

SELF-INSCRIPTION IN *BECOMING* BY MICHELLE OBAMA

MUNGA SIMON MBUCHI

C50/10408/2018

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF
ARTS IN LITERATURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

2020

DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any University.

Munga Simon Mbuchi

C50/10408/2018

Signed.....

Date *16th October 2020*

This project has been submitted for examination with our approval as University supervisors:

First Supervisor:

Dr. Masumi Odari

Signed.....

Date *16th October 2020*

Second Supervisor:

Prof. Ciarunji Chesaina

Signed.....

Date *16th October 2020*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Primarily, I would like to thank God for providence, Love and safety. I also thank Him for giving me the category of people that I acknowledge in this section. Glory be to Thine.

Second, my earnest appreciation goes to my two ingenious supervisors: Dr. Masumi Odari and Prof. Ciarunji Cheisaina. It is because of their priceless guidance that I have been able to orient the research and writing of this project into its relevance. *Mwene Nyaga amurathime!*

Third, I extend my gratitude to all the lecturers from whose insight, I have been able to combine the necessary materials for this project: Therefore, I would like to thank Prof. Monica Mweseli, Prof. Henry Indangasi, Prof. Bhakti Shringarpure, Dr. Masumi Odari, Dr. Tom Odhiambo, Dr. Judith Jefwa, Dr. Miriam Musonye, Dr. Joseph Muleka, Dr. Makau Kitata, Dr. Jennifer Muchiri, Mrs. Mwangi, Mr. Sean and Mr. Kanyari for their resourceful input.

The fourth category is made up of my 2018 cohorts: Special thanks to Wayne Otieno, Yego Tingiya, Roselyn Ileri, Otieno, Chelule, Edna, Ruth, Atem, and Mary for the best learning time. Also, special thanks to Duncan Kirui, Maxwell Chuma, Brender, Zeytun and Spourtinah in my 2019 class. You have been the best!

Next is the branch of faithful friends who always make me see the world as a better place. For this reason, my appreciation goes to Umira Ochieng' for dedicating his time to read

and critic this thesis Wanyaga Roseline for her patience in editing and proofreading the project. Kibet Ngetich for encouragements and believing that this attainment is worth the struggle. Indeed, it would not have been easy without you guys. Thank you, a lot.

Moreover, as a product of Munga family, I owe all I have to my mother; Margaret Njeri Munga, my sisters; Wanjiru, Warigia, Wambui and brothers; Njuguna, Muroki and Mbatia. Your prayers and best wishes are certainly the foundation of this attainment.

Also, there are those angels that God just send. They connect to me in proxy yet I have made it through because of that attachment. In this category, I appreciate *Ba. Mwangi Ndirangu, Ma. Ndirangu* and their son, *Ndirangu* for their kindness and collective interest in what I do. May God bless you abundantly.

Lastly, I appreciate the departmental librarian, Mr. Ongeru for the efficient provision of significant academic resources that made this project a part of my success stories.

DEDICATION

To my dearest Mother, Margaret Njeri Munga, for Unconditional love, Provision and
Unquestioning Trust of what a Mum's boy can do.

To Edna Mbuchi. My cousin. My friend.

To Lawrence Mbatia. My Nephew. My friend. My inspiration.

To Joan Wambui. My granddaughter. My source of Happiness.

In memory of my father

Titus Munga

You liked reading. So, on the pages, we are connected, dad.

Finally, to everyone who relishes new things, new books, new ideas, new ways of
reasoning— Try harder. The sky is the limit. They say.

ABSTRACT

Self-inscription in Becoming by Michelle Obama

Autobiography as an interface of the self and experience is pivotal in the study of "what" and "how" people represent their stories. Since her appearance as the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama has been a point of critical attention. This study aims to investigate "what" and "how" she inscribes the self in *Becoming*. As a result, the goal of the study was to examine the cultural, historical and economic conditions that defines Michelle Obama in *Becoming* and to evaluate the narrative strategies that Michelle Obama employs to portray herself in *Becoming*. Correspondingly, two hypotheses informed this study. The first one presupposed that Cultural, historical and economic conditions define Michelle Obama in *Becoming* and that there are narrative strategies that Michelle Obama employs to portray herself in *Becoming*. In conversation with these premises, how the subject employs the form of autobiography to assert her authentic representation in respect to race, class and gender has been discovered. In addition to espoused confines of self-inscription, the language and structure of her story have been studied. In so doing, it has been revealed that, as a woman writer, Michelle Obama reconstructs her story in cohesion with characteristics of autobiography's artistic features. For instance, she envelopes her narrative in a coherent story structure and in agreement with other communicative strategies that inform on the subject's self-inscription. Alongside, "Theory of Autobiography" and "New Criticism" were employed as guiding frameworks in the portrayal and form interpretation of the subject and the autobiography respectively. However, while the stressed realms revolve around subjectivity, agency and artistry, this study acknowledges that *Becoming* can as well be comparatively studied in conjunction with works whose concentration revolves around similar precincts of Michelle Obama's race, class and gender—I suggest that the triad acts as informative zones of African American's history and literature, which contribute to the understanding of their individual and collective experiences.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

To portray the self, individuals revitalise their past through writing. While this process can be pegged down to various motives, it happened that, men, in crave of justifying their achievements and "sense of isolation," (Gusdorf 29-30) they invented what straddle between both genders in today's platform of self-inscription. This is an autobiography. Some critics define it as a story of a person written by the self, but, specifically, Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* describes it as a "reconstruction of a moment of a life, or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived" (9). It follows that memoirs, diaries, journals and biographies mimic this genre as they recapture the self's past; with each having its disparity from Pascal's description. In spite of this likelihood, it is imperative to note that, just like how it captures the life of the self, either across or from a particular moment in time, likewise, it provides the framework in which the self's portrait can be studied. This makes it possible to account for reflected selves (subjects) in relation to the surrounding that yields them. Thus, from a realisation that narrators in autobiography artistically dramatise certain dispositions due to circumstances enmeshed within their society, a study geared towards studying their representation and how they inscribe it (portrait) in autobiography's narrative is significant. As a result, this study probed on *Becoming's* reflection of Michelle Obama as a woman, black woman, the former First Lady of the United States, and in relation to narrative strategies that she has employed to inscribe the self in the form of autobiography.

Apparently, the above thesis signals to the position that unveils the women's contribution in the literary studies —a proof of their farfetched contribution across

political, cultural, historical and economic zones that confront them. Needless to say, but such involvements are the very reason that autobiography's characteristic attracts a plethora of critics in today's academia—in other words, they take its fluid form to account on issues raised by experiencers and in conjunction with the system that forms the part of the surrounding which either improves or disdains their spaces and agency. *Eighty Years and More* by Elizabeth Candy Stanton is a typical example of the form that women take to share their accrued experiences from the stated conditions (social, political, cultural among others). On the other hand, Maya Angelou's *I know why the Caged Birds Sing* has been interpreted as a stretch of psychological and emotional protest against the oppressive system. In addition to protest, from Angelou's reading, autobiographical habit (the process of employing the self's voice to assert one's awareness) reveals women's proclivity to reading and writing, which altogether operate as their (women) nonviolent strategy to reclaim and publicise their subjugated voices, but in varying approaches. However, irrespective of the disproportion that emanates from women's stories, the fact that they are women, they are tied together by shared experiences. That is why, with Michelle Obama being a prototype of such construction, her study is a continuum of issues that are already introduced into scholarship by African American writers. Michelle Obama has authored three complex memoirs when judged in terms of length and content. These are *Michelle Obama in Her Own words* (2008), *American Grown* (2012) and *Becoming* (2018). Briefly, while *Michelle Obama in Her Own Words* gives a revealing insight into the life and mind of the new First Lady, *American Grown* offers an exquisite account of food, health and South Lawn Farm that she introduced to curb increasing cases of childhood obesity and

encourage healthy eating habits among children and general American population. In this project, *Becoming* formed the nexus of my study.

Further investigation into her biographical sketch reveals that she was the forty-fourth First Lady of the United States (2009-2017), who was preceded by Laura Bush (2001-2008) and followed by Melania Trump (2016). In respect to early life, she was born as Michelle LaVaughn Robinson in Chicago, Illinois, on January 17, 1964. Professionally, she is a Lawyer, University administrator, and writer. Other than espoused particulars, she is a wife to forty-fourth U.S. President, Barack Obama (2009-2017). Having married him in 1992, she is a mother to Malia Ann Obama and Natasha Obama. Lastly, a glimpse into her academic background reveals that she is a product of Whitney Young High School, Princeton University and Harvard Law School. Presently, she lives in Washington D.C. Considering the given sketch, a glance into *Becoming* reveals that people "implicitly and explicitly" (Pascal 32) write about their past from discourses that stem from childhood, process of growth, family, work, school, and marriage conditions.

However, as a woman, Michelle Obama does not just write. I contend that women's narratives are peculiar in their own ways. As a female writer, she is aware of the constituents of women's discourses. She therefore writes like a woman and include women in *Becoming* to propel some integral thematic concerns that resonate with authentic feminine capability. This is what Elaine Showalter refers to as 'gynocriticism.' She (Showalter) believes that women, just like men typify strength, success and subtleness in their state of mind. In her work *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, she contends that "gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the

newly visible world of female culture" (131). In other words, this argument is what underscores the aims of gynocritics— this is a thinking which is geared towards understanding the specificity of women's writing as a necessary aspect of female reality. In concrete terms, women write bearing in mind that their experience parallels that of others with whom they share characteristics. In particular, Mary Mason in *Autobiographies of Women Writers" Autobiography: Essay Theoretical and Critical* reinforces that, "the merging of her private consciousness with her collective consciousness", "evolution and delineation of an identity by way of alterity", "the double focus writer" (30) is a typical strategy and nature of women's narrative. Whereas "her" imply a woman writer, it is convincing that Mary stresses that women's autobiographical writing not only reflect the self but bear witness to society's issues that confront women of diverse race, origin and religion, too.

In addition to issues wrapped within the threads of *Becoming's* content, form is identically significantly in the study of how the subject inscribes her individual and collective stories. In support of artistry in autobiographical narratives, Marjanne Gooze's in *The Definitions of Self and Form in feminist Autobiography Theory* argues that "critics now look increasingly at the autobiographical text as an artistic work in its own right" (411). From the jurisdiction of "New Criticism," Gooze observes that autobiography bear literary strategies that expound on how individuals inscribe their individual and collective past—that apart from limiting autobiography's criticism to history, there are strategies in it that add on how the subject's crafts and organises their past into a holistic and coherent whole.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

I premise that there are cultural, historical and economic conditions that are peculiar to the apparent images that defines Michelle Obama in *Becoming*. As a result, this study seeks to evaluate the subject's self-representation and portrayal interpretation with gender, race and class as the epicenter of its argument. In addition to the study of the portrait, this study acknowledges that there are narrative strategies that the writer employs to narrate her story in both consistent and artistic method. It is these strategies that present her individual story in the form and language of her autobiography. Particularly, the study investigated the account of Michelle Obama's images that emanates from culture, history and economic background that is reflected in *Becoming*. Other than images that defines the subject in such fashion, the study problematised form in regard to narrative strategies that she utilises in both crafting and representing her individual experiences.

1.3 Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives:

- a. To examine the cultural, historical and economic conditions that defines Michelle Obama as an established African American Woman with race, class and gender as epicenters of *Becoming's* reflection.
- b. To evaluate the narrative strategies employed by Michelle Obama to portray herself in *Becoming*.

1.4 Hypotheses

This study hypothesises that:

- a. As an established African American woman, Michelle Obama's culture history and economic conditions in *Becoming* bear informative reflections that define her in relation with race, class and gender.

- b. There are narrative strategies in *Becoming* that Michelle Obama employs to portray herself.

1.5 Justification of the Study

Autobiographical narratives are important as they interrogate: Who is this autobiographical self? Furthermore, it gives these subjects a space for recording their achievements and contributions that means a lot to them. Consequently, Michelle Obama is a product of such a self. For instance, after several achievements and contributions, she became the forty-fourth First Lady of the United States. It is these spaces that inform on how she relates to America's society. When she became the First Lady, she amplified how first ladies are learned for being the first African American woman to attain such mileage in her country. This implies that conversations about her life revolve around several rhetorics: Will she be a full-time mother? Will she stick to her hard-earned career? Will she multitask between career, family and First Lady and succeed? Will she display the disposition that society has for black women? I argue that interrogating these issues is an important avenue of how she is consumed outside and how she does it for herself in the context of *Becoming*.

From another angle, her portrait can be understood from her interaction with segments interlinked to gender, class and race. It is worth noting that, in the African American literary landscape, these social constructs, more especially, race and gender have overtime been at the center of attention for both writers and readers of African American experience. Gender, for one thing, women have been relegated by men for quite a long time. On the other hand, racially, African Americans have been 'othered' by the white majority for an equal expanse of time. In concrete terms, whether reading of literature from Northern or Southern regions, the narratives expound on existential crises that emanate

from members on binary: White/ black, men/women, rich/poor, immigrants/natives that are striving to coexist. For this reason, *Becoming* is a unit of events that act as an extension of stories that she reconstructs for the sole purpose of achieving the accomplished and independent self-inscription within the parlance of factors that distort how women's portrait is constructed. Thereupon, studying the core assembly of discourses that shape her stories is studying the language and extra areas that add to how she conceptualises herself as well as America's society and its contents.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

In the incoming sailing of portrayal, the foremost opportunity is pegged down to dialogs that stride within the primary text, *Becoming*. In this autobiography, I delved into the narrative to gather images that define Michelle Obama as well as folding together, the narrative strategies that she employs to inscribe herself in *Becoming*. That is to say that since the subject on board is an established woman and dramatise black identity, I have pinned down her representation into three factors: race, class and gender. To accomplish the objectives, I have invited critical texts that espouse on the self in relation to aforesaid triads—these sources come in the shade of journals, books as well as master and Ph.D. dissertations that encapsulate women's narrative and criticism. In addition to these areas, theoretical texts (*Theory of Autobiography*, as well as *New Criticism*) have been sought after because they supply principles that expands on the relevancy of the study.

1.7 Literature Review

Writers employ histories of their nation and other subjects as indices of achieving their whole selves. In other words, autobiography is a mosaic record of a person, of a nation, of societies altogether tangled to the history of one person. For instance, from Pascal, the first

assumption of autobiography's nature dwells on the poetics of the past's reconstruction (9). For that matter, Michelle Obama's *Becoming* bears a characteristic reflex of her past, her society's past and her nation's collective past. Thence, from many works that articulate similar inference, I begin the segment by pressing my point with major textual examples that crisscross with *Becoming's* historical impulses and in relation to what I term as 'Race Question'

Booker Taliaferro Washington in *Up from Slavery* depicts a kind of historical experience that is relatable to the then slaves and the oppressive system. To address the exploitation of black people, he developed *Self-help, Solidarity, and Accommodation* philosophies that became instrumental tools of rallying African Americans to embrace suffering for the time being; work step by step towards overcoming race-induced ills. Perching on *Becoming*, Michelle Obama's supporting subjects such as Harold Washington are among the subjects whose philosophy marks the ideology that she champions as an African American writer and as a descendant of a slave (Jim Robinson). In this study, I have examined how the subject employs *Becoming* to speak for herself as a recipient member of race-oriented marginalisation by both the white majority and the system.

From another position, the race is tied to identity and its complications. So then, unlike self actualised in *Up from Slavery*, there is yet another character towards the post-reconstruction era (late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century) who is in incessant search of himself. Lucidly represented by James Weldon Jameson in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, a young man is revealed. His reveal, however, is a representation of identity fragmentation; of unsettling treatment of blacks; of how black men had to cope through a persistent bargain between survival, access, and success. In

other words, this phenomenon shows the complexities of living as a minority citizen in a country where most of them are offshoots of slavery. In other words, while Weldon reveals this phenomenon at the time when racism was institutionalised, Michelle Obama in *Becoming* unearths the intensity of racism during slavery, institutionalised racism, and in contemporary America with the help of subjects who have witnessed its shockwave on the body, status, and psychology.

In continuation, the historical outlook of the 1960s strikes as a moment when human activism was at its climax. Consequently, it led to the murder of significant African American activist, Martin Luther King Jr. Putting this time in context, Maria Lauret in *How to Read Michelle Obama: Pattern and Prejudice* note the shift that her (Michelle Obama's) family had to undergo at the time. She writes:

Michelle Obama's family history from slavery through to the 1960s then is an ordinary story of miscegenation and migration, trial and tribulation, setbacks and progress, familiar in outline if unknown in detail except, of course, for its outcome in her. From around about her birth in 1964, however, the situation is reversed: on the one hand, we know of this individual life in more detail than anyone could possibly need while, on the other, the contours of collective African American history become less and less defined as black activism falters or is fractured, and class divisions open up in the 1970s and 1980s. (110-111)

As outlined in the above citation, the assassination of activists disoriented African Americans and their dream, altogether. According to Lauret, the bond that had tied them began to break, the class system began to form among African Americans, whereby wealthy blacks started to move from labeled South ghettos to high rise residences. As

aforementioned above, this study focuses on events that align with what she recollects in *Becoming*, because, studying them is an informative venture that dissects her (Michelle Obama's) reaction to the concept of racism, collective consciousness and class.

In conversation with the branch that appraises on gender and autobiographical writing, Lionette Francoise in her study, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portrait* proposes the kind of a narrative that conforms to female writing. In tracing the place of gender in writing, she is concerned about the shape in which the narrative assumes as prompted by women characters. In this regard, she interrogates how self-portrait in autobiography defines the woman heroine and whether such impulse is free from male influenced characterisation. Still, on the same, Francoise is not only interested in the subject or female character in autobiography, but collective literary heirs as well. According to her, it is only then, self-portrait treated in women's narrative can be regarded as informative and revealing of authentic women experience. She insists that "Women narratives must retrace the narrow paths along which the female heroine of literature has been allowed to walk. But they must also attempt to find new and empowering directions for themselves and their literary heirs" (94-95). Parting ways with Francoise, it is evident that women's autobiography has a unique constituent as it is majorly folding together, only content that brings together the sum of past selves that are real and deemed so because they are fashioned by women themselves. It is only from this process that male literary tradition is subverted, women tradition asserted, and new methods of articulating women's experience articulated from the interplay between the personal, political, text and context as well as what the new cloth achieves by way of intertextuality. Rooted from the past, the incoming tradition from Francoise's proposition does bring about a drift in how women's

work is consumed in literary scholarship. For instance, in stressing the importance of new tradition, I suggest that deconstructive criticism is vital in sanitising characterisation of a marginalised woman from male influenced portrayal. Here, I will see how Michelle Obama in *Becoming* orients her portrait amid the possibility of America's cultural and historical influence and social indoctrination.

Another vein is by Lynn Bloom. In his cutting-edge paper, *American Autobiography and the Politics of Genre*, Bloom posits that, "the personal in political is never truer than in relation to autobiography. American autobiography, what we write, read, teach, study and critique, is inseparably intertwined with political concerns" (64). As an exotic term in sense of criticism, politics shape and enthrall autobiographical arguments because, sometimes, the fact that some autobiographical subjects may be successful in life, they publicise their private to public for scrutiny. It is this kind of study that invites how Michelle Obama publicises her private in *Becoming's* context of race, class and gender. More so, in regard to the form of her autobiography, it has been argued that some implicatures bear intention of expressing her political concern.

In continuation, Gordic Petkovic in *Constructing Gender roles in Literature and Criticism. Elaine Showalter and Anglophone Women's History* argues that "Gynocriticism constructs a new perspective of women's literary history and explores the creativity of women against the male-oriented literary canon. As the main representative of this critical practice, Elaine Showalter advocates the intention to study the production of women's writing in relation to the female experience, and the new perspectives of gender roles in literature" (Showalter 187). Therefore, women's autobiography assumes what gynocriticism proposes. It is a construct of women's experience as narrated through the

reconstruction of how gender roles define the self in society. Conspicuously, *Gynocriticism* shapes the narrative of *Becoming* by virtue of realities that come in its resonance with feminine experience. In this autobiography, some women subjects transcend conceptualisation of gender: These are women who are single yet prosperous, divorced yet independent, mothers yet with disciplined and smart children, all together, women who are a typical embodiment of feminine capability. From this wave of women's genre, I have studied how Michelle Obama problematises the concept of paradigm in American society. At this point, the study, from Michelle Obama's method and portrait, has anticipatorily proposed a new literary tradition which adds insight into contemporary spaces that define the position of women in the society.

Other than history and gender-related reflections that tally to the proposed hypotheses, there are precise studies that circle on the principal subject, Michelle Obama. Therefore, from the *First Lady of Social Media: The Visual Rhetoric of Michelle Obama's Twitter Images*, Michelle Obama is deemed as the first First Lady to employ social media to shape her rhetoric. Precisely, this is what interests Paul and Perreault. Even though it is coincidental that her triumph in the White House coincided with the prevalence of social media, her effect on them had a huge shaping of what she supports as the First Lady. What she stands for therefore is exclusively shaped by "visual fantasies present in her most popular tweets" (164) that act as a symbol of how first ladies influence public opinion. They proceed by observing that "even though first ladies strive to appear as nonpartisan figures and function differently from political candidates, they are associated with the administration currently in power, and we expect them to use social media in strategic ways to inform and influence the American public" (165). Either way, it is transparent that their

impulse into the social media platform expands on discourses that unravel what she is expected to conform to by the public. Hence, it is categorical to note that what they theorise spins from images to characterisation of Michelle Obama as an occupant of West Wing's office. Exiting from Paul and Perreault's argument, this study focused on *Becoming* as an extra realm of deducing images peculiar to her as a public figure and a writer.

Regarding how people react to her self-inscription, Joseph Lugones in *Hope is finally making a comeback: The first lady reframed: Communication, Culture and Critique* argue that "first ladies have long captured the public's imagination as embodiments of "femininity, strength, maternity, humility, grace and restraint" (Paul and Perreault 56). This implies that her gotten images are a confirmation of how she impacts on people and how they interpret both of her works and presence as the First Lady. Therefore, while Joseph focuses on the form of her embodiment and particulars of rhetoric, this study assessed extra striking features that come from Michelle Obama's self-representation in her 2018 autobiography, *Becoming*.

Immersing in Janice Hopkins, a study casing her contributions to life-enhancing campaigns is transparent. Particularly, from her chat with "Let's Move" campaign, Hopkin in *Michelle Obama Starts Project to Combat Childhood Obesity* is conscious of consequential merit that such an initiative has, more especially, when pinned down to health and welfare of the vulnerable in America's society. She states that "the wife of the US president has announced an ambitious and comprehensive programme to "solve the problem of childhood obesity" in the United States within a generation. About a third of US children are overweight or obese and at increased risk of future health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, and asthma" (387). From Hopkins'

perspective, Michelle Obama's campaign is critical in defining her legacy. Inasmuch as she is able to construct her image in other myriad ways, identifying with children through arguing against what ails them as every woman's concentration is critical. From eating habits, for instance, domesticity is brought forth—where cultural stipulations assign women with a mandate of feeding her family. For instance, in *Becoming*, in realising that her daughter would become obese, she took upon herself to protest against capitalism that put money before children's health—this is a collective space that she identifies with in her autobiography and a typical example that stretch on the nexus from which her imaging is studied.

Christina Haynes and Ray Block are concerned about the effect that she creates among American society. From, *Role-Model-In-Chief: Understanding a Michelle Obama Effect*, the pair contends that "Because of the national conversation about her status as a role model, the former First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS) presents an opportunity to analyze an Obama effect—particularly, the idea that Michelle Obama's prominence as a political figure can influence, among other things, citizens' impressions of black women in America," (1-39). For quite a long time, the place of a black woman has been vague in the United States. For what biology could have it, their large hips make them objectified by society. Their black colour equally has accentuated their marginalisation in the sense that they are classified as the other. In this study, the focus is on how the subject in *Becoming* articulates synonymous trends of racial imaging that society attribute to women. In reaction, the study has further probed on mechanism that she employs to transcend the stereotyping of either individual disposition, social normativity and gender performativity.

Further scrutiny of Blow Charles in *The Magic of Michelle* is crucial in adding into how her popularity and influence traverse within and outside America's context. According to him, "the Former First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS) was poised and confident while remaining relatable to those so inclined. She was impeccable, and the tone of her speech was adroit, striking a balance between folksy mom-isms, policy speak, partisan rhetoric, and "black girl magic" (2). As an observation from what and how she manages herself before the public, her brilliance in speech mannerism and outlook is a reflection of an embodiment of a black woman. In reference to this argument, this study has focused on *Becoming's* narrative and in respect to how she demonstrates black aesthetics and in relation to how she employs it to locate herself in the public as the first African American First Lady.

Moving on, Deborah King in *Mom-in-Chief: Community Othermothering and Michelle Obama, the First Lady of the People's House* maintains that Michelle Obama's decision to forfeit her career to be a fulltime mother when she became the First Lady enhanced harsh criticism from feminist scholars. This is because quitting a job was contrary to their emancipation strategy. In other words, abandoning her hard-earned academic career over mom in chief's role was regarded as an unbecoming move. She argues that "the most aggrieved and hostile reactions to Obama as 'mom-in-chief 'came from feminists (mostly white). Some of their furies reflected general angst about the indelible persistence of gender inequality" (6). As opposed to gender balance, she (Michelle Obama) is specific on this complicity. Therefore, in this study, the focus is on how she mediates between work and family and processes of excelling in both. This entry is crucial in stretching on women's experiences that portray her as a mom-in-chief, and as a self-defining image in *Becoming*.

Further scrutiny of existing literature reveals that the subject has been studied in conjunction with other African American Women Such as Beyoncé Knowles. In this category, Farah Jasmine Griffin in, *At Last...? Michelle Obama, Beyoncé, Race and History* argues that these women "reveal that the history of racial inequality in this country is far from over" (1). This premise informs some more on the nature of stories that she narrates. Also, they inform how she is impacted from the glimpse of identity accomplishments, which forms the focus of most of the narratives that relate to African American society. Focusing on the implication of "At Last" and other songs implied in *Becoming*, this study has focused on music as a narrative style of narrating integral political concerns that cannot be explicitly put.

Diving more into fringes of *Becoming*, Candace Howze in her venture, *Michelle Obama's Secret to Becoming is Within Every Woman's Reach* flosses off fragments considered damaging by critics from the conversation that I had with Deborah King. She (Howze) argues that "Becoming manages to bring the stressors of a First Lady into our living rooms and says 'we're the same'. Having your words spoken out of context is hardly a lamentation reserved for the rich. Working-class women and first ladies alike have warred with the roles of public opinion on our private lives" (1-3). This segment apprises about the implication of the title, *Becoming*. This discussion parts with Howze's conceptualisation of *Becoming* and perches on the same title as a structural realisation of her selfhood from childhood to adulthood and her consequent strivings in America as a black woman.

Still on studies that relate to Michelle Obama, Stephanie Schafer in her study, *Phenomenal Woman: Michelle Obama's Embodied Rhetoric and the Cultural Work of*

Fashion Biographies believes that forty-fourth First Lady of the United States is an icon and can only be understood from such light. *Becoming* from iconography perspectives therefore dwells on the title of the First Lady which means more to the individual. In reinforcing this, Schafer argues that "Michelle Obama's role as the first black First Lady of the U.S is contextualized in discourses of feminism and race in the historical meaning of the First Lady, and in the world of fashion and celebrity...Michelle memorialized another African American poet and icon, Maya Angelou, by recalling the impacts the poem Phenomenal woman had on her as a child" (1). This extrapolates on how she not only revives the memory of one of the greatest African American literary icon, but also identifying with her, equally influences the public on the integral notion that shapes such phenomenal women—women with brains, influence and fame. A contextualised portrait from Schafer's argument depicts a famous and phenomenal woman too. Parting ways with Schafer, this discussion has dwelled on *Becoming's* iconography discourses that project Michelle Obama as a woman of class.

Moving on, even though discussed pieces of literature are essential in the study of autobiography and the self, there are some critics who provide reasons that interrogate why people love Michelle Obama. As a sociological and a comparative study, Laurel Elder and Brian Frederick in their article titled, *Why We Love Michelle: Understanding Public Support for First Lady Michelle Obama* argues that "What is remarkable about the love so many Americans expressed toward First Lady Michelle Obama is that she was able to maintain high favorable evaluations through a period of political, social, and electoral acrimony that made high approval ratings for national political figures increasingly unlikely" (403). From the above-mentioned, it becomes imperative therefore to focus on

only of her crucial characteristics, and how they have been problematised by the duo in specific conjunction that ranges from one, her husband, two, her preceding and following First Ladies. When navigating some more into their study, a clear-cut confirmation comes out. Further study by Cottle Michelle in *Battle of the First Ladies: Michelle Obama vs. Ann Romney* discloses that Michelle Obama's approval comes from reasons specific to how she "challenged some aspects of the traditional image of presidential candidate spouses through her race and "modern, striving, edgy, ironic" personality (Elder and Fredrick, 407). On the other hand, because she is not liked by everyone, Elder and Fredrick observes that it is those with negative attitude "towards African Americans feel less favorably toward Michelle Obama even after controlling for a collection of relevant political and demographic variables" (423). This imply that far-reaching yet nuanced evaluation of racism and attitude towards Michelle Obama requires an appreciation of her "ability to overcome the backlash among individuals concerned about her status as the first African American first lady" (Elder and Fredrick 407). Taken together, these studies manifest why people approve while others disapprove of her. In other words, this is criticism and it is essential in the literary assessment of the subject. In *Becoming*, we encounter a subjectivity and agency that paves way for balanced criticism of Michelle Obama. I intend to navigate America's society that reflects history, culture and class distribution because these frameworks offer the capacity from which Michelle Obama's portrait has been assessed from what she does and what she says about herself as opposed to what projected criticism has offered.

From the reviewed literature, this study insists that Michelle Obama is worth the case study in literary study. While this premise aid in advancing on studying her

autobiography, *Becoming*, identified gaps disclose a parallel entry from which I intend to interrogate images that define her as well as narrative strategies that she has used to inscribe herself in the same narrative.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

I begin this section by proposing that, literary studies are better when guided by certain sociological perspectives. This premise is backed by a notion that it is only then, (when literary studies are theorised), that consequent research assumptions are tested and driven to an informed end. It is from such conceptual consideration that warrants me to invite *Theory of Autobiography* and *New Criticism* as theoretical frameworks that informed my conversation with Michelle Obama as a subject and a woman writer within the margins of *Becoming*.

1.8.1 Theory of Autobiography

This discussion set off by probing the nature of autobiography. Albert Stone in his study, *The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays* perceives autobiography as "simultaneously historical record and literary artifact, psychological case history and spiritual confession, didactic essay and ideological testament" (2). This definition is salient as it is what impel theoretical simultaneity and consequently the sense of convergence left prone by critics who merely reduce autobiography to self-reportage with no adherence to beauty or technicality of any sort. According to Stone, critics consume autobiography "as a series of paradoxes: fact and fiction, private and communal, lessons and lies" (66) from binary assessment of its content and style.

Moreover, in spite of its heterogeneity in composition, autobiography portends two distinct tentacles, which are prevalent through lenses of history, poetics and philosophy.

Precisely, this is what interests William Spengemann. In his study, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*, Spengemann claims that historical autobiography "assumes a kind of self-knowledge based upon a true and stable account of the past" (66). This presupposition draws from the real reconstruction of a person's life as history. On the other hand, philosophical autobiography "reflects a changing self-determined by a mixture of present and past circumstance" (66) with an implication that autobiography is an introspection that compares the essence of the self as a product of the past and the present. Lastly, he acknowledges that these two categories are enmeshed by language. This gives rise to poetic autobiography whereby "the self can be represented only through the performance of a symbolic action" (66). This implies that, even though the primary goal of autobiography is to publicise the private life, there are autobiographies whereby subjects are fully learned from symbolic implications of what they dramatise in their recollection. In this discussion, *Becoming* resembles the three categories, because there are moments when ideologies that the subject opposes are wrapped in elements of form that can only be deciphered by close textual examination. Second, by the fact that she is reconstructing her past, her story is historical in nature: the history of herself, family, slavery, racism and so on. Lastly, by virtue of philosophy, Michelle Obama's narrative is a composite of events that are understood because of how they are intertwined by an interplay between the past and the present.

From discourses of women's narrative, Estelle Jelinek in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* theorises on the essence of women's autobiography. To venture into what interest women, she compares it with what men talk about in theirs. One of her observations is that while autobiography by men revolves around "success stories and

histories of their eras" (10), women describe their connection with other people such as children and marginalised. Not enough, she goes ahead to argue that, men canonises themselves in autobiographies that "idealize their lives or cast them into heroic molds to project their universal importance" (14-15), while by comparison, women are driven by "self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding" (15). This is an important input in the study of the form and content of the autobiography in question. I have ventured into how Michelle Obama employs another people's story to tell and understand herself in *Becoming*. In addition to her identification with her society, Jelinek's premise is instrumental in the analysis of how she (Michelle Obama) problematises her consciousness within the narrative of American society for the sole purpose of sanitising and vindicating her and other black women's representation, as well.

Patricia Meyer in her article, "Selves in Hiding" highlights this trait of women's autobiography and searches for the root of such tendency in a socio-cultural and patriarchal setup. *Self in Hiding* is a predicament that faces a woman writer who is not sure how to balance domestic experience with professionalism or work. By negotiating her identity from these two, there are moments that she skips some part of either sphere (domestic/private and public/work/profession) in her efforts of recounting on the other. Consequently, when domesticity takes the larger slot, Domna Stanton in *Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?* reduces the self into a binary opposition of private/public and inner/outer dichotomies by arguing that domestic "relatedness was traced to the dependence imposed on women by the patriarchal system, or then it was upheld as a fundamental female quality" (138). Dependence of females on men tie them to home and

so their stories. However, since Michelle Obama's narrative straddle between domestic and professionalism, it seems that the latter takes the larger part of her narrative structure. This premise has fueled the understanding of concepts within gender complexities in American women's narratives.

Apparent images that define Michelle Obama in *Becoming* are reflections similar to that of a mirror. This premise invites yet another strand of self-inscription from Georges Gusdorf. From his study, *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography*, Gusdorf treats autobiography as a component with features characteristic to a mirror. He believes that "the community within which a person becomes self only serves as a social 'mirror' against which a person can recognize his individuality and does not shape or influence the self in any other way" (33). This takes the form of what Stone imbues as participant observer's process and an important tenet in the study of *Becoming*. She shares sociocultural, historical, geographical, or even technological phenomena that define the explicit portrayal of self through simple diction, pictures and introspection. However, there is another part that requires scrutiny—the veiled part. Otherwise, by polarity, the mirror reflects the image of who we are, with the likelihood of hiding the other. This possibility brings about criticism whereby, through Stone's participant-observer's process, readers engage given details and fact-check if they correlate with what is known in other documents, history, witnesses and so on. From Gusdorf's premise, the unseen side of Michelle Obama has been studied.

The concept of autobiography is driven by the author's recognition that they are individual beings and separate from others because of personality, class, gender and race. Gusdorf refers to it as 'separate and unique' (Friedman 34) consciousness. So, even if

Becoming is by a woman; even if its narrative represents the self in relation to others (as I have discussed above), the fact that it is driven by a motivation which is geared toward self-inscription, it becomes a product of the enlightenment, western, classist and individualistic. In the past, these identities have been used to discard the minority, women and other marginalised selves. However, because of women's upbringing (playing roles of the isolated other), its constituent propels inclusivity nevertheless, because of how she (Michelle Obama) articulates the plight of the marginalised selves as an established woman, herself.

Further on the assembly of theory, memory is crucial in the study of autobiography because subjects rely on it to express the past through remembering. For this reason, it becomes a principal facet in the study of women's narrative. In writing of the past experience, the selves negotiate between remembering and creativity. This is however influenced by expectation rooted in writing of these sums of experienced old memories. Eventually, this makes memory and imagination crisscross with each other in the narration process. This has been theorised by Marcel Proust and James Olney. I will begin with Proust. In his study, *The Past Recaptured*, he investigates about what happens when autobiographers want to rewrite. Is it haphazardly or strategic? He ponders but yields some insight:

Between the memory which brusquely returns to us and our present state, and no less between two memories of different years, places, hours, the distance is such that it alone, even without any specific originality, would make it impossible to compare one with the other. Yes: if, owing to the work of oblivion, the returning memory can throw no bridge, form no connecting link between itself and the

present minute, if it remains in the context of its own place and date . . . for this reason it causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past (7)

So far, Proust is comfortable with the memory that has its stories. In responding to Proust, Louis Renza in his study of *Theory of Autobiography* reiterates that Proust "seeks to find that "new air" of old memories—memories made literally new again by their introduction into the proleptic course of the narrative" (4). This presentation of old memories as new memories is what gives them (the subjects) the agency to categorically voice their past yet manage to convince the reader of the intensity of that past to their present. This is because, even if those are past experiences, the autobiographical audience can still relate to the details. On the other hand, Olney attributes memory to a more complex source. He posits:

The autobiographer is the self-historian, autobiography representation. Asserting to reflect upon or re-create the past through the processes of memory, autobiography is always, multiply, storytelling: memory leaves only a trace of an earlier experience that we adjust into the story; the experience itself is mediated by the ways we describe and interpret it to others and ourselves; cultural tropes and metaphors which structure autobiographical narrative are themselves fictive; and the narrative is driven by its fictive conventions about beginnings, middles, and ends. Even more fundamentally, the language we use to "capture" memory and experience can never "fix" the "real" experience but only approximate it, yielding up its own surplus of meaning or revealing its own artificial closures. (34-35)

Summarily, Olney's theory brings about the self as an approximation, relation and reconstruction of what might have happened (the real) in the past. Therefore, language

seems like the bridge that connects these memories and the reason why the past can be understood as an organised form of someone's past to the present. This premise has informed on the treatment of Michelle Obama's narrative's form that interrogates what she remembers in *Becoming*.

1.8.2 New Criticism

In addition to the *Theory of Autobiography*, the study invited principles from *New Criticism* to back literary premises that holds to its artistic characteristics. For instance, I incorporated 'Defamiliarisation' by a Russian theorist, Victor Shklovsky in my chapter three for purposes of illustrating some of the moments that the subject (Michelle Obama) employs to mold her textual meaning.

1.9 Research Methodology

The core source of my research is the primary text, *Becoming* by Michelle Obama. A close textual reading directed me to excerpts that respond to the study of the proposed objectives. The second chapter that encapsulates historical, cultural and geographical conditions that define the subject was propelled by both theoretical reflections and assertions from critical works that relate to the main topic. These are all-encompassing strands utilised in *Theory of Autobiography* and *New Criticism*. For instance, Roy Pascal's *Design and truth in Autobiography* and Georges Gusdorf's *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* arguments are among scholars from a plethora of sources that have been incorporated to fuel evaluation of *Becoming*. In my last objective, the studies that account for the language have been sought after. But, first, close textual reading aided in filtering from the text, the narrative strategies that the subject has used to inscribe herself in the narrative of *Becoming*. This is because, one, from Aristotle's *Poetics* and Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory*, an

assumption goes that not every organisation and presentation of language is artistic. So, this discussion rests on assumption that narrative strategies do render *Becoming* as an artistic text—in other words, it (*Becoming*) is in agreement with Pascal's presupposition that stresses on organisation of autobiographer stories as an artistic necessity in autobiography. As per sources, I was relying majorly on library and online research. These are journals such as Jstor and z-library. From these sources, I have read articles, theories and books that capture integral information of my working study subjects (Michelle Obama and the form of *Becoming*)—some of these are Maria Lauret's *How to Read Michelle Obama: Patterns and Prejudice*, Leah Johnson's *Michelle Obama: Marching to the Beat of her strength and Defying Stereotypes Along the Way* and Carolyn West's *Mammy Jezebel, Sapphire and Their Home Girls-Developing an "Oppositional Gaze" Towards the Images of Black Women*. These studies are crucial in expounding on images of Michelle Obama. Last but not least, I employed some published and unpublished masters and Ph.D. theses that advances on the study.

CHAPTER TWO

IMAGES OF MICHELLE OBAMA IN *BECOMING*

2.1 Introduction

In the present chapter, I study images that define Michelle Obama in *Becoming*. I premise that studying her autobiography is a parallel trace of her self-portrait in conjunction with culture, history and economic layout, which forms the part of experiences that characterise her uniqueness in relation to America's society. Foremost, her past reconstruction falls under the history of slavery whose effect brings about a conception of "Race Question" that still impacts African American people. Second, since she is a woman, her portrait envelops the description which is unique to her gender and which oftentimes come to dictate on what women and men ought to do in her society. Lastly, her story interweaves aspects from economic status. Her class extend areas from which I examine her imaging in the incoming conversation.

In addition to gender, race and class, this segment is fueled by theorists whose concentration rests on dynamics within women's narratives. One of such is Sidonie Smith. In her study, *Self, Subject and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice* Smith is in agreement with the appropriateness of women telling their stories: That a woman's narrator "I" is "assured of its own free agency, its movement through time is teleological. Its self-presentational utterances are univocal, authoritative, sovereign" (11). According to her, the 'I' narrator amplifies the woman's voice, because, at any given moment, she can speak for herself as self, unlike in instances when she is represented by the third- or second-person point of view or when they act as subjects in a biographical mode of narration—Theoretically, this is the freedom that Elaine

Showalter in *American Gynocriticism* advocate for—the freedom for women to write as women. Further strategies that women writers employ to inscribe themselves in autobiography is discussed in the study, *Women Autobiography*. At this study, Smith and Watson contends that, in women's narrative, the 'self' represented by "letter 'I' Its initial invisibility, and then its imposing and obvious presence, produces a plausible graphic representation of the issues of women's subjectivity and voice so well-articulated in the text" (Routon 217). Jointly, the duo suggests that selfhood and subjectivity concert to produce the cornerstone of self-representation in women's narrative. Therefore, cognisant that imaging of Michelle Obama is most foregrounded in race, class and gender, my last point of entry rest on *Becoming* as a conflation of discourses where she asserts her subjectivity and agency as an African American woman, experiencer of unfolding events and a creator of the same.

2.2 Self-representation in the Cultural Context of *Becoming*

Becoming is vocal in Michelle Obama's scenes which thwarts some cultural jurisdiction that support the existing disparity between men and women by either particularising in what the binary do, should do, or be in the society. Therefore, culture is the basis in which I intend to study the concept of gender and gender roles. From many definitions, Alice Eagly in *Sex differences in Social Behavior: A social Role Interpretation* ascribes it (gender) to "meanings that societies and individuals ascribe to male and female categories," (4). Definitely, 'meanings' from her understanding suggests that gender is a social construction and therefore, no much premium can be put on a word with inconsistent semantic denotation. Parting with Eagly, another set of scholars, West and Zimmerman in their joint study, *Gender and Society* seem convinced that gender is limited to "the activity

of managing situated conduct in light of normative conception of altitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (127). Control, they maintain, is the defining factor. The more accurate one can master and replicate roles designated for them by the society, the easier they can fit and cope with activities rigidly meant for them. So far, the two studies suffice the usage of gender but extra scrutiny suggests that within this parlance of treating men and women, in what I refer to as 'gender effect,' a production of yet another pertinent term in defining the subject is arrived at. In particular, Coyne Sarah et al refers to it as gender stereotype: The "collections of gender-specific attributes or traditional norms that differentiate typical feminine behavior patterns from typical masculine behavior patterns in society" (Brower 3). From patterns, Professor Coyne and her group supply the realms from which Michelle Obama motions some of the unconventional predispositions that are interlocked with her woman gender.

2.2.1 Gender and Visibility

A holistic impulse into the study of *Becoming* represents the subject as a visible and conscious self. In dialogue with *Conditions and Limits in Autobiography*, Georges Gusdorf avers that "Autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speak, exist" (30). Michelle Obama dramatises this consciousness by declaring her visibility in form of contextualising events that inform on her collective stories. From this point of departure, her prominence as a woman inside America's domestic and public context of gender and gender roles is evident. In what appears to be a discourse marker for the incoming narrative of "*Becoming Me, Becoming Us and Becoming More*," she declares what she has become over the past years and in various capacities, where a woman's capacity is seemingly overlooked. She writes:

So far in my life, I've been a lawyer. I've been a vice president at a hospital and the director of a nonprofit that helps young people build meaningful careers. I've been a working-class black student at a fancy mostly white college. I've been a bride, a stressed-out new mother, a daughter torn up by grief. And until recently, I was the First Lady of the United States of America. (13)

Sidonie Smith in *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body "Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century"* argues that women locate themselves "through content as well as rhetoric, within the traditional feminine domestic sphere and within the masculine public sphere of activity in order to expand the terrain of women's authority—that is, women as experts and as authors" (Frey 171). Consequently, Smith's observation of twentieth-century women writers is in resonance with spaces that she (Michelle Obama) utilises to locate herself as a professional and a mother in America's society. Certainly, the cited sphere of activities topples a normative picture that depicts a woman within the home's confinement. For example, her ability to achieve, as it turns out is exclusively tied to stressed (domestic and public sphere) zones of location that boosts her conspicuousness in the public, and that which is evident in the myriad of life enhancing activities that she engages in. I infer this because, from African American culture, women have been oppressed and stories of their contributions unheard, because they are still silenced by their men. For example, while investigating the place of women in America's society, Claudia Tate's in *Maya Angelou' in Black Woman Writers at Work* probes on the 1960s as a glimpse into the place of an African American woman. She observes that men, "felt that in order to be total and free and independent and powerful they had to be like white men to their women" (4). Tate's insight emphasises on the odds that a woman like Mrs. Obama had to defy to reinvent herself as a

mother and a professional. For instance, deducing from what she has become (Ivy League lawyer, which is male-centric profession by virtue of cultural expectation of gender), her career is a proof that a woman is no different to a man, and that only biology makes women and men different and that should not be a reason why men relegate them. Therefore, her self-examination as an influential woman is a proof that her consciousness is a reflection of a visible woman in a cultural context where men are more elevated and somewhat visible beyond domestic duties.

2.2.2 Gender and Intelligence

Supplementary assessment of *Becoming* portrays Michelle Obama as an intelligent woman protagonist. In women's narratives, intellect is vital in the making of the self. Hence, by crafting herself this way, she alludes that women are knowledgeably gifted just like men in and outside academics. This align with what *Towards a Feminist Poetics stipulates*. From Showalter's perspective, the narrative of *Becoming* is a typical insistence of a "point when we (women) free (them) selves from the linear absolutes of male literary history" (Showalter 131). By taking a closer look, she inscribes herself in shades of role modeling, subtleness in the state of mind, ambitiousness and competitiveness. Taken together, I infer that these forms of self characterisation function as a counterpoise of the cultural belief that downplay women as otherwise. As an illustration, she insets her academic pursuit next to that of her brother, Craig to stress her intellect in a sense of balance with that of a man whom culture ascribes such might. Comparatively, I stress that the subject does considers herself just as sharp as Craig and anyone else as the incoming citation suggest: "As had always the case, I figured that whatever Craig liked, I would like, too, and that whatever he could accomplish, I could as well." (65) In addition, besides context offers another

context that informs on her ability to adapt to both broad and complex precipice of curriculum that eventually made her transcend as a woman. This is apparent in the following job description:

I edited other people's memos. At this point, I thought of myself basically as trilingual. I knew the relaxed patois of the South Side and the high-minded diction of the Ivy League, and now on top of that I spoke Lawyer, too. I'd been hired into the firm's marketing and intellectual property practice group, which was considered intellectually more freewheeling and creative than other groups. I suppose because we dealt at least some of the time with advertising. (87)

As articulated above, I infer that this is the version of a subtle woman. Fundamentally, as an autobiographical self, she utilises *Becoming* to remind the reader about whom she is (a lawyer), how she speaks (Lawyerly), what she knows (complex diction of Ivy League). In other words, this according to her is a portrait of an exemplar and intellectual woman protagonist—a woman whose capability is nothing short of copacetic, and everything more of what is unusual from men's depiction of per se, successful women.

2.2.3 Gender and Politics

Auxiliary scrutiny of *Becoming* suggests that Michelle Obama represents herself as a woman in politics, with an equivalent expanse of gender activity and capacity as a hypothetical vice to her husband, Barack Obama. This is not common because traditionally, presidential wives are viewed as passive caregivers to their husbands' quest. As apparent in the subsequent citation, she stresses that their identification as an inextricable family is what boosted their preliminary prominence:

It began dawning on me that we were the band. We were the team about to take the field. What I felt more than anything was a sudden sense of responsibility. We owed something to each one of these people. We were asking for an investment of their faith, and now we had to deliver on what they'd brought us, carrying that enthusiasm through twenty months and fifty states and right into the White House. (154)

The espoused metaphor of the 'band' is a clarification of this hypothesis—that their 'joint ticket' facilitated their prominence and ultimate win in the November 2008 elections. The use of 'we' is a compliment to this argument. Furthermore, while isolating the role of presidential wives on their husband's win or fail, Tiffany Shoop in her study, *From Professionals to Potential First Ladies: How Newspapers Told the Stories of Cindy McCain and Michelle Obama* confirms that women are critical just like their male spouses are in election determinism. With a particular impulse into Michelle Obama and Cindy McCain, she observes that the "role of spouses in presidential politics is evolving, from one of smiling wife to equal and visible partner—complete with appearance schedule, entourage and opinion" (807). This privilege justifies why Michelle Obama ascertains her impact on the stated quest from the preceding citation. According to Shoop, Mrs. Obama's portrait is what contributed to her husband's win as enhanced by her "professionally and financially successful, family-oriented (815) traits. Therefore, in her assessment, it is undeniable that for the presidential candidate to win, a perfectly dramatised femininity is a prerequisite in today's America's political arena. This is because "feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does. Thus, a woman forms her identity in relation to others (Chodorow 44), which fills the hiatus left by masculine representation by the chief male candidates. Now,

parting ways with women in politics, it is evident that *Becoming* is an assertion of her feminine role in the campaign process, which she achieved through subverting her representation as electoral rudiment's with inferred requisites. Markedly, this space is boosted by her significant insertion of her subjectivity in such premised representation. (the traits that complemented her husband's masculinity).

2.2.4 Gender and Gender Roles

Badas and Stauffer in *Michelle Obama as a Political Symbol: Race, Gender, and Public Opinion Toward the First Lady* posit that "though first ladies may have the potential to influence policy outcomes and priorities, they are vested with no formal policy-making power. In this sense, their ability to provide substantive policy representation is limited" (7). Bearing in mind that her significance in policy representation is limited, I suggest that the subject strategised on how to boost her place and space as the First Lady. Consequently, from the private sphere, the study of *Becoming* reveals a context where she identifies herself as the Mom-in-chief.

In juxtaposing argument, Meyer and Goman in *Michelle Obama: Exploring the Narrative*, ascertains that "motherhood and family are primary" (20) in respect to the First Lady. Therefore, in reference to mom in chief's portrait, she suggests that, as a mother, her dream is to be understood from motherhood before any other. She writes: "Several months before Barack was elected, I told a magazine interviewer that my primary focus in the White House would be to continue my role as "mom in chief" in our family" (315). I reiterate that the fact that she is a woman, it warrants her with enough reason to identify with besides sense of responsibility over what the society expects from an established woman.

Reflecting from theory, women according to Showalter in *American Gynocriticism* "stresses on spiritual or maternal motives for their work" (113 Emphasis added). It is inherent that amidst fame and burden of representation, the family remains at the core of Michelle Obama's life and so, her story. Interrogating her capacity, I argue that the mom in chief's image is vindicated from strident criticism that targets her domestic performativity over professionalism. Furthermore, her performance as the mom in chief is a proof that sometimes, even though gender roles remain contested, *Becoming* reveals that there is a clear cut between the roles that men and women perform in even today's America's culture. That is to say, in terms of responsibility, women can hardly extricate themselves from domesticity. Theoretically, this is a realist fact. In her argument with how women locate their natural bequest, Fatterly Judith in *Provisions: A Reader from 19th-Century American Women* argues that "Commitment to realism is closely connected to the commitment to social change" (Showalter 113). In other words, for Michelle Obama, motherhood is a natural or realistic quest and it has a streamlining impact on society, because, when empowered women demonstrate their commitment to family as a primary arrangement of one's space of perfection, then, performing other areas of personal development becomes manageable. But this kind of inclination demands perseverance, "self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding," (Jelinek 15) because women will barely be like men, who from natural quest are seemingly more detached from domestic duties, because of what culture could have it.

Angling from another branch of gender roles, a study of *Becoming* reveals that America's First Lady's job is undefined. As a result, solutions have been suggested to

account for this problem. To extrapolate this point, Robert N. Roberts in *First Ladies: Constitutional and Job Description Problem?* hypothesises that the first ladies' power is influenced by both administrative and environmental related problems, whereby, in order to mitigate them, he proposes that the president "appoint the first lady as a presidential aide or advisor: As a result, the first lady would be subject to the same laws and regulations which cover other presidential aides" (412). As ingenious as it can be for Roberts to supply a response to First Ladies' job description, in *Becoming*, the subject is conscious of the influence that she commands. She is therefore determined to exploit that advantage in impacting what she does best. This comes after a realisation that she can "generate buzz around a good idea. Now I wanted to highlight a larger issue and push for larger solutions" (316). The result of this incisive formulation is a depiction that she is indeed, a tactical woman and a creative thinker by extension. In Concrete terms, this performance is validated by duties that she discharges and range from "Let's Move" (323), "childhood obesity" (240) to her involvement in "service members, veterans, and military families" (463). Arguably, these responsibilities symbolise a robust set of activities that women do in the White House but because of the system that overlooks their potential, they are presumed, undefined. The contrary is that, from very similar work, Michelle Obama utilises *Becoming* to demonstrate how busy and important the woman is within the same system.

Closely related to the job description, this discussion goes ahead to investigate what she does from poetics of collective representation with central focus given to girls and the vulnerable prototypes beyond America's border. So, in some scenes of *Becoming*, it has been noted that girls are the principal recipients of detrimental part of political, ethical and

economic fallout at any place in the world. Tentatively, it is this drive that links her story with the story of other women. In particular, it is "the grounding of identity through relation to the chosen other, seems, if we may judge by our four representative cases, to enable women to write openly about themselves" (Mason 210). This means that the context I cite here expresses responsibilities that define her as a representative of unheard 'cases' of subjugated voices. She argues:

I was horrified when, about six months after Malala's visit, 276 Nigerian schoolgirls were kidnapped by the extremist group Boko Haram, seemingly intent on causing other Nigerian families to fear sending their daughters to school. It had prompted me, for the first and only time during the presidency, to sub for Barack during his weekly address to the nation, speaking emotionally about how we needed to work harder at protecting and encouraging girls worldwide. (373)

To emphasise this point, I argue that, who she is, is complemented by what she bags-out on behalf of those who cannot do so because they are devoiced by a hostile patriarchal system. Then, as the first lady, speaking against what ails them is tantamount to protecting them. Branching further, Hanna Pitkin's concept of *The Concept of Representation* is pivotal. She defines representation as "the extent to which a representative "stands for" those they represent" (97) and with her work then, even though she (Michelle Obama) may not directly involve herself in the running of Oval Office, the study of *Becoming* reveals that it is because of her improved efficacy that brings about her representation for the victimised 'other' in the diaspora.

2.2.5 Gender on Disposition and Othering

In respect to the personal disposition of Michelle Obama, she uses *Becoming* to seek the public's understanding of her anger attitude. She states that "and for better or worse, I tend to yell when I'm angry. When something sets me off, the feeling can be intensely physical, a fireball running up my spine and exploding with such force that I sometimes later don't remember what I said in the moment" (137). This is admittance to anger as part of the self's making. At the onset of this discussion, Sarah Coyle formulated stereotypes as a branch in gender studies. She argues that stereotypes come in the range of positive and negative. So, from this resonance, it is evident that they define gender by how a woman should be like and act like from emotive to physical. However, parting with Coyle et al once again and settling on Meyer and Goman, the fact that Michelle Obama is made to feel bad of her anger by society is a marker of partial gendered space. Seemingly, she laments about people for attacking her based on this disposition. Therefore, having been considered angry, she stresses by implication that culture interprets such a deviation of character to hostility and unbecoming of the First Lady:

I could see how the opposition had managed to dice up these images and feed me to the public as some sort of pissed-off harpy. It was, of course, another stereotype, another trap. The easiest way to disregard a woman's voice is to package her as a scold. No one seemed to criticize Barack for appearing too serious or not smiling enough. I was a wife and not a candidate, obviously, so perhaps the expectation was for me to provide more lightness, more fluff. (270)

Taken together, the cited scenes are just examples of the contemporary contexts that add to areas where she has been misrepresented. Through juxtaposing her anger with that of

Barack Obama, whom the society has no problem with, the implication is that women are relegated and devalued from their inherent nature of emotive sense to obligations.

An additional image that comes from *Becoming* is that of Michelle Obama as the 'other.' Spinning from Showalter's prescription that any self-contained and experimental type of a narrative can be analysed by biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic or cultural theory, and owing to Maria Mies's perspective (*Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*) is sociocultural one, I argue that her othered portrait can be stretched into its relevance. For instance, musing from one of her lamentation that: ("I've heard about the swampy parts of the internet that question everything about me, right down to whether I'm a woman or a man. A sitting congressman has made fun of my butt. I've been hurt. I've been furious. But mostly, I've tried to laugh this stuff off," (14) a sense of prosecution is apparent. Thence, according to Mies, while women's objectification was shooting from men, in today's America, for Michelle Obama, because she looks in a certain way, her detractors' claim that she is a man. This depiction stretches into the evaluation of how men characterise empowered women. Their move is what Mies term as with-hunt and its main objective is to deter women from displaying their brilliance in some cultural contexts that are men-bound. The overall consequence is that women suffer not because of crime, nor biological limitation, but due to antagonistic turns that exist between them and radical patriarchs. Therefore, to respond to the subject's predicament in *Becoming*, othering is a strategic method that is employed by her society to devalue and render her achievements, insignificant.

2.2.6 Gender and Paradigms

Extra scrutiny of *Becoming* and semantic construction of 'the self' pin Mrs. Obama as an enemy of social paradigms. In discussing this concept, I infer that paradigm-influenced qualities range from ingeniousness, strength to the dominion of men (the mightier) over women (the lesser) by the dichotomy of gender contrast. For example, for men to assert themselves as better, it is because history states so. When it transpires in academia, I infer that a paradigm presupposes that education is an isolationist system that maintains one gender at the top and the opposite to minor professions.

Therefore, in *Becoming*, the reaction against paradigms portrays her (Michelle Obama) as an assertive and unbowed woman protagonist within a male dominated society. This is apparent in the following scene:

I tried not to be intimidated when classroom conversation was dominated by male students, which is often was. Hearing them, I realized that they weren't at all smarter than the rest of us. They were simply emboldened, floating on an ancient tide of superiority, buoyed by the fact that history had never told them anything different.

(76)

To her, it is regrettable to see this kind of arrogance of one-sided justification that men are at the top. Identically, this phenomenon conforms to what Maria Mies in the *Sexual Division of Labour* laments about—the social paradigm that dictates what men ought to do, be and all that. That is why, in opposing that men are traditionally and inherently smarter than women, she expresses her frustration for their ego. In respect to her sense of purpose, in subverting this culture, she learned to assert herself, not as a woman, but as Michelle Obama. Eventually, her attack on this paradigm betokens a parallel breed of

paradigm that is measured by hardwork, progress and pleasant results. To be exact, for her, having successfully written her LSAT score for Harvard Law School is the result of hardwork, working for Sidley & Austin Law Firm at twenty-five, earning twelve thousand dollars monthly is a result of progress and being the most powerful woman in the world at the time is definitely a realisation of unconventionality or rather a proof of transcending the woman's limit.

Still from what I problematise as 'Paradigm Question,' her reflection from Gusdorf's *Mirror Mechanism* is in resonance with other women. In this category, her conversation with single mothers, married but independent and divorced women is gotten. What is more, her position on how this category of women is treated is a stretch of her identification with women's aptitude. This phenomenon occurs in twofold: First, she subverts a distorted assumption and traditional paradigm that women are better fulfilled with men on their side. Second, she asserts ethics and autonomy to children of single mothers that are often classified as imperfect. (In so doing, she underscores a paradigm that represents these children as morally upright and autonomous just like any other child with a father by the side). She suggests that the father/husband's absence can be fixed by other women instead. As result, she emphasise on caucus of gender selves that are exclusively defined by creativity and productivity unlike seeking fulfillment by virtue of having a husband or not. In supplying proof, she holds that there are indeed women out there who taught her how to become yet independent and role models. Before I cite an example from *Becoming*, let me emphasise that, from Mies' perspective, these women (established women) were once labeled as witches. The result is that they were tried without credible judgment and sometimes, they got marooned at a place far away from the rest of the community. This is

because, how come they have no man by their side yet, but prosper? Their pursuers could wonder. This is because it is not common from the cultural lens of the overhyped family system to see this category of women transcend the set barriers. But, what do we get from *Becoming's* story? A group of these mothers. In particular, Czerny Brasuell represents this new paradigm. The reading of *Becoming* alludes that Brasuell's impact and status had been instrumental towards the subject's later development as a young lady. In remembering Czerny, she writes:

Czerny saw some sort of potential in me, though I was also clearly short on life experiences. She treated me like adult, asking for my thoughts, listening keenly as I described the various worries and administrative tangles students had brought in, she seemed determined to awaken more boldness in me. (74)

As espoused in the above citation, it is crystal clear that the subject pays tribute to Czerny for igniting her critical thinking and equally, she celebrates her indomitable spirit. In addition to espoused images, Czerny is upbeat and intelligent—the predisposition from whose demeanor the subject learned to assert herself. A memory of it is nostalgic: "It was a heady experience, being around her—as close-up as I'd ever been to an independent woman with a job that thrilled her. She was also, not incidentally, a mother raising a dear, precocious boy named Jonathan, whom I often babysit" (74). It is apparent that she criticises the narrative which goes about that boys with no contact fathers are weak or bent as compared with ones who have. Subtly placed in Jonathan's case; by disposition, he is represented as a "precocious boy" (74) with a dedicated mother.

2.3 Self-representation in the Historical Context of *Becoming*

Cuesta Marta in his study, *How to Interpret Autobiography* posits that "in an epistemological point of view autobiography as a method represents both a partial truth and a very personal one. This is a nonetheless vital material for verifying that individuals' life experiences are interconnected and can thus be understood from many different angles" (1). His argument revolves around a possibility of unreliability with the truth but still an acknowledgement to it as a central entry into areas that self-inscription is leaned. From the layout of historiography, *Becoming* represents Michelle Obama as a woman writer, who is conceptualised from the truth within the historical account of America as a nation, its community and the one she has lived for herself. Therefore, interrogating these stories are significant in evoking images that are characteristic of her as a black woman.

That being the case, I thereby hold that recreating the self in *Becoming* for the former First Lady is imperative for two things: One, it is the only way that she inscribes herself in American history as forty-fourth First Lady and two, self-inscription is fundamental in vindicating her portrait from historical-related stereotypes, from which, black women are usually learned. In other words, asserting her own identity and subjectivity is an African American writer's tradition. For instance, in echoing this premise, Dianne Sadoff, in her study, *Gender and African-American Narrative* contends that "black women and men tell their stories to create themselves as subjects" (120). This is because, aforesaid subjectivity and identity is an entity that they have been deprived by one, white master, two, white writer and lastly, any writer who pints unreal representation of their lived reality. Largely, African American writers "speak in some way to the fissures of race that have characterised American experience," (Obama 7) ever since the time of slavery.

That is why, in *Becoming*, I probe on images that define her as a product of her history from the subjective standpoint of what she says about herself.

2.3.1 Race and Invisibility

From discourses of identity, Michelle Obama in *Becoming* declares that she is a slave descendant. Marta argues that "domains serve as sources for what experiences internalize and display as acts of central importance for individuals in reproducing social patterns" (4). Fortunately, this segment foregrounds slavery as a central domain in *Becoming* in respect to the story of her invisibility. In other words, domain according to Marta occurs dialectically. This implies that slavery and Mrs. Obama are unified by her knowledge of treatment that she has undergone as an African American, which forms the basis of her experience in the broader history of America. Thus, her connection with slaves is the very reason that she is deemed invisible by white people. Invisibility yield a sense of not-belonging to the marginalised. For this reason, the former First Lady is aware that she is treated with suspicion by whites because of her identity. In particular, this feeling is ubiquitously felt by her people but unexpressed because of its dread legacy. She notes:

There was a push and pull to our history, a deep familiarity that sat atop a deeper and uglier legacy. Many of the people I knew in Chicago—the kids I'd gone to Bryn Mawr with, many of my friends at Whitney Young—knew something similar, though it was not explicitly discussed. (81)

Likewise, before this context, she explicitly reminds the reader about South's "slave plantations" (81) where her people once laboured but "nobody bothered to remark on them" (81). These literary signals offer a personal and collective history that defines her as a slave descendant. In other words, her genealogy started with nauseating killing, selling and

raping (in the case of women) of black people, which is a domain that ties whites and blacks on board of hostility. However, from a political angle, this consciousness is a knowledgeable "act to declare and tell subjective good/bad experiences caused by objective structures of social injustice" (Marta 4) at the time, with an intension of criticising the then primitive system that prejudiced against the black people for profit.

However, from an invisible space, in her psychology, she is optimistic that acknowledging her place in American history is the beginning of embracing that future might be different. She notes:

I tried to communicate the one message about myself and my station in the world that I felt might really mean something. Which was that I knew invisibility. I'd lived invisibility. I came from a history of invisibility. I liked to mention that I was the great-great-granddaughter of a slave named Jim Robinson, who was probably buried in an unmarked grave somewhere on a South Carolina plantation. And in standing at a lectern in front of students who were thinking about the future, I offered testament to the idea that it was possible, at least in some ways, to overcome invisibility. (376)

Knowledge of having a clear conscience is accepting invisibility to overcome it. She lays her emphasis on amplifying ones' self to lessen it through identifying herself with the above collective selves. Kerstin Shands et al in *Writing the Self: Essays on Autobiography and Autofiction* infers that, as a woman, her act of attesting to this hostility is a "subversive testament of violating power structures of all kinds—colonisation, race, gender" (20). Because of the sense of isolation among black people, the subject is prompted to speak against racism and its consequences that still confronts them in the present time's America.

Moreover, her (Michelle Obama's) travel experiences disclose extra settings that she employs as a mechanism of asserting the legitimacy of her black colour in a white-dominated country, the United States, other than in any other place of the world. One of such scenes is pegged to *Becoming's* reflection of her diasporic experiences. For instance, in 1992, just before she married Barack Obama, she traveled to Africa. Specifically, while in Kenya, she reveals of how different she is from people and continent that she is made by history to believe that it (Africa) is her home:

I felt Nairobi's foreignness—or really, my own foreignness in relation to it—immediately, even in the first strains of morning. It's a sensation I've come to love as I've traveled more, the way a new place signals itself instantly and without pretense. The air has a different weight from what you're used to; it carries smells you can't quite identify, a faint whiff of wood smoke or diesel fuel, maybe, or the sweetness of something blooming in the trees. The same sun comes up, but looking slightly different from what you know. (136)

Africa seems to repel her and the opposite. I argue that this excerpt is particularly meant to stretch the meaning of life from her perspective. Like nature, she wishes people reveal themselves without 'pretense.' From the start, Nairobi's experience made her discover the assumptive identity search as such a mirage, because, in Africa, she discovered that she longed for home (United States—) where she belongs. Furthermore, she employs senses that evoke, smell, taste, hearing and movement to typify human nature and how they percept the world. In spite of her body and Africa repelling, she leans that, under the sun, humans are equal but they are made to believe that they are different because they come from different corners of the earth, where a woman is lesser than a man, where a white man

is superior than a black man and litany of other dualities that create social disharmony. However, blameless as this transcending may sound, I would like to stress that her visit in Kenya made her believe that she cannot conform with either of African's food nor people, but rather be and make the best out of what life has given her as an American from South Side of Chicago. This is because, to her surprise, she wonders in the subsequent events of how Obama felt so connected to this place that she does not. Markedly, as a transcending strategy, she echoes the appropriate of individual visibility over collective because the latter creates disharmony within social nationalism.

2.3.2 Race and Aesthetics

The second outlook of *Becoming* depicts Michelle Obama as an embodiment of black beauty. In other words, her physical attraction rings a message of 'ornamented blackness' which is a reflection of her looks. Following ascertaining this claim, I infer that she articulates her image into textual and concrete insertions. To begin with, self-ornamentation at the text is rendered in a description, while paratextual is mirrored in a form of pictorial representation. Exclusively, the two acts as a process and means of her self-inscription. Through textual discourse, she discloses what Obama saw in her: "He told me I was beautiful" (98). This assessment is reinforced by paratextual elements that reveal her concrete characteristic of beauty. I argue in support of beauty because, based on her colour, Marta's hypothesis of dialectical opposition of knowledge and reconstruction lies on a strength that warrants this discussion to affirm that, due to politics of exclusion and domination, black colour has been used to embody evil, darkness, angriness, emptiness and invisibility, while on the other hand, white colour has been to typify purity, beauty, ingeniousness, fulfillment and luck by some people in the system who marvel in bigotry.

In other words, her portrait evokes poetics of differentiation acts or what Marta ascribe to "politics of identities" (6) that stress on importance of diversity. In a historical layout of black and definition of beauty, Sharley Tate in *Black beauty: Shade, Hair and Anti-Racist Aesthetics* contends that such physical display is a declaration of ones' self-esteem: where blackness epitomises beauty:

Beauty and recognition as both black and beautiful, occupied such a central place at every stage of the life course of black mixed race' women. Their pre-occupation with beauty is not new but is part of a continuing historical trajectory of how to locate oneself within beauty both as a matter of aesthetics and politics. (301)

From how Michelle Obama clothes, for instance, she asserts her stable identity as a black and beautiful woman for the sake of trajectory that Tate associate with beauty among typical African American women. This argument is implied by the truth offered by over fifty pages of paratextual elements that capture her various stages of growth (208-255). Politically, beauty boosted her image as a black woman. Also, it enhanced her confidence before the public and so, her personality and popularity. Moreover, since her period as the first lady coincided with the media and digital era that shapes (d) the way First Ladies appear before the gauntlet of newsmen and plethora of followers on social media networks, perfecting her outlook had a political gesture of exhibiting the best image that acts as a representative of black women. Sidonie Smith argues that "narrative performativity constitutes interiority. That is, the interiority or self that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an effect of autobiographical storytelling," (109) which means that her portrait in the realm of aesthetics preexisted her narrative in a sense that, she only uses *Becoming* to catapult her smile, hair and body contours as an

embodiment of black aesthetics. In conjecture, Tate reduces this interiority to a certain personal configuration that is particular to women of colour—beauty then is defined by having a well-placed "good hair", 'a good nose' and 'a good complexion" (Tate 302). Therefore, because beauty is a grand entry into the study of black women, Michelle Obama utilises *Becoming* to sensitise black colour as a "dominant beauty paradigm" (Tate 302). This way, her portrait establishes a new kind of normalcy which is defined by the objective outlook of black women, unlike racist and one-sided classification of aesthetics to white people.

2.3.3 Race and Characteristic of Black Women

In *Becoming*, Mrs. Obama confides with the reader about her depiction by white people as uncharacteristic of femininity. She says that "I've heard about the swampy parts of the internet that question everything about me, right down to whether I'm a woman or a man" (14). This insertion represents one of her major crises. Body. In turn, it is a proof that the former First Lady has been assigned a negative stereotype and judged from portrait interlocked within the antebellum concept of black people.

Leah Johnson in her paper, *Michelle Obama: Marching to the Beat of Her Own Strengths and Defying Negative Stereotypes along the Way* is convinced that the former first lady is beyond the category of race-propagated images and probably the reason her detractors are not satisfied with her. To them, a woman for instance is that one "in hip-hip music videos are seen scantily clad "twerking," gyrating and grinding, clearly behaving in a hypersexual manner." (216). In concrete terms, the foundation of objectification is rooted in historical images of black women. Irrespective of farfetched standpoint, these images are intergenerational in a sense that, they are carried ahead to the incoming generation. For

instance, on reflecting on the same Johnson contends that "image of sensuality trickles down to the younger generation, unconsciously pacifying them to believe that the foremost use of their bodies is for sex" (216). That is why, in *Becoming* Michelle Obama takes off her story by telling that she was assigned the image of "angry black woman," (14) as a branch of the stereotype that stems all the way from the historical interpretation of black women. Moreover, her body has been deemed unusual from an instance where she recounts about an occasion when a member of U.S. congress targeted his criticism on her butt, which theoretically is a confirmation that "negative attitude toward the black female body targets one aspect of the body in particular: the buttocks" (Hobson 87). In essence, this is objectification and it marks as a situation where "racism and sexism readily intersect" (Crenshaw 1242) because arguing that Michelle Obama has a funny butt (big hips) is an oppositional implication that only white women have got ordinary or regular butts. Argumentatively, some scholars have theorised imaging of black women, more especially in relation to their big butts. Among them is Janelle Hobson. In her work, *The "Batty" Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body*, Hobson argues that sometimes, black women's body (big butts to be specific) has been classified as "grotesque," "strange," "unfeminine," "lascivious," and "obscene" (87). In other words, the funny description apparent in *Becoming* alludes to foresaid Hobson's characterisation of black woman's butt. Overall, I argue that Michelle Obama's decision to include them in her autobiography in form of 'funny butts' is a fundamental strategy of speaking against sexism and racism in contemporary America.

Pointing racism from another angle, Carolyn West's study, *Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel: Historical Images of Black Women and their Implications for Psychotherapy* argues that

historical images of black women in contact with stereotype are connected "between the Mammy image and disordered eating, concerns about physical features, such as skin color and hair texture, and role strain; between the Sapphire image and the expression of anger; and between the Jezebel image and sexual functioning and victimization" (458). History and its imaging of black women ripples to produce a context where the subject is the victim, while her pursuers, indoctrinated. This is the connection that West assigns to images that people use either consciously or not by drawing from the above symbol of historically bent black women. One of these is anger and its linkage is reflected in the below context:

I was female, black, and strong, which to certain people, maintaining a certain mind-set, translated only to "angry." It was another damaging cliché, one that's been forever used to sweep minority women to the perimeter of every room, an unconscious signal not to listen to what we've got to say. I was now starting to actually feel a bit angry, which then made me feel worse, as if I were fulfilling some prophecy laid out for me by the haters. (313)

While she states her observation, I insist that 'angry-woman in the context of the race does "not only impact how information is encoded and interpreted about blacks but also how behavior, both of the perceiver and stereotyped individual is influenced. These mental representations or images are difficult to alter and can occur without conscious intent or awareness" (458). In other words, they are the reason that the subject and her pursuers are to blame for being available in the first place. However, because a woman who stands for them is always the same woman whom they exist to criticise, then, it implies that, in *Becoming*, Michelle Obama is not complaining about them (stereotypes) but rather how they (stereotypes) evolve to perpetuate othering of minority women like herself.

Moreover, a closer look at *Becoming's* cover illustrates a blouse disclosing her shoulder and a couple of other in the paratextual elements. In reaction, this sense of fashion has an inference to the unconscious display of sensuality as informed by this historical signal:

In the south, public nudity was frowned upon and this automatically associated Black women with lewdness... The whippings of Black women contained sexual overtones. Women were beaten while being on all fours, or whipped with their clothes over their heads exposing their private parts" (Johnson 216)

As a counteraction to the assumption that her wear is subconscious nature of black and sensuality, she employs *Becoming* to paint her individualism with a multiple occasion that comes in the shade of similar revealing outfits. Noticeably, she did put on one of such during her inauguration, which is a suggestive drive towards looking smart in terms of style that suit with a particular occasion: "I was wiped out after the day's festivities, but this gorgeous gown designed by Jason Wu gave me fresh energy" (233). The choice of dressing is what Johnson further theorise as one of the techniques of the First Lady, Michelle Obama to assert her image while at the same time overcoming stereotypes.

Having discussed her mode of dressing, another compelling image of Mrs. Obama in *Becoming* is that of a proud black mammy. From edges of history that define Michelle Obama, Johnson reminds us that:

Mammies often served as advisors to their master and mistress, and she was a special woman in the Big House and wasn't treated like a house slave. This made her valuable to Whites, and she could have felt her position lessened the likelihood of her or her family being sold or abused. In stark contrast to Jezebel, Mammy was

asexual, often depicted as being fat, and unattractive. This character creates the mirage that slavery was a humane institution as Mammies were portrayed as happy, loyal and submissive. (217)

Once again, I refer back to antebellum ages where the history of black women resonates from and in juxtaposition, where word mammy may have been a stereotype of an enslaved woman. In that light, a characteristic of a black mammy was: fat, asexual, happy and submissive woman. Further study by Carolyn Brown in *The Black Female Body in American Literature and Art* narrows down some of the other characteristics of a black mammy to: "sexual surrogate, human breeder, and violently ungendered commodity" (3). Revisiting the case study, paradoxical imaging of mammy from her predisposition casts a larger picture embedded in history that depicts the authentic image of a mammy and supposedly, the one that rings back to such of antebellum mammy, but due to conditions at the time, it got overlooked.

Comparatively, I wrap Mrs. Obama to a mammy and embrace that her condition is different from twofold cases of antebellum mammy discussed by Brown and Johnson. However, the two have leveled the latitude from which Mrs. Obama's narrative can be understood. Also, even though there is a big disparity between the reference and the referent, the fact that they are African American by identity informs on the binary assessment that feeds into the portrait of her (Mrs. Obama) as a contemporary mammy. Lionette Francoise in *Race, Class and Gender* contends that "The female writer who struggles to articulate a personal vision and to verbalize the vast areas of feminine experience which have remained unexpressed, if not repressed, is engaged in an attempt to excavate those elements of the female self which have been buried under the cultural and

patriarchal myths of selfhood" (91). To put it in another way, her portrait as a proud mammy stretches out to reframing the picture of a black woman. I acknowledge that she relates with so called mammy's experience for having to be a direct offshoot from a slave descendant, Jim Robinson. However, concerning submission, the former first lady comes out in *Becoming* as assertive, influential, financially independent as well as unbowed, which altogether adds up to characteristics of today's mammy. Moreover, she alludes that her pride is derived from the fact that she is an African American from the South Side of Chicago, whose environment smell of agony experienced during slavery and yet, she has been able to achieve in life. Notwithstanding, she tells us that she was brought up differently but always remember where she had come from as well as the knowledge of where she belongs. She states:

I'd never been someone who dwelled on the more demoralizing parts of being African American. I'd been raised to think positively. I'd absorbed my family's love and parent's commitment to seeing us succeed. I'd stood with Santita Jackson at Operation PUSH rallies, listening to her father call for black people to remember their pride. My purpose had always been to see past my neighbourhood—to look ahead and overcome. (103)

That is to say, as opposed to the portrait of the then mammy, the subject represents a characteristic of an attractive woman by virtue of success, expression (colour-wise) and impression (colour-wise, still). This statement elicits several implicatures from her narrative yet which defines her as a smart, beautiful and smiling African American woman. Lastly, while antebellum mammy (in this case, the constructed typical form of a black

woman) advised slave masters and their mistresses, as a black woman, Mrs. Obama's contribution toward issues that impact society is community oriented.

Yet, there is an image that comes about in reference to black women as lazy. In *Becoming*, she paints herself as a consistently hardworking woman. This contradicts history which depicts a black woman as what Johnson would call "Welfare Queen" (218). This is a woman who is constantly at the receiving end. She never works but lives happily because there is a man in the background, who is taking care of all her needs. This entails laziness that is associated with African Americans, but in *Becoming*, a different kind of a black woman is represented. From her job description, she denotes a caliber of authentic black woman's image and a phenomenon that according to Johnson's hypotheses and Françoise prescription, deconstructs the lazy black woman stereotype. Precisely, as a marker of these hypotheses, Johnson contends that:

She focuses on helping other families by encouraging youths to stay fit through her Let's Move! Campaign to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation. Along with Dr. Jill Biden, Michelle Obama launched Joining Forces, an initiative to raise awareness of the unique needs of military families. (218)

Conspicuously, this proposition resonates with her nature of hard work and professionalism that is apparent in present in *Becoming*. From the onset, her narrative is arranged in such a way that it emphasises on the section of *Becoming Me* that mark as proof that, even before she met a man who later influenced her, from the beginning, she was oriented towards work-progress-result because she managed to go Ivy League schools (Princeton and Harvard University), became an Ivy League Lawyer, managed to secure for herself a slot

at Sidley & Austin firm at a time when racism and percentage of black people on high-end professional jobs were still dismal.

2.3.4 Race and Family

Michelle Obama is a product of a close-knit family and a champion of the same structure in *Becoming*. Family contains the segments, which, if connected, they elaborate on one's identity. This is overly important when the African American community is considered. Through family tree, it is possible to trace where they belong and came from. This backtracking has enabled some to identify as slave descendants with more still fragmented. Obama, for instance, in *Dreams from my Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* is confronted by the void of an absent father. He apostrophises us with a mystery man with an aim of taking us to Kenya to trace his roots. Ex-Coloured Man himself, in James Weldon Jameson's semi-autobiography, *The Ex-Colored Man* in as much as he is in the conundrum of neither black, mulatto nor white, his old man is a mystery to him as well. Those two analogies ring a synonymous case that defines the African American quest and today's worry of disconnecting ones' family for fear of accentuating fragmentation that was once deep rooted during the primitive age. Identically, Mrs. Obama endorses family's necessity using her portrait to reinvent herself within the large domain of Frasers' and Shields' history. In doing so, she dramatises the concept of marriage, motherhood and family.

Therefore, unlike what is expected of successful black women to be single, in *Becoming* Michelle Obama balances between relationship, work and family thus stressing the essence of family in African American society, which is historically deemed otherwise. Since their marriage, her ability to maintain a husband and overall happy family is not common to women of her sort. Being "A wife for over two decades, and a loving mother

of two daughters, Mrs. Obama again derides the myth that Black women are incapable of "having it all"—a career and a man" (Johnson 217). The 'having it all' in this case, a husband, Barack, Malia and Sasha come with a good career as the cornerstone of maintaining it.

Another cogent picture of Michelle Obama can be deemed from textual analysis of black women and their relationship with their husbands. Simply, black women are not promiscuous as history might suggest. For instance, in conjunction with her husband, she suggests that their relationship mirrors trust and reliability, which altogether define her as a dedicated or devoted wife. In other words, she debunks West's conceptualisation of black women who are associated with Jezebel, sapphire, or drama queen. In essence, these are women who marvel in ills that vary from adultery, prostitution and other amorous escapades. She alludes that indeed, historically, it is not black women who are promiscuous but white women instead. She writes:

For many women, including myself, "wife" can feel like a loaded word. It carries a history. If you grew up in the 1960s and 1970s as I did, wives seemed to be a genus of white women who lived inside television sitcoms—cheery, coiffed, corseted. They stayed at home, fussed over the children and had dinner ready on the stove. They sometimes got into sherry or flirted with the vacuum-cleaner salesman, but the excitement seemed to end there. (146)

This is the version that she never aspired to be. By this, she debunks the black woman's philandering history by planting a version that she aspires to be instead—that reflected in her mother's portrait. "The irony, of course, was that I used to watch those shows in our living room on Euclid Avenue while my own stay-at-home mom fixed dinner without

complaint and my own clean-cut dad recovered from a day at work. My parents' arrangement was as traditional as anything we saw on T.V" (146). This parallelism supplies concrete evidence of black women's loyalty to their husband. On the whole, she "thematize mother-daughter bonding" (Sadoff 122) in that context and at the same time emphasising on principles that emanate from such a relationship.

2.3.5 Race and Protest

In *Becoming*, Michelle Obama embraces inclusivity and diversity over exclusivity and uniformity. Driven by immediate injustices since her childhood, her autobiography is defined by some of those experiences. Because of these specific moments, I classify her as a realist autobiographer. Discussing the same, Fetterley, once again posit that "woman writer's commitment to realism is closely connected to the commitment to social change" (Showalter 113). In a modern context, realism is instrumental because of its effective portrayal of issues that drag and break society. In other words, it is her form of *Marxism* and *Feminism's* intention to expose ills towards the attainment of a better, balanced American community.

Therefore, concerning diversity, as a recruiter, she understands that people are not only different, but they come with just enough potential and if they are not given a chance, their efforts then, can neither surface nor their life improve. She notes that "my goal was to bring in law students who were not just smart and hard-driving but also something other than male and white" (105). This excerpt conditions her to identify with people who have been marginalised or are still suffering because of intergenerational prejudice meted on black people. It happened that, with an upsurge of black families in the Northern States, companies were using Union Cards to block black people away. It was obligatory to have

a Union Card to work in a factory, but since it was only given to the native and white immigrants, blacks were locked out of good jobs. In particular, this reality is lensed through her Uncles: Pete and Terry. She writes:

It pained them, I know, to be cast aside, to be stuck in jobs that they were overqualified for, to watch white people leapfrog past them at work sometimes training new employees they knew might one day become their bosses. And it bred within each of them at least a basic level of resentment and mistrust: You never quite knew what other folks saw you to be. (45)

Patricia Meyer contends that "women define for themselves and their readers, woman as she is and as she dreams" (17). From her narrative in *Becoming*, it would be her dream to find a system where diversity is given a chance from the very beginning. Following this, she is bitter about what her family went through. To overcome such an impasse, she takes the position of a politician to change history in her narrative—in other words, she capitalises on urging blacks to vote responsibly and embrace education, because it is only then, they will overcome their past— Just like she did through education herself, she is convinced that blacks can equally transcend historical-propagated isolation and poverty.

2.4 Self-representation in the Economic Background of *Becoming*

There are unseen informative discourses that explain conditions that facilitated Michelle Obama's upward trajectory. From such an implicature, it is evident that studying these pictures or signals is a parallel trace of *Becoming's* representation of her class, family's class and circumstances that surround it, which presents to the reader the established subject. This implies that what is perceivable of her is just an outside outlook. Fortunately, there is what Gusdorf terms as veiled that if known, the economic aspect of the former U.S

First Lady will become known. In support of this statement, Leon James in Carl Jung's *Psychology of Dreams and His View on Freud* observes that "the thing that wells up has an inside and an outside, and that if you talk only of the latter you speak of the shell alone" (1). In this discussion, the argument rotates around the distribution of factors that smoothed her exponential gain of intellect, awareness and today's accrued wealth.

2.4.1 Class on Michelle Obama's Neighbourhood, Places and Spaces

Because of where she comes from, the foremost image of physical places and spaces of *Becoming* portrays Michelle Obama as a South Side's resident. This implies that she is presumably defined by conditions surrounding it. (Spaces such as housing and neighbourhood in reference to features that enhance a portrait of life conditions). When focusing on where people come from, there is a trend that ties ones' achievement and early life conditions. The actual implicature is that a person may be motivated by the circumstance of luck or lack to work for ascending by virtue of economy or maintenance of their status. For this reason, Mrs. Obama for instance is an ostensible prototype of both luck and lack based on, for example, this citation:

I grew up with a disabled dad in a too-small house with not much money in a starting-to-fail neighborhood, and I also grew up surrounded by love and music in a diverse city in a country where an education can take you far. I had nothing or I had everything. It depends on which way you want to tell it. (385)

In the preceding section, Jung acknowledges the existence of duality—what is perceived may have two sides of the story. Her experiences from the above testament, therefore, are an indication of self whose drive is geared by utmost resources and at the same time, void of some based on the reflection of her consciousness. This implies that physical space with

its other entangled conditions such as economics, politics and society are causes of the story that she tells in *Becoming*. From an autobiographical criticism, Sidonie Smith's conjecture in, *Self, Subject, and Resistance Self, Subject, and Resistance.*" *Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice* ascertains that aforesaid conditions are manipulating to an extent that autobiographer loses the freedom to convincingly justify their story due to discrepancies brought about by how some contexts are interpreted:

The "essential self" encountered possibly its first disturbances in the Marxian analysis of class consciousness and the insertion of a determinative linkage between individual consciousness and larger economic forces. Individuals lost their autonomy and agency as they became subjected to, and thus manipulated subjects of, economic and social structures. (12)

Evidently, in *Becoming*, her economic environment manipulates her claims of striving. Reasoning from luck then, it seems that she had a comfortable background. This is because South Side economic layout places her as a person from a privileged family. I illustrate this by two of the places (Euclid Avenue and Parkway Gardens) that she lived with her family. Parkway Gardens for instance, "was an affordable housing project on the South Side made up of modernist apartment buildings" (19) at the time. In other words, only privileged families lived at this location and so was hers. Next is Euclid Avenue. The picture of Euclid is a resemblance of the middle class. She writes:

This was the tail of 1960s on the South Sid of Chicago. The cubs weren't bad, but they weren't great, either. I'd sit on my dad's lap in his recliner and listen to him narrate how the cubs were in the middle of a late-season swoon or why Billy

Williams, who lived just around the corner from us on Constance Avenue, had such a sweet swing from the left side of the plate (18).

It is evident that the subject's luck is in resonance with Smith's proposition. In other words, the evidence that supports the 'humble background claim' is overridden by her impetus to supply the truth about social infrastructures within her vicinity. For instance, zooming Billy William, who lived just a stone throw away from their home, it reinforces the idea of black privileges—this National Baseball Hall of Fame's (1987) player is (was) a rich person and so, presumably, it must have been the case for his neighbourhood but not necessarily the case.

Further reading of *Becoming* reveals an avalanche of discourse markers that top on her (the subject's) privileges:

Meanwhile, from my bedroom window, I could observe most of the real-world happenings on our block of Euclid Avenue. In the late afternoons, I'd see Mr. Thomson, the tall African American man who owned the three-unit building across the street, loading his big bass guitar into the back of his Cadillac, setting off for a gig in one jazz club or another. I'd watch the Mendozas, the Mexican family next door, arriving home in their pickup loaded with ladders after a long day of painting houses, greeted at the fence. (31)

In this context, she recollects how her neighbourhood was. It is noticeable that all of them were working class citizens. Thus, in *Becoming*, the former U.S First Lady falls under the offshoot of many black people who had as much as the privileges that enabled her to make it in life. On balance, black people in the North could hardly make it because they were more visible and prone to isolation and discrimination unlike those in the south—

particularly the South Side. South Side as it turns out was a land of milk and honey. James Grossman tells us that this place was an attraction because of its favourable conditions such that blacks and immigrants "knew where to go when they walked out of the train station" (Pauillac 274) from other parts of the world or the country. This is South Side.

Perching on spaces, I acknowledge that they have the potential to amplify her luck over lack as evident in *Becoming*. Space in this regard, I have assigned to living conditions that come in the shade of amenities and infrastructure like home, which she had as a young girl. First, I begin by acknowledging that her parents never owned a house when compared with her neighbours such as Kansopant, Abuasef, Yacker. She writes: "We were among the few people we knew who didn't own their home" (31). However, her family lived comfortably at Robbie and Terry's House for free with other commodities like television, car and basic furniture. So, living conditions may not be defined by whether people can or cannot afford a home but rather where they live and struggle behind it.

In addition to the above discussion, another angle of spaces and places in *Becoming* represents Michelle Obama as a Washingtonian member of the Upper Class and an icon by the sense of fame and fashion. Marriage facilitates class or upward mobility. With a major example, I press this argument by reflecting on her as the First Lady and a wife of the former United States president, Barack Obama. That being the case, by having a successful husband is a crystal-clear indication that she is indeed a rich woman—richer than she was as a lawyer, administrator and a civil service worker at Mayor Daley's office in Chicago.

2.4.2 Class and Michelle Obama's Intellectual Development

Foremost, by social infrastructure (her parents and sibling, family and schools) Mrs. Obama can be seen as an autonomous individual. The early moment of this is apparent

through her mother and father. This implies that considering where she grew up, she had facilities at a personal level that positively influenced her behaviour. Stimulating environment influence the personal growth and development of a child. These include both human and other input that is critical in building a child's intellectual development. She states that:

My family was my world, the centre of everything. My mother taught me how to read early, walking me to the public library, sitting with me as I sounded out words on a page. My father went to work every day dressed in the blue uniform of a city laborer, but at night he showed us what it meant to love jazz and art. (18)

Erickson in reference to Sigmund's *Psychosocial Stages* is convinced that a person is a reflection of sketches that were harnessed from growth in a sense that, how people behave, speak and learn is determined by how their immediate environment looks like. From how one speaks, for instance, people can easily tell from their accent that they belong to this geographical region with no much guessing. In other words, their total selves are a reflection of other people, places and so on. He avers that:

Anything that grows has a ground plan, and that out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole. At birth the baby leaves the chemical exchange of the womb for the social exchange system of his society, where his gradually increasing capacities meet the opportunities and limitations of his culture. (Miller 146)

Fortunately, I infer that the art of early glimpse into either reading or playing music is an outstanding source of a child's intellectual development. In resonance with this entity, Michelle Obama was exposed to these elements (books and jazz) and that is why until

today, she is not only smart by intellect but fond of Jazz as well. This characteristic is interlocked with class because it is as a result of having these resources that she achieved the mentioned abilities. Hypothetically, class influence extrinsic intellectual development such that, if one comes from a stimulating home (Home human and material resource or means to access them), from Erikson's conjecture of 'parts,' it means that they eventually end up replicating their status and become even better in their later stages of personal development.

2.5 Conclusion

The present chapter has focused on *Becoming* from gender, race and class as the main entrance into the study of Michelle Obama's self-inscription. Ultimately, I argue that images gotten herein depict her as a woman, black woman and as the first African American woman to become the First Lady of the United States and the implication such an achievement has for her as a black woman in a society that has recorded a wide range of the white majority's representation.

With respect to culture, it has been noted that gender is the main concern. It is the source from which I have scrutinised roles that mirrors what Michelle Obama does from the landscape of motherhood, work and family. I note that there is a connection between her and her community as a product of the South Side. This connection propels her narrative on the study of her in conjunction with the race. With respect to race, this discussion has interwoven subject from functions that she does that, in turn, subvert some of the intergenerational stereotypes that depict black women as lazy, promiscuous and submissive. Lastly, in the economic distribution section, I have studied factors related to spaces both physical and psychological. On the same, it has been noted that discovery dealt

with at various scenes is instrumental in her discovery or transcending the self and coping in life.

Also, this study has dwelled on subjectivity and agency to affirm the importance of studying the subject from her own story. Herself and the story of herself is an indication that "women define for themselves and their readers, women as she is" (Meyer 17). However, the content assessment of *Becoming* is not sufficient in the study of self-inscription. I argue that, beyond thematic construction and interpretation of events, its form indicates extra areas that Michelle Obama has tied her personal and collective stories that stretch the nexus and emphasis of her experiences as a woman, black woman and a creative writer. This presupposition brings the focus on narrative strategies that she has used to convey and shape her sum of stories. Therefore, in the next chapter, I probe on strategies that amplify her stories by form, text and structure of her autobiography, *Becoming*.

CHAPTER THREE

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN *BECOMING*

3.1 Introduction

In this section, I study form in respect to narrative strategies that Michelle Obama utilises to inscribe herself in *Becoming*. That said, crafting of this autobiography and my reading contexts into a conversation with how the narrator articulate events and contextualise reality through language and structure of her story. However, in light of literariness, I embrace that the study of language in autobiography is a contested one. This is because, since the primary goal of autobiography is to inscribe the self, some critics suspect that its artistic claim is nothing but a fake embellishment. Their justification is that, if autobiography is placed alongside other literary genres, its artistry is dismal. Notably, Paul de Man is on the view that literary appreciation is limited to niceties that wrap the narrative together. Unfortunately, his closer look at it reveals that other genres are much ahead in terms of artistic crafting. He posits:

By making autobiography into a genre, one elevates it above the literary status of mere reportage, chronicle, or memoir and gives it a place, albeit a modest one, among the canonical hierarchies of the major literary genres. This does not go without some embarrassment, since compared to tragedy, or epic, or lyric poetry, autobiography always looks slightly disreputable and self-indulgent in a way that may be symptomatic of its incompatibility with the monumental dignity of aesthetic values. (919)

I argue that above De Man's argument from *Autobiography as De-facement* is an important expanse on this artistic predicament because it is the very same premise that paves a way

for subjects to showcase that, indeed, autobiography is a literary genre, just like any other. That is to say that his basis is contentious because arguing that there is a propensity of 'embarrassment' in highlighting autobiography as artistic, his critique seems exacting. Therefore, in favour of literariness in autobiography, Jacques Derrida, from his reading of "Circumfession" and noting compelling subtleness of events and form, he reasons that "the concept of autobiography can have a universal appeal to everybody" (311). This appeal is what forms the focus of a study like this—the knowledge that the ostentatious narrative of *Becoming* is not accidental wrapping of stories together that captures the growth of Michelle Obama from Euclid Avenue, Chicago to exquisite lanes of White House in Washington D.C, but an artistic construction and arrangement of events and sections that conform to literary expectations— or rather, the strategies that elevate it as work of art.

In addition, while artistry is acknowledged in autobiography, the core of its survival is the language encoded from the memory of the writer's surroundings. Istvan Dobos in *Autobiographical Reading* argues that "Human memory retains the acquisition of the surrounding world in the form of language, in which process the image of reality is created by acts of imagination and the experience obtained through the learning of the names of entities, together with perception" (8). According to Dobos, it is evident that language and environment (social, economic, political, geography and history) are intertwined and they total to the stories that define the subjects. Therefore, in parting with Dobos, it is apparent that, by the fact that language is the bonding agent between the person and environment, its functions are flexible but mandatory in the analysis of a literary work. In other words, language herald events—the events that shape thematic construction that a subject such as Michelle Obama employs to frame the content of *Becoming*. For that matter, I will focus

on point of view, flashback, use of journal entries, rhetoric questions and form in terms of structure as well as graphic elements (paratextuals) that she has used to convey her story.

3.2 Point of View

First-person point of view is the dominant perspective that the subject utilises in *Becoming* to narrate her story. Therefore, the recaptured sum of past experiences is represented through 'I' pronoun. From a linguistic standpoint, 'I' is an antecedent of Michelle Obama as the main protagonist in the narrative. In autobiographical criticism, this perspective is integral to a woman writer as a witness and experiencer of unfolding events.

Smith and Watson contend that "letter 'I' its initial invisibility, and then its imposing and obvious presence, produces a plausible graphic representation of the issues of women's subjectivity and voice so well-articulated in the text" (Routon 217). This implies that subjectivity that is motioned by 'I' perspective is the reason behind autobiography's self-inscription. From what I discussed in the second chapter; it is conspicuous that women have long been deprived of a chance to be heard by men's way of writing. Therefore, writing an autobiographical narrative is one way of asserting their portrait in private and public spaces. Reflecting on *Becoming*, Mrs. Obama is driven by analogous gear. She states:

So far in my life, I've been a lawyer. I've been a vice president at a hospital and the director of a nonprofit that helps young people build meaningful careers. I've been a working-class black student at a fancy mostly white college. I've been the only woman, the only African American, in all sorts of rooms. I've been a bride, a stressed-out new mother, a daughter torn up by grief. And until recently, I was the

First Lady of the United States of America—a job that's not officially a job, but that nonetheless has given me a platform like nothing I could have imagined. (13)

Inspecting this inclination, her narrative comes in many of these indicators that are proceeded by I perspective to reflect on what she has managed to become as an African American woman. So, espoused proclivity in locating herself as such is suggestive of attained voice and impetus of sharing her story as an achieved woman. She therefore recounts some exclusive moments that act as a proof of how she asserts herself in male dominated professions such as law, male and white dominated schools such as Princeton University as well as conferences that women of her race are not that many when likened with men and women from the majority side.

Argumentatively, other than the discussed function, 'I' captures the subjectivity of the actual lived experience and not imagination. In other words, it gives her the authority to represent herself in a form that will be felt complete once she is done recounting events that hold her past's experiences. D. K. Naik in support of this statement argues that "the details of any given life, therefore when accommodated in a story or narrative inevitably take a shape or form, which, in literary terminology, is called the form of the autobiography"(44). Likewise, it happens that details that she gives are an interplay between what she wanted to become, what she wanted to have by virtue of materialism as juxtaposed with whom she is, and have at the present. In contrast, what she wanted to become and have is an expressed wish from which she draws her stories from. She writes:

When I was a kid, my aspirations were simple. I wanted a dog. I wanted a house that had stairs in it—two floors for one family. I wanted, for some reason, a four-

door station wagon instead of the two-door Buick that was my father's pride and joy. I used to tell people that when I grew up, I was going to be a pediatrician. (13)

Herein, she articulates the realms that she sources her stories from—the details that, if tied together, they ring back at what she ever wanted in relation to a myriad of conditions within her social, economic and time setting. In extrapolating this, Adrienne Rich in, *The Politics of Location.* *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose* contends that "One has the imagination of one's century, one's culture, one's generation, one's particular social class, one's decade ... but above all one has the imagination of one's body and of the sex which inhabits it" (Karpinski 912). So, courtesy of 'I,' a gesture to specific positions that she has held as the former First Lady and as an American in totality is gotten—To put it in Rich's words, she locates herself through those spaces by inscribing herself as an 'I' in the mode of action of what she has been.

In addition to subjectivity and agency, she uses all-inclusive 'I' to assert herself in America's context with *Becoming* as a vessel of doing so and in conjunction with other women, whom she shares context with as friends. Citing Helene Cixous in her study of, *The Laugh of the Medusa.* *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, it is apparent that her (Michelle Obama) moment of self-representation is preceded by self-awareness and a belief that she has gone beyond male tradition, because of the collective efforts of other women:

I cannot speak us without first knowing how to reply in I. 'If I know ecstasy', I am transposed. I have at my disposal a domain of writing and this domain can summon together the us of the retort each one of us is; we all have the build for it. It sows

doubt. It breaks away, and brings up the question of liberation. It makes imperative a time of historic solidarity. Resolute ecstatic women. (Karpinski 912)

As conveyed, it is apparent that Cixous advocates for group identity as the cornerstone of women's liberation. In this discussion, I argue that the subject recognises herself as a product of women who have helped her become in every bit of her past and even, a projection of what they might impact in her incoming present. She Writes:

I'd learned many years earlier to hold my true friends close. I was still deeply connected to the group of women who had started gathering for Saturday playdates years earlier, back in our diaper-bag days in Chicago, when our children blithely pitched food from their high chairs and all of us were so tired we wanted to weep. These were the friends who'd held me together, dropping off groceries when I was too busy to shop, picking up the girls for ballet when I was behind on work or just needing a break. A number of them had hopped planes to join me for unglamorous stops on the campaign trail, giving me emotional ballast when I needed it most. Friendships between women, as any woman will tell you, are built of a thousand small kindnesses like these, swapped back and forth and over again. (341-342)

Therefore, I insist that 'I' point of view is a rallying agent of group identity in women's narrative. In other terms, she does so in order to attain "expression" (Karpinski 912) as a woman and acknowledges that she would not have made it in life were it not for the contribution of the above caucus of women. As a result, sisterhood according to Cixous can be conceptualised from identifying contributions that women do in the narrative as the subject does in *Becoming*. Whereas it is conspicuous that these groups of women helped her become, likewise, from discourses of group identity, it is arguable that 'I' from another

viewpoint has a bearing on the collective becoming of these women as well. This is because their contributions are parts of parcels that add up to Michelle Obama's overall realisation of becoming.

Lastly, the narrative of *Becoming* is conveyed to a disembodied narrator 'you,' which from the narrative discourse, it marks as the second person point of view. This implies that, as a woman, she is aware of the position that she has to take within the course of writing. On her mind, therefore, she embraces the possibility of a reader whom she believes can understand her predicament as a woman. Earlier on we saw that Mary Mason in *Autobiographies of Women Writers' Autobiography: Essay Theoretical and Critical* acknowledges this position of women as a technique of telling their stories. That: "the merging of her private consciousness with her collective consciousness", "evolution and delineation of an identity by way of alterity", "the double focus writer" (30). For Mrs. Obama, she connects her private consciousness with the public, or rather an external observer to locate her own space within a monolithic system that assigns a woman the 'other.' In 'you' therefore, she negotiates how she has become the woman she is by calling in the reader into her story into the private aspect of her consciousness. She writes:

Maybe during those three years you make friends you'll love and respect forever, people who seem genuinely called to the bloodless intricacies of the law, but you yourself are not called. Your passion stays low, yet under no circumstance will you underperform. You live, as you always have, by the code of effort/result, and with it you keep achieving until you think you know the answers to all the questions—including the most important one. Am I good enough? Yes, in fact I am. (86)

From Pascal, "autobiography is a shaping of the past. It imposes a pattern on a life, constructs out of it a coherent story. It establishes certain stages in an individual life, makes links between them, and defines, implicitly or explicitly, a certain consistency of relationship between the self and the outside world" (32). His interpretation of autobiography's shaping effect is instrumental in the assessment of the subject's implicit expression. Thence, the above citation articulates the moment that she uses to narrate her story of *Becoming*. Curtesy of this point of view, she connects the reader to identify with her and past's circumstance and approves of the decision that she made to be unique. For example, she represents her part of consciousness that always kept her going: the "Am I good enough" rhetoric that impact her decisions.

3.3 Flashback

In his concept of truth in autobiography, Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* argues that "autobiography is then an interplay, a collusion, between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past" (38). That is to say, ideas must be presented in a framework that adds up to the present, from an informed past. In addition to this characteristic of an autobiography, Pascal suggests that "past is connected with the present in artistic coherence so that the past throws light on "the present situation" (38). In *Becoming*, the present and the past is informed by a process of flashback. It is the strategy used by the narrator to refer back into the distant past that eventually adds to her story and that of other autobiographical "contemporaries" (Pascal 38). Coming in the fashion of introspection and retrospection, the subject relays directly into the distance and recent past through organising her stories in the form of *Becoming Me*, *Becoming Us*, and *Becoming More*. Primarily, these sections

are entries that inform on her holistic reflection from Childhood to adulthood. It has been deduced from Pascal that this back-tracking must demonstrate a connection so as not to attain an "artistic failure" (Pascal 38). Fortunately, by her careful remembering, re-remembering and crafting, the form of *Becoming* is in chronology and in obeisance with Pascal's presupposition of an immaculate autobiography's form.

Delving deeper, a study of introspection and retrospection in *Becoming* reveals an instance that function as moments where the narrator inspects her thoughts and feelings:

Looking back on it, I'm sure I was only capitalizing on what felt like a rare opportunity to speak with a woman whose background mirrored mine but who was a few years ahead of me in career trajectory. Valerie was calm, bold, and wise in ways that few people I'd met before were. She was someone to learn from, to stick close to. I saw this right away. (129)

As elucidated above, introspection makes the reader know what the subject is referring back to recapture past experiences. The result is that she reveals to the reader how she was anticipating to speak with her mentor, Valerie Jarret and the importance that their meeting had on her career trajectory.

To achieve introspection and retrospection, she employs language to concretise her actual lived past, in a coherent syntax. Jaume Aurell in the study of *Making History by contextualising Oneself: Autobiography as Historical Intervention* believes that, although authors write by referring back into history, they demonstrate a connection between language that they use and representation of their stories:

When historians produce interventional autobiography, they confirm the paradox that writing about oneself, which might once have been a way to communicate

outside the ordinary codes of academic language, "now seems to epitomize that language, and it becomes the new thing and stands at the very mark of cutting-edge professionalism. (249)

Therefore, with a flashback, Aurell asserts that autobiography can be assessed as an epitome of aesthetics, markedly because of how the writer employs language to reconstruct that past. At this juncture, Aurell intricates language with history and so, on the autobiography's quality. He further believes that despite language giving these forms a feel of professionalism they yield what today's literary academy expects from autobiographies—the intellectual symptoms that rewrite history. *Becoming* offers a similar context where the subject artistically historicises herself by recollecting the past through flashback. For example, in back-tracing of her physical disposition and people's wonderment of how she copes in mostly white rooms, she artistically describes the context in a sense that the reader can see, feel and sometimes relate to her situation. She writes:

Mainly I bristled because the question was so antithetical to what I was experiencing and what the people I was meeting seemed to be experiencing too—the man with a seed-corn logo on his breast pocket, the college student in a black-and-gold pullover, the retiree who'd brought an ice cream bucket full of sugar cookies she'd frosted with our rising-sun campaign logo. These people found me after my talks, seeming eager to talk about what we shared—to say that their dad had lived with MS, too, or that they'd had grandparents just like mine. Many said they'd never gotten involved with politics before but something about our campaign made them feel it would be worth it. (198)

Driven by the agency of self-contextualising, she describes the social infrastructures that relate to her story as a black woman. Her attention to details is what Aurell attribute to artistry—she does not introduce other subjects by their names, but by strategic characterisation and space description that pertains to her overall experiences. In so doing, she produces their portrait from how they look to their perception. Still on language and introspection, cited excerpt comes with two dashes that stress her recognition of a group of people that she approves and relate to. This is a proof of proper autobiography, where the writer includes moments in their own life that may be interesting to them and captivating to their readers. In other terms, *Becoming*, from this excerpt, is a typical display of autobiography proper— or rather, a "narrative of the author's life with stress laid on the introspection or on the significance of his life against a wider background" (Shipley 24). This is underscored by how she historicises her consciousness in the above retrospection as a product of wider America's society.

Moreover, flashback coupled with present facilitates the reconstruction and its relevance. At this occasion, she recounts how past events aided how she copes at the present, thus, a marker of *Becoming* as a composite of the interplay between the present and the past. She goes ahead to situate some defining moments which are primarily defined by past's pain to narrate her side of the story and as a mechanism of indicating how she has been able to acclimatise in some of the present extreme duress. In particular, the weaving of the past as a catalyst into the present is best felt in her life in politics. In as much as she can remember, because of her gender and race, she has been attacked but instead of sulking, on the contrary, she ended up befitting out of it. She writes:

Only later in life would this become a real challenge for me. Only when I was in my early forties and trying to help get my husband elected president would I think back to that day in the lunch line in first grade, remembering how confusing it was to be ambushed, how much it hurt to get socked in the face with no warning at all...

I spent much of 2008 trying not to worry about the punches. (256)

The last statement of that citation is an indicative of the present with the preceding being flashback. Together, they intertwine to supply her story with a different gear—to remind the reader about where she has come from and the amount of pain that she has endured. From theory, the above context "characterizes the life of woman" (Smith 50) because, since the spaces that she talks about are gender and racial based, thence, her present is informed by complexities of negotiating herself through patriarchy and biased society. Given these social realities, I further argue that combining the two (past and present) techniques is a suggestion that, as a woman, she had to be strong to overcome impediments that come from the historical characterisation of literary heirs.

On the other hand, a woman's story is informed by selves whose efforts made the principal subject overcome either emotionally or financially. For instance, being the kind of a woman that she is, she pays tribute to her mother, Mariam Robinson, her late father Fraser Robinson, Robbie and Terry, her husband, Barack Obama, Valerie Jarrett, Czerny Brasuell and a plethora of others that together form the tapestry of heroes who backed her upward expansion. In stressing this premise, Istvan Dobos in *Autobiographical Reading* maintains that indeed, for there to be the central subject or the narrator that is reflected in the title, there must be surrounding that produce and defines them in conjunction to reality, imagination and experience. The three in tandem form the self, whose parts are distributed

in different temporal or lengthy settings: "Human memory retains the acquisition of the surrounding world in the form of language, in which process the image of reality is created by acts of imagination and the experience obtained through the learning of the names of entities, together with perception" (8). This implies that, because the narrator has experienced different social infrastructural surroundings as a student, lawyer, most powerful person, wife, mother and the First Lady, it makes her imagine and represent those experiences as her past's imagination only that they are real.

3.4 Journal

The subject employs a journal in *Becoming* to underscore the relevancy of her retrospection. A journal is a form of a diary that captures the day-to-day activities of a person or a place in a great wealth of details. Its presence in autobiography is fundamental in captivating truth. Precisely, since autobiography is a collage of past experiences, a journal rejuvenates those memories by capturing the then actual thought, event and personal feeling. Other than that, journal entries are fundamental because they inform on what is on the subject's mind at the actual past's moment.

Therefore, in detail, the journal in *Becoming* emphasises on most significant past moments for the subject. As it turns out, these moments do not only impact the subject, but their insertion twists the form from autobiography to patriography as well. She notes:

One, I feel very confused about where I want my life to go.

What kind of person do I want to be?

How do I want to contribute to the world?

Two, I am getting very serious in my relationship with Barack and I feel that I need to get a better handle on myself. (115)

It is evident from the above citation that her story is tied to that of Obama and thus, the reason why the form is fluid (For the fact that it can be interpreted as a patriographer). In other words, paying attention to Leavis practical aspect of language, the subject, before meeting her husband, she was a successful lawyer, had a car and happily contributing to what her parents would have ever wanted for her—financial breakthrough but yet, she was yet to discover herself. That is why, upon meeting him, another sense is awakened within her. Based on subsequent events, he directed her into the right path because, he connected her to Valerie Jarrett, whom, with political consciousness and professionalism, she felt convinced for the first time that she has attained the opportunity to do what she aspired (public service). In particular, she came to engage in children's diet, teen pregnancy, and servicemen. Therefore, by telling their stories, they stretch the narrative by both breadth and length. This makes *Becoming* a biography of other people and their experiences, too.

Other than inferring sequentially of events, I note that a journal in autobiography is a marker of everyday autobiography's experience. In this category, I argue that what she felt at a particular moment may not be a permanent interpretation of feeling about some experiences but an extrinsic and temporal one. I stress this point with the incoming entry:

I don't think we have anything in common. (137)

From the primary practicality of language, the above entry exposes her identity and upbringing, which when compared to that of her husband, it is quite unmatched. However, nothing in common aspect can be concretised from discourses of travel and illness. Therefore, how she deals with illness to expound on what she feels about Africa and Obama is instrumental in this discussion. According to Kerstin Shands "illness narratives give voice to experiences that are silenced in biomedical discourses. This assertion of the

suffering self, hitherto not domesticated in scientific parlance and cultural discourses of health, is both cathartic and therapeutic" (26). For that reason, I acknowledge that anecdotic line that she made in her journal is not after serious illness but a reaction of her body due to context shift (from United States to Africa) of places that eventually predisposed her body to physical and psychological harm with a parallel disclose of the veiled part that would not have been revealed to the reader was it not for that exposure.

3.5 Music

The content of *Becoming* is embellished by music, occasions and dance. Particularly, a closer look suggests that introduction of the narrative is commenced by music and its content. Since music has an independent message from the narrative, and its impact stretches to affect the author's meaning, in this segment, concentration dwells on it at both function and a metaphor level.

To begin with, *Becoming* is introduced by the sound of striving. Its representation is inferred by the piano's sound:

I spent much of my childhood listening to the sound of striving. It came in the form of bad music, or at least amateur music, coming up through the floorboards of my bedroom—the *plink plink plink* of students sitting downstairs at my great-aunt Robbie's piano, slowly and imperfectly learning their scales. (17)

This citation captures the agent and the product of striving. (The Aunt Robbie and her struggles). When interrogating the metaphor phase of this segment, I infer that Robbie is an important character in the course of *Becoming*, because, in her, she ignites the problem that many African Americans have been facing and so, it is from her work and striving that places her niece as a prototype of synonymous striving. For example, Robbie is restrained

by this circumstance (factors behind striving) to work at home, unlike teaching music in a college as a profession. In reference to Michelle Obama, I contend that *Becoming Me* recaptures the exclusive moments and contexts that she had to go through in order to achieve in life.

Therefore, delving into the epicenter of striving, it is apparent that racism is a core thematic construction that propels her story of *Becoming Me*. Tied to Robbie, it replicates into her entire family, herself and to the African American community in the subsequent sections. Briefly, In *Becoming Us*, she narrates about how Obama himself was verbally attacked because of his colour: "We're not impressed with these folks with eastern elite degrees." He's not one of us, in other words. Barack wasn't a real black man, like them—someone who spoke like that, looked like that, and read that many books could never be" (166-167). In *Becoming More*, their decorum and programmes are criticised just because they are Democrats. Parting with Racism at the sectional level and perching on the epicenter once again, she recounts of how Robbie was prejudiced against at Northwestern University just because of her colour: "I'd learn many years later, had sued Northwestern University for discrimination, having registered for a choral music workshop there in 1943 and been denied a room in the women's dorm. She was instructed to stay instead in a rooming house in town—a place "for coloreds" (20). Moreover, her family and so many blacks were denied Union Cards to access better jobs that would have enabled them to work in lucrative positions in the industries. Specifically, she was deemed as a potential threat to Cathy (her Princeton's roommate) because she came to learn that Cathy's mother had had her daughter moved away from their joint hostel over a similar concern. Conclusively, I argue that structural partitioning of *Becoming* into *Becoming Me*, *Becoming*

Us and *Becoming More* is a conflation of joint struggle that she conveys in form of a metaphor of striving in music form to make it clear to the reader that the processes that she underwent to become the woman she is today in contemporary America are not that smooth as some would like to put it.

On the other hand, from annals of history, literally implication connects music and African American writers together. For instance, to revolt against slavery, they used to sing to resist subjugation by encouraging one another, pass a message to each other, and caution one another in case of containable or uncontainable danger. In this context, Michelle Obama was motivated by this song to make herself the best version of African Americans, which prompted her to become the United States' forty-fourth First Lady and a pioneer of other life-enhancing activities. Moreover, in the form of *Becoming*, it is a major art that offers opportunities to black people with Robbie being an example of such.

Furthermore, inasmuch as jazz is for entertainment for Michelle Obama, it bears social consciousness as well as political consciousness in the sense that, it can be used to enact political message and unify people. Other than these two, music in an autobiography can be used to stimulate the remembering of past events. To begin with, concerning social consciousness, music acts as the bond that connects her and Uncle Shields, rechristened Southside. Therefore, as an entertainment, art brings people together, it places Michelle Obama in relationship with people that she loves the most and people whom she pays tribute to in *Becoming*. From a long list, her Uncle Shields and Barack Obama are brought together by niceties of music. As a bond between these two people, we get the foundation of music from another person (Southside) other than Robbie, whose impact on her is a long lasting one. So, through Southside, young Michelle Obama learned how to play jazz by

herself and more importantly, how to preserve it. This preservation is a culture that she breathes air to when she became of age and in which context, the function of music inside autobiography is gotten. She illustrates:

Well, in my mind, we can conquer the world

In love you and I, you and I, you and I... (140)

Overhead context articulate instance where music is a bonding agent between the subject and several social infrastructures. Thence, she is not only connected to Southside but the music and the singer himself. Besides this function, the music brings her into a context with her societal function (wedding) which serves as a traditional mode of unifying people. Moreover, from Steve Wonder's song apparent in the above citation, I insist that literally implication of repetition as a sound device is an enhancement of the connection between the two referents (you and I) which symbolise her and Barack Obama. Metaphorically, repetition is a representation of her journey motif which mimics her physical quest—to conquer the world as a connotative meaning of the song is instrumental in conveying the adamant spirit that drives her in case of difficult stride on the incoming future that will come after their wedding.

In continuation, I argue that music is integral in remembering the past. Marcel Proust argues that what we get in autobiography is a recaptured memory, that remembering "causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past" (7). With a particular impulse into the cited scene, it is arguable that music not only is it an art, but a memory triggers in the course of her remembering. I argue like this because autobiographical forms are defined by the sum of past experiences. This implies that the exact experience can be solidified by music, which makes it even easier

for the subject to reconstruct her past. Therefore, concerning the functions that are alluded to in the above concept of music in autobiography, I affirm that stretching scenes and story is its primary function within the context of *Becoming*.

Lastly, music exacts political consciousness. In this section, I study the inclusion of *At Last* by Beyoncé Knowles in *Becoming*. Contextually, the song is performed during their inauguration ceremony as the First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS) and that of her husband as the President of the United States (POTUS) by Beyoncé herself. She writes:

That night, Barack and I went to the Neighborhood Ball, the first inaugural ball ever to be broadly accessible and affordable to the general public and where Beyoncé—real-life Beyoncé sang a stunning, full-throated rendition of the R&B classic "At Last," which we'd chosen as our "first dance" song. From there, we moved on to a House States Ball and after that to the Commander in Chief Ball, then onward to the Youth Ball and six more beyond that. Our stay at each one was relatively brief and pretty much exactly the same. A band played "Hail to the Chief," Barack made a few remarks, we tried to beam our appreciation to those who'd come, and as stood and watched, we slow danced yet another time to "At Last." (295)

I insist that this song compliments the song of striving. It is a fulfillment of the long-awaited Martin Luther King Jr's vision; *I Have a Dream*—the proof that just like the white majority, African Americans can as well lead the nation. Reading *Becoming* is paying attention to music as an artistic avenue of inscribing political statement. For Michelle Obama as a creative writer, I argue that her strategic wrapping of *At Last* in that context is her method of experimenting with new ways of intersecting her story with collective stories of the

marginalised that cannot be explicitly but implicitly put. Mukar'ovsky argues that "art and literature are not eternal verities but are always open to new definitions" (Selden 37). This implies that, from Mukarovsky's perspective, she legitimises jazz in *Becoming* and asserts her people's mileage in the political landscape of the United States where they were once enslaved and their art overlooked as well. Lastly, *At Last* is followed by *Hail to the Chief* which for decades has been sung for white presidents and their wives. Therefore, besides the social and political consciousness, it is the song that connects readers to the story for they can reflect together with the narrator, the historical moments that that act as a testament of black man's achievement since the founding of the United States on July 4, 1776.

3.6 Imagery

In spite of it being a narration dominated by a different point of views, *Becoming's* implication is further underscored by imagery as an artistic construction. In poetics, imagery is defined as the manner in which the writer employs language to shape the narrative. Likewise, the form of *Becoming* adjusts to this literary merit. In almost all instances of Michelle Obama's physical and psychological growth, a portrait of her in conjunction with her immediate environment is created through imagery. Before assessing the implications of images in the autobiography, I argue that, the focus of a writer such as Michelle Obama is to create these images such that the reader is able pay much attention to reflect on the details.

Shklovsky in *Art as Technique* defines this inclination as "Defamiliarisation. " According to him, "the technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of

perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important" (Lemon and Reis 12). In the reading of *Becoming*, characterisation of people and objects is deliberately prolonged such that there comes a need for readers to pay much attention to given the details is inevitable. However, even if this prolongation of intent and meaning is felt in most of the narrative, I infer that it is foregrounded more in some instances. For instance, during the inauguration of the Forty-fourth First Family, the narrator paints a picture in the reader's mind about the condition of social representation at the time. She notes:

From where I sat, I could see most of the chamber below. It was an unusual, bird's-eye view of our country's leaders, an ocean of whiteness and maleness dressed in dark suits. The absence of diversity was glaring—honestly, it was embarrassing—for a modern, multicultural country. It was most dramatic among the Republicans. At the time, there were just seven nonwhite Republicans in Congress—none of them African American and only one was a woman. Overall, four out of five members of Congress were male. (303)

I argue that, the subject, in this context treats language to an aesthetic feel—this qualification delineates *Becoming* as a product of aesthetic device. A forthright entry of Bakhtin and Shklovsky's views in this except are pertinent in making sense of her use of imagery. Since it is creating a view for the reader, the fact that she was all upon introducing the elected president, Barack Obama in his address to Congress, she brings out a particular picture of social misrepresentation that confronts her country, with the major at the apex of leadership. On another light, Mikhail Bakhtin ascribes this kind description to the *Shaping Effect of Art*. In particular, she demonstrates the prejudiced against the oppressed

in a single context, rich and the poor and such dualities in a meeting for the synonymous purpose of exposing inequality in her contemporary society:

The festivities associated with Carnival are collective and popular; hierarchies are turned on their heads (fools become wise, kings become beggars); opposites are mingled (fact and fantasy, heaven and hell); the sacred is profaned. The 'jolly relativity' of all things is proclaimed. Everything authoritative, rigid or serious is subverted, loosened and mocked. (Selden 41)

According to Bakhtin, Michelle Obama as a woman writer, she creates an instance whereby destabilisation of hierarchies function as a means of stabilising humanity in the sense that everyone is equal. However, there is something unique about this context, she plants Obama to subvert a notion that the majority (whites) are the only ones suited to lead the country. Therefore, the president who is neither white nor black is a marker of hybridity in a racially diverse country of United States and assumptively, what American's need as their president.

Moreover, just like American writers, Michelle Obama adjusts to the method that Hakutani XI and Ryder posits to "changes in subject matter and style that parallel differences in lived realities, thus "reaffirming relevance in the Americas" (802). Simply, this is because, its form is in conformity to the twenty-first century American's lived reality—the incessant subjugation of women by men as well as that of blacks by the white majority. From the onset of her autobiography she is remembering her childhood, she paints a picture that exemplifies the social and economic condition that defines her in reference to that of her close family members (Craig, Robbie, Terry, Shield, Robinson among others). It is worth noting that, as a narrator, she does not just introduce these

autobiographer subjects by default but through careful selection, characterisation and dramatisation of events that align with their surroundings, which altogether present events in a clear picture for the reader to perceive. For instance, *Becoming Me*, she remembers these events and immediately delves to private memory where she recollects on her parents' striving to bring attention to striving that kicked off her story:

None of this really registered within me. I was just a kid, a girl with Barbies and blocks with two parents and an older brother who slept each night with his head about three feet from mine. My family was my world, the centre of everything. My mother taught me how to read early, walking me to public library, sitting with me as I sounded out words on a page. My father went to work every day dressed in the blue uniform of a city laborer, but at night he showed us what it meant to love jazz and art. As a boy, he'd taken classes at the Art Institute of Chicago, and in high school he'd painted and sculpted. (18)

Georges Lukas in *Reflectionism* states that "a literary work reflects not individual phenomena in isolation, but 'the full process of life'. However, the reader is always aware that the work is not itself reality but rather 'a special form of reflecting reality" (Selden 87). So, that mattered to her as a child is vivid—her mother, brother and father in a condition that surrounds their lives. By this, the narrator reflects the reality (from parenting, income as well as art). This affirms that *Becoming's* narrative is indeed a reflection of not only images that directly come from where she comes from, but also an indicator that she is in the process of growing toward the whole self.

Besides family and memory, the narrator intersects a vivid description to let the reader see images of social conditions that define her. Boris Tomashevsky argues that

"Defamiliarisation changes our response to the world but only by submitting our habitual perceptions to a processing by literary form" (44). Before representing the savage side of capitalism and hypocrisy of real estate developers, she strategically put her brother to create an image of how people from South Side live with the fear of the unknown (it can be gun violence, real estate developers, or racism). She states:

Somewhere along the way, my laid-back brother started to sprout worries. I can't say exactly when or why this began, but Craig—the boy who could high-five and what-up his way around the neighborhood who blithely catnapped anytime he had ten free minutes, regardless of his surroundings –grew more fretful and vigilant at home, convinced that catastrophe was creeping our way. (39)

Raman Selden in *New Criticism* espouses this kind of a phenomenon where the narrative speaks to itself. By illustration, the narrator comes effortlessly and vividly to relay on the bigger picture of social circumstances that confront the Southerners in America's context. As a referent, Craig propels the notion that, it is what is outside the text that influences the form of the narrator's plot—the connection of parts that mimic how humans respond to danger brought about by fellow humans. In the provision of this implication, Selden maintains that "text in itself, with its language and organization; it does not seek a text's 'meaning', but how it 'speaks itself" (31). In such instances of imagery, the narrative corresponds to what ought to be defining autobiography—the sum of observation that she recounts as observed by the self and rendered to speak about the self through “reconstruction” (Pascal 9) of their past.

3.7 Paratextual Elements

Images, synonymously used with pictures are fundamental in the construction of the self in the narrative form of *Becoming*. Specifically, being referred to as paratextual elements with respect to autobiographical discourses, their presence aid in fact-checking, more especially, when physical growth is of utmost consideration. In the autobiography, a plethora of images helps in underscoring the writer's intention, at least in the basic sense—to portray herself in literary history. In essence, just like imagery, pictures help in claiming the ownership of one, body as well as giving a glimpse of concrete places and events that form the grand experiences that describe the self's journey motif.

Foremost, the first image is located on the cover. Topmost, is the title of the autobiography, *Becoming* and at the bottom the name of the owner of the narrative. Lejeune introduced "the concept of the 'autobiographical pact' as a contract that contains a self-written story by a verifiable person: one who has "a proper name" that appears on the book cover" (2). Therefore, the cover page presents the picture of an already established woman with a proper name which prepares our perception of what to expect in the incoming narrative. Therefore, according to Lejeune, the fact that Michelle Obama is the former First Lady of the United States, it verifies where she has come from in respect to history that ties her with per se, slavery, complexities of gender roles and class.

As it has been felt before, in the discourse interpretation of the subject, thematically, herein still, curtsied by images, the second apparent picture is that of her childhood, precisely, as a girl of fewer than six years. Another one as a student, a graduate and as a friend to Barack Obama whose picture takes us to their wedding and eventually representing her as a mother of two girls. The series ends with her as a First Lady and of

course an empowered woman who is not only making historical speeches but also as a proud White House farmer. Moving on, from this selection, she ventures into her parents, Fraser and Mariam Robinson as young parents in 1965 (208). The inferred pictures end with a narration that brings out Craig as an influential person in her identity. This is because, from some of her given details, she was oftentimes called Craig's little sister not only while in Bryn Mawr, Whitney Young, but Princeton University well. This is perhaps underscored by his immeasurable care that he has offered in her life—Craig took full responsibilities, for instance, during her wedding (216). Discharging such a role, Craig became, as it has always been, another branch for Michelle Obama, and thus, a part and parcel of her becoming.

Sailing some more into the study of paratextuals, I argue that they (pictures) capture moments. But why? Because her (Michelle Obama's) life in politics is vital in her journey motif, discovery and transcending the self, a collage of these pictures capture and reinforces those moments. These picture ranges from some that capture her activities during campaign trails to those that gives the literary reader her very first glimpses the first African American First Lady. Others helps to recount some of high impact Denver speeches and more. Together, I maintain that these pictures support in documenting the very imperative moments that yield the outstanding narrative of *Becoming*:

Officially POTUS and FLOTUS, Barack and I hit ten inaugural balls that night, dancing onstage at each one. I was wiped out after the day's festivities, but this gorgeous gown designed by Jason Wu gave me fresh energy, and my husband—my best friend, my partner in all things—has a way of making every moment we have together feels intimate. (233)

So, in addition, not only do pictures capture moments but they act as means by which Michelle Obama takes to extend her curtesy to those (Jason Wu) who make her boost her image before the public. In extension, the picture which portrays them dancing to what we might suspect to be Hail the King is a celebration of the journeys that she has worked hard to achieve. Besides the moment marked by the audience, song and the narrator, the description of her style is a marvel with respect to fashion. It brings out the narrator as a woman of class but nonetheless a woman with a king's sense of style because of the choice of dresses that she wears in different occasions.

3.8 Rhetoric Questions

The form of *Becoming* comes in instances where the self is posing questions to the unseen observer. This style is called rhetoric. Rhetoric comes in different shades: Interrogation and affirmation. However, the most likely rhetoric employed in the narrative is the rhetoric of interrogation, which is employed at the onset of her story. (In the prologue). For instance, because of so many subjective and romanticised spot shots, which have been meted to her, she interrogates herself while at the same time eliciting a response to the reader:

Since stepping reluctantly into public life, I've been held up as the most powerful woman in the world and taken down as an "angry black woman." I've wanted to ask my detractors which part of that phrase matters to them the most —is it "angry" or "black" or "woman"? (14)

This question is fundamental in understanding the self. Wrapped in rhetoric, it allows the readers to anticipate what her incoming narrative will be about. Will it be for debunking these stereotypes or for asserting herself? However, all these are observations. There is what defines Michelle Obama —her voice as she asserts later on is what made her

overcome some cultural and historical subservient positions. In particular, in mechanism of parallelism, she places her elevation and downplay in binary to indicate the mileage that she has been able to traverse. Being a black and powerful woman in the world is a manifestation of the power of a black woman—the becoming of once negatively culturally 'othered' self. Therefore, the implicature of the above rhetoric acts as a gap that allows the reader to think about why she orients her narrative with respect that it captures race, gender and class as the core entries of her narration.

The second interrogation comes in the context of schooling. Upon joining Princeton University, she employs rhetoric. At this juncture, it is clear that for the second time, the innocent girl, the girl mostly used to Southside, Bryn Mawr and Whitney Young was for the first time cast into a context that is defined by the absence of most of the blacks that she has been used to, women, as well as riches. These are exclusively implied in a rhetoric. She writes:

There was an especially distinct learning curve when it came to understanding sports. I'd been raised on the bedrock of football, basketball, but it turned out that East Coast prep schoolers did more. Lacrosse was a thing. Field hockey was a thing. Squash, even, was a thing. For a kid from the South Side it could be a little dizzying.

"You row Crew?" what does it even mean? (71)

From "Defamiliarisation," we figured out that the goal of the narrator is mostly to strategise how she writes and allows the reader to pay much attention to details. Thence, I argue that such a rhetoric is her strategy of exposing the shortcomings attached to background that makes her adaptability in the new world an uphill task. In other words, she 'rhetoricises'

her intention to further to question the world where lack define motivation towards achieving.

Likewise, in addition to espoused phenomenon, immersing down to the peripheries of her classroom reveals another rhetoric. At this juncture, she makes it known to the reader how students and professors may have been thinking about her. She interrogates: "Was I here merely as part of a social experiment?" (76). This context is imperative towards her story of becoming because it amplifies areas that she had to deal with the burden of representation that keeps on trailing her within the course of her life as reflected in *Becoming*. Even though because of her class she might not be representing the black community, from her interrogation, it seems that she does not preclude the possibility of carrying the weight of what black pigmentation means in backdrop of her history —and for these reasons, she had to be better, smarter and such to inscribe her independent treatment of her as Michelle Obama. In support of the possibility of collective representation, from autobiographical criticism, Gilmore in *Limits of Autobiography* argues that a "crucial limit in autobiography" is "not just the one understood as the boundary between truth and lies, but, rather, the limit of representativeness, with its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others" (5). Essentially, the above citation is one of many events that drive the plot in forward trajectory and in obeisance to her narrative. In other terms, as an autobiography, she at least portrays herself as an African American in contexts crowded by the whites to an extent that she feels like a representative of her people. Claims of representing are at best felt by young Michelle Obama and they keep on following her to an extent that, everywhere she goes, she feels like she is representing her race.

Conclusively, I contend that Michelle Obama's perennial worries were mostly revolving around race and gender. For this reason, they become a part of discourse markers or what 'Formalist' scholars ascribe to motif. (The action moving entity that is so imperative and without it, the story cannot progress). Arguing the case, Russian theorist, Tomashevsky contends:

Smallest unit of plot a 'motif', which we may understand as a single statement or action. He makes a distinction between 'bound' and 'free' motifs. A bound motif is one which is required by the story, while a 'free' motif is inessential from the point of view of the story. However, from the literary point of view, the 'free' motifs are potentially the focus of art. (Selden 35)

Therefore, according to Tomashevsky's presupposition, representation is a free motif. Although it is not the center of *Becoming's* point of departure, it is instrumental in holding the narrator's story together, because, it replicates to versions that align with a context that impact on the story of the main subject in conjunction with that of her society.

3.9 Structure of *Becoming*

This segment explores the internal and external part of narrative structures that shapes the form of *Becoming*. The form is achieved in the form of a plot. *The Russian Formalists* emphasises "that only 'plot' (sjuzet) is strictly literary, while 'story' (fabula) is merely raw material awaiting the organizing hand of the writer" (34). Inasmuch as they (Formalists) insist on the plot which they believe that it is not intertwined at all with the story, nonetheless, Istvan Dobos feels that stories do count. Precisely, Dobos contends that there is an interplay between the form and the metaphor that describes the principal subject which he calls "metaphorical descriptions" (10). His argument complements some strands

of *Formalism* that approve of some entities that describe form based on the imbued stories that people tell. It is devices that constitute the story and the very elements that determine the scope and implication of the story to the central autobiographical subject.

3.9.1 External structure of *Becoming*

Externally, *Becoming* comes in five sections: *Preface*, *Becoming Me*, *Becoming Us*, *Becoming More* and an *Epilogue*. Holistically, it contains twenty-four chapters that are interconnected in nature. Together, these components contribute to the story of Michelle Obama in relation to American society. The preface is the foremost part that introduces the self and it is introduced by picture insertions that trace on the physical growth of the self. By timeline, March 2017 is the foremost date captured in the autobiography's preface. At this juncture, the already established First Lady in exit is apparent. She is just processing the events that brought her to the White House. She writes:

I'm just beginning to process what took place over these last years—from the moment in 2006 when my husband first started talking about running for president to the cold morning this winter when I climbed into a limo with Melania Trump, accompanying her to her husband's inauguration. It's been quite a ride. (13)

These events are used to join the events in chapter one of *Becoming Me*. Now that the narrator is a grown up, with privileges that show that she has transitioned from one socioeconomic sphere to another by the sense of class, she is recapturing what has transpired over those decades. In chapter one, she remembers about these particular strivings that drove her to aspire to be a pediatrician—a job that supposedly would have elevated her to change the situation at her home, or rather, "the sound of striving" (17) that I have discussed in music's segment as a narrative strategy.

In continuation, *Becoming Us* is made up of events that happen in chapter eight. The culminating affection for Barack Obama drives the events in chapter nine. She admits to having felt "feelings that came crushing" (98). This chapter propels the plot to their marriage and consequently becoming the First Family: "we'd been waiting a long, long time" (279). Even though they had won the election with over sixty-nine million popular votes, the next section *Becoming More* is joined to chapter eighteen concludes with the narrator assuming undefined roles: "there is no handbook for incoming First Ladies of the United States. It's not technically a job, nor is it an official government title." (280). Moreover, it is this occurrence that twists the narrator's life. She has gotten the privilege of touring the country and irrespective of its discontentment, she discovers that she loves it and its content: "As we moved towards the end of Obama's presidency, I thought about America this same way. I loved my country for all the ways its story could be told" (385). This event ends her narrative in the subsequent section which is an epilogue, where she coerces Americans to come together as reflected in the following citation: "let's invite one another in" (389). These events imply that externally, *Becoming's* narrative is assuming the causality of cause-effect-because that recaptures her growth alongside that of her key friends and family.

3.9.2 Internal Structure

The internal structure contains the core storyline and its metaphorical descriptions of the self's past. Both Michelle Obama's physical and psychological journeys are studied here. The self's story is interwoven in a series of events that barely move in causality. Victor Shklovsky asserts that plot, despite it being the part and parcel of text's form, it is made so by its complexity that stretches to the sum of all its blocks. To expound on this, he looks at

Tristram Shandy's story and from its parts, he affirms that "digressions, typographical games, displacement of parts of the book (preface, dedication, etc.) and extended descriptions are all devices to make us attend to the novel's form" (34). As he attests, some of his observations are apparent in *Becoming*. For instance, the narrative is introduced by displacements that defamiliarise the reader even before venturing into the actual narrative.

As an autobiography, the title depicts Michelle Obama and based on how the cover looks like, several assumptions can be made. The text "Becoming" and the name Michelle Obama is printed in white while the subject is African American. This implies that both races can integrate for coexistence since colour is what meets the eye but within, Americans are equal. This is enhanced by the message captured in the blurb. That "even when it's not pretty or perfect. Even when it's more real than you than you want it to be. Your story is what you have, what you will always have. It is something to own." On the other hand, Shklovsky tells us that dedications are pivotal in the form and they come just before the main narrative. In this case, the story of becoming is attributed to these people:

To all those people who have helped me become:

The folks who raised me—Fraser, Marian, Craig, and my vast extended family,

My circle of strong women, who always lift me up,

My loyal and dedicated staff, who continue to make me proud.

To the loves of my life:

Malia and Sasha, my two most precious peas, who are my reasons for being,

And finally, Barack, who always promised me an interesting journey. (3)

More so, how the narrator introduces the dedication, it makes the reader anticipate the content of the incoming narrative. Inasmuch as it does so, it marks as the periphery that the

story of becoming takes—If it is not her folks, extended family, her circle of strong women, members of FLOTUS staff, then it is her two daughters, Barack Obama as well as "all those people who have helped" her become.

Also, I argue that the "Obama effect" as a motivation has a bearing on the form of the autobiography. The name Obama and the prosperous becoming that he has made in the twenty-first century and by the fact that the text is a product of capturing such an accomplishment, then, Michelle Obama becomes the part and parcel of the twenty-first century's rarest phenomena. This name (Obama) therefore is what, by hypothesis, the principal reason that the suspense it comes with eventually hold the narrative together. Furthermore, its self-characterisation is what moves the plot of the story nonetheless shaped to seek apathy from the reader with careful construction of inviting descriptions. Voloshinov's central insight on the form is that "words' are active, dynamic social signs, capable of taking on different meanings and connotations for different social classes in different social and historical situations" (Selden 36). The word "Obama" wets the reader's appetite as the reader can easily be swayed to follow the stories to trace the moment, which she obtained Obama as her surname and the effect that such a transition had on her life and discovery. Along with espoused impact, the words that she employs to build upon the self-using this word is strategic. For example, before being assigned this name, Michelle was Robinson's then Craig little sister then Michelle Obama. I maintain that, the time that the subject took to acquire and drop the naming (identity) is equal to stories that she has maneuvered along with in *Becoming Me*, *Becoming Us* and *Becoming More* content.

Summarily, according to *Formalists*, "the plot prevents us from regarding the incidents as typical and familiar. Instead, we are made constantly aware how artifice

constructs or forges (makes/counterfeits) the 'reality' presented to us" (35) through language as a mode of action. It is only through the internal structure, (hidden plot) that part of inconsistencies can be deduced. As Formalist suggests, similar scenarios define the structure of these three subtitles and how they add on the grand title of *Becoming*. In other words, it is this knowledge that invites criticism, because not all stories are true; hitherto the case, that I reason that "Defamiliarisation" facilitates in filtering artifices that brings about autobiographical fallacies and inconsistencies.

3.9.3 Conclusion

The form is complex yet defines a genre. *Becoming*, as an autobiography does reveal constituents that elevates it just like other forms that Roman Jakobson feels to be inherently literary. Therefore, my focus has been revolving around the form with respect to elements that Michelle Obama uses to shape her story. Aspects from *New Criticism* have been used to expound on how she employs description to defamiliarise the perception of the reader. Besides these theoretical dissections, I have engaged the *Theory of Autobiography* for it is only then, a balanced and credible judgment has been made about the constituent of the principal text, *Becoming*.

Even though form has been problematised in such light, some axioms that jostle autobiography as nonstandard have been debunked because it has been felt that self-narration is artistic and plot driven. Moreover, additional prisms (covers, blurb and portrait) that stretch areas where Michelle Obama's form of self-inscription is interwoven to add to the narrative of the grand section has been elucidated. Still on this segment, digression within the narrative, although it has been disapproved by some strands of "Formalism" like "Russian" and "Bakhtin School, " some like Shklovsky's "Defamiliarisation" has proved

that their inclusion is indeed complex and makes *Becoming* a complex autobiography by the measure of literary expectations. All these codas manifest the complexities of form and politics of what ought to constitute autobiography. In merging these upshots, in the realm of autobiography, Louis Renza in *The Veto of the Imagination. A Theory of Autobiography* contends that autobiography is a "unique, self-defining mode of self-referential expression, one that allows, then inhibits, its ostensible project of self-representation, of converting oneself into the present promised by language" (16). Conversely, despite having studied the form of *Becoming* in such said admittances, the self, just like reflected in the preceding thesis (images that define Michelle Obama in *Becoming*) has been echoed in some sense. All these arguments considered, the form of *Becoming* is compelling by shape and logic—this is what aids in giving the text a scholarly merit and equally why studying it is adding to how Michelle Obama paints herself within the narrative form with music, journal, flashback, rhetoric, and structure of the autobiography as most foregrounded elements of her story.

CONCLUSION

A few decades ago, it was a dream that a black family could occupy the White House, while on the other hand, it was a dream for a black family to think of attaining that milestone. Textually, I have suggested that *Becoming* articulates a typical understanding of this historical paradox, because of its representation of Michelle Obama as a caliber of this unique accomplishment. This is because, from a historical perspective, there has been a noted unparalleled series of events that came about with her as the first African American woman to become the First Lady in a country where once in history, people of her genealogy were enslaved. Therefore, from African American criticism, *Becoming's* reflection of Michelle Obama is a depiction of her deliberate aim of subverting some of the preconceived images that misrepresent black women and the holistic African American community. In addition, I have problematised the concept of culture in several realms as well as class status, which altogether acts as an informative zone of images that are distinct to the former United States First Lady. Other than that, after a realisation that she uses language to inscribe herself in history and literary landscape, the fourth entry has dwelled on strategies that Michelle Obama as a woman writer employs to inscribe the self in *Becoming*.

In detail, whom she is has been treated from the concept of gender. As a woman, therefore, it has been noted that she locates herself in both private and public spheres. In the private sphere, she dramatises some of the responsibilities that are unique to her as a mother and a wife. In this segment, the concept of domesticity comes about with her as a visible woman. As noted, education gave her the voice to assert herself in public spaces. In addition to location, she comes out as an intelligent woman protagonist, which from a

theoretical perspective is a confirmation of a woman's writer who has the impetus of speaking about the self. In this slot, her portrait as a typical woman is evident from how she empowers herself in areas that were traditionally associated with men in America's context of professionalism. For instance, she made it to become a lawyer at a time when such a profession was crowded by men and white people. From politics, I have theorised that Michelle Obama represents herself as a hypothetical deputy to her husband because of the impact that her colour and femininity had (has) that Obama lacked, but which was a prerequisite for their candidacy's credibility. As the first lady, I have problematised the roles that she paints in *Becoming* as indicators of critical thinking, which is appropriate in filling a gap that is traditionally void in the West Wing office. These gaps come in shades of 'Let's Move' campaign, reducing teen pregnancy as well as acting as a representative for a girl child, women and other marginalised groups within and outside America's boundary. Other than those realms, she comes out in *Becoming* as objectified or the other. Following this, it has been noted that she has been labeled the 'angry woman' stereotype, which she has subverted by asserting such characteristics as part of her disposition. Furthermore, as a woman writer, she has demonstrated a prescription of Gynocriticism and its expectation as proposed by Elaine Showalter. Therefore, she calls upon women to support one of their own. In that regard, there are instances where she identifies, embraces and hit back in moments where women have been mistreated. This is an indication that not only does she speak for herself but 'the other' (women experiences), as well. Speaking for the other is an indication that she is a woman in politics. To become, therefore, she sends a message that sisterhood is a prerequisite because only then, problems are shared and solved. As a metaphor, Nafula Were in his study, *Negotiating Public and Private Identities:*

A Study of the Autobiographies of African Women Politicians argues that such an act is indeed, politically motivated. That: "sisterhood, motherhood, widowhood, and warriorhood as such metaphors that, when deployed by the authors as narrative features and interpreted, indicate historical consciousness" (42). As a woman in politics, Michelle Obama ties her narrative with these categories throughout her journey motif as a narrative feature of resistance to historical stereotypes that have been used to define women in America's society.

In history, she employs race as a fundamental issue that confronts her as an African American woman as well as that of her family and community. Foremost, she inscribes herself as invisible in America. In this regard, she defines herself as a descendant of a slave and a recipient of what visibility comes with. As an invisible citizen, she alludes that she is marginalised just like any other black person. This brings in another picture that locates her visibility as a black woman. In this facet, I have discussed the concept of blackness in conjunction with beauty as Michelle Obama's strategy of subverting some of the preconceived and racist depiction of black people as ugly, and unsuccessful. In addition to espoused images, it has been noted that Michelle Obama inscribes herself as a devoted wife unlike the asexual and promiscuous representation of black women by history that has been used to classify them since antebellum times. At this juncture, I have employed Carolyn West and Leah Johnson's perspectives to fuel the argument.

In the aspect of class or economic context of *Becoming*, this study has focused on areas that stretch her depiction with respect to intellectual growth as well as privileges apparent in her neighbourhood, places and spaces. The physical place and space stretch her imaging in *Becoming* because I have been able to account on the subject as a member of a

well of class. Therefore, because of how she places herself in the economic layout of South Side, I have inferred that Michelle Obama is defined by luck over lack because that is what defines the members of the middle class. So, neighbourhood discourses as well as spaces such as housing and other privileges that were in place, are what streamlined her upward projection and they are the reason that she is an established and conscious self. Last in this section, I have problematised growth concerning psychological input that class has on the intellectual development of a child. As a result, it has been noted that her channeled entry into the best schools is as a result of growing up in a stimulating home. (home with educational resources and committed parents). The two are what fostered the autonomy and present success.

In the third chapter, I discuss narrative strategies that shape her story. I argue that since *Becoming* is an autobiography, the narrator conveys her story in the first point of view and second point of view. Through 'I' point of view, she narrates her story by directly referring to herself in various economic, historical and cultural spaces. On the other hand, she has used 'you' point of view while speaking to the unseen observer. For example, upon becoming a lawyer, she employs a disembodied narrator 'you' to reveal how events unfolded to her in a career that she thought would make her happy as well as supplying to the reader, the first glimpse of how she received the news about an intern, who happened to be Barack Obama. Taken together, I have hypothesised that such narrative perspectives are imperative in asserting the subject's subjectivity as a woman and a champion of collective women stories. In addition to point of view, flashback has been identified as a principle style that offers contexts where she draws her story. Moreover, there are moments that she interplays between the present and the past as an indicator of why she is reacting

to certain immediate conditions. For instance, having been punched as a child, she refers back to that scene to justify why she can accommodate criticism. Moreover, Journal entry is important in the form of *Becoming*. I have argued that a journal in an autobiography is crucial because it ascertains the truth as well as boosting what the author remembers. By using a journal, she reveals her private to the public. For example, she confesses to the reader what she feels about her husband (that they have nothing in common) yet they live as a family. Music is another element that she uses to narrate *Becoming*. In music, there are stories that she wraps within her grand narrative, which embody political and social consciousness. Moreover, just like a journal, I argue that music in an autobiography boosts what the subject remembers. In continuation, imagery is another element that specifies how she expresses her story. Through imagery, I argue that she is a creative writer because, she defamiliarises the language to achieve an artistic effect in that, the reader tends to pay much attention to given details. In this section, I have employed views from *New Criticism* to support the claim. Other than that, she has used rhetoric questions to tell her story. As a persuasive strategy, she has used it to elicit a response to the reader. Structurally, *Becoming* is arranged in three sections (*Becoming Me*, *Becoming Us* and *Becoming More*) that are connected in nature that shows her physical and psychological growth of becoming

However, even though such observations are fundamental with respect to the two hypotheses, self-portrayal has its shortcomings, which are inextricable to the genre itself. This is because of one, its category and two, the narrator's motivation. In reflecting on the former, critics such as Georges Gusdorf believes that "one starts dissociating one's self from the others and tends to think of self as the center of the living space" (32). This pliability extends to subjectivity since the narrative is a story of the self that proves that the subject

cannot represent the society which she claims to represent. In respect to the genre, form in terms of aesthetics is a contested area with critics such as Paul de Man arguing against it (art in autobiography) while on the other hand, we have Derrida and Marjanne Gooze who vindicates its (autobiography's) style and artistry.

From how and means in which Michelle Obama contextualise about herself in *Becoming*, the scope of my research has excavated additional comments that struck my attention within the course of reading, content dissecting and writing. That albeit *Becoming* being a continuum of women's narratives, the fact that its principal motivation is based upon inscribing the self, likewise, it converges with male individualistic inscription. However, by the fact that it captures the moment of a life of the woman subject with some "actual circumstances in which she has lived" (Pascal 9), then, it is a confirmation that not only was Gusdorf Georges misconstrued for associating self-inscription to men, but also a validation that an autobiography straddles between genders. In so doing, I part way with this conversation by arguing that Michele Obama can not only be studied in *Becoming* in realm of artistry, agency and subjectivity but intersectionality, criticism and comparative studies as well. Therefore, apart from images and modes of self-inscription, studying *Becoming* can be used to extend on Michelle Obama's self-inscription from corpus of race, gender and class in the sense of their intersectionality. Second, by looking at how she expresses truth, a critique of any prevalent silence can equally add on the objective criticism. Last but not least, I insist that biographies on her can be used to represent further imaging of the self from either comparative standpoint or from the objective outlook of the autobiography's subject.

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