



National Character and the Narrative of Self-Image in Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* and Obasanjo's *My Watch*

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Abstract

Building on the view of biographical writing as a cultural practice and expression, this article adopts identity and narrative theories to discuss the interconnection between national character and identity construction in political autobiographies. It used Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* [LWF] (1994) and Obasanjo's *My Watch* [MW] (2014) as primary texts. It identifies prejudice against black South Africans as the national character in *LWF* and postcolonial political disillusionment in Nigeria as that of *MW*. It further demonstrates how the personalities of Mandela and Obasanjo are rooted in role-based identity and the respective saliences that activate this identity type. Additionally, it discusses the modes of narration in the two texts. The article concludes that national character is a socio-cultural and psychological indicator that influences identity construction in political autobiographies.

Keywords: National character, Self-image, Identity construction, Modes of narration

Introduction

This attempts to delve into a predominant concentration in critical and scholarly studies in biographical literature, which is the image of the self. The portrayal of self-image and nationalism is critical to biographical studies in Africa (Aguoru 2004 and Aguoru 2020). In this regard, autobiography, as a subgenre and narrative subcategory of biographical literature, is viewed as a cultural practice and expression (Odugbemi, 2017a and b). The tendency to view works of biographical literature, particularly those under the narrative subcategory of autobiography, from this perspective appears to have begun around the second half of the twentieth century. This tendency is apparently betrayed by, among many others, Starobinski (1971) in his assertion that, ‘Autobiography is certainly not a genre with rigorous rules. It only requires that certain possible conditions be realized, conditions that are mainly ideological (or cultural).’ It is also in Olney’s explanation that, ‘autobiography occupied a central place as *the* key to understanding the curve of history, every sort of cultural manifestation, and the very shape and essence of human culture itself’ (1980, 8).

In this respect, therefore, critical, and scholarly publications have concentrated on examining identity construction in autobiographical works in relation to racial backgrounds, temporal and spatial coverage, religious affiliation, and sexual/gender orientation. A long list of such publications is given by Olney (1980). These publications as well as other related ones are generally critical writings on England, the United States and France. While these publications might not have come up with specific theoretical and methodological viewpoints in their examinations, they have arguably been able to demonstrate the presence of psychological and sociological frameworks as aspects of culture in identity construction and in the narrative recollection in biographical literature. Oriaku, (1999) for instance, gives the inkling of this in his identification of the two perspectives from which self-image can be constructed in an autobiographical writing. He explains that the subject could emphasize the environmental and socio-cultural factors which influence his personality formation, or his uniqueness and the inability of the environment to mold him (1999). These two perspectives are also similar to what Wang and Brockmeier (2002) give as independently-oriented self and interdependently-oriented self. In the same vein, Wang and Brockmeier explain that “... concepts of the self and practices of remembering not only construct and constitute each other; they are also bound into the material and symbolic orders of the overarching cultural system” (2002, 46).

Nevertheless, this view of biographical literature as cultural expression and practice is not limited to culture as every human population is socially, politically, and psychologically distinct, as Wang and Brockmeier demonstrate. Indeed, culture

transcends the above to include the totality of ethnic/racial, psychological, attitudinal (individual and collective), political and all other social concerns and practices that may be thought of. It also includes the technological, creative, and intellectual; thereby covering the documentary view of culture (Castle, 2007).

With this broad sense of cultural presence and influence in biographical literature, the self- image could be identified with socio-cultural and psychological indicators and variables such as a belief system, political posture, ideological persuasion, and any social affiliation that may describe the subcategory of life writing or be foreground in it. That is, the subject identifies with factors like socio-economic class, profession/career, religious affiliation, racial/ethnic orientation and background, marriage/family life, politics, sex/gender orientation and experience, temporal coverage (time), geographical distribution (space) personal conviction/experience and in fact, an intended audience. The magnitude of this cultural affiliation, therefore, considerably informs the portrayal of character, thematic concerns, narrative mode and technique, and use of style and language in biographical literature.

Within the African parlance where the works examined here are situated, these elements play out in such a manner that "...the national character or spirit of peoples is observable and embodies the literary output of each nation" (Aguoru, 2011, 4). These elements have enormous influence on the biographical narratives that portray national ideology, national characters, national settings and aspirations, as well as plots and themes developed from national legends and myths. (Aguoru, 2011). For instance the Olaudah Equiano story, the earliest autobiographical slave narrative account has these as threads running through the narrative (Aguoru 2004b), Soyinka's Biographical Collection is yet another folio with these political and national elements (Aguoru 2004a.) While Kuforiji-Olubi (Nigeria) and Elizabeth Bagaaya (Uganda) are women and nationalists whose biographical writings reposition gender slants and political communication in Africa (Aguoru, 2020).

The foregoing thus corroborates the argument of this paper the of aim of which is to examine the interplay of national character and self-image in the texts in question and whose objectives include: explicating the nature of national character in the selected texts (either as practice and policy, or recognition and value judgement); examination of national character as a factor in political culture for identity construction and orientation about African leaders; to examination of the construction of the self-image of the African leaders across different categories and perspectives of identity; and to discuss the roles of the subjects in relation to the national character of their respective countries; and to interrogate the authors' modes of narration in presenting the personal identities of their subjects—narrative, persuasive, argumentative or expository.

Self-Image and Narrative in Theoretical Perspectives

Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke's model of identity, James Paul Gee's identity theory and Gerard Genette's narratorial functions are adopted for this study. Stets and Burke's model of identity, propounded in the year 2000, is a self-image or self-identity theory. It is based on the scholars' critical interrogation of the two theories of identity in social psychology—identity theory and social identity theory—in a bid to evolve a 'general theory of the self' which can attend to both macro and micro processes of identity and simultaneously avoids the redundancies of the two separate theories of identity. Stets and Burke identify and critically engage three areas of central concern in these two theories of identity. The three areas, the first-two of which are applied here, are given as, "...the different bases of identity (group, role, person), the different foci of examining activation and the salience of an identity, and the cognitive and motivational underpinnings of the two theories" (2000, 234).

The first area, the different bases of identity, is about how the self classifies itself in specific ways in relation to other social categories. These specific ways of self-image formation and construction applied in here are group, role, and person identity. Group identity is concerned with "how people come to see themselves as members of one group/category (the in-group) in comparison with another (the out-group), and the consequences of this categorization" (Stets and Burke, 2000, 226). This principle is used to examine how the self is identified by national character within a racial and/or political in-group. Role identity is concerned with the self "occupying a particular role and the behaviours that a person enacts in that role while interacting with others" (2000, 227). This is applied to discuss the role of the self in politics in relation to the national character prevalent in their political domains or sovereign states. Person, otherwise, core, identity is about "the set of meanings that are tied to and sustain the self as an individual" (2000, 229). This base of identity focuses on how the self-image perceives of and presents itself in relation to its group and role identity. This identity can be likened to what, in summary as it were, the autobiographer claims to be.

The second area of concern, generally referred to as 'salience', presupposes that a subject's role identity is made manifest by a situation. Thus, it focuses on how and when identity becomes activated. This shows that there is always a factor that informs the participation of a person in an in-group and the role the person performs within it. It is in the light of this that Stets and Burke explain that it has to do with "understanding what makes a particular social categorisation of the self (or other) relevant in a situation" (2000, 229). In this paper, therefore, this area of concern, salience, is taken to be national character or a significant event that leads to the connection of a subject to national character. This is because it is national character that informs a political leader's affiliation with a circle or group with a political scheme or interest. It is also national character that determines the actions and

inactions of such political leader within and outside his political group and sovereign boundary.

James Paul Gee's identity theory was also propounded in the year 2000. The theory views identity from four perspectives. These are nature perspective (N-Identity), institutional perspective (I-identity), discourse perspective (D-identity) and affinity perspective (A-identity). These perspectives are each named after the powers that facilitate their formations or the sources of the powers. Nature-identity for instance, develops from forces (power) in nature (source); institution-identity is authorised by authorities (power) within institutions (source); discourse identity is recognised in the discourse/dialogue (power) of/with "rational" individuals (source) while affinity-identity is based on experiences shared in the practice (power) of affinity groups (Gee, 2000, 3). These four perspectives are complementarily applied in this paper with Stets and Burke's model. Therefore, what Stets and Burke's model cannot explain clearly is given more clarification by Gee's theory of identity and vice versa.

Gerard Genette's model of narratology is concerned with how the events of a story are unfolded (Childs & Fowler, 1973). It attempts to capture what narratology is in its full essence because it interrogates narration and its strategies. It is a model that has been able to clearly examine the basic stance of narratology which is the interplay between *fabula* (story) and *sjuzhet* (plot). This model of narratology includes what Barry describes as some range of possibilities on how a story is told or the process of telling it (1995). Castle discusses these possibilities and other narratological principles using what he describes as Genette's tripartite theory of narrative which include the three narratorial functions— narrative function, directing function and function of communication—adopted in this paper. These functions, particularly the first-two, are used in discussing the subjects' modes of relation and interaction with the national character of their respective countries.

National Character and Political Culture

National character is a broad concept that is used to describe the shared attitudes, beliefs, worldview, ideals, realities, opinions and inclinations among individuals and groups in a modern nation-state. It is the image of a nation as derived from its system and state of polity, economy and the totality of its social atmosphere, institutions, and practices. It is a concept that attempts to foreground the homogeneity of a nation-state by posing the argument that "each nation possesses psychological and cultural characteristics in common, which confer upon them identity and distinguish them from others" (Neiburg, 2002, 296).

Critical studies on the concept of national character began to attract wider reception when it was considered from the perspective of anthropology. This consideration is said to have been informed by the clashes between the United States

of America and Japan during the Second World War. This explains why its studies have been referred to as war-time anthropology. By analysing national character from this viewpoint, anthropologists have been able to initiate an examination of nations as object of study. With this, national character becomes a concept for understanding the cultural configurations and personalities within national communities (Nieburg, 2000).

Before World War II, and particularly the clash between the United States of America and Japan, national character was restricted to 'pre-revolution conceptions' (Martindale, 1967, 31). The 'post-revolution conceptions' of national character therefore open up a broader and comprehensive view of the concept. Perhaps the point that national character acquired metaphysical status best describes this post-revolution view and understanding of the concept. This is because from this point, national character has been expanded from the biological, physical, and social to simultaneously biological and attitudinal; physical and social; cultural and politico-economic, individual, and collective and more importantly fluid and plural. It is not fixed; it is multifaceted; and it is opened to change in time and in space.

One social factor that is particularly intricately connected to national character in the modern community is politics or government/governance. Politics as a practice is part of the national engagements of a nation-state. In addition, as the domain and point of control of a state's power and authority, politics is also a platform for determining a country's national character. That is, political culture inevitably acts out or relates with a country's national character which in this regard may be summarised as the political situation or attitude towards politics. This point is clearly corroborated by Nieburg's argument that national character "serves to make legitimate claims for sovereignty and forms of political action" (Nieburg: 2000, 296).

With this interplay of national character and a nation's politics, a close examination will show that the identity of a nation's leadership becomes impacted. This is because it is through this leadership that the power and authority of a nation-state is exercised. Political philosophers, building on the ideas of Immanuel Kant, have demonstrated this interconnection of national character, politics, and the personality of the leadership in some of their propositions for nationalist political philosophy. It is therefore important to evaluate the self-image in political life writing in relation to national character as it is usually the salience, or it projects the salience for the activation of the subject's image. This concept is recognisable in group identity which can take one or all of Gee's perspectives like nature-identity, institution-identity, and affinity identity.

National Character and the Construction of Group-Based Self-Image

In the selected texts, the construction of the image of each subject of narration from the early years of childhood could be seen as group-based. Here, the

subjects are identified with such social groups as family, ethnic group, and the larger community, among others. This is so because at this stage, the subjects are less active in performing significant social and cultural roles. Therefore, the subjects are necessarily interdependently-oriented. They are defined by socio-cultural and political characteristics that are directly attributed to a group than by those that are linked to the individual. As a result, the process of chronology becomes the first victim of frequent distortion, and foreshortening largely because, it leans on oral accounts (Bonner, 2019). According to Bonner, Mandela himself admitted the fact that his early sociocultural identity was constructed from the recollection of others, as he was apparently too young to describe many of the events characterising the sociopolitical structure of his homestead as at that time.

However, it is still instructive to note that as political figures, what makes and distinguishes the subjects could have its source or influence in this period. That is, the viability of national character as political culture-in terms of practice and policy, or recognition and value judgement-and as it relates to self-identity could be confirmed right from this point. Suffice to say that national character could influence how group identity shapes a subject as a political figure. In Mandela's *LWF*, the representation of the subject-narrator and corresponding persona of the author, Rolihlahla, in his years of childhood constitutes a significant phase in the construction of his identity as a political figure. The period of this childhood is pre-apartheid South Africa during which the British are in control of government and politics in South Africa. During this period, there was racial prejudice against black South Africans as well as other racial and cultural populations considered inferior like the Coloureds. However, this prejudice is not given the inordinately high political and social undertone evident from 1947. In the same vein, the subject's consciousness and awareness during this period is constructed with respect to group identity largely in the social and cultural sense; that is, as a Xhosa and black South African. Thus, he is identified and portrayed with respect to membership in such cultural in-group and practice as domestic and family life, community and ethnic cultural conditioning, politics, and economy.

The group identity of the subject described in the foregoing could be described to have been informed by the nature perspective (N-Identity). This is because this identity is developed from forces in nature (Gee, 2000). As this perspective of identity always gains its force through the work of one or some of other, the nature perspective of the group-based self-image of Mandela informs his political conditioning. This is so due to the control and influence of the political institution of the country over Rolihlahla's N-identity. As a result of the dictates of the country's political institution, the N-Identity of the subject-narrator is not in the same pace with that of such out-groups as the British and the Afrikaner. The subject-narrator is a member of an in-group that is socioeconomically and politically disadvantaged.

In coming to terms with the realities surrounding this group identity from the nature perspective and as shaped by the political institution of South Africa at the time, the subject-narrator is aided by his position within his in-group as a member of the royal house. This accords with Mangcu's argument that, "in order understand Mandela's celebrated political pragmatism, we must understand the political history of the Transkei, specifically, the history of indirect colonial rule and the role of Thembu royal family in its implementation" (2019, 1040). Born on 18th July, 1918 at the tiny village Mvezo, and named Rolihlahla by his father, the subject recognises himself as a Xhosa boy growing up in a polygamous household in the village of Qunu, wearing a blanket wrapped around on shoulder and pinned at the waist. As an interdependently oriented self, the subject-narrator's Xhosa background shapes Rolihlahla's early life to be one in which knowledge is acquired through observation, imitation and emulation and one shaped by custom, ritual and taboo. This background of the subject-narrator is described thus:

The Xhosa are a proud and patrilineal people with an expressive and euphonious language and an abiding belief in the importance of laws, education, and courtesy. Xhosa society was a balanced and harmonious social order in which every individual knew his or her place. Each Xhosa belongs to a clan that traces its descent back to a specific forefather. I am a member of the Madiba clan, named after a Thembu chief who ruled in the Transkei in the eighteenth century (Mandela, 1994, 4).

At this level of the subject-narrator's group identity from the nature perspective, his relationship with members of his extended family is also well pronounced. Mafela describes this relationship as kinship relations in African culture which serves as "the foundation of social life, and the basis of custom and law among the Africans" (Mafela, 2008, 101). The relationship is described this way not just because it involves the subject-narrator and members of his extended family but also because it contrasts the kind of relationship in family and community settings of the out-group; that is, the British as well as other white nationals. Moreover, this relationship considerably prepares Mandela for his life and role as a political activist and leader. There is no gainsaying that, it is by living and acting under the auspices of the tradition, worldview and value system put in place by this relationship that the subject-narrator becomes acquainted with the political situation in South Africa.

In connection to the above, the place of Rolihlahla's father, Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa, in the Xhosa society is a privileged one. Mphakanyiswa was, both by blood and custom, the chief of Mvezo and in fact, a kingmaker and adviser to the king of Thembuland. Mphakanyiswa is identified with these positions because he belonged to the Thembu Royal House, specifically the *Ixhiba*, given in English as the Left Hand House. Mphakanyiswa's appointment however had to be ratified by the pre-apartheid British government already ruling South Africa. In addition, he had some economic benefits attached to this appointment. In the subject-narrator's

words, his father “was eligible for a stipend as well as a portion of the fees the government levied on the community for vaccination of livestock and communal grazing land” (Mandela:1994: 4). However, the subject’s father soon forfeited his British-ratified appointment after a dispute with the magistrate. As a result of this, Mphakanyiswa lost both his title and fortune which included his herd and land and the revenue that would come with them. This unfortunate circumstance made Rolihlahla’s mother to move to Qunu, a village larger than Mvezo where she received the support of friends and relations.

Rolihlahla’s significant group affiliation to the larger community of his in-group in Qunu started with his enrolment for elementary education at the age of seven. On his first day in school, Miss Mdingane, his teacher, gave every pupil an English name; his was Nelson. Subsequently, at the age of nine after his father’s death, the subject-narrator was taken to Mqhekezweni, the provisional capital of Thembuland to live in the Great Palace of his uncle Chief Jongintaba Dalindyebo, the acting regent of the Thembu people, who served as a crucial second role model for the growing Nelson Mandela and consequently influenced his leadership style later in the macro political sphere. Here, where he was given and commonly called by a pet name of Tatomkhulu which means ‘Grandpa’, Rolihlahla soon struck up a friendship with the regent’s son, Justice. Also, in this new home, the subject-narrator underwent the rite of passage to manhood at the age of sixteen through circumcision. There was similarly a significant change in his environment, level, and condition of learning as he began to attend Clarkebury Boarding Institute which was about sixty miles away from the Great palace.

As earlier hinted, it was in this new home at Mqhekezweni that Rolihlahla began to know more about the black ethnic communities of South Africa and the true history of the country itself. This knowledge came from the tales he and other members of the Great Palace at Mqhekezweni would listen to from the old Chief Zwelibhangile Joyi who was from the same Royal House—though the section of Great House—as the subject. Chief Joyi narrated tales of Xhosa and non-Xhosa warriors alike to members and guests of the Great Palace at Mqhekezweni. He relayed tales of how the different black tribal groups, the Thembu, the Mpondo, the Xhosa, and the Zulu, were all children of one father and lived as brothers, and how these peoples were living in relative peace until the *abelungu*, the white people arrived with fire-breathing weapons from across the sea (2019). Reflecting on the knowledge and enlightenment gained from these tales, the subject-narrator comments thus:

I did not yet know that the real history of our country was not to be found in standard British textbooks, which claimed that South Africa began with the landing of Jan Van Riebeeck at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. It was from Chief Joyi that I began to discover that the history of the Bantu-speaking peoples began far to the north in a country of lakes and green plains and

valleys, and that slowly over the millennia we made our way down to the very tip of this great continent (1994, 24).

At the age of nineteen, in 1937, Rolihlahla joins Justice at Healdtown Wesleyan College in Fort Beaufort for his secondary education. After this, he moved on to the University College of Fort Hare to study for a Bachelor of Arts degree. The subject-narrator's misunderstanding with the college principal, Dr Kerr, however, became an impediment to his graduation as and when due, as he was punished with a year extension of his session of study. Thus, he had to return to the Great Palace at Mqhekezweni because of this. It was while he was there that the regent, now ageing, informed the subject-narrator and his own son, Justice, of his intention and preparation to have them married. Rolihlahla and Justice's reaction to this marked the beginning of the former's wider understanding of the white chauvinist manners which characterised and defined the national character of the country. These two young men, not willing to accept the choices of brides the regent had made for them, fled to Johannesburg, the capital city of South Africa.

This choice turned out to be a hard one as the regent got to know of it and tried to get Rolihlahla and Justice apprehended by government authorities as they moved from one point to another. However, the two had rather obstinately chosen never to give up. Thus, after several encounters with authorities and individuals that tried to impede their movement, the subject-narrator and the regent's son arrived in Johannesburg. Financial incapacity also turned out to be a major challenge upon their arrival in Johannesburg. However, after a financially tough time in Johannesburg, the subject-narrator, who was now being known more as Nelson Mandela or in short, Mandela than Rolihlahla, was taken in as a clerk in a law firm, Witkin, Sidelsky and Eidelman. He also enrolled in night studies at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in order to complete his B.A. He needed this degree to become articulated; that is, to practice as an attorney. It was in the law firm Nelson Mandela first met Walter Sisulu. Shortly after, Mandela was admitted into the University of the Witwatersrand to study for a degree in law.

It is still instructive to note that the identity of the subject, in all this period, is not that of an anti-apartheid crusader and political leader. This is because the salience that activated this self-image of the subject was not yet in place. Nonetheless, his political consciousness and awareness had apparently been developing right from this period. This was because even during this period, discrimination against black South Africans had been there but it lacked the obvious official validation and institutionalisation of the apartheid period which made it more of a socio-political policy. This national character, which was thus informed by the practice—which was largely informal—and policy of the ruling racial population, and which gradually woke up the social and political consciousness of the Nelson Mandela, is spelt out in the subject-narrator's comment thus:

I cannot pinpoint a moment when I became politicized, when I knew I would spend my life in the liberation struggle... I had no epiphany, no singular revelation, no moment of truth, but a steady accumulation of a thousand slights, a thousand indignities, a thousand unremembered moments, produced in me an anger, a rebelliousness, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people (1994, 95).

Unlike that of Mandela's *LWF*, the self in Obasanjo's *My Watch*, as a member of an in-group from the nature perspective, was not politically influenced. During the period in which the in-group identity of the subject-narrator was limited to nature identity, life for him was somewhat only characterised by ignorance as far as political orientation, interest and awareness are concerned. It follows then that the indigenous Owu/Abeokuta background and orientation of the young Olusegun as part of pre-independence Nigeria did not spur him politically unlike the Xhosa/black African background of the young Rolihlahla.

In place of nature identity, therefore, the awakening of the subject-narrator's political capacity and interest found its stimulus in group identity from the institution perspective. That is, the power that determines the self-image of the subject as a political figure and leader is a set of authorities within given institutions (Gee, 2000, 6). These institutions which are also in-groups since the subject-narrator identifies with them are initially, the military polity in Nigeria in the 1970s, and subsequently the civilian and democratic government in the Fourth Republic Nigeria. Thus, the politicisation of the subject is narrated to have begun in the cause of his service in the Nigeria Army. The subject-narrator confirms this in his comment that "[the] spell of military assignment exposed me to politics..." (2000, 203, Vol.1).

Before delving into the foregoing, it is also instructive to add that the narrative of subject's entry into the military shows it was also not connected with any intention of engaging in socio-political struggle or commitment. The military career which he applied for in 1957 sequel to an advertisement he came across in a newspaper, *Daily Times of Nigeria*, was just the option he picked out of the many available to him. Others were offers of admission into the University of Ibadan and Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, and a United Nations' scholarship to study geology either in India or in the US. It was easy to dismiss the first two options because they were not on scholarship. Olusegun did not consider going immediately for the UN scholarship option because it was, to his immense advantage, open for a period of one year. He thus decided to use it as a backup such that if he failed in the six-month cadet training in Teshie, Accra, Ghana, he would come back for the scholarship. Eventually, he was successful in the training and therefore, just had to move on with this budding military career of his.

It was therefore the involvement of the military as an institution in the politics and governance of Nigeria that initially facilitated the emergence and recognition of the subject-narration as a political figure and leader. He thus, had his

first step into politics through his appointment as commissioner for works by the administration of General Yakubu Gowon. Subsequently, after the third coup in the history of Nigeria politics in July 1975, the subject became the deputy Head of State in the Murtala-Obasanjo military administration. After the sudden murder of the Head of State in an unsuccessful coup by some army officers, the subject-narrator became the head of state from 1975 until 1979 after which he voluntarily handed over to an elected civilian government headed by Shehu Shagari. However, the subject's exit from the military career and administration only meant an interregnum of twenty years. In 1999, at the beginning of Fourth Republic Nigeria, he was elected civilian and democratic president for a term of four years and re-elected in 2003 for a second term.

While the rise to power of the subject-narrator at each point is informed by the authorisation and provision of an institution, it is worthy to note that his government, like that of any Nigerian leader, is characterised by the same national character which is the postcolonial disillusionment about politics in Nigeria as it is in the case of many African independent countries. Such that at different levels, the Nigerian political culture appears to be perceived with the same lens. The nature of this national character is therefore more of recognition and value judgment. It is notably unlike that in Mandela's *LWF* that is more of practice and policy. The military government, for instance, apparently because it is a non-democratic rule, has always been thought of as illegitimate, dictatorial, and corrupt. The civilian rule, with the open membership and multiparty system of Nigeria, has also been seen as visionless, irresponsible and corrupt. Suffice to say that there is a dominant impression that corruption, especially in pecuniary terms, colours Nigeria's national character, therefore influencing how Nigerian political elites are recognized and judged.

The Nigerian leader, therefore, as in the case of the subject-narrator in Obasanjo's *My Watch*, is, by the virtue of his function within the political institution, bound to have corruption ascribed to him in one way or the other. That is, the discourse identity of the subject, the identity powered by the dialogue of other people (Gee, 2000, 8) is informed by the identity attributed to the political institution as an in-group through and by national character. This, in turn, informs how the subject-narrator, Olusegun Obasanjo, presents his role-based image and reconstructs his person identity.

Salience and the Activation of Role-Based Self-Image

Stets and Burke's model of identity recognises that a subject's role-based self-other image is enlivened by a situation or factor known as salience which activates the role identity of the subject. What this aspect of the model has been able to demonstrate is the complexity of the subject as a psychological, social cultural being.

The subject does not only carry the socio-cultural identity attributed to him by his in-group based on any of the four perspectives of identity given by Gee. Rather, the subject as a socially and psychologically-conditioned being is also capable of exerting, acting and enacting following the influence of a situation or factor which is also a psycho-social variable in its own right. It means the portrayal of the self-image of a political figure is not just from the angle of the in-group through which the subject gets the recognition but also from the viewpoint of the role of such subject. Owing to the importance of understanding the background of this role-based identity, salience, therefore, is a concept that cannot be neglected. In addition, this is more so because there is usually a connection between such salience and national character.

In *LWF* for instance, the salience is apartheid. It is portrayed in this text that there has always been inequities and discriminations along racial and cultural lines in South Africa's economy and polity from the point of settlement of the Afrikaners and the British. However, this system of life in the country which had been set up by the British for about three centuries still appeared bearable to its victims, black South Africans as well as other victimised communities. Moreover, as a national character, it was not a strictly formalised practice at the outset. Thus, it at least, still gave its victims some little space to grow. Nevertheless, the extension of the nature of this national character to policy brought about a complete loss of the little space for survival and growth previously granted to the blacks. This loss further meant the beginning of an ominous and inglorious future all at the expense of the life and survival of the black community of South African as well as other marginalised human populations.

The extension of this national character from practice to policy was achieved through the adoption of apartheid by the Nationalist Party of the Afrikaners. The subject-narrator describes this political party as one animated by "bitterness toward the English, who had treated [Afrikaners] as inferiors for decades, and bitterness toward the African who [they] believed was threatening prosperity and purity of the Afrikaner culture" (Mandela, 1994, 111). This view is also corroborated by Toyin Falola in his explanation that, the reason for institutionalising this system was the fear of the Nationalists that, "the blacks could use their numerical strength to control economic and political power; therefore, the survival of whites in South Africa was possible only if the races were separated" (Falola, 2014, 5). The goal of apartheid was thus to annihilate the black majority of South Africa because, as the largest racial population in South Africa, the Afrikaners saw them as a socioeconomic and political threat.

The institutionalization of this concept as a state policy and system of government is explained to have been carried out in 1947 by Dr Daniel Malan, the leader of the Nationalist Party. In fact, the inkling about the policy and system is shown to have been given by the Nationalist Party's campaign during the pre-election period. The campaign concentrated so much on spreading slogans like *smart*

gevaar (the black danger), *Die kaffer op sy plek* (The nigger in his place) and *Die koelies uit die land* (The coolies—a derogatory term for Indians—out of the country) as well as *Die wit man moet altyd baas wees* (The white man must remain boss) and *Eie volk, eie taal, eie land* (Our own people, our own language, our own land). The subject-narrator explains the philosophy of this system thus,

Apartheid was a new term but an old idea. It literally means “apartness” and it represented the codification in one oppressive system of all the laws and regulations that had kept Africans in an inferior position to whites for centuries... The premise of apartheid was that whites were superior to Africans, Coloureds, and Indians, and the function of it was to entrench white supremacy forever (Mandela, 1994, 111).

As seen in the excerpt above, apartheid was a racist system and policy that established and upholds white supremacy at the expense of blacks and other supposedly inferior racial populations in South Africa. It sought to reduce blacks to the dregs of the society. The institutionalisation of this system is demonstrated to have consequently condemned the black South African to live “a shadowy life between legality and illegality, between openness and concealment” (1994, 267). It made the division among different socio-cultural groups in South Africa more evident by creating rooms for more demarcations and infringing on basic human rights. It was therefore Mandela’s role in the African Nationalist Congress (ANC) to bring “an end to the master/servant relationship that characterised black and white relations in South Africa” (579) that further establishes the image of the subject as a political figure. Since the ANC is also the in-group that determines the subject’s affinity identity, his recognition, thus, began to grow from a tribal group-based to a national and political one. It follows then that, apart from being an extension of the national character of racial prejudice from practice to policy, apartheid is also the salience that activates the role of Nelson Mandela as a freedom fighter.

Military and Civilian Polity and the Activation of Role Identity in Obasanjo’s *My Watch*

The role-based self-image of Obasanjo as a political figure and leader in *My Watch* comes to the fore sequel to his occupation of political offices as a military Head of State and then as civilian president in Nigeria as earlier explained. That is, the subject-narrator was not known as a political figure and leader until in the first place, his institution identity in the Nigeria Army made him so after the execution of the third coup in history of military governance Nigeria in July, 1975. With the success of the third coup, the Supreme Military Council was established and subsequently through it, Murtala Ramat Mohammed emerged as the new Head of the Federal Military Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces with the subject-narrator, as Second-in-Command. The subsequent abortive coup leading

to the murder of Murtala Mohammed, nevertheless, changed the course of things with Obasanjo becoming the new Head of State. A major role of the subject-narrator in this position is the continuation of the Murtala-Obasanjo's commitment to voluntarily hand over power to a civilian government. This became a reality with the election that ushered in President Shehu Shagari and the subsequent handover of power to this civilian leadership on October 1, 1979. This action of the subject-narrator as head of state is apparently not disconnected from his objective as a human and a political leader. This is reprinted from his memoir, *Not My Will*, as given below;

My objective in and out of government is to serve the public as best as I can and not necessarily to please people or the public because public tastes, requirements, desires and opinions are as varied and diverse as there are people. I put ordinary people first and I will make them to know that at least I share their main concerns (Obasanjo, 2014, 256, Vol.1).

The subject-narrator discusses his experience of a twenty-year interregnum during which his identity as a political figure and leader, especially as a military Head of State that voluntarily handed over power to a civilian government, continued to inform his engagements and activities and the course of his actions and inactions. As a former Head of State, he was statutorily involved in the activities of some international organisations including the InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government, a global organisation that is "fiercely concerned with global peace, security, disarmament, and development" (2014, 362, Vol.1). With his credentials, he also continued to work closely with the Commonwealth, having been appointed a member of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group on South Africa to look into how to curtail the evils of apartheid in South Africa, especially in connection with the incarceration of such anti-apartheid crusader as Nelson Mandela. Also worth mentioning are the subject-narrator's involvement with Peter Eigen during which the two "worked to establish Transparency International (TI) to fight against corruption across the world" (2014, 301, Vol.1) and also his establishment of the Africa Leadership Forum in 1988. The decision to start this non-governmental organization is said to have been "successfully brought to life with a seed money of \$100,000 from the Japanese government through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)" (2014, 302, Vol.1).

With Obasanjo's consistent involvement in international polity, the Nigeria leadership that he had tried to cut himself away from still continued to regard him as a major voice and figure as far as government and governance were concerned. Working quietly as it were in his farm at Ota, the subject-narrator begins to realize this attachment to a system he thought he had detached himself from with what he describes as the "weirdest visit" (2014, 300, Vol.1) from Ibrahim Babangida and Mohammed Aliyu. These two officers intending to plot a coup against the civilian

government of Shehu Shagari came to offer the subject-narrator the seat of the military head of state of the country after carrying out an intended coup.

Seeing this offer as unacceptable and uncalled for, the subject-narrator says he literally drove the two officers away and reported the incident to the security officer of the government, who in turn hinted the head of government about it (300, Vol.1). However, the government's refusal to take immediate preventive action facilitated the successful execution of the coup by Babangida and Aliyu and the enthronement of Muhammadu Buhari as head of state. Even after this, the subject-narrator is shown to have remained in touch with the government and thus came to realise his position as a watchman:

By their pronouncement, they [the coup plotters] dubbed themselves an offshoot of the Murtala-Obasanjo regime. The visits to my farm by appointed officials did not diminish... I suddenly came to realise the position that was being cut out for me – not a captain but a watchman (Obasanjo, 2014, 301, Vol.1).

The political image which Obasanjo had carved for himself at both the national and international levels enhanced his consideration for the office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. As presented by the subject-narrator, this consideration was raised by members of the InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government during an informal meeting at Hamburg in 1987. This consideration is shown to be in line with the consensus of the council “not to continue to moan and wring its hand but be more proactive in finding a competent leader for the United Nations” (2014, 363, Vol.1). Helmut Schmidt, the chancellor of West Germany at the time, is portrayed to be particularly interested in the candidacy of the subject-narrator and to have gone as far as writing to the Military President of Nigeria, Ibrahim Babangida, to solicit the support of his government for him.

In the long run however, after the election held on 21 November 1991, Dr Boustros Ghali, a North African Coptic Christian married to a Jew, emerged as the winner of the fourteen candidates involved in the race. Although the subject-narrator, in his retrospective reflections, feels that the failure of sub-Saharan Africa to produce a single candidate for the race was a major impediment, he acknowledges the fact that his campaigning for “one of the world's most powerful jobs” shows that ‘Africa can get to wherever it wants to’ (2014, 383, Vol.1). Moreover, he feels emerging the winner could have changed the course of events in his subsequent capacities and experiences as a political figure and leader:

And who knows, if I had made it to the thirty-eighth floor of the UN Building in New York, the course of my life would have changed – and maybe the course of Nigerian history as well – as I might not have gone to jail or become an elected president of Nigeria (2014, 383, Vol.1).

The jailing referred to in the excerpt above is the arrest and subsequent incarceration of the subject-narrator in 1995 during the military regime of General Sani Abacha. As the subject-narrator demonstrates, his opposition to the policy and system of Sani Abacha through such organisation as the National Unity Organisation of Nigeria (NUON) and through his personal opinions about the government apparently informed his incarceration. This point contradicts the claim and indictment of coup plot put against Obasanjo and other political internees by the Abacha-led administration leading to his three-year imprisonment without trial.

The subject-narrator discusses the requests and agitations for his release, and the supports of different parties and personalities for him at both national and international levels during his imprisonment. General Sani Abacha is, however, said to have remained adamant despite all these. The subject-narrator explains the reason for this to be Abacha's long-term goal of becoming life president of Nigeria. However, the plan failed with the sudden death of the Head of State on 8th June 1998, leading to the release of the subject-narrator on 16th June 1998. Thus, he subsequently became involved in the presidential race under the People's Democratic Party (PDP) for the civilian government that would usher in Fourth Republic Nigeria. It follows that his victory in the presidential election, in addition to suspending his interregnum of twenty years, is yet another salience that reactivates his role as a political leader.

The role-based self-image of Obasanjo as a democratically elected president is the focus of the second volume of *My Watch*. This role identity of the subject-narrator covers his attempt to bring amendments, reforms and enhancements to different sectors and aspects of Nigerian polity and economy through constitution amendments, judicial reform, conflict resolutions, financial management reforms, fuel, energy and power reforms, civil service reforms, social welfare services reforms, among others. A number of these reforms are reflected on and interrogated by the subject-narrator. This is because the opinions of the public on them considerably speak much about the national character—which is instructively what the author describes as “part of the burden of leadership in our type of society” (2014, 103, Vol.2)—of the country that has made him a political figure and leader. Thus, this reflection and interrogation of the subject-narrator on the opinions of others with respect to his role-based image as both military head of state and civilian president significantly shapes his person image presented to the reader.

It follows then that more can be understood about the role-based self-image of the subject-narrator by examining how he, as an author, has carved out his person identity out of role identity. This same applies to Nelson Mandela. However, this is not to imply that there is equally the same degree of reflection and interrogation in the two works. Each author craves to mold a person identity through their narrative modes of constructing their personalities. Such modes and manners of narration, as this article proposes, include the narrative, persuasive, argumentative, and expository.

National Character and the Construction of Person Identity

Person identity is what, in the long run, the subject of narration is represented/constructed or re-presented/reconstructed to be, having portrayed his self-image from both the angle of group-based and role-based identities. This type of identity is also connected to national character because of the significance of the latter in relation to the group and role identity of the subject. In fact, the connection of person identity to national character appears to deserve a second and closer look because this is the identity that is eventually carved out and molded to be the typical representation of the subject of narration as a political personage. Therefore, person identity as the core identity constitutes the set of essential and recognized meanings of what an individual is. To use the words of Stets and Burkes (2000), person identity encompasses the meanings “that are tied to and sustain the self as an individual” (229). It is an identity whose recognition is, arguably, based on the discursive perspective. In relation to life writing in this instance, person identity is derived from the dialogue or discourse of other people, the rational individuals, on the subject (Gee, 2000, 8-9) including readers and critics. It is incumbent to examine this identity type that is central to the understanding of each of the subjects in relation to national character. This is because, with its tendency to interpret, re-evaluate and re-examine in many cases, person identity may be radically different from a subject’s group-based and role-based identity which always tend to go by the directions of national character.

The person identity attributed to the self-image of Nelson Mandela is in tandem with how the national character of South Africa that has shaped the in-group and role-based identity of the subject-narrator are generally read and interpreted. The national character, as previously pointed out, is the injustice and racial prejudice against black majority especially as contained in the system, policy, and practice of apartheid. In his role against this national character, Nelson Mandela did not only enjoy the supports of ANC as an affinity group but also supports and commitments of other governments, institutions and circles outside South Africa including African Heads of State, the United Nations and the Commonwealth. This shows that the subject-narrator’s affinity group is “made up of people [that are] dispersed across a large space” (Gee, 2000, 12). Therefore, with the victory achieved over apartheid after over four decades of his involvement in the struggle, Nelson Mandela emerged as a revered personality and an extraordinary moral and political leader of national significance in addition to his recognition as a global icon. Suffice to say that his person identity is that of the father of the nation.

This person identity is, arguably, what Nelson Mandela is still known to be even after his demise. No one, even those who might not have supported him, will deny that the life of this political leader and figure is representative of the struggle.

However, the subject-narrator does not mince words in admitting that the price he had to pay through his role-based identity to become such person of high repute as the father of the nation is a heavy one. The price has to do with Mandela's sacrificing of his family life especially as it eventually culminates in his breakup with his wife and fellow comrade, Nomzamo Winnie Mandela. While establishing and acknowledging the inexorably unflinching support of Winnie, Mandela felt bad for not being able to fulfil his role as a husband to his wife and as a father to his children. Thus, the subject-narrator refers to a statement he made at the wedding of one of his daughters, Zindzi, that 'it seems to be the destiny of freedom fighters to have unstable personal lives' (Mandela, 1994, 600). He sees his inability to play his role as a husband and a father to as a joy he has "far too little of", hence his admission that, "To be the father of a nation is a great honor, but to be the father of a family is a greater joy" (1994, 600-601).

The national character in Obasanjo's *My Watch*, postcolonial political disillusionment in Africa particularly as it affects Nigeria's polity and economy, does not have much felt presence as the one presented in Mandela's *LWF*. Despite this, this national character significantly informs reactions to the role-based identity of the subject-narrator both as a military head of state and a civilian president. From all indications, it is unarguable that the subject-narrator, Olusegun Obasanjo, particularly as an author, is aware of this national character. This is evident in his comment, that, "Sadly, the belief that has been created in most Nigerians is that everyone goes into government to fend for themselves, with little or no idea of service being part of the motivation for, and interest in, public office" (Obasanjo, 2014, 114, Vol.3). It follows therefore that it is the subject-narrator's responses to these reactions and his comments about them that are used to mould his person identity.

As a military head of state, an identity described through an institutional group-based identity, the subject-narrator has several reactions put up against him with respect to his actions and inactions. These reactions are apparently informed and enhanced by, among others, this institutional perspective, the military, that shapes and moulds the subject as a political figure. A major reaction against the subject-narrator in this regard came up as soon as he left office as the military head of state. This is the indictment that he "had stolen N2.8 billion petroleum proceeds from the government coffers" (2014, 269, Vol.1). The excerpts from Obasanjo's *Not My Will* reprinted between page 267 and 294 in the first volume of the author's autobiography selected for this paper, explain this to be a deliberate false accusation fueled by the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and spread around by different newspaper publications including *Nigerian Tribune* and *Punch* and also by some individuals like Ayodele Awojobi, Dr. Olusola Saraki, Dr. Tai Solarin and Fela Anikulapo.

The subject-narrator's point that the allegation against him was false explains his reference to 'The Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into Crude Oil Sales'

presented by a tribunal set up by the government to investigate the issue of the misappropriated fund. The author shows that, according to the report of the tribunal, there was no such money missing. Many of these accusers are also said to have admitted that their accusations were false or without concrete evidence. It is based on these proofs of his innocence that the subject-narrator considers himself to have labored to satisfy his conscience and the majority of fair-minded people while in office. On this note, he sees the accusation of the stolen 2.8 billion naira and other pecuniary allegations before and after it as well as other indictments against him as a former military Head of State as “virulent and unfair attacks and persecutions mostly from self-centred and selfish leaders and their supporters... who believed [he] did not do their bidding nor join in as one of them in and out of public office” (2014, 267, Vol.1).

Similarly, the subject-narrator points out that he has also been criticised as a civilian president for some of his actions and inactions which constitute his role-based self-image. For instance, he was taken up on the constitution amendment by being accused of seeking an extension of tenure for himself through the creation of a third term. Having pointed out that the constitution amendment becomes necessary during his second term because of the “unceasing complaint on how the so-called 1999 Constitution came to be,” Obasanjo argues that the accusation against him over the rather selfish desire to have his tenure extended through the third term is “a monumental mischief and misrepresentation by a man I personally brought into government and who believed that he would ride to become president on the ashes of Obasanjo’s presidency” (2014, 88, Vol.2).

The man referred to here is Obasanjo’s vice president for the two terms he spent in office, Atiku Abubakar. Abubakar is said to have bought over the press and ordered them not to report the subject-narrator’s refute of the allegation. The subject-narrator points out that, the idea of third term is just a recommendation of a sub-Committee on the amendment of the constitution set up by the national assembly and that it is just one of the hundreds of issues in the constitution amendment. However, the vice president, to facilitate his chance of becoming the next president, is said to have manipulated the recommendation to misrepresent Obasanjo “through lies, propaganda, blackmail and purchase of all buyables in the media and the National Assembly” (2014, 88, Vol.2). Despite not being able to let his position known to the public through the media, Obasanjo believes he has now been vindicated by a revelation of Senator Omar Hambagda in the *Daily Trust* of April 12, 2012 and other documents reproduced between pages 89 and 100 of the second volume of *My Watch*.

In most of the instances if not all, the author and subject-narrator, Olusegun Obasanjo, addresses all the allegations levied against him in relation to his role as a political figure with references to different documented and official evidence that vindicate him. Against the popular accusation of highhandedness, for instance, he

explains that his fallout with his deputy is due to the latter's involvement in corrupt and fraudulent acts especially within the international circle as well as his mischief and disloyalty to oust him.

For many of the allegations against his person as a civilian president, Obasanjo points out that the media practitioners are the major villains involved, all for their selfish interests. He believes that contemporary Nigerian media practitioners are becoming politicised as they regard the media as “a stepping stone into politics or into political appointment” (2014, 111, Vol.3). More so, he points out that his non-patronage of these media practitioners who consider him as being stingy, and the notice on the gate of his farm which reads that, ‘Dogs, Armed Robbers and Journalists are not welcome here’ have been responsible for the unfair treatment he has received from the media as a political figure. The subject-narration also explains that some of these allegations against him are spread by social critics who are either not well informed or who just want to score a point. Against all the allegations put up against him, the subject-narrator goes on to identify his own person as a patriotic and committed political leadership. The picture he paints of himself is disconnected from postcolonial disillusionment as the national character identified with politics and governance in Nigeria. This person identity painted in many instances including the excerpt below:

Strengthening Nigerian unity and stability through establishment of democracy, putting an end to the threat of coups and military takeover in Nigeria and putting Nigeria on the path of sustainable development and growth with reforms and debt relief were undoubtedly for me the most important achievements of my Administration. Part of that achievement is giving every community, ethnic group, minority and majority, state and geo-political region a sense of belonging and a stake in Project Nigeria (Obasanjo, 2014, 84, Vol.2).

At this juncture, it is important to examine the reasons for the evident differences in person identity between the two subjects, having understood that the focus of each is to have the subject seen through this form of identity. As pointed out earlier, this paper builds its argumentation on the premise that biographical literature is a cultural practice and expression. In the light of this, it is not of the viewpoint that the presentation and construction of the person identity of some or all the three political leaders is characterised by falsification. This however does not mean the study is condemning such viewpoint. What is rather done in the study is an attempt towards being more critical and ontological. This is achieved through the examination of the narrativity of person identity in each work by scrutinising the narrative modes and manners deployed by the authors using the principle of narratorial functions.

Narratorial Functions and Person Identity

The principle of narratorial functions is a two-way thing as it could be seen as simultaneously involving both narration and reception. On the one hand, this principle attempts to explain how the narrator has packaged and processed the information and message contained in a text and, on the other hand, to reveal the cognitive connection of the reader to the text. Suffice to say that this principle interrogates the processes of presenting and receiving. These two processes are inseparable, and they appear to be covered by the three divisions of narratorial functions—narrative function, directing function and function of communication.

The two narratorial functions that are clearly adopted in the works are narrative function and directing function. The narrative function is particularly used in Mandela's *LWF*. As the name suggests the narrative function is evident in a work where the narrative mode of constructing and presenting information about major characters is narrative in the basic sense of the word, and to a minimal extent, expository. It is evident in a life narrative where the past is "simply reported as having happened at a certain time and place" (White, 1973). That is, this type of narratorial function takes a mode that is story-like; it is all about 'telling', reporting.

The reason for the prevalence of this narratorial function in *LWF*, is not far to seek. The author and subject-narrator, Nelson Mandela, with his wide international affiliation identity as discussed above, has always been regarded in the positive light as a freedom fighter. He has always been iconic as a political leader both at the national and global level. Therefore, it is clear to the world that his struggle against apartheid is a worthy cause; this much is so despite the initial phase of his demonisation as terrorist. It follows then that, this subject-narrator only narrates this long past of social and political struggle towards freedom for the black community of South Africa. He has little or no explanation to make with respect to his actions or inactions in the cause of the struggle because to a very great extent they are not viewed by the public as leaving much to desire.

The directing function is adopted in *My Watch*. Thus, the author here does not only relay the past of the subject as is the case in *LWF*. He explains and argues in the presentation of actions, inactions and the person identities of their subjects. Thus, the directing function is deployed through the argumentative and the expository modes. In molding and carving out his person identity by refuting the allegations and criticisms against him from groups and individuals, the subject-narrator constantly argues against these negative views about him. In fact, in most of the cases, he comes up with different documented and official sources that vindicate him. Where there are no such concrete or formal sources to refute these accusations, the subject-narrator attempts to give explanations to clarify the situations of things particularly because they are used against him. In the same vein, he argues against the positions

of the accusers in few instances, and condemns the persons and attitudes of such accusers in the process.

Conclusion

This article has attempted a broader view of culture beyond ethnicity or race to include psycho-social understanding of humanity, and human engagements in their totality. To examine this all-encompassing view of culture from a definite perspective, the article investigated identity construction and narrative in two works subcategorized as political biographical writings. It has examined the place and influence of national character in the construction and narrative of the self-image of the subjects of narration in the selected works. Using Stet and Burke's model of identity, the self-images in relation to national character were examined across such forms of identity as group, role, and person identity. These identity forms were further subcategorized using the four perspectives on identity in Gee's identity theory. The paper has also examined person identity in relation to national character. Person identity is described as constituting the meanings that define and sustain the self as an individual.

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