to Thornton Township High School, a predominantly black high school in Chicago's southern suburbs. My staff had worked with teachers there to organize a youth town hall meeting—representatives of each class spent weeks conducting surveys to find out what issues their fellow students were concerned about and then presented the results in a series of questions to me. At the meeting they talked about violence in the neighborhoods and a shortage of computers in their classrooms. But their number one issue was this: Because the school district couldn't afford to keep teachers for a full school day, Thornton let out every day at 1:30 in the afternoon. With the abbreviated schedule, there was no time for students to take science lab or foreign language classes (pp. 159-160).
>
> How come we are getting shortchanged? They asked me. Seems like nobody even expects us to go to college, they said.
>
> They wanted more school (pp. 159-160).

In the same vein, Obama, in the final chapter of the narrative (Family), draws stories from his own immediate family to expresses his frustration at the prohibitive cost of childcare and the increasing cost of maintaining a family in America. He notes that unlike he and his wife Michelle who "had enough income to cover all the services that help ease the pressures of two-earner parenthood: reliable child care, extra babysitting whenever we needed it, … someone to come in and clean the house once a week," many other American families do not have it as smooth and easy:

> For most American families, such help is financially out of reach. The cost of day care is especially prohibitive; the United States is practically alone among Western nations in not providing government-subsidized, high-quality day-care services to all its workers.
>
> Finally, Michelle and I had my mother-in-law, who lives only fifteen minutes away from us, in the same house in which Michelle was raised. Marian is in her late sixties but looks ten years younger, and last year, when Michelle went back to full-time work, Marian decided to cut her hours at the bank so she could pick up the girls from school and look after them every afternoon. For many American families, such help is simply unavailable; in fact, for many families, the situation is reversed— someone in the family has to provide care for an aging parent on top of other family responsibilities (pp. 341-342).

Moreover, to put things in proper perspective and further emphasize that America is indeed falling, Obama alludes to times in the past when America was stable and on a path of upward trajectory. He reminisces times past when parents could send kids to play outside by themselves; when parents had no need to burden their children's schedules just so they won't be home alone when their parents are at work: "there are playdates, ballet classes, gymnastics classes, tennis lessons, piano lessons, soccer leagues, and what seem like weekly birthday parties." He talks about the look of surprise on his daughter Malia's face when he once told her that

> During the entire time that I was growing up, I attended exactly two birthday parties, both of which involved five or six kids, cone hats, and a cake. She looked at me the way I used to look at my grandfather when he told stories of the Depression—with a mixture of fascination and incredulity (p 349).

In addition, as previously mentioned, Obama does not just stop at telling stories that signpost the challenges bedeviling America. He goes a step further by also telling stories that that trace the root causes of these wicked problems and give an idea of when things started going awry in the country:

> By the time I returned from law school, though, tensions between Blacks and Latinos in Chicago had started to surface. Between 1990 and 2000, the Spanish-speaking population in Chicago rose by 38 percent, and with this surge in population the Latino community was no longer content to serve as junior partner in any black-brown coalition. After Harold Washington died, a new cohort of Latino elected officials, affiliated with Richard M. Daley

> and remnants of the old Chicago political machine, came onto the scene, men and women less interested in high-minded principles and rainbow coalitions than in translating growing political power into contracts and jobs. As black businesses and commercial strips struggled, Latino businesses thrived, helped in part by financial ties to home countries and by a customer base held captive by language barriers. Everywhere, it seemed, Mexican and Central American workers came to dominate low-wage work that had once gone to blacks—as waiters and busboys, as hotel maids and as bellmen—and made inroads in the construction trades that had long excluded black labor. Blacks began to grumble and feel threatened; they wondered if once again they were about to be passed over by those who'd just arrived (pp. 262-263).

Having peddled stories that articulate some of the causes and timeline of America's challenges, Obama still does not stop; he takes things a notch higher by telling personal stories about his encounter with Americans across all racial, political, and social divides at home and abroad to establish the fact that he knows what Americans really want and need. That he has been an advocate and servant of the people as a civic organizer, constitutional lawyer and senator and in essence shares their pain:

> One of my favorite tasks of being a senator is hosting town hall meetings. I held thirty-nine of them my first year in the Senate, all across Illinois, in tiny rural towns like Anna and prosperous suburbs like Naperville, in black churches on the South Side and a college in Rock Island. There's not a lot of fanfare involved. My staff will call up the local high school, library, or community college to see if they're willing to host the event. A week or so in advance, we advertise in the town newspaper, in church bulletins, and on the local radio station. On the day of the meeting I'll show up a half hour early to chat with town leaders and we'll discuss local issues, perhaps a road in need of repaving or plans for a new senior center. After taking a few photographs, we enter the hall where the crowd is waiting. I shake hands on my way to the stage, which is usually bare except for a podium, a microphone, a bottle of water, and an American flag posted in its stand. And then, for the next hour or so, I answer to the people who sent me to Washington (Obama, 2006, p. 101).

In more specific terms, Obama alludes to his meeting with students, trade unionists, low-income earners, rural/suburban/urban Americans etc. to emphasize how well he understands the depth and breadth of the issues. Below he recounts one of such encounters:

> When I met with representatives from organized labor, though, they were having none of it. As far as they were concerned, NAFTA had been a disaster for U.S. workers, and

> CAFTA just promised more of the same. What was needed, they said, was not just free trade but fair trade: stronger labor protections in countries that trade with the United States, including rights to unionize and bans on child labor; improved environmental standards in these same countries; an end to unfair government subsidies to foreign exporters and nontariff barriers on U.S. exports; stronger protections for U.S. intellectual property; and—in the case of China in particular—an end to an artificially devalued currency that put U.S. companies at a perpetual disadvantage (p. 172).

In the same vein, to prove that he is in touch with contemporary governance and policy issues, Obama also gives account of his meeting with technology giants leading the new wave of America's development:

> Eventually we found Larry Page, talking to an engineer about a software problem. He was dressed like his employees and, except for a few traces of early gray in his hair, didn't look any older. We spoke about Google's mission—to organize all of the world's information into a universally accessible, unfiltered, and usable form—and the Google site index, which already included more than six billion web pages…
>
> Toward the end of the tour, Larry led me to a room where a three-dimensional image of the earth rotated on a large flat-panel monitor. Larry asked the young Indian American engineer who was working nearby to explain what we were looking at.
>
> "These lights represent all the searches that are going on right now," the engineer said. "Each color is a different language. If you move the toggle this way"—he caused the screen to alter— "you can see the traffic patterns of the entire Internet system."
>
> The image was mesmerizing, more organic than mechanical, as if I were glimpsing the early stages of some accelerating evolutionary process, in which all the boundaries between men— nationality, race, religion, wealth—were rendered invisible and irrelevant, so that the physicist in Cambridge, the bond trader in Tokyo, the student in a remote Indian village, and the manager of a Mexico City department store were drawn into a single, constant, thrumming conversation, time and space giving way to a world spun entirely of light (pp. 140-141).

After painting a gloomy picture of America's socio-political and economic situation and expounding the causes/implication of these myriad challenges, Obama subsequently tries to assuage the audience's fear by peddling stories which offer hope in the future and people of America:

> This book grows directly out of those conversations on the campaign trail. Not only did my encounters with voters confirm the fundamental decency of the American people, they

> also reminded me that at the core of the American experience are a set of ideals that continue to stir our collective conscience; a common set of values that bind us together despite our differences; a running thread of hope that makes our improbable experiment in democracy work. These values and ideals find expression not just in the marble slabs of monuments or in the recitation of history books. They remain alive in the hearts and minds of most Americans—and can inspire us to pride, duty, and sacrifice (p. 8).

He pushes this further by also alluding to history and touching on America's global influence and power to show Americans that by collaborating and rediscovering lost values, a better future is not out of reach. For instance, to illustrate that with intentionality and philosophical leadership, America has all it takes to surmount the intractable problems it faces, like it has done in the past, Obama takes the reader back memory lane by detailing how America, led by President Woodrow Wilson played a vital role in securing America and consolidating its leadership position in the world during and after World War I:

> During World War I, Woodrow Wilson avoided American involvement until the repeated sinking of American vessels by German U-boats and the imminent collapse of the European continent made neutrality untenable. When the war was over, America had emerged as the world's dominant power — but a power whose prosperity Wilson now understood to be linked to peace and prosperity in faraway lands. It was in an effort to address this new reality that Wilson sought to reinterpret the idea of America's manifest destiny. Making "the world safe for democracy" didn't just involve winning a war, he argued; it was in America's interest to encourage the self-determination of all peoples and provide the world a legal framework that could help avoid future conflicts. As part of the Treaty of Versailles, which detailed the terms of German surrender, Wilson proposed a League of Nations to mediate conflicts between nations, along with an international court and a set of international laws that would bind not just the weak but also the strong. "This is the time of all others when Democracy should prove its purity and its spiritual power to prevail," Wilson said. "It is surely the manifest destiny of the United States to lead in the attempt to make this spirit prevail" (pp. 282-283).

In addition, he recounts his experience in Iraq where he met a group of young American journalists and how his meeting with those selfless American reporters made it clear to him that America's presence in Iraq is the only strand of unification keeping the country from falling apart:

> I asked them if they thought a U.S. troop withdrawal might ease tensions, expecting them to answer in the affirmative. Instead, they shook their heads. "My best guess is the country would collapse into civil war within weeks," one of the reporters told me. "One hundred, maybe two hundred thousand dead. We're the only thing holding this place together" (Obama, 2006, p. 298).

What this particular example exemplifies is that America has an ingrained value of service to humanity and further projects that if America could serve other countries selflessly and save those from sinking, it definitely has the power to save itself from impending doom at home.

Besides, drawing from his personal story, Obama hints that America is indeed progressing, albeit more needs to be done:

> My campaign for the U.S. Senate indicates some of the changes that have taken place in both the white and black communities of Illinois over the past twenty-five years. By the time I ran, Illinois already had a history of blacks elected to statewide office, including a black state comptroller and attorney general (Roland Burris), a United States senator (Carol Moseley Braun), and a sitting secretary of state, Jesse White, who had been the state's leading vote-getter only two years earlier. Because of the pioneering success of these public officials, my own campaign was no longer a novelty—I might not have been favored to win, but the fact of my race didn't foreclose the possibility (p. 234).

By drawing from his personal experience to highlight this progress in America, Obama is subtly hinting that there are vast possibilities for progress in America. He shows the audience that all hope is not lost, that a better America is not out of reach, that new institutions/alliances can be formed and that the possibility of the new kind of politics he proposes is neither bizarre nor far-fetched. Obama, in this sense is urging Americans to remain optimistic because the timeless values that have helped America navigate tumultuous events previously, "a tradition that stretched from

the days of the country's founding to the glory of the civil rights movement" (Obama, 2006, p. 2) can also be applied to face contemporary challenges.

Next, Obama weaves stories about his knowledge of American politics and policies with stories of his extensive experience in public service to propose actionable solutions that he believes have the potential to help put America back on the track of progress and sustainable development. This is explained comprehensively in the analysis of RQ3.

Subsequently, what Obama does as he proposes actionable plans to restore America is to present himself as a leader who could lead the charge of helping America course-correct: "If I could reach those voters directly, frame the issues as I felt them, explain the choices in as a fashion as I knew how, then the people's instincts for fair play and common sense would bring them around" (pp. 17-18).

This 'framing of issues as he felt them' and 'explaining choices as he knew how' to 'activate people's instincts for common sense and fair play' is, as already mentioned, the fashion of dressing the thoughts and ideas he presents in the garb of personal stories. This technique is more likely to be effective because the more we know about an author (their dreams, aspirations, struggles and victories), the better we can understand the messages central to what the author talks about and connect with them on an emotional level. By leveraging stories from his day-to-day life to explicate his thoughts and ideas about the challenges that America faces and how those challenges can be ameliorated, Obama gives a human angle to the thoughts and ideas that he shares. By storifying his ideas, Obama is essentially trying to evoke emotional responses from the audience as this is the fundamental basis for persuasion; as Fisher (1982; 1984; 1987; 2009) argues, it is easier to achieve persuasive effects on audiences by integrating stories into texts rather than presenting cold facts and rational arguments alone. This is because human beings are *homo*

narrans (storytelling animals) who "remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love" in stories (Hardy, 1981, p. 1).

It is also apt to mention that besides the fact that Obama's story structure hangs coherently, the story of his life is coherent as well and largely follows the American "success sequence" concept: go to school, get a job, and get married before having children. Besides, by hinting at the fact that he has been able to avoid any major scandal, that he remains a good father to his kids and a loving husband to his wife despite all of the challenges that he has faced, Obama is strongly emphasizing the fact that his family is built on the pristine Christian principles that formed the cornerstone of America, "one Nation under God. He is living the American dream; a dream that has not been truncated by an awful divorce, a painful separation from his children or a scathing scandal. By framing his story in a fashion that aligns with the tenets of typical American life, Obama projects himself as a typical representation of American citizenship; a model of what an America citizen should be.

That Obama's life trajectory also follows sequentially bolsters the structural coherence of his story. The congruence that is visible between the sequential trajectory of his personal life and the coherent alignment of his narrative flow makes his story more credible, believable, and persuasive as it will most likely not create a disconnect in the reader's mind. If one of both structures had failed, that is, if either the trajectory of his life story or his storytelling structure does not hang together, this would have created a disconnect in the reader's mind and therefore smeared the entire persuasive force of his narrative.

Furthermore, by telling stories about himself, his family, and his career progression, Obama seeks to establish trust and build credibility. For example, to show how hard he is at work contributing to the growth of America and fighting for the good of its people, Obama recounts how

he proposed "legislation I called "Health Care for Hybrids." The bill makes a deal with U.S. automakers: In exchange for federal financial assistance in meeting the health-care costs of retired autoworkers, the Big Three would reinvest these savings into developing more fuel-efficient vehicles" (Obama, 2006, p. 2) in his first year as a senator. In fact, he is so invested in this task of ensuring that America works that he has gone through the trouble of writing a book that chronicles how Americans:

> Might begin the process of changing our politics and our civic life. This isn't to say that I know exactly how to do it. I don't. Although I discuss in each chapter a number of our most pressing policy challenges, and suggest in broad strokes the path I believe we should follow, my treatment of the issues is often partial and incomplete. I offer no unifying theory of American government, nor do these pages provide a manifesto for action, complete with charts and graphs, timetables and ten-point plans.
> Instead what I offer is something more modest: personal reflections on those values and ideals that have led me to public life, some thoughts on the ways that the current political discourse unnecessarily divides us and my own best assessment – based on my experience as a senator and lawyer, husband and father, Christian and skeptic – of the ways we can ground our politics in the notion of a common good (p. 9).

Moreover, to emphasize his moral rectitude and show that he is the kind of leader America needs not only in thoughts and words but in character as well, Obama reminds us that as a senator, he has strived to live above suspicion by preserving "my independence, my good name, and my marriage, all of which, statistically speaking, had been placed at risk the moment I set foot in the state capital" (Obama, 2006, p. 2). Furthermore, to show that he comes from a lineage of individuals who led a life of service, Obama reveals that his "grandfather had signed up for the war the day after Pearl Harbor was bombed and had fought in Patton's army" (p. 249) and that his mother traversed between America and Indonesia for twenty years "working for international agencies for six or twelve months at a time as a specialist in women's development issues, designing programs to help village women start their own businesses or bring their produce to market" (p. 256).

To further appeal to the emotion of the audience, Obama leverages the technique of plain folks propaganda to identify with the masses and emphasize that he is just like them. In chapter 5 (Opportunity), he states that "most of the time I fly commercial and sit in coach, hoping for an aisle or window seat and crossing my fingers that the guy in front of me doesn't want to recline" (Obama, 2006, p. 137). In the same chapter, he mentions that as an American senator, he has the privilege to use a private jet for official duties but prefers not to use that privilege quite often even though the experience of flying in a private jet is way better than flying coach. According to him, this is because the stories of Americans he meets when he flies commercial are "the stories you missed on a private jet at forty thousand feet" (p. 145).

By telling stories of how he has served and continues to serve America, establishing that he is from a lineage of servant leaders, extoling his own character attributes and identifying with the people using plain folks propaganda, Obama is essentially establishing that he is qualified to aid America's restoration process.

Overall, as this analysis of Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* from a structural coherence lens reveals, the narrative is indeed structurally coherent; Obama tells stories in a way that hangs together logically and exhibits internal consistency.

Material coherence: To reiterate, material coherence, in the purview of narrative coherence, tests the strength of a narrative based on how well it compares with other narratives that the audience are familiar with. As Walter Fisher (1984; 1987; 2009) states, for a story to make sense to a target audience and move them to act or think in a certain way, it has to fit the picture of how they understand narratives.

Obama achieves material coherence by employing the "American Reclamation Jeremiad" discourse mode. Named after the biblical lamentations of Prophet Jeremiah, the American

reclamation jeremiad has been used for many years by politicians in the construction and critique of public life "because it is consistent with their objectives and worldview" (Rowland, 2005, p. 160). The American jeremiad has three distinctive discourse modes: "a chastising of society because it has sinned by violating its basic values, a warning that calamity is imminent if society does not reclaim its basic values, and a calling to return to the basic values so that society may prevent such destruction" (Harrell, 2010, p. 166). As can be deduced from the analysis of the autobiography's structural coherence above, these three discourse modes form major parts of the structural components of Obama's *The Audacity of Hope*:

> Whether we're from red states or blue states, we feel in our gut the lack of honesty, rigor, and common sense in our policy debates, and dislike what appears to be a continuous menu of false or cramped choices. Religious or secular, black, white, or brown, we sense—correctly—that the nation's most significant challenges are being ignored, and that if we don't change course soon, we may be the first generation in a very long time that leaves behind a weaker and more fractured America than the one we inherited. Perhaps more than any other time in our recent history, we need a new kind of politics, one that can excavate and build upon those shared understandings that pull us together as Americans.

The American restoration jeremiad lends credence to *The Audacity of Hope's* material coherence because American politicians have been using it for a very long time to emphasize America's need for change. By applying the same discourse mode, Obama grounds his work in the tradition of American politics and political thought to consolidate his status as an American political leader.

It can be argued that American audiences have become familiar with the jeremiad discourse mode: It is "an ancient formulaic refrain, a ritual form imported to Massachusetts in 1630 from the Old World" (Bercovich, 1978, p. 6). Ronald Reagan's 1992 speech titled *To Restore America* (Reagan Library, 2019), Dr. Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* (NPR, 2010) and *Rediscovering Lost Values* (King et al., 1955) speeches, Barack Obama's keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in 2004 (C-SPAN, 2008), Robert F. Kennedy's speech on the incidence of

Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, n.d.), Donald Trump's book *Crippled America: How to Make America Great Again* (Trump, 2015), Alan Keyes campaign speech at the Hylton High School in Virginia (C-SPAN, 2000) all follow the American restoration jeremiad discourse mode. Hence, it is not a narrative style that American audiences are unfamiliar with, even if many may not be able to identify it by its nomenclature.

By employing the age-long American restoration jeremiad discourse mode, Obama seeks to ensure that his stories does not stray from the way Americans conceptualize the world.

Narrative Fidelity: In reference to narrative fidelity, Fisher notes that the public are more amenable to believe stories that match their values. Narrative fidelity gets to the heart of a story by seeking answers to the following questions (Fisher, 1987):

- what values does the story highlight?
- do these values align with the shared values of the story's audience?
- do these values match the actions of the characters?
- do these values have positive consequences in people's lives?
- do these values match the ideals for accepted social behavior?

The values that Obama highlight in this autobiography stress the deeds of community, service, unity, the greatness of America and the resilience of its people.

Besides, he alludes to American history, culture, and text to reiterate these values. Some examples of the American values that Obama give emphasis to include the values of community, faith, service, hard work, patriotism, freedom, and honesty.

Like he does throughout the book, Obama draws from his personal story - stories about his family and lineage and other everyday Americans that he has encountered - to explain how deeply the values of hard work, patriotism, honesty, freedom, etc. are ingrained in the American DNA.

To showcase the value of hard work, he draws references from his work in congress. He emphasizes how he literally slaves away within and beyond the walls of the hallowed chambers forcefully pleading the cause of Americans. He notes that after hurricane Katrina

> I returned to Washington and worked the phones, trying to secure relief supplies and contributions. In Senate Democratic Caucus meetings, my colleagues and I discussed possible legislation. I appeared on the Sunday morning news shows, rejecting the notion that the Administration had acted slowly because Katrina's victims were black— "the incompetence was color-blind," I said—but insisting that the Administration's inadequate planning showed a degree of remove from, and indifference toward, the problems of inner-city poverty that had to be addressed (pp. 229-230).

Furthermore, he notes that instead of choosing a steady career path that would have guaranteed him a comfortable life, his patriotism and utmost love for America guided his decision to choose a career in public service. Instead of choosing a plum job in corporate America as a Harvard trained lawyer, he has chosen "a life with a ridiculous schedule, a life that requires me to be gone from Michelle and the girls for long stretches of time" (p. 348).

Another important American value that Obama projects in his autobiography is the value of honesty. He notes how he has and continues to stand for justice, fairness and does not shirk from speaking truth to power notwithstanding the consequences:

> Since my arrival in the Senate, I've been a steady and occasionally fierce critic of Bush Administration policies. I consider the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy to be both fiscally irresponsible and morally troubling. I have criticized the Administration for lacking a meaningful health-care agenda, a serious energy policy, or a strategy for making America more competitive. Back in 2002, just before announcing my Senate campaign, I made a speech at one of the first antiwar rallies in Chicago in which I questioned the Administration's evidence of weapons of mass destruction and suggested that an invasion of Iraq would prove to be a costly error. Nothing in the recent news coming out of Baghdad or the rest of the Middle East has dispelled these views (p. 47).

Moreover, Obama notes that at the core of the America society is the deep reverence for a higher power; the value of faith. Making references to how the African American religious

traditions pivoted the civil rights movement without "separating individual salvation from collective salvation," Obama notes that it was in the history of the Black church's history that:

> I was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death; rather, it was an active, palpable agent in the world. In the day-to-day work of the men and women I met in church each day, in their ability to "make a way out of no way" and maintain hope and dignity in the direst of circumstances, I could see the Word made manifest (p. 207).

To showcase America's value of diversity/multiculturalism that further lend credence to the notion that America is indeed the world's melting pot, he recounts how

> During the campaign, I would see firsthand the faces of this new America—in the Indian markets along Devon Avenue, in the sparkling new mosque in the southwest suburbs, in an Armenian wedding and a Filipino ball, in the meetings of the Korean American Leadership Council and the Nigerian Engineers Association. Everywhere I went, I found immigrants anchoring themselves to whatever housing and work they could find, washing dishes or driving cabs or toiling in their cousin's dry cleaners, saving money and building businesses and revitalizing dying neighborhoods, until they moved to the suburbs and raised children with accents that betrayed not the land of their parents but their Chicago birth certificates, teenagers who listened to rap and shopped at the mall and planned for futures as doctors and lawyers and engineers and even politicians (p. 260).

In the same vein, Obama draws from popular American myths to ensure that his narrative has a strong resonance with the audience. Some of the popular American myths he explores include the American dream myth, the journey myth, and the coming-of-age myth. In the example below for instance, Obama leverages the coming-of-age myth:

> I have recorded in a previous book the ways in which my early work in Chicago helped me grow into my manhood—how my work with the pastors and laypeople there deepened my resolve to lead a public life, how they fortified my racial identity and confirmed my belief in the capacity of ordinary people to do extraordinary things. But my experiences in Chicago also forced me to confront a dilemma that my mother never fully resolved in her own life: the fact that I had no community or shared traditions in which to ground my most deeply held beliefs. The Christians with whom I worked recognized themselves in me; they saw that I knew their Book and shared their values and sang their songs. But they sensed that a part of me remained removed, detached, an observer among them. I came to realize that without a vessel for my beliefs, without an unequivocal commitment to a particular community of faith, I would be consigned at some level to always remain apart, free in the way that my mother was free, but also alone in the same ways she was ultimately alone (p. 206).

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, allusion is another narrative strategy that Obama engages to enhance the material coherence of his narrative. Examples of historical, biblical, textual, and cultural allusion abound in the narrative. The example below is an instance from the book where Obama alludes to America's history to fortify a point he makes in the narrative:

> Still, as I stood in the foyer and let my eyes wander down the corridors, it was impossible to forget the history that had been made there—John and Bobby Kennedy huddling over the Cuban missile crisis; FDR making last-minute changes to a radio address; Lincoln alone, pacing the halls and shouldering the weight of a nation (Obama, 2006, p. 44).

Having established the values embedded in the narrative, the next question that begs to be answered is if the values entrenched in Obama's narrative align with the values that the American audience hold dear. As the analysis revealed, the values that Obama highlight do align with the values that American audiences exalt. For example, the following quote recapitulates the stories that highlight the value of education and hard work that Obama promotes: "Throughout our history, education has been at the heart of a bargain this nation makes with its citizens: If you work hard and take responsibility, you'll have a chance for a better life" (p. 159). The fact that hard work and education resonates and has endured "throughout our history" proves that it is an entrenched value in the American system which matches the values of American audiences.

By interspersing the narrative with American values, Obama is rallying the people of America to embrace "a new kind of politics, one that can excavate and build upon those shared understandings that pull us together as Americans" (p. 9). Community, service to humanity, unity, hard work, the American dream, etc. are ideal scripts for the American audience and Obama's allusion to these values by referring to historical events, myths, and texts foregrounds that these "shared understandings" remain the stanchion upon which the foundation of the American nation

rests. America may be wounded, but the people have the might and will power to wrench the soul of their country from the hands of heartless politicians and tend to its proper healing.

Next, we examine whether the values expressed in the narrative have positive consequences in the lives of American. A close examination of Obama's narrative from this viewpoint affirm that the values indeed bear positive consequences for the audience. Obama tells stories that offer hope, reassurance and confident optimism. The narrative uplifts Americans and reiterates that notwithstanding the circumstance, these American values remain "our inheritance, what makes us who we are as a people. And although we recognize that they are subject to challenge, can be poked and prodded and debunked and turned inside out by intellectuals and cultural critics, they have proven to be both surprisingly durable and surprisingly constant across classes, and races, and faiths, and generations" (p. 69) and therefore have the strength to carry us through these tough political milieu as they have in the past.

Finally, we examine these values to see if they match the ideals for accepted social behavior in an American context. As already reflected, these values indeed map an ideal for accepted social norm in America. Obama's stories rally Americans and emphasizes the time-tested founding values that the public hold dear. Community, unity, service to humanity, faith, the American dream etc. are values that match an ideal script of behavior for an American audience and that is why Obama really harps and integrates them in the stories that he tells.

RQ2: Obama's Persona, Character and Archetype

Obama's overarching message and the prominent America is wounded theme that runs across the narrative calls forth the leadership character and persona that Obama cultivates in *The Audacity of Hope*.

As already mentioned in the literature review section, some of the archetypal figures peculiar to the American culture include the trickster, the healer, the hero, the outlaw, the warrior, the sage, etc. In *The Audacity of Hope,* the major character and protagonist, Barack Obama portrays himself as a wounded healer in tandem with the healer archetype in American culture. Obama notes in the narrative that some of the wounds afflicting America have been inflicted on his person as well, by political opponents and beyond the ambits of political life. He recounts how a political opponent constantly hounded him because of the political ideas and beliefs he professes:

> Take my Republican opponent in 2004, Ambassador Alan Keyes, who deployed a novel argument for attracting voters in the waning days of the campaign. "Christ would not vote for Barack Obama," Mr. Keyes proclaimed, "because Barack Obama has voted to behave in a way that it is inconceivable for Christ to have behaved." This wasn't the first time that Mr. Keyes had made such pronouncements (p. 209)

Obama further makes it clear that wounds have been inflicted on him outside the ambits of politics:

> I can recite the usual litany of petty slights that during my forty-five years have been directed my way: security guards tailing me as I shop in department stores, white couples who toss me their car keys as I stand outside a restaurant waiting for the valet, police cars pulling me over for no apparent reason. I know what it's like to have people tell me I can't do something because of my color, and I know the bitter swill of swallowed-back anger. I know as well that Michelle and I must be continually vigilant against some of the debilitating story lines that our daughters may absorb—from TV and music and friends and the streets— about who the world thinks they are, and what the world imagines they should be (p. 233).

The stories within *The Audacity of Hope* that depicts Obama as a wounded individual bolsters his credibility. Personalizing America's wounds gives the impression that Obama would be in a better position to diagnose America's wounds, propose effective antidotes and administer proper curative measures to ameliorate those wounds. As Benziman et al. (2012) noted while quoting Carl Jung, "only a wounded physician can heal effectively" because ""only what he can put right in himself can he hope to put right in the patient"" (p. 2). It is the wounds that the wounded

healer has suffered that gives them the epiphany, inspiration, and motivation to take the path of a healer.

Obama's propositions for healing reverberate throughout the narrative. He calls on citizens, government, and politicians to sheath their swords, bury the hatchet and set aside biases and parochial interests for the greater good. He states that he uses *The Audacity of Hope* as a medium to:

> Suggest how we might move beyond our divisions to effectively tackle concrete problems: the growing economic insecurity of many American families, the racial and religious tensions within the body politic, and the transnational threats—from terrorism to pandemic— that gather beyond our shores (p. 10).

In the typical healer fashion, he believes that "a stronger sense of empathy would tilt the balance of our current politics in favor of those people who are struggling in this society. After all, if they are like us, then their struggles are our own. If we fail to help, we diminish ourselves" (pp. 67-68). This healer character is so ingrained in Obama's heart to the extent that "Democratic audiences are often surprised when I tell them I don't consider George Bush a bad man, and that I assume he and members of his administration are trying to do what they think is best for the country (p. 47). According to Obama, Americans must find "ways we can ground our politics in the notion of a common good" (p. 9).

To further put Obama's wounded healer persona in proper context, we also examine how he approaches and discusses the subject of race in America. This is an apposite metric to judge Obama's healer archetype by because race is one of the most contentious issues underpinning discussions around the development of the American society. As someone who identifies as Black, Obama stresses that his race is central to how he has conceptualized and told his stories in *The Audacity of Hope*:

> Furthermore, I am a prisoner of my own biography: I can't help but view the American experience through the lens of a black man of mixed heritage, forever mindful of how generations of people who looked like me were subjugated and stigmatized, and the subtle and not so subtle ways that race and class continue to shape our lives (p. 10).

Despite being a victim of racial discrimination himself, Obama still remains resolute and quips that "we will need to understand just how we got to this place, this land of warring factions and tribal hatreds. And we will need to remind ourselves, despite all our differences, just how much we share: common hopes, common dreams, a bond that will not break" (p. 25).

Through his words and by identifying as an individual who has suffered some wounds, Obama shows that he understands America's wounds in profound ways. He weaves stories that portray him as a strong willed and level-headed politician qualified for the task of leading the charge to ameliorate the wounds that have been inflicted on some crop of American politicians with whom he shares no traits and ideologies. Obama's stories and his vision for a united America fortifies his evocation of the wounded healer persona archetype.

RQ3: Policy agenda and call to action

As previously explained, by deploying the American restoration jeremiad discourse mode, Obama has already amplified his displeasure with the existing American system. In regular politician fashion, after telling stories that foreground his discontent with America's situation and peddling stories that highlight the causes of the challenges that dogging America, he then proceeds to present his prescribed policy ideas wrapped in stories drawn from experience as propositions for the restoration of America's soul.

Obama's call to action in *The Audacity of Hope* covers a broad spectrum of issues. To begin with, on the need for Americans to go beyond speculating and spend themselves in the task of repairing race relations in America, Obama tell us that he believes that

> After all, talk is cheap; like any value, empathy must be acted upon. When I was a community organizer back in the eighties, I would often challenge neighborhood leaders

> by asking them where they put their time, energy, and money. Those are the true tests of what we value, I'd tell them, regardless of what we like to tell ourselves. If we aren't willing to pay a price for our values, if we aren't willing to make some sacrifices in order to realize them, then we should ask ourselves whether we truly believe in them at all (p. 68).

In a practical sense, Obama presents actionable fixes to each specific challenge dogging the American system. To make a case for the need for more generous investments in America's health sector, Obama tells us how:

> One night five years ago, Michelle and I were awakened by the sound of our younger daughter, Sasha, crying in her room. Sasha was only three months old at the time, so it wasn't unusual for her to wake up in the middle of the night. But there was something about the way she was crying, and her refusal to be comforted, that concerned us. Eventually we called our pediatrician, who agreed to meet us at his office at the crack of dawn. After examining her, he told us that she might have meningitis and sent us immediately to the emergency room. Sasha is fine now, as healthy and happy as a five-year-old should be. But I still shudder when I think of those three days; how my world narrowed to a single point, and how I was not interested in anything or anybody outside the four walls of that hospital room—not my work, not my schedule, not my future. And I am reminded that unlike Tim Wheeler, the steelworker I met in Galesburg whose son needed a liver transplant, unlike millions of Americans who've gone through a similar ordeal, I had a job and insurance at the time.
>
> Americans are willing to compete with the world. We work harder than the people of any other wealthy nation. We are willing to tolerate more economic instability and are willing to take more personal risks to get ahead. But we can only compete if our government makes the investments that give us a fighting chance—and if we know that our families have some net beneath which they cannot fall (pp. 186-187).

In addition, while proposing how racial inequality can be stemmed, Obama makes a case for affirmative action and to substantiate his stance, he relays that in his experience "as a lawyer who's worked on civil rights cases, I can say that where there's strong evidence of prolonged and systematic discrimination by large corporations, trade unions, or branches of municipal government, goals and timetables for minority hiring may be the only meaningful remedy available" (p. 244).

Furthermore, on reigning in the rising tide of teenage pregnancy, Obama calls on young Americans to "show more reverence toward sex and intimacy, and I applaud parents,

congregations, and community programs that transmit that message. But I'm not willing to consign a teenage girl to a lifetime of struggle because of lack of access to birth control. I want couples to understand the value of commitment and the sacrifices marriage entails. But I'm not willing to use the force of law to keep couples together regardless of their personal circumstances" (pp. 335-336).

Additionally, while Obama proposes that Americans should engage more in the public sphere, he however notes that deliberation and mutual understanding is not a silver bullet because "talk is cheap" (p. 68). He argues that as Americans talk with one another, they must pursue those talks with action. To emphasize this point, Obama narrates how as a community organizer, he used to "challenge neighborhood leaders by asking them where they put their time, energy, and money" because he believes that we need to pay the price and make sacrifices if we would successfully actualize our topmost dreams and values as a nation (p. 68).

In conclusion, as this analysis shows, Obama's campaign autobiography, *The Audacity of Hope* qualifies as an effective persuasive narrative as it fits Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm criteria which sets the standard for what constitutes a persuasive document: narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. Besides, the analysis of the narrative characters and examination of the narrative's call to action element shows that the narrative integrates components that qualify it to be tagged a persuasive political document.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Analyzing *The Audacity of Hope* in the purview Fisher's narrative paradigm theory gives useful insights concerning why the autobiography is a successful persuasive political document. The component of narrative coherence reveals how story flow, characters, and the congruence between Obama's autobiography and others that have been written before it enhances the narrative's overall persuasive power. In the same vein, the narrative fidelity element emphasizes the important role that values, myths and history play in the context of persuasive communication.

The analysis lends more credence to Walter Fisher's (1982; 1984; 1987; 2009) claims that rational argument or rhetoric alone is not as effective as rational argument fused with narrative to create persuasive force. Instead of only making rational arguments, Obama bolsters the rational arguments with stories drawn from his personal and professional lives to establish connections between the ideas that he proposes and the real world. This goes a long way to show readers that the ideas he proposes have concrete meanings in his life and in theirs as well. Merging the magics of expression (rhetoric) and experience (stories), what Walter Fisher (1984, p. 2) refers to as the fusion of "the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme" not only adds vibrance to the autobiography but also increases its persuasive force and epistemic value. Unlike the plain rational argumentation that rhetoric offers, or bare storytelling that the literary aesthetic theme offers, the combination of rational arguments and stories in narrative paradigm contextualizes the arguments that the author makes; as audiences read what those ideas mean in the lived experiences of the author, they can evaluate what those ideas and arguments mean in the context of their own lives and how they can apply those ideas in their lives as well.

For example, Obama's argument for increased budgetary allocation for health care in America using the story of his own daughter's agonizing experience with meningitis and the story

of Tim Wheeler is bound to resonate with Americans more because he has added context to the story. By showing real life examples of how lack of access to quality health insurance can be the thin line between life and death, Obama appeals to our emotions of pain and helplessness. By so doing, even readers who haven't been in Malia (his daughter) or Tim Wheeler's situation can relate with their stories because they most likely know someone or people who have been or are in a similar situation.

The analysis of *The Audacity of Hope* in the purview of narrative paradigm reinforces the claim that a combination of rational arguments and stories can enhance a narrative's believability, legitimacy, and persuasive force in ways that rational arguments or stories alone cannot.

Besides, the other two research questions which border on leadership character/persona and the call for political change confirm that *The Audacity of Hope* shares a lot in common with other narratives in the genre of presidential/political communication. However, one major factor that distinguishes Obama's autobiography from many other political autobiographies and treatises is that in the same way that Obama's fuses arguments and stories to contextualize and strengthen the ideas he expresses, he also just does not present his persona and call for political change in abstraction. In terms of persona, instead of merely stating how hardworking and upright he is, he tells stories that portray him as a hardworking and upright individual who comes from a lineage of other hardworking and upright individuals and leverages plain folks propaganda to tell stories that depict him as a typical "man of the people". This subtle method of applying propaganda through storytelling is bound to be more effective because as Sproule (1994) has established, propaganda would be more effective if "it persuades people without seeming to do so" (p. 3).

Moreover, in terms of call to political change, he also uses stories to contextualize the proposed policy ideas he presents. This realization aligns with what Clark (2008) notes in the

comparative analysis of Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* and Tavis Smiley's *The Covenant with Black America* which also proposes policy fixes to some of the challenges peculiar to the African American community in the United States of America. According to Clark, *The Audacity of Hope* does a better job of articulating propositions and is more relatable because Obama ornates his propositions with personal stories that project values and ideas that can motivate and inspire people to take actionable steps (p. 233). The personal stories he integrates to dissect America's challenges and propose solutions centers the struggle of average Americans in such a way that they see themselves in Obama's story.

Above all, Obama's story is a satisfying one. It exhibits narrative coherence as the stories that Obama tell and how he tells them hold together structurally. The personal stories he tells also ring true for Americans because those stories mirror their lives and the values exhibited within the story rings true for them. The emotions that the stories he tells evoke, for example, are emotions that Americans also feel. By the virtue of being human, every American have at one time or the other felt the emotion of fear like Obama felt when his daughter was ill; the emotion of love like Obama feels towards his wife and family; and the emotion of pain like Obama felt when he lost an election. For American audiences specifically, the values and myths that Obama talks about are values that are at the center of American life and living. As one of the most productive countries globally, the values of hard work, persistence, and the American dream myth that Obama harps on resonate with Americans. The arrangement of events in Obama's story further strengthens the narrative coherence; the coherence of his life story proves that he lives by the values he is trying to persuade Americans to adopt. Broadly, the autobiography serves not only as a campaign autobiography which tries to persuade people to vote a certain way. It is also a political thought

document which answers the question "how ought I to live?" for American citizens in the same way that autobiographies like that of Benjamin Franklin does.

Conclusion

This study focused on interrogating Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* to determine what components of narrative paradigm (narrative coherence and narrative fidelity) appear in the autobiography and how those components are deployed to brand the autobiography as an election campaign tool that Obama exploits to introduce himself to the American public as an aspirant to the office of the president of the United States of America, introduce his policy ideas to the voting public and canvass voters.

This research study has valuable implications for the field of communication. It foregrounds the power of consistent and reasoned stories towards creating shared meaning, socializing emotions, defining history, and making a case for political change. Interrogating the autobiography from a narrative paradigm perspective explains how shared meaning and persuasion is achieved; by leveraging the intrinsic communication modes that tap into the socio-cultural experience and expectations of an American audience.

To quote Lepore (2019) again, "like gods and superheroes, Presidential candidates require origin stories" and through the adept fusion of communication modes and elements, Obama solicits goodwill and canvasses support for his ideas. He notes that the American society is on the brink of collapse and indicts American politicians across the Democratic and Republican divide as the villains pushing America in the direction of this impending doom. However, instead of calling for the heads of these so-called villains, Obama preaches healing by urging American citizens to embrace "a new kind of politics" built on the principle of common good. In addition, apart from just canvassing for healing, Obama proposes policy fixes and solutions, based on his vast

experience in government, public service, and his personal life, that have the potential to help America speed up the healing process.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study is that some of the positive bias I have for Barack Obama might have colored my analysis and interpretation. I therefore wonder how my analysis could have been different if I have a neutral disposition towards Obama. Nevertheless, this is not a research anomaly given that biases are present in all research endeavors, especially qualitative research studies like this one.

On the other hand, this research has some strengths as well. First, applying Fisher's narrative paradigm theory to study and analyze Obama's autobiography bolsters the usefulness of the theory as an alternative mode of communication analysis to Aristotle's conception of rhetorical analysis and the rational world paradigm.

Besides, this analysis provides helpful communication and persuasion insights that can help researchers and practitioners within the field of political communication and election campaign management refine, adjust, and adapt their work to suit an American context better.

Future research

Given that this study examines Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope*, as a medium of communication that achieves persuasive success, future research can as well apply Fisher's narrative paradigm concept to interrogate other media of communication like it that do not ultimately achieve a persuasive effect to uncover what it is that hindered the media from moving intended audiences to action. This can potentially help researchers draw comparison between communication structures, types of characterization, shared values, and discourse modes to determine the ones audiences find more engaging and the ones they find less appealing.

In addition, future research can apply the narrative paradigm theory to examine presidential autobiographies published recently by political office hopefuls to predict whether those autobiographies will play a pivotal role towards ensuring the victorious emergence of the authors as public office holders.

Besides, future research can also apply the narrative paradigm theory to the study of non-political communication modes like health and environmental communication also premised on facilitating some form of persuasion and behavioral change to see how the paradigm fares in those realms as well.

In addition, just like this research, many other studies in the purview of rhetoric and narrative analysis seem to focus on issues of national concern. It would therefore be pleasing to see how the dynamics change, if they do, when rhetoric and narrative analysis techniques are applied to the study of issues and politicians at the state, regional, county and municipality levels.

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