

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF MEMOIR “DREAMS FROM MY FATHER” BY “BARACK OBAMA”

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Abstract:

Setyowati (2014) stated Obama is famous as he was the 44th president of America for his writings he wrote some of his well-known works, which are the famous ones, are Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance, the Audacity of Hope, and Change We Can Believe in. His books are very inspiring. In his book, Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance, he explains his life journey from Africa to America and becomes the president of America. This study is exploratory and the nature of data was qualitative. The primary and secondary sources were used to gather the relevant data for the purpose of thematic and content analysis. The evaluations and illustrations in this study were taken from books, journals, magazines, and articles that are related to Barack Obama's book. Codification strategy was used to process the data to undergo analysis. In addition, the authors used online sources to round out the information in Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance. The findings of the study reflect a vast variety of literary, textual, and pragmatic features used by Obama in his memoir. The text is full of textual and pragmatic interpretations of American dream, identity reconstruction, hope, self discovery, and future resilience.

Keywords: Racial identity, ethnicity, prejudice, class, American culture, African culture

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This paper aims to explore the identity crisis and the basic concept of American and African culture. In Barack Obama's memoir, "Dreams from My Father" the quest primarily reveals the author's journey of self-discovery and identity exploration. Obama embarks on a quest to better understand his own identity, his roots, and his place in the world. In this regard, the selected textual lines of Barack Obama have been studied to discover identity crisis elements. His concepts of racial discrimination and self-identity have been studied from American and African concepts of identity crisis. His concept of family, heritage, community, and the broader social and political context in which his identity is shaped has also been studied. This paper after analysis of identity crisis in the memoir of Barack Obama's "Dreams from My Father" has compared basic concepts of American and African racial discrimination and highlights cultural similarities and dissimilarities. Identity crisis is the concept in memory of Barack Obama's "Dreams from My Father" in which African people's rights were violated by the Americans when Barack used to go

to his classroom, he faced challenges and racial prejudice, but besides all these challenges he survives in the best way in society and also became the 44th president of United States from 2009 to 2017. "Dreams from My Father" by Barack Obama features a nonlinear plot. The narrative is not strictly chronological; instead, it weaves between different periods of Obama's life, incorporating flashbacks and reflections. The major themes of the memoir are the following Identity and self-discovery, racism, race and equality, education, and ambition, the American dream, and Family and heritage.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.2.1 Identity Crises

The term identity crisis was first coined by German psychologist Erikson. Identity crisis is experienced by people during the age of their teen years the period of identity crisis is also known as the adolescence period. There are eight stages of development of Erikson but identity crisis comes during the fifth stage of Erikson's development.

Eight stages of development of Erikson

- 1) Trust vs. Mistrust
- 2) Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
- 3) Initiative vs. Guilt
- 4) Industry vs. Inferiority
- 5) Identity vs. Confusion
- 6) Intimacy vs. Isolation
- 7) Generativity vs. Stagnation
- 8) Integrity vs. Despair

The concept of identity crisis is explained by different authors which are cited below:

Obama, B. (2004), "My identity might begin with the fact of my race, but it didn't, couldn't, end there. At least that's what I would choose to believe,"

Mason(2016)I do believe, separate and apart from any particular election or movement, that we are going to have to guard against a rise in a crude sort of nationalism or ethnic identity or tribalism that is built around us and them. According to Kalhitmrawe (2017), the text of the memoir "Dreams from My Father" by Barack Obama is most related to the "Autobiography of Malcolm X". By considering the autobiography of Malcolm X, Flick argued that there are three myths identified by Malcolm, the first myth is that blacks were animals; the second myth is that blacks were a minority, and the third one is that integration was a concept that was supported by many black people in the US.

Fowler(1987). Faulkner is one of America's greatest writers, and one of his central subjects is race. But can Faulkner, a white Southerner, the great-grandson of a slave owner, or, for that matter, can any white man enter a black consciousness or render accurately black lives? Opinions vary. On the one hand, Faulkner has created unforgettable black characters like Dilsey Gibson, Faulkner's favorite character, whom Faulkner described as "much more brave and honest and generous than me." And, with characters like Joe Christmas, a man who can never be categorized as either black or white, and Charles

Bon, a seemingly godlike. In another study, Mansoor (2012) reflected a schism emerging within an individual owing to drastic alterations in the social order, which, in turn, exerts pressures on an abruptly marginalized individual is termed an Identity Crisis. This schism leads to a subsequent appraisal and redefinition of the Self within a new paradigm, in Chuck's case, within the paradigm of his religion.

Black people's physical appearance is often the target of disparaging remarks in social settings, which is a way of undermining human dignity and equality. This is evident in the excerpt from the IYCS novel provided below. According to Al Hafizh (2017), Jeremiah was black. He could feel it. The way the sun pressed down hard and hot on his skin in the summer. Sometimes it felt like he sweated black beads of oil. He felt warm inside his skin, protected. And in Fort Greene, Brooklyn—where everyone seemed to be some shade of black—he felt good walking through the neighborhood. But one step outside. Just one step and somehow the weight of his skin seemed to change. It got heavier

1.3 RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

The memoir “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama will highlight unique or difficult topics of Identity and self-discovery, racism, race and equality, education and ambition, the American dream, and Family and heritage. This memoir “Dreams from My Father” will do the thematic analysis of the memoir. This paper will highlight the plot, themes, characterization, setting, and tone of the memoir.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore what kind of themes have been discussed in the memoir “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama
2. To explore what kind of plot is discussed in the memoir “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama
3. To investigate the types of characters used in the memoir “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama
4. To examine the setting of the memoir “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What type of textual and Obama has used pragmatic themes in the memoir “Dreams from My Father”?
2. What is the Plot structure used is in the memoir “Dreams from My Father”?
3. What type of characters in the memoir “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama have been introduced?
4. What is the setting of the memoir “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This book will help the reader, what is an identity crisis, how an identity crisis affects the personality of different characters. After reading this research article the reader will be able to understand the literal postulates of identity crisis and how identity crisis affects the memoir Dreams from My Father by Barack Obama.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Themes in Different Memoirs

2.1 The theme of grief and loss

Macdonald (2015) uses certain abbreviations to show names for example he uses H for Hawk. This memoir is handling themes of grief and sorrow. In the memoir H is for Hawk major themes are grief and loss. Helen Macdonald wrote this memoir to show how she lived through her remaining life after the death of her father. Helen Macdonald shows her important theme of grief and loss in a way by saying “Sometimes, a few times, I felt my father must be sitting near me as I sat on a train or in a café. This was comforting. It all was. Because these were the normal madness’s of grief”. We can perceive from the lines as a psychoanalyst from her imaginary sighting that her father is still in existence with her. The theme of identity crisis is somehow elaborated through the death of her father in a way that after losing her father she was deprived of the individual identity purpose and existence in the world.

2.2 Theme of Racial Differences

Jefferson (2015), in the memoir “Negroland” major themes are racial differences: This memoir is about racial relations in the mid-20th century. The main focus of this memoir was on the social construction of white people who consider themselves as upper class and they consider black people belonging from the lower class (superior and inferior respectively). Jefferson (2015) further says by exploring the theme of identity crisis in her memoir “I hate when I'm supposed to be having fun and Race singles me out for special chores and duties.” In these lines, the author wants to express her feelings when some tasks or assignments are assigned to her and she feels discomfort and frustration.

In this memoir, the theme of race relations is also similar to the theme of identity crisis in the memoir *Dreams from My Father* by Barack Obama where Barack Obama also talks about the superiority and inferiority of the people living in America based on the white and black color. White people see black Africans with hatred eye because black people were always struggling for basic survival and respect.

2.3 Theme of the American Dream

The term American dream was first coined by James Truslow Adams in 1931. He defines this term that American dream as the wish to live a happy and better life for all citizens of every status. He also mentions in his book “Epic of America” that the American dream “is the dream where everyone would have access to achieve the desirable dreams and these dreams based on the ability and accomplishment and a place where everyone should be a man having good qualities and domestically rich. Nasalevych, & Pchela, (2019), mentioned J. Bragg and M. Drayton, who described the concept of the American Dream” that includes, 1) faith that the resources of American land are vast, and the material abundance is destined here to all without exception; 2) the conviction that only in America a person becomes free from class, social, ideological, educational and other restrictions; 3) confidence that in American the right to happiness is granted to everyone, and the chances of achieving happiness are equal for everyone.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

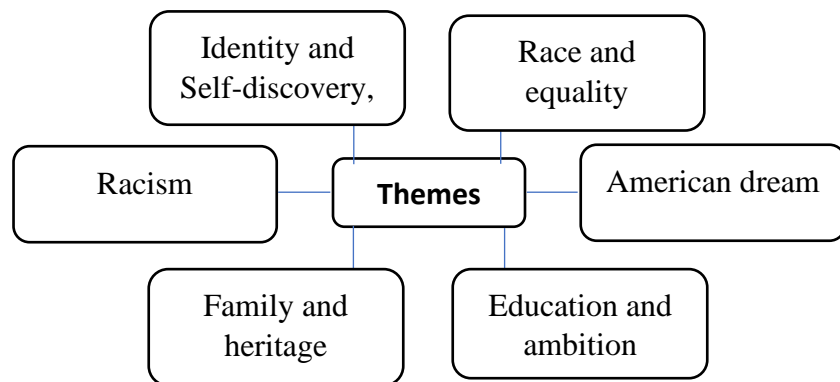
3.1 Research Framework

Leedey and Ormrod (2001) stated that research methodology is an approach to systematically gathering the data and data can be interpreted to achieve the desired results. A methodological framework is an organized way to define what the research questions are and meet the findings that take place in the framework that has already been established. Qualitative research has been adopted to gather the data. Decoding the text and textual analysis methods have been used to investigate the findings of the study. Creswell (1994) stated that qualitative research helps the researcher towards some new findings. Anwer, R., Lodhi, M. A., & Anam, S. (2021).

Name of the book	Author	Publication Year	Publisher
Dreams from my Father	Barack Obama	1995	Barack Obama

3.2 Framework of Analysis

Primary data is the data which is collected by reading the original text of the memoir and this methodological framework is also based on the primary data. The memoir is consisted of 3 parts (1, origins.2, Chicago. 3, Kenya). Here decoding the text and textual analysis techniques have been used to investigate and comprehend the identity crisis in the memoir “Dreams from My Father”. Following are the themes that have been studied in the framework of Analysis, Identity and self-discovery, racism, race and equality, education and ambition, the American dream, and Family and heritage.



4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

When we read this memoir the theme of identity and self-discovery was prominent as the memoir *Dreams from My Father* extensively describes Obama's journey of self-discovery. It is shown in the memoir when he started his journey for identity and self-discovery from Hawaii to Indonesia and then he moved to Chicago. His whole life was spent discovering his identity.

The theme of education and ambition was also highlighted in this memoir, this narrative started from Occidental College to Columbia University and then to Harvard Law School. He faced many difficulties in his life even in schools, colleges, and universities just because he was an African-American student but he succeeded in his life, crossed the hurdles which were just due to color and race, and became the 44th president of America.

The American dream was another important theme that was prominent in the memoir. The story of Obama's life is an example of the American dream which shows us the path of multicultural childhood to community organizing and in the end Harvard Law School.

Next, there was the theme of racism, and this was shown in the memoir through the character of Barack Obama's father, Barack Obama Sr. of Kenya, and Ann Dunham. This was basically against the norms and traditions of the society of that time as there was no custom like this when Obama's parents came into a marriage relationship. If we look on the other side of the mirror, this was the dehumanization as white people consider Obama a monkey when he came to society as white used to think that he belonged to an uncivilized community, and also as his father left him just when he was two years old due to the skin color. This was all about the destruction of social norms that point us toward the modern world.

5. JUSTIFICATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.1 What type of textual and Obama has used pragmatic themes in the memoir "Dreams from My Father"?

The theme is the main idea, central idea, or main subject of the given literary piece of writing. A story must have a theme, but themes can of major and minor themes. The theme is the big idea in Literature. Important themes in the memoir "Dreams from My Father" include the following:

Racism: The relationship between a black man and a white woman was so strong that they eventually got married and a child was born, but this marriage went against social norms because white people used to think of themselves as superior to black people, which made their married life extremely challenging. Because of the color of his skin Barack Obama's father abandoned him when he was just two years old. White people, who are regarded as an uncivilized community, viewed Obama as just like a monkey when he first entered society. This was the collapse of our social norms that point out modern life.

Identity and Self-Discovery: Born to a Kenyan father and an American mother, Obama faces the challenges of his mixed-race identity. He talks about the difficulties of being a part of African and American cultures. The biography examines his pursuit of self-awareness and efforts to reconcile his several identities.

Rich Wailer (2024) in the 21st century, American literature is characterized by themes of identity, social justice, and technology's impact on human interaction. The writer examines the intricacies of sexuality, gender, and race, mirroring the nation's ongoing struggles with inequality. As in the USA, Ta-Nehsi Coates' "Between the World and Me" explores the harsh realities of being Black

in America, while Margaret Atwood's "The Testaments" in the UK discusses the ramifications of Authoritarianism and gender oppression.

Race and Inequality: Obama considers his experiences growing up as a Black man in America throughout the biography. He discusses the greater issue of racial inequality in society as well as his encounters with prejudice. A complex viewpoint on the racial dynamics in the US is offered by the story.

Harris (2019) Obama and Kamala Harris are both the personalities which faces the problem of oppression, identity crisis and race. As we mentioned in above notes about Obama that his father was black African and his mother was white American, and the problems he faced from the start of his birth till became the president of America as black African. Same is the case with Kamala Harris, her father was Jamaican and her mother was Indian, she wrote about the experiences being perceived as "Other" in America, where the identity is often denied by race.

In *The Truths We Hold*, Harris reflects on her upbringing in a similar vein, mentioning how her mother faced the problem of identity and race on the basis of skin color. She continued her struggles and at last she was sworn in as Vice President – the first woman, the first Black American, and the first South Asian American to be elected to this position on January 20, 2021.

Family and Heritage: A recurring focus of Barack Obama's journey, as captured in his biography, is the impact of his father's absence. The biography delves into Obama's yearning for a connection to his African heritage and the effects this absence had on his childhood. The complexities of his relationships with his mother, grandparents, and half-siblings are explored in depth, highlighting their influence on his upbringing and identity.

The American Dream: Obama discusses the "American Dream" and whether or not anyone can realize it. He reflects on his path and the difficulties he encountered in order to succeed. The memoir critically examines societal issues and the role of personal agency in pursuing the American Dream.

Education and Ambition: The narrative details Obama's pursuit of education for upward mobility. It examines his experiences attending different schools and how education influenced his goals. The memoir underscores the transformative power of learning and intellectual curiosity.

5.2. What is the Plot structure used is in the memoir “Dreams from My Father”?

A plot refers to the arrangement of events in a story, detailing the order in which they unfold from start to. It encompasses the tensions and conflicts that drive the narrative. Freytag's pyramid model includes elements such as exposition, climax, falling action, and rising action. There are four main types: 1) Linear 2) Nonlinear 3) Flashback 4) Episodic. Barack Obama's “Dreams from My Father” employs a nonlinear plot. The storytelling does not strictly follow chronological order; instead, it navigates through various phases of Obama's life, integrating flashbacks and introspective moments. This approach allows Obama to explore his identity, heritage, and experiences from a thematic perspective rather than a strictly linear one. The nonlinear narrative enriches the storytelling, enabling him to delve into different aspects of his life and provide a more

nuanced insight into both his journey and broader societal issues (Lodhi et al., 2018). Both Obama 2009 inaugural address and *Dreams from My Father* discuss the challenges of identity, both nationally and personally. While his memoir finds his personal journey of reuniting his multiracial background and understanding his place in a racially divided America, in his inaugural address, he urges a national retribution and a concerted attempt to bridge past conflicts. Both works draw from America's complex racial history, and in his address, Obama extends the personal lessons from his memoir to offer an idea for a united future focused on shared American principles and values.

5.3. What type of characters in the memoir “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama have been introduced?

Characterization is a process in which it is shown how characters are portrayed in a play, movie, or book to make them look authentic and natural.

A character is a person who occurs in a narrative, be it a drama, a film, a short story, a memoir, or a novel. There is a protagonist and antagonist in each drama, a film, a short story, a memoir, or a novel. The protagonist character is a hero if they can elicit empathy and sympathy from other characters. It makes us think that we are dealing with the same problem as they were. In contrast, the antagonist is a character who stands in opposition to the protagonist. The protagonist of the memoir is Barack Obama, the narrator and the antagonist of the memoir are not clear in the memoir, however, it can be said that racial and cultural tensions in the memoir could be seen as societal antagonist forces.

5.4. What is the setting of the memoir “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama?

The setting is the time and place or when and where the story is told. Usually, when we read a story and find the major themes, plot, and characters of the story there is an important literary device which is the setting. All the stories, novels, dramas, and memoirs have their setting. The setting of the memoir “*Dreams from My Father*” by Barack Obama is in different ages of the author's life and different places (Hawaii, Chicago, and Kenya). The memoir starts from his early years of life in Hawaii until he entered into the political field and when he became the 44th president of America even though he was not pure American, he worked hard and faced many challenges and difficulties in his life such as he has to face to challenges of racial discrimination which was the very important and crucial one for him. Before transferring to Columbia University in New York City, he studied in Chicago Occidental College in Los Angeles outside of Los Angeles. After graduating from Columbia, Obama decided to work as a community organizer in Chicago's South Side, a predominantly African-American neighborhood plagued by poverty and social issues. During this time span, Obama began to examine his African heritage by traveling to Kenya, where he first encountered his paternal family. This journey to Kenya deepens his understanding of his heritage and the complexities of post-colonial Africa. Finally, he relocated to Kenya, where titled *Kenya*, takes the reader on a contemplative trip with Obama as he struggles with his father's legacy and his sense of purpose. As Obama returns to Chicago and becomes involved in law school and community activism, Obama grows more passionate about politics and social justice. He shares

his experiences tackling problems in underserved communities such as housing discrimination and employment inequality.

6. CONCLUSION

As it is discussed before in the last sections, this study focused on a thematic analysis of Barack Obama's memoir entitled "Dreams from My Father". It deals with racism and relevant issues like identity and self-discovery, race, and equality. By taking the fictitious characters, the author tried to discuss the story of white Americans and black Africans. The critical analysis was conducted by focusing on the important major and minor themes that are depicted in the narrative story of the memoir. By concentrating on the meaning of the memoir, the researchers tried to evaluate utilizing the identity crisis technique. As mentioned in the aforementioned discussion, the analysis conducted leads to the identification and discussion of five major themes portrayed in the memoir. They can be followed as in short.

Identity and self-discovery – Obama was born into a family where he faced a dual heritage problem as his father was Kenyan and his mother was American. He talks about both African and American cultures and their difficulties. This struggle was just because he wanted to finish the issue of an identity crisis.

Racism- The relationship between Barack Obama's father and mother was so strong that they finally came to a new relationship that they named a husband and wife, and due to this result, Obama was born, but this relationship was not so strong in the future days as it was against the norms and tradition of white people as they used to consider the black as inferior before them.

Family and Heritage- Due to the absence of Obama's father Barack Obama Sr., is a major theme. The biography explores Obama's childhood experiences of being disconnected from his African heritage and his longing for a connection. There is also an examination of the subtleties of his relationships with his mother, grandparents, and half-siblings.

The American Dream- Obama muses over the idea of the "American Dream" and queries whether it can be attained by everyone. He thinks back in his past times and come to realize the difficulties he faced for his success. The autobiography offers a perceptive examination of societal barriers and highlights the importance of personal resolve in pursuing the American Dream.

Education and Ambition- Obama's pursuit of education as a method of attaining social change is covered in depth in the memoir. It explores his experiences attending various educational institutions and how education shaped his goals. The narrative highlights how Obama's life path was greatly shaped by his education and intellectual curiosity.

In short, Barack Obama's memoir shows his reflections on his American mother and Kenyan father, as well as his exploration of his identity and the difficulties of being biracial. The story explores Obama's path to self-awareness and the healing of his disparate cultural upbringings. It shows how difficult it is for him to balance his dual African American and American identities. Overall, the memoir shows Obama's struggle to maintain a cohesive identity while navigating the nuances of his background.

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