THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FORM IN *THE ROAD TO MAKKAH* BY MUHAMMAD ASAD

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M.A/ARTS/41224/12-13

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER IN ENGLISH LITERATURE, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA, NIGERIA

JANUARY, 2018

DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this Dissertation entitled "The Autobiographical Form in *The Road to Makkah* by Muhammad Asad" has been carried out by me in the Department of English and Literary Studies. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of this dissertation was previously presented for another degree or diploma at this or any other Institution.

Mohammed Safiyanu Sabiu	Signature	Date

CERTIFICATION

This dissertation entitled THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FORM IN *THE ROAD TO MAKKAH* BY MUHAMMAD ASAD by Safiyanu Sabiu, MOHAMMED meets the regulations governing the award of of the degree of Master of Arts in English Literature of the Ahmadu Bello University, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father Alhaji Mohammed Malami Modibbo and my mother Hajiya Aishatu Mai Jabe. Thank you for all the love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the Heavens and Earth for the countless blessings such as making this work to come to fruition despite all the challenges and difficulties.

I would like to thank the following people: my supervisor Prof. Tanimu Abubakar for his invaluable support, professional guidance and expertise. My second supervisor Dr. Edward Abah for the motivation and support which contributed enormously to the progress of the work despite all the challenges associated with a research of this nature. My heartfelt gratitude also goes out to Dr. Jonah Amadu, Dr. Abdulrahman Jaji and all the lecturers of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University. Many thanks to my wife Ummi Bako for sharing in all the joys and challenges, and my family: Gidado, Abdulrahman, Adamu, Abba, Sadiya, Ibrahim, Sani, Amina, Mahmoud and little Ruqayya – for everything.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the structural configuration of the autobiography and how various components from its narrative structure to theme and textuality interact in creating the autobiographical form. The exploration of these elements and how they are juxtaposed in Muhammad Asad's *The Road to Makkah* reveals that the form is essentially structural. The thesis, therefore, looks at the juxtaposition of entities from these elements and how this spiritual odyssey derives its form and meaning from a series of complex binary oppositions. This is done through a qualitative analysis of the primary material and related secondary literature. The work presents the argument that the autobiographical form is essentially structural. It derives both its form and meaning from a succession of binary oppositions through which the autobiographer presents a story in relation to their lifetime. To this end, the thesis contends that in *The Road to Makkah* binary opposition forms the basis upon which the autobiographer deploys most of the autobiographical elements that give both form and meaning to the narrative. The thesis also maintains that of central importance in unraveling the autobiographical form is the understanding of the limitations placed upon the autobiographer by the presence of a narrative identity system with its expectations. The study also reveals that the narrative in The Road to Makkah is based on a multiplicity of binary oppositions through several mini-narratives set within a central narrative. Thus, the autobiographer uses binary opposition as the foundation upon which the story is built. It is through this system of binary relationships that Asad is able to constitute his narrative and present his life story.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the last three decades of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st Century the autobiography has become one of the most important literary genres of contemporary times. The rising prominence of the form can be attributed to the fact that it deals with a range of contemporary concerns (Wang, 2013). It deals with issues such as selfhood and identity; the individual's relationship with his or her past; issues of gender; truth and reality; the structure of society; culture, morality and ideology, etc. (Gappmaier, 2009, p.1). These issues, most of which are central to literature, are deeply explored in *The Road to Makkah* by Muhammad Asad. It is their centrality to his narrative that makes Asad's autobiography very noticeable as a work of literature.

The study also examines how the autobiographer makes use of binary opposition as a foundation upon which his life story is told. It is deducible that the story in the primary text is constructed based on a series of binary oppositions. These oppositions are very noticeable in most of the anecdotes that populate Asad's autobiography. Thus, they give the narrative a coherent and consistent structure in the exploration of most of the key issues that are discussed in the book. Accordingly, the study focuses on unraveling the reliance of the autobiographer on binary opposition as a means of giving both form and meaning to his autobiography.

Consequently, the research explores the nature of the autobiography by examining the techniques employed in constructing the narrative in *The Road to Makkah.* A structuralist

analysis is employed to examine the autobiography as literature. This is particularly important because with the advent of Derridean Deconstruction several writers have sought to "annul the distinction between autobiography and fiction altogether" (Gappmaier, 2009, p.11). Sprinker (1980, p.342), for example, argues that "the concepts of subject, self and author collapse into the act of producing the work." Similarly, de Man in Gappmaier (2009, p.1) points out that "the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but [one] … finally undecidable."

Despite such criticisms the autobiography has continued to undeniably flourish as "a form irreducible to fiction" (Prosser, 2001, p.249). It could, then, be argued that Deconstruction's "denial of autobiography's ability to provide a means of self-representation is unsatisfactory" (Gappmaier, 2009, p.12). Prosser (2001, p.249) also maintains that autobiographies are always assigned a "separate space in our experience of reading them and they remain distinct from works of fiction by the same authors." Thus, readers recognize the autobiography as being characterized by specific types of artistic or cultural composition, identified by codes which the audience recognizes (Anderson, 136, in Gappmaier, 2001, p.5).

Works in the field of autobiography studies by Gusdorf (1956), Lejeune (1973), Blowers (2000) and Prosser (2001) point to the fact that the fictive nature of textual representation does not totally obliterate the reference to a living individual in the autobiography. Prosser (2001, p.249) illustrates this paradox when he writes that "after theory we accept the impossibility of autobiography and go on reading (and writing about) autobiography as if we still believed it had something of the real to offer us that fiction does not." According to Eakin as cited in Prosser (2001, p.249), the autobiography remains distinct from fiction

because of its "referential aesthetic" that keeps it distinct in the mind of the reader. Yet, it is unquestionably tied to representation because it seeks to tell a story. Therefore, it relies on an aesthetics that is tied to representation and it borrows heavily from the methodological procedures of fiction. Thus, it is a representational form presented in relation to the autobiographer's life.

The autobiography, therefore, is a literary-historical personal reflection by an individual. It is also a literary form because autobiographers set out to write a story "… as a kind of text to be read and interpreted as part of the field of writing" Sutherland (n.d). Consequently, like any other literary work, it is made up of materials arranged according to proportions and relationships. The mutual attraction and repulsion gives the autobiography a structure and form (Shumaker, 1954, p. 101). This is evident in *The Road to Makkah* the structure and form which is basically a product of the binary oppositions inherent in most of the anecdotes related by Asad in the story.

The exploration of the autobiographical form in this thesis therefore relies to a large extent on the analysis of narrative in the primary text. This is primarily because it is through narrative that any work is first experienced. Narrative is what constitutes the work. Ricoeur (1984, p. 72) captures this point when he states that, "Narrative gives form to what is unformed, transforming *fabula* into *sjuzet.*" Thus, the analysis will reveal the presence of binary oppositions within the narrative in terms of aspects such as presence and silence; past and present; silence and telling as well as the presentation of different temporal scopes and self, etc. The emphasis on narrative is also important because as Gudmundsdóttir (2003, p. 59) points out, "it establishes causality and continuity and allocates meaning to events."

This study therefore examines the interrelations of constituent parts in the autobiography particularly in relation to the *The Road to Makkah* by Muhammad Asad. The book is an account of the author's journey from life in Europe as Leopold Weiss to his experiences and subsequent residency in the Middle East. He was born to Jewish parents in 1900 in Lwow in Austria. He attended the University of Vienna before dropping out to pursue a successful career as a journalist. *The Road to Makkah* tells the story of how he encounters Islam and his subsequent conversion to the faith. It was first published in the year 1954 as a spiritual and travel odyssey. It received significant accolade as a work of high literary, spiritual and cultural value. Accordingly, Rahim (1995) states that it is, "one of the most remarkable spiritual autobiographies ever…" A noticeable feature of *The Road to Makkah* is the author's presentation and treatment of historically opposing entities. There is a recurrence of binary operations within the text. It could be argued that these operations seem to determine the structure of the entire book. The numerous anecdotes in the primary text are based on a multiplicity of binary operations. Thus, the structure and meaning of the work is significantly based on binary relations.

1.2 Statements of Research Problem

In *The Road to Makkah* the autobiographer makes use of binary oppositions to logically classify and organise life experiences. Accordingly, this work examines how Asad deploys binary oppositions in relation to the various autobiographical elements that define the autobiography. Hence, there is a focus on an objective analysis of interrelationships in the primary text. This is unlike most approaches that focus on examining texts based solely through aesthetic experience. Thus, an analysis of binary relationships is utilized to explore the narrative structure of the primary text. Such an approach will focus on examining the structural configuration of the system of

interrelationships deployed in organizing and presenting the narrative of the primary text.

Consequently, the thesis has the following propositions:

i. In the *The Road to Makkah,* binary oppositions provide a framework that makes meaning relational through a central narrative interspersed with mini narratives.

ii. Meaning in the autobiography is a product of certain structural systems of signification based on well-articulated rules.

iii. A referential aesthetic to the autobiographer's life significantly differentiates it from fiction.

iv. Viewed from a structuralist perspective, meaning in *The Road to Makkah* is a product of relationships among the various elements that make up its narrative.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to illustrate that in *The Road to Makkah* the significant elements of the narrative are structured using binary relationships. Consequently, an analysis of these relationships yields insight into the structural configuration of the primary text. The study also examines the notion of autobiographical truth and objectiveness in the form. Thus, the study explores the primary text as a representational account of personal truth and identity with the aim of unraveling the unique handling of autobiographical elements by the autobiographer. The objectives of the thesis are to illustrate that:

i. The interaction of textual elements depicts the author's history within the limits of a narrative identity system.

ii. Autobiographical elements such as memory, experience and identity depend on binary opposition for their function, meaning and relevance.

iii. The autobiography is a constructed reality.

iv. Elements in the autobiography combine and contrast to produce meaning.

1.4 Significance of the Research

This research examines the primary text from the perspective of binary operations and as such it highlights the richness of the narrative structure employed by Asad in the book. The study contributes to existing knowledge in the field of Autobiography Studies by scholars such as Prosser (2001), Blowers (2000), and Lejeune (1973). As such, there is an emphasis on the relationship between narrative and life writing in the thesis. The relationship between narrative, temporality and self-knowledge also makes the autobiography realizable, realistic and distinguishable from other genres. The autobiographical theorist Paul John Eakin (2000) has written extensively on the subject. According to Gappmaier (2009, p.13) "In *Touching the World*, Eakin asks a pivotal question of why autobiography has not vanished into fiction even though poststructuralism had written a premature obituary of autobiography. He [Eakin] maintains that it is autobiography's referential aesthetic that keeps it separate in the mind of the reader." Prosser (2001, p.249) also maintains that "postructuralist cynicism", which maintains that the autobiography lacks a means of representing the self, is unsatisfactory. Prosser (2001, p.249) additionally maintains that the autobiography "as a form is irreducible to fiction". One reason he advances for this argument is that the autobiography has continued to flourish and readers assign a separate space in their experience of reading them (Prosser, 2001, p.249). Readers classify autobiographical works quite distinctly from fictional works even if written by the same author. This is mainly due to a difference in the referential aesthetics involved in the autobiography.

The arguments presented above are made possible because in the writing, reading and interpretation of autobiographical works there is a narrative identity system that comes

into play. The system is based on the notions of personal truth and identity. Eakin (2008) discusses the narrative identity system elaborately. An important aspect of it is that the autobiography presents a verifiable narrative. Thus, the reader reads with the expectation that a cardinal truth is being presented in the autobiography despite its being tied to representation. Therefore, the narrative identity system is rule-governed with telling the truth at its core.

The study also generates further studies on the primary text because of its artistic richness and the relevance of Asad's narrative to contemporary debates on various important issues. His use of binary oppositions highlights some debates that have continued to the present day. The narrative in *The Road to Makkah* also presents a rich analysis of how the present and past could be blended seamlessly into a story. This is particularly noticeable in relation to how the autobiographer makes use of intertextual connections in the primary text. Similarly, the autobiographer also employs a similar approach in a discussion of various moral and ideological issues in the primary text. Consequently, this study adds to existing knowledge on both the form and content of the autobiography in relation to Asad's approach in the presentation of his narrative.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This research is restricted to exploring the autobiographical form in relation to Muhammad Asad's *The Road to Makkah* which is one of the most successful spiritual autobiographies (Rahim, 1995). The choice is based on the richness of the text in terms of its artistic and thematic preoccupations. Another reason for the choice is due to the wealth of extensive and intensive employment of binary oppositions for most part of the

book. Consequently, the research will concentrate on the exploration of binary operations in the primary text and how these operations enrich the narrative.

1.6 Methodology

This research is largely a qualitative investigation that is explanatory and interpretive in analyzing both the primary and secondary texts. It is a library-based research which seeks to examine the recurrence of binary operations in the several anecdotes within the primary text. Thus, the research involves a theoretical-critical examination of the primary text along narrative structure, thematic preoccupation and interaction, representation and interrelationship of culture and institutions.

1.7. 1 The role of narrative in the autobiography

According to Flanagan (2012) "Evidence strongly suggests that humans in all cultures come to cast their identity in some sort of narrative form. We are inveterate storytellers." It is a view that undoubtedly illustrates the centrality of narrative in how humans interact and exchange perspectives. It helps humans to shape and maintain a sense of self (Eakin, 2008). This perhaps explains its very ubiquitous nature in the lives of humans. It permeates all aspects of how humans communicate and share experiences. Rimmon-Kenan (1983) illustrates this position when she writes that "Newspaper reports, history books, novels, films, comic strips, pantomime, dance, gossip, psychoanalytic sessions are only some of the narratives which permeate our lives." Our lives are clearly immersed in narrative practices. The autobiography is also another form of narrative practice which adds to the list above by Rimmon-Kenan. Therefore, narrative is widespread and indispensable in most human communicative means. Hanne (2001, p.634) encapsulates

this position in relation to the autobiography when he writes thus: “Any examination of the connection between narrative and life writing must start with an acknowledgement of the ubiquity and centrality of narrative to the personal and social existence of all humans.” Consequently, according to Gappmaier (2009) most researchers in autobiography studies such as Blowers (2000) emphasize on the need to view the autobiography as a “specialized form of the much wider human practice by which we use narrative continually to invent and reinvent ourselves and the world around us (Hanne).”

Narrative is of such importance to human communication partly because it is a constructive process that allows a narrator to describe or re-describe a sequence of events which could be both non-fictional and fictional. However, within the context of this research work narrative will for the most part be viewed in relation to the presentation of verifiable events. It enables the autobiographer to explore and present self-knowledge as it relates to their lifetime. Louis Mink in Gappmaier (2009) denotes it as “a primary-cognitive instrument” while Jameson (2009) sees it as “the all informing process … the central function or instance of all human mind.” Thus, the autobiography is another type of this practice where humans share their experiences directly with an audience with both autobiographer and reader acknowledging that this is a narrative of self-knowledge. This is achieved through the deployment of certain autobiographical elements that give the narrative its distinctive form.

Therefore, narrative plays a dominant role in the way that autobiographer’s relate their life experiences. This is only natural because narrative plays a dominant role in how humans communicate. Writing on the ubiquity and centrality of narrative Gappmaier (2009) maintains that the importance of narrative “… may be found in the fact that

human existence and narrative share a fundamental feature: both are temporal in nature." They are both based on successive events. Rimmon-Kenan (1983) also views it "as a succession of events." She further elaborates that "Narration suggests (1) a *communication* process in which the narrative as a message is transmitted by addresser to addressee and (2) the *verbal* nature of the medium used to transmit the message." The arguments by both Gappmaier (2009) and Rimmon-Kenan (1983) illustrate the importance of narrative to describing lived time within the context of verbal forms. It is in fact unavoidable in the presentation and description of lived time (Hanne, 2001).

The relationship and interconnection between narrative and self-knowledge in the autobiography also points to the key aspect of time. Time is a concept that is dominant in human existence. The notion of universal time is experienced by humans daily and seasonally as the days, months and years go by (Blowers, 2001, p.107). It is within their context that the notion of an historical time also exists. However, according to Blowers (2001, p.107) there also exists "historical time, which mediates between universal time and our experience of lived time." The difference between these two concepts of universal and historical time according to Blowers (2001) is based on the latter being circular and the former being unidirectional and irreversible. Blowers (2001) further maintains that the unidirectional and irreversible nature of historical time permits humans to measure the passing of time and also to talk about it. The utilization of historical time is one of the distinguishing features of the autobiography. However, the narrative structures that permit the deployment of historical time in narrative are similar to those used in fictional narratives. This is, in fact, one of the major arguments by proponents of

the argument that the autobiography is also fictional. Blowers (2001) illustrates the relationship thus:

> the invention of historical time allows us … to place ourselves in a continuum and compare our lives with those who went before us, even to an extent immortalize ourselves by looking back to our 'forefathers' in one direction and towards our children … in another. The narrative structure (or ways of refiguring time) that we have invented for putting ourselves on this historical continuum are the same structures that we use to refigure time in fictional narratives. (p.108).

Therefore, time is a definitive aspect of most narratives. Its usage in the autobiography is very pronounced as the writer uses it in a manner similar to a signpost in the quest to utilize historical time in rendering the story of a life into text.

Rimmon-kenan in Gappmaier (2009, p.37) further illustrates the relationship and relevance of time to narrative when she writes that "time is not only a recurrent theme in a great deal of narratives, it is also a *constituent* factor of both story and text." However, it is her attempt at elaborating on what constitutes story and text that adds more to the relationship and relevance as illustrated above. According to Gappmaier (2009, p.37) "She differentiates between three different aspects of narrative: the events, their verbal representation, and the act of telling or writing, which she labels 'story', 'text' and 'narration' respectively. Gappmaier (2009) explains the difference between the three from Rimmon-Kenan's perspective accordingly:

> Story refers to the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in the events … The 'text', on the other hand, is what we read or hear; it is a 'a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling … Because the text is communicated, 'it implies someone who speaks or writes it. The act or the process of production is the third aspect – 'narration'.' … All three of these elements of narrative unfold along the

> temporal axis: time is constitutive of both the means of representation through language (narration, text) and the object represented (the events of the story).

The threefold separation of "story", "text", and "narration" and their relationship to existence and representation or content and form is one of the major premises upon which the autobiography is consigned to fiction (Eakin, 1989, p.99). Yet, a close examination will reveal that the isolation of these three concepts that define both historical and fictional discourse illustrates that they are "part and parcel of the same phenomenon" (Gappmaier, 2009, p.38). Consequently, any such separation or isolation of these concepts is only aimed at providing a tool for narrative analysis. It is a tradition that is very common in structural analysis of texts. Therefore, such isolation only aims at producing theoretical models of analysis in both structural and autobiographical studies. Rimmon-Kenan (1984) argues further on story, text and narration:

> The text is the only aspect directly available to the reader. It is through the text that he or she acquires knowledge of the story (its object) and of the narration (the process of its production) … However, the narrative text is itself defined by these two other aspects: unless it told a story it would not be a narrative, and without being narrated or written it would not be a text. Indeed, story and narration may be seen as two metonymies of the text, the first evoking it through its narrative content, the second through its production. (p.14).

Rimmon-Kenan's argument above additionally illustrates the interdependence between content (story) and form (text, narration). Despite this relationship in autobiography studies the content of the narrative is seen as true and factual. Yet, in most narrative analysis "existence" and "textuality" are viewed as two phenomena that should never mix or coexist on the same plane. It is a problematically strict division in narrative theory and

even in traditional models of autobiography studies (Gappmaier, 2009, p.39). However, proponents of this strict division fail to acknowledge that human action can only be narrated because "it is always already articulated by signs, rules and norms … It is always symbolically mediated" Paul Ricouer in Gudmundsdottir (2003, p.83). The unavoidability of signs, rules and norms in narrative is one of the underlying principles of structuralism and its models of analysis. All the models of structural analysis from Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Vladimir Propp, and Jonathan Culler, etc. illustrate the incontestable notion of signs, rules and norms being the foundation of both language and narrative.

1.7. 2 Narrative identity and the autobiography

Writing in the preface of *Living Autobiography* (2000), the Autobiographical theorist Paul John Eakin maintains that "our life stories are not merely about us but in an inescapable and profound way are us, at least insofar as we are players in the narrative identity system that structures our current social arrangements." To Eakin, the reality of human society is now based on a system that places significant emphasis on narrative identity which individuals might choose to share with others via a communication process such as the autobiography. The modes such as autobiography that allow individuals to share their life stories are only possible because the narrative identity system accepts that people can display these stories as factual narratives. In a critique against the condemnation of narrative identity, Eakin (1989) maintains thus:

> I think that Strawson is mistaken when he attributes the dominance of the idea of narrative identity to "intellectual fashion." What he fails to reckon with is that we are embedded in a narrative identity system whether we

> like it or not. Our social arrangements … assume that we all have narrative identities and that we can display them on demand. (p.16).

One important feature of the narrative identity system is based on the idea that what individuals present to the readership is factual and verifiable. As earlier, mentioned in the course of this research the reading public easily classifies and distinguishes autobiographical works as different from fictional narratives. It is a reading response that has defied every poststructuralist attempt at equating the autobiography to fiction.

Going back to the issue of the narrative identity system it is important to point out that like most systems it is based on certain rules. According to Eakin (2000, p.17) "In fact, the language we use when we present ourselves and our stories to others is a rule-governed discourse, both when we talk and when we write …" His position implies that the narrative system is rule governed. Telling the truth is the cardinal rule according to Eakin. Accordingly, Eakin (2001, p.21) writes that "Autobiography is a referential art: it self-consciously, usually explicitly, positions itself with reference to the world …" A consequence of this perception of the autobiography is that its writer is always expected to present only "factual" events in their narrative. This is in fact not a new idea as other writers like Lejeune (1989) have written about this idea particularly as it relates to the notion of the "autobiographical pact".

However, it is a violation of this cardinal rule of telling the truth that clearly illustrates the expectations of the narrative identity system. Eakin (2008) illustrates a particular case in the United States of America where such a violation occurred in 2005. The passage will be quoted at length in order to view the issue in its full context:

> It is hard to imagine how autobiography's usually tacit conventions could have been given greater exposure than they were in the case of James Frey's memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, which was adopted by Oprah Winfrey's Book Club in the fall of 2005. The controversy over the book, which erupted a few months later, caught my attention on Tuesday, January 10, 2006. In an article in the *New York Times* titled "Best-Selling Memoir Draws Scrutiny" (Wyatt), I learned that a website suitably name The Smoking Gun had posted a critique of Frey's story on January 8, charging that had "wholly fabricated or wildly embellished details of his purported criminal career." The initial response from Doubleday, Frey's publisher, reported on January 11 in the Times under the heading "When A Memoir And Facts Collide" (Wyatt), was dismissive: by Doubleday's permissive definition, in a memoir, anything goes – it is the author's call. But that same night, the author was called to account on *CNN's Larry King Live*. Quizzed by King, Frey conceded that he had made up some details, but he stood by the basic truth of his story, namely, "that he was an alcoholic and drug addict who overcame his addiction" (Wyatt, "Writer"). Moreover, Oprah Winfrey called in to Larry King during the show to express her continuing faith in Frey and his "underlying message of redemption" (quoted in Dowd). As Maureen Dowd's column put it a couple of days later: "Oprah! How could ya? And on the 13th, the *Times* ran an editorial on Frey titled simply "Call It Fiction."
>
> Just when I thought that the Frey flap was running out of gas, if anything, it picked up speed in the following days. By this point, the story was popping up everywhere in columns, letters, and cartoons. On Sunday, January 15, one week after the Smoking Gun posting, the *Time's* lead story in the Week in Review section featured a wide-ranging discussion of autobiographical truth under the title "My True Story, More or Less, And Maybe Not at All" (Kennedy). That same Sunday, on the op-ed pages, Mary Karr, author herself of two outstanding memoirs, wrote a scathing attack on Frey titled "His So-Called Life." "Call me outdated," she announced, "but I want to stay hamstrung by objective truth." "Distinguishing between fiction and non- isn't nearly the taxing endeavor some would have us believe," Karr commented scornfully, "Sexing a chicken is way harder…" … In September of 2006, Frey and his publisher [Doubleday] apparently agreed to recompense readers who filed lawsuits claiming they had been defrauded when they bought *A Million Little Pieces.* (p.17).

Frey's case above demonstrates that narrative identity system places the burden of sticking to facts on the autobiographer. It also reinforces the notion of clearly demarcating a line separating factual and fictional narratives. Consequently, it is now generally considered a transgression when an autobiographer embellishes the

autobiography with unreal elements. Therefore, misrepresentation of biographical and historical truth is a practice that erodes the claim to autobiography.

The autobiography is one of the most important literary genres of contemporary times. The rising prominence of the form can be attributed to the fact that it deals with a range of contemporary issues. However, this research focuses attention on examining the techniques employed by Asad in *The Road to Makkah*. The thesis also approaches the primary text from the perspective that the autobiography is largely a work that presents factual and verifiable truths in relation to the autobiographer's life. Thus, narrative in the autobiography becomes a vehicle for the revelation of the self. It is with this understanding that the thesis approaches Asad's narrative with the aim of studying his employment of binary relations. These relations appear to largely determine his deployment of the autobiographical form in *The Road to Makkah*.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Structuralism as Theoretical Framework

The analytical framework for this research is Structuralism with emphasis on Roland Barthes' model on binary operations. The analysis of texts in the thesis is derived from the emphasis of Structuralism on studying works as systems bound up by structures, relationships and rules. It is a methodology that interprets literary works using an intrinsic approach that is guided by the quest for objectivity. The aim is to explore a text based on an examination of the multiple interrelationships within it. Bressler (2003) illustrates this point when he writes that "this methodology shows the process of decoding a text in relationship to the codes provided by the structure of language itself." There is a focus on how linguistic elements interact and how this interaction creates meaning based on difference.

For Barthes the emphasis is therefore on how the text conveys meaning through the codes that constitute the work. This mode of literary analysis derives origin from the works of the French scholar Ferdinand De Saussure whose posthumous essays titled: *Course in General Linguistics* essentially set the tone for subsequent structuralist assumptions. Saussure's essay focuses on the quest to introduce a scientific mode of analysis to the study and interpretation of language. Thus, Structuralism views language as a system with constituent units that could be analysed like any other system on the basis of its interacting units. Accordingly Eagleton (2008, p.82), "Structuralism, as the term suggests, is concerned with structures, and more particularly with examining the general laws by which they work." It therefore places emphasis on the form of the work.

The laws or rules by which the structures of a text work would invariably determine its narrative structure and ultimately its meaning. Eagleton (2008) refers to such rules as "mental operations" that form the foundation of the narrative in a text. For Barthes binary operations constitute these "mental operations" that are so relevant to the classification and organization of reality (Eagleton, 2008, p.90). It is a position that is well illustrated in his famous text S/Z where he noted that the /s/ and /z/ in Balzac's *Sarrassine* are a minimal pair that operate on the basis of binary opposition. It is the same rule that distinguishes, for example, the phonemes /p/ and /b/, /t/ and /d/, and /f/ and /v/ respectively. Consequently, Barthes according to Eagleton (2008, p.86) "… declares that all language is its own self-enclosed system based upon binary operations (difference). Eagleton (2008) further expounds on Barthes' position especially as it relates to literature and meaning in these words:

> Barthes then applies his assumption that meaning develops through difference to all social contexts, including fashions, familial relations, dining, and literature, to name a few. When applied to literature, an individual text is simply a message – a parole – that must be interpreted by using the appropriate codes or signs or binary operations that form the basis of the entire system, the langue. Only through recognizing the codes or binary operations within the text, says Barthes, can the message encoded within the text be explained… By finding other binary oppositions within the text and showing how these oppositions interrelate, the structuralist can then decode the text, thereby explaining its meaning. (p.86).

Meaning in every text is determined by its structure. In terms of literature, the quest for its meaning would require an investigation into the conditions surrounding the act of interpreting a text (Bressler, 2006, p.83). This implies that how meaning is conveyed occupies the central idea behind structuralist analysis. At the core of this idea is the belief that any individual work is only an isolated text (parole) whose meaning would be embedded in the overall system of rules and meaning (langue). Therefore, any investigation of an individual work without a focus on

unraveling the values and beliefs behind the underlying system of codes and rules that make it possible negates the structuralist perspective on meaning.

It is also arguable that structuralism ushered in some of the most profound developments in the course of literary history especially from the twentieth century. The theory offers a fundamental way of thinking and viewing literature and the world that is grounded in the perception and description of systems and structures. Central to structuralism is the understanding that the world and by extension works of art are systems possessing a structure. These systems could be understood only by an examination of the relationships that determine their coexistence. This emphasis on systems and structures by structuralism is illustrated by Sturrock (2003) in the following words:

> [To structuralism] Everything which is not by its nature indivisible might be shown to possess a structure, or to be a complex whole capable of analysis into its constituent elements, these elements being themselves definable not as independent entities but in terms of the mappable relations in which they stand to the other elements with which they coexist in a particular system or structure. (p.21).

A closer examination of Sturrock's position implies that the search for meaning in structuralism would be based on examining the relationships of the constituent elements of a narrative. Meaning, thus, is based on interrelationships of the structural elements of any system which could be a story, fashion, sports, etc. Sturrock (p. 21) also adds that "Structuralism is distinctive for studying its objects explicitly as *whole* and the parts which make up those wholes as *parts*, that is, never purely intrinsically but in terms of the contribution they make to the whole they are part of."

Such perspectives on structuralism go back to the work of the Swiss linguist and theorist Ferdinand de Saussure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Structuralism's unique approach to language and literary theory are directly attributable to his scientific investigations of language. He introduced a momentous historic shift in the nature of perception which finally crystallized through his works in the early twentieth century. Hawkes (2003) elaborates on Saussure's work:

> Like any other innovator Saussure was in reaction against an orthodoxy: in his case the orthodoxy of the later nineteenth century which dictated that language be studied historically and genetically. The question that the linguists then chose to ask and to answer were chiefly ones of the origins and evolution of particular languages or groups of languages. They were obsessed with change and ignored what it was exactly that was changing. The first great shift which Saussure introduces into his linguistics is intended to go against this emphasis and, as it were, to hold the object of study – language – steady for long enough to enable its permanent structure to be investigated. "Properly conceived of," Humboldt had declared, "language is something persistent and in every instant transitory." It was the persistent aspect which Saussure meant to uncover. (p.27).

The focus on examining language historically and genetically was a methodology rooted in philology which was the science of language for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Bressler (2003, p.76) "Philologists described, compared and analysed the languages of the world to discover similarities and relationships." This diachronic approach laid emphasis on the historical development of languages particularly how words or sounds change etymologically or phonologically (Bressler, 2003, p.76). At the heart of philology's approach were its theoretical assumptions on the nature of language. This approach known as the mimetic theory of language maintains that language directly mirrors the world. It is a perspective that consequently views words as symbols for things in the world. Bressler (2003) illustrates this position in the following words:

> Known as the mimetic theory of language, this linguistic hypothesis asserts that words (either spoken or written) are symbols for things in the world, each word having its own referent – the object, concept or idea that is represented and/or symbolized by that word. According to this theory, the symbol (a word) equals a thing:
>
> Symbol = Thing
> (word) (p.77)

Central to Saussure's work in structural linguistics is his introduction of a synchronic approach to the study of language. It is a method that focuses on studying language at a particular point in time rather than a historical phenomenon. Emphasis is placed on the language, its various components and how they function at a particular point in time. Eagleton (2008) accordingly illustrates Saussure's position thus:

> Saussure viewed language as a system of signs, which was to be studied 'synchronically' – that is to say, studied as a complete system at a given point in time… Each sign was to be seen as being made up of a 'signifier' (a sound-image, or its graphic equivalent), and a 'signified' (the concept or meaning). The three black marks *c – a – t* are a signifier which evoke the signified 'cat' in an English mind. (p.84).

The consequence of this major shift in linguistic analysis is the understanding that language is determined by its own internal structure and system of rules. These rules determine every aspect of a language such as its phonology and phonetics, morphology, syntax and semantics.

2.1.1 Langue and Parole

Structuralism is therefore very persistent on the importance of systems, structures and rules to any understanding of language. This is very much highlighted in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, a collection of his lecture notes published posthumously by his students and which forms the basis of structuralist literary theory according to Bressler (2003, p.77). In the notes Saussure discusses the concepts of langue and parole. Such rules of language such as phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics which are mastered to communicate in language Saussure

dubs as langue. Bressler (2003, p. 80) writes that it is "the structure of the language that is mastered and shared by all its speakers". The langue of a language therefore illustrates the overall body of structure and rules that allows for individual configurations by the users of the language.

Consequently, it is langue that gives rise to the possibility of individual utterances in a language. The individual's actual utterances Saussure refers to as parole. Thus, the langue makes it possible for a user of a language to make an infinite number of utterances. However, such utterances will be determined by the langue of the language in question. Any utterance or instance of parole must conform to the established rules in order to make meaning. Accordingly, Bressler (2003, p.80) writes that "… langue emphasizes the social aspect of language and an understanding of the overall language system." Bressler's position implies that the proper study of language and meaning should be rooted in the analysis of the overall system which is langue. Any analysis of parole should be directed towards unearthing the systems behind the language.

Saussure's position on langue and parole was revolutionary to the study of meaning in literature. It generated significant shifts and interests in literary interpretation based on the search for a universal narrative structure. Similarly, the quest for understanding meaning based on intertextual connections also garnered significant interest with the birth of structuralism. Another major pattern in the quest for literary interpretation related to the theory is the search for a system of recurrent patterns or motifs in literary works. So also is the emphasis on what distinguishes a particular genre from another in terms of structural configuration. These shifts were catalyzed significantly by Saussure's work. A look at them illustrates a quest to understand what constitutes langue in terms of literature and language.

2.1.2 Arbitrariness and Difference in Structuralism

The idea of a word or symbol being a direct referent to a concept or thing in the world as espoused by philologists was dismissed by Saussure. He argued that a word was not a direct referent to anything. Bressler (2003, p.81) writes that "Saussure proposed that words are signs made up of two parts: the signifier (a written or spoken mark) and a signified (a concept)." The sign is thus a union of the signifier and signified. Bressler (2003) aptly illustrates Saussure's position and its impact on linguistics:

> Accordingly, for Saussure a word does not represent a referent in the objective world but a sign. Unlike previous generations of philologists who believed that we perceive things (word = thing) and then translate them into units or meaning, Saussure revolutionizes linguistics by ascertaining that we perceive signs. (p.81).

This mode of thinking did not only alter the course of linguistics but also literature and theory. It opened up literature to a systematic analysis rooted mostly in the work rather in contexts beyond the text. Saussure's position on the sign as illustrated above is directly related to his position on the arbitrary nature of the sign. The relationship between the signifier and signified, he argued, is arbitrary. It is simply a convention that has evolved over time among the users of the language who agree to refer to things using various particular signs. Saussure accordingly maintains that there is no natural or iconic relationship between the signifier and signified, "nor is there any natural relationship between the linguistic sign and what it represents (Bressler, 2003, p.81)." His argument here poses a tricky question on how people perceive signs and their world in general. His response to the question of how we differentiate one sign from another led to perhaps one of structuralism's most significant maxims about difference in language. Bressler (2003) maintains that:

> For Sausssure, meaning is therefore relational and a matter of difference. Within the system of sound markers that comprise our language, we know ball, for instance, because we differentiate it from hall, tail, and pipe. Likewise, we know the concept "bug" because it differs from the concepts "truck," "grass," and "kite." As Saussure declares, "In language there are only differences." (p.81).

Saussaure's position above illustrates that words have only a relational meaning within the overall system of language. Accordingly, Groden (1994, p.652) writes that users only recognize a word "because it is defined as an element in a system, the 'structural whole' of language." Therefore, the quest for meaning should be based on systematically examining the system that makes the possibility of meaning based on differences and interrelationships.

2.1.3 Basic Assumptions of Structuralism

The basic assumptions of structuralism are based on the notion of structure in literary analysis. As a theory it views literary works and language as a system which is based on relationships. According to Groden (1994, p.697) structuralism emphasizes on "The systemic nature of language, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." It is an argument that also brings to the fore the philosophical position of structuralism which is based on the notion that reality is made up of relationships and not things (Abubakar, 2014). Thus, the search for meaning revolves around exploring the totality of the structural codes of a text. The focus of literary analysis should be on how the various parts of the text work to make the whole function. It is only such a practice that shifts the focus of literary interpretation unto the elements that make up the subject. Bressler (2003) further elaborates on this position in the following words:

> Strcturalists find meaning, then, in the relationship among the various components of a system. When applied to literature, this principle becomes revolutionary. The proper study of literature, for the structuralists, now involves an inquiry into the conditions surrounding the act of interpretation itself (how literature conveys meaning), not an in-depth investigation of an individual work. Since an individual

> work can only express only those values and beliefs of the system of which it is a part, structuralists emphasize the system (langue) wherby texts relate to each other, not an examination of an isolated text (parole). They believe that a study of the system of rules that govern literary interpretation becomes the critic's primary task. (p.82).

At the core of Bressler's argument and indeed that of structuralism is the assumption that reality derives its significance in terms of relationships. Codes, signs and rules that govern all aspects of human social and cultural practices only illustrate and make possible such relationships.

Structuralism also assumes that any system such as a literary work is based on rules. According to Abubakar (2014) "The actual cognitive issue in all relationships is the procedure through which that system operates." Accordingly, Bressler (2003, p.83) also writes that "Such a belief presupposes that the structure of literature is similar to the structure of language. Like language, so say the structuralists, literature is a self-enclosed system of rules that is composed of language." Therefore, literature is based on its own rules without any need for an outside referent in the quest to understand it. This is due to the methodology central to structuralism where the aim of any interpretation is the search for the underlying system of codes that convey a text's meaning (Bressler, 2003). Thus, how a literary work conveys meaning through the various rules that enable its system of codes to function is central to structuralism. It is an interpretive methodology that places significant emphasis on how meaning is actually conveyed.

The theory also assumes that language constructs reality. Therefore, an author's intentions can no longer be assumed as the sole meaning of a text. Meaning, argues the structuralists, is determined by the shared system which governs the writer. Thus, the writer is bound by certain universal variables or patterns already established. It is against such patterns that a structural analysis would proceed in examining a work of art. For example, a structuralist would ask what

would make a work a novel when examining it against universal variables such as point-of-view, individuation and plot, etc. in relation to, for example, the rules of plot (Abubakar, 2014). Therefore, meaning is generated in the act of writing, reading and interpretation. It is not an innocent phenomena located in the text alone.

Structuralism is also based on the assumption that linguistic signs are arbitrary. It stresses that linguistic elements have no inherent relationship to the things they describe. Thus signs, according to structuralism, can only be studied functionally. Groden (1994, p.697) aptly illustrates this position when he writes that "The arbitrary nature of linguistic elements, where they are defined in terms of the function and purpose they serve rather than in terms of their inherent qualities" means that signs cannot be studied by their causes. Therefore, the sign in language is always functional. Thus, the meanings of signs shift in language. Meaning of individual signs is thus deeply rooted in the structural configuration of a text.

Another assumption central to structuralism is the notion that linguistic elements combine and contrast to produce meaning. This is based on Saussure's position that goes back to the basic building blocks in human language. According to him phonemes which are the smallest meaningful units of sound enable communication based on differences as used in various combinations. Such contrast based combinations extend beyond combining phonemes alone. They permeate all aspects of narrative and communication in the use of language. It is such rules that enable communication based on differences. According to Eagleton (2008, p.90) "The rules which governed such combinations could then be seen as a kind of grammar, a set of relations beneath the surface of the narrative. These relations … were inherent in the human mind itself …" To Eagleton (2008) such relations as binary operations are inherent in the human mind itself for they are ways that permit the classification and organization of reality.

It is against these assumptions that the primary text will be examined to uncover some of the general and internal laws that make its realization possible. A structural analysis will therefore examine the rules that govern Assad's utilization of the narrative elements that define his autobiography. The central aim is therefore an exploration of how the autobiography works by subjecting it to a structuralist critique. This systematic analysis will therefore focus on how the autobiographer is able to illustrate reality through the use of narrative. It is an attempt that is invariably tied up to the uncovering of the structure of the autobiography and the rules that make it possible. At the heart of these rules is the concept of relationships based on combinations and contrasts. Thus, the analysis of how binary operations systematically work is an integral part of the analysis in this research.

2.1. 4 Assessment Criteria

The following tenets of Structuralism as outlined by Eagleton (2008), Assiter (1984) and Abubakar (2014) form the basis of analysis of the primary text:

i. Reality is made up of relationships and not things. The search for meaning should therefore be on how parts work to make the whole function. Focus should be on the elements of a system and their interrelationships.

ii. A system is based on rules. The actual cognitive issue in all relationships is the procedure through which that system operates.

iii. Language constructs reality. Consequently, Structuralism looks for universal variables or patterns in a text. Thus, it lays emphasis on intertextuality.

iv. Meaning is generated in the act of writing, reading and interpretation.

v. Every system has a structure beneath the surface of meaning and this structure determines the position of each element of the system.

The analysis of the primary text based on the foregoing assumptions illustrates how relationships determine reality as presented by the autobiographer. Emphasis is also placed on examining what rules make the narrative possible and how such rules operate in the autobiography. The analysis also examines how meaning is generated in the process of writing, reading and interpretation particularly in relation to binary operations. Thus, the analysis closely analyses the interrelationship between language and reality in the form. Focus is also placed on examining the positioning of the significant elements of the narrative and how this positioning is based on a structure.

2.1.5 Literature Review

The meaning of the Greek words which define the etymological roots of the word "Autobiography" presents a good definition of the term. In Greek, *autos* signifies "self," *bios* "life," and *graphe* "writing." Thus, "self life writing" could be seen as a brief definition of autobiography. It is a type of writing where the writer narrates experiences from his or her own life. However, it is much more complex than the preceding definitions. This is because the writer, in the act of writing, becomes both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance and contemplation. Therefore, it is self-referential writing. Lejeune in Smith and Watson (2001, p.1) describes it as, "…the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality." One of the earliest examples of the autobiography is *The Confessions* of St. Augustine written in the fourth century. Nonetheless, Smith and Watson (2001, p. 2) point out that the term first appeared in English in a preface to a collection of poems by the eighteenth century English poet Ann Yearsley. Gappmaier(2009) is, however, of the opinion that the first recorded usage of the term was by William Taylor in 1797 in the British *Monthly Review.* In the

review Taylor had suggested that the term "autobiography" be used as a substitute for the word "self-biography" which had been used by the writer D'Israeli in his *Missellanies* (Gappmaier, 2009). However, according to Anderson and Winslow (n.d) the term is thought to have been coined by the English poet Robert Southey in 1809 in describing the work of the Portuguese poet Francisco Vieura. It was not until the 1830s that the usage of the term, however, became stable in the English language.

Nevertheless, the basis of most definitions of the term illustrate that autobiography is a narrative that reflects the experiences and perspectives of its writer. This is despite the fact that it has always been characterized by significant instability in attempts at its definition. Nonetheless, it is perhaps the only genre of writing where the writer stands or attempts to dominate the narrative as the fulcrum upon which the story is based. It is for this reason that it is compared to the act of looking into a mirror. This metaphor was aptly captured by Gusdorf (1980, p.33) in the following words, "autobiography is the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image." Accordingly, Gappmaier (2009, p.2) writes that, "Writing an autobiography is indeed like looking into a mirror, in which the autobiographers see – or seek to detect – who they have been, who they are now, and who they may become." Therefore, the life of the autobiographer is the central focus in the autobiography.

Thus, it is a literary form that enables an individual to directly explore their own life through narrative. The exploration is however characterized by a concrete attempt to present a story that is reliable in relation to its reference to the autobiographer's life. Accordingly, Pleasance (2015) maintains that:

> The central issue for such text [autobiography] is the need to establish a reliable relationship with the reality they purport to represent … The life genre is dependent upon establishing a reliable relationship between the

> 'inside' of the text and its 'outside': the real events to which it refers and purports to represent factually. (p.71).

Consequently, the autobiographer, as in the case of Asad, usually attempts to indicate the limitations and constraints present in such a literary endeavour. A recurring strategy is the acknowledgement by most autobiographer's that their narrative covers not all the story of their lives but only a fraction or part of their experiences. In *The Road to Makkah* Asad (1954) also employs this strategy when he reflects:

> And here it is: not the story of all my life, but only of the years before I left Arabia for India – those exciting years spent in travels through almost all the countries between the Libyan Desert and the snow-covered peaks of the Pamirs, between the Bosporus and the Arabian Sea … It is told in the context and, it should be kept in mind, *on the time level* of my last journey from the interior of Arabia to Mecca in the late summer of 1932: for it was during those … days that the pattern of my life became fully apparent to myself. (p.9).

Thus, the autobiography is not the story of an entire lifetime; it is the autobiographer's attempt at creating a pattern from some of the most significant experiences and times that define their life and worldview. For Asad, such times and experiences occurred during the journey mentioned above.

The autobiography is also a historical form that attempts to relate the story of a self via its history. Consequently, the autobiography is a discourse defined by notions of personal truth and identity. Carr (1986, p.51) points out that, "Life is itself a narrative…" The autobiography is, therefore, a means through which the individual attempts to organize and present this narrative. Carr (1986, p.65) also illustrates that, "Narrative … is our primary way of organizing and giving coherence to our experience." It is a position that Harpham (1988, p.44) further expounds on in the following words, "Autobiography is the conversion of experience into narrative or of life into textual self-representation in which one is "converted" when one discovers that one's life can be

made to conform to certain culturally validated narrative forms."

Similarly, Lejeune (1973, p.3) defines it as a, "Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality." Lejeune's definition, as explained by Eakin in Gappmaier (2009, p.20), aims to draw a line between what he refers to as "autobiography proper" and other modes of writing that may seem to share some close relationships with the genre. An example of such writings may include the autobiographical novel, the diary, the autobiographical poem and the memoir, etc. All these are writings that focus on the life of an author. What, then, is it that distinguishes such writings from the autobiography? Answering this question, or attempts at resolving the issues it raises, will yield significant understanding into unraveling the autobiographical form.

Writing in *L'Autobiographie En France* (1971), Lejeune also came up with the notion of *le pacte autobiographique.* This is more commonly known as the autobiographical pact. According to Eakin ('Foreword') the autobiographical pact is essentially "a contract between author and reader in which the autobiographer explicitly commits himself or herself not to some impossible historical exactitude but rather to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to understand his or her own life." It is an unwritten agreement which places the burden of narrating the truth on the autobiographer.

The pact is essentially a contract, albeit an unwritten one, between the writer and a reader. The understanding is that the writer commits to unraveling and relating an exact historical reflection of their life as the basis upon which a reader commits to the autobiographical text. This, however, as argued, subsequently, by even Lejeune seem insufficient at determining whether a piece of writing is autobiographical or not. It is an argument that stems from the fact that other forms of writing closely related to the autobiography could also lay a claim to the

autobiographical pact. Writings such as the memoir, diary, and autobiographical novel and autobiographical poem all exhibit tendencies related to the pact.

Consequently, another attempt other than the autobiographical pact has to be used in distinguishing the autobiography from other literary forms. The discovery of the author's proper name as the deep subject of autobiography was subsequently argued to be the generic line dividing the form from others (Lejeune, 1971, p.20). This implies that "identicalness" of the proper name shared by the author, narrator, and protagonist is a central defining feature of the autobiography. It also implies that, for writers, such as Lejuene the cover page of the autobiography is also an integral part of the text. However, this does not do away with the idea of the autobiographical pact. Lejeune (1971, p.14), asserts that the pact signifies, "the affirmation of this identity [as shared by the author, narrator and protagonist], referring back in the final analysis to the name of the author on the cover."

Lejeune's argument, thus, implies that it is only through reference to a proper name that a valid distinction could be drawn between the autobiography and fiction. Accordingly, he maintains that the proper name, of the author, is "the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-text, referring to a real person" Lejeune (1971, p.11). This relationship of the text to a "world-beyond-text" makes it possible to subject the autobiography to a reasonable degree of scrutiny against verifiable statistics and facts. It is a possibility made possible by the existence beyond question of the author- through the presence of a proper name.

Therefore, the autobiography is bound up with notions of truth and identity in relation to the author. It is also heavily influenced and determined by the experiences of the self in relation to the wider world. Yet, like other forms of writing it is unarguably based on textuality to render a story. However, the form employs what Eakin (1991, p.249) refers to as "referential aesthetic".

This makes its reading distinct in the mind of the reader. We read autobiographies from a different perspective as we would some other literary work. Its reading is guided by the belief that there is an unquestionable representation to real individuals and events while still being tied to representation (Prosser, 2001, p.249).

Tonya Blowers (2000) expresses the above position in detail in her essay "*The Textual Contract: Distinguishing Autobiography from the Novel".* Blowers' position is largely based on Lejeune's idea of *"The Autobiographical Pact".* However, she remodels Lejeune's position to illustrate that the reader reads the autobiography while acknowledging both the realities of the real world outside the text as well as the constructed reality within the text. Accordingly, she claims that we read autobiographies as a *textual contract,* taking into consideration the proper name of the author-narrator-protagonist, "knowing that it signifies a distinct mode of reading – autobiography, not fiction" (Gappmaier, 2009, p.13). Yet, the reader according to Blowers also acknowledges that the proper name is mere adornment which refers to "no person, no thing, no history, other than that which it creates for the complicit reader in the text" Blowers (2000, p.115). Consequently, "the textual contract provides a means of having our cake (there is a historical reality) and eating it (a text is pure representation)" Blowers (2000, p.115). Her argument illustrates that the autobiography is a representational form which seeks to retrospectively tell the story of a past from the perspectives of its writer. Thus, the representation made possible by the text makes it possible for the reader to examine the history presented by the author. It is this benchmarking that makes the autobiography very distinct from most other literary forms. A deep consciousness of reality is always present in the mind of its reader.

In addition the autobiographer does not only present a story of their life but also an evaluation of their actions and inactions. This is very central to the autobiography. The narrator usually makes

very pronounced judgments on some of the key moral and ethical issues confronting the protagonist. Writing on the nature of the autobiography, Brockmeier (2000) illustrates that:

> Autobiographical narrative does not just describe or represent a self in time, but it evaluates this self in the light of moral assumptions and ethical convictions. To take up on the distinction just mentioned, the narrator does not just tell the story of the protagonist, but he also makes clear his stance towards this protagonist; he also positions himself within a moral and affective framework… (p.59).

It is an evaluation that is often subject to temporal changes. This is unavoidable in most cases because the narrator is illustrating a position at the time of narration vis-à-vis the position of the protagonist in the story. It is a narrative feature that is very present in Assad's *The Road to Makkah.* The narrator takes up very definitive and critical moral, spiritual and ethical positions in relation to both the protagonist and other elements of the story. Brockmeier (2000, p.59) is also of the opinion that autobiographical narrative employs a time-evolving plot. The assumption is that the form does not usually follow the normal linear ordering that is a determining feature of most narratives. Therefore, there is a very flexible handling of chronological ordering in the autobiography. However, the degree of this flexibility would definitely vary from one autobiography to another. Yet, it is a feature that is very common with the autobiography, even though there are definitely some exceptions. Brockmeier (2000) further illustrates his position in the following words:

> Although it is true that all narrative implies a diachronic structure, this does not necessarily imply that a life narrative follows the lines of a linearly ordered plot, a *fabula*, as it is sometimes called in narratology. Rather, the story of one's life almost always leaves the paths of chronology, presenting life as a *sjuzet*, a narratively composed synthesis. The autobiographical process does not follow chronological time but creates its own time, narrative time. (p.59).

This strategy in the handling of time makes it possible for the autobiographer to creatively embed other stories within their life narrative. *The Road to Makkah* is rich with embedding,

particularly in relation to the life of the Saudi Arabian King Abdulazeez Ibn Saud. This embedding is so frequent in Asad's work to the extent that it almost reads as a biography of Ibn Saud.

The distinction, however, is because all the elements of the narrative revolve around a protagonist – Asad. The autobiography is a narration about the self. It is about the actions, thoughts, feelings, memories and intentions, etc. of the protagonist. More importantly, this protagonist blends with the narrator to form the center upon which the story revolves. This is irrespective of the points of view, characters and other stories embedded within the autobiography. There is always a center as exemplified by Asad in his autobiography. Therefore, whenever someone tells their story the narrator according to Bruner (1991, p.69), "takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in there and then, one who happens to share his name. He must by convention bring that protagonist from the past into the present in such a way that the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness." Therefore, the substantial insertion via embedding of the story of other characters and individuals within the autobiography is only to serve a purpose in relation to the autobiographer.

Consequently, the autobiography as a narrative is, in most cases, aligned towards the autobiographer in their present reality. Brockmeier (2001, p.60) refers to this aspect of the autobiography as retrospective teleology. The life narrative tells the story of an individual by crafting their past and that of others as if it were teleologically directed towards the author's present. Accordingly, the form is characterized by deep reflections and evaluations of past events. There is also substantial critique of past actions and their outcomes. This is very much present in Asad's autobiography. The reflections are not illustrated in relation to only the story's

past and present but also the future. This is probably unavoidable since Asad reflects not only on his personal life in isolation from the wider world. He particularly examines his life in relation to Islam and its relationship with the Western world and other major faiths.

Thus, the autobiography presents the individual with a means to explore their life through textual representation. Consequently, it is, perhaps, the only literary form that textually refers to a real individual who also happens to be the author of the text. Prosser in Gappmaier (2001, p.14) writes that, "autobiography has an unquestionable ability to refer to the real; as an 'aesthetic', however, it is intricately tied to representation." Therefore, the form presents a mirror-like reflection of the autobiographer's life. The images it presents are realistic and experienced while also being illusive. Therefore, it is the biography of oneself narrated by oneself. This referential aesthetics is one of its defining features (Prosser, 249, as cited in Gappmaier, 2001). According to the Encyclopaedia Brittannica, "autobiographies offer a special kind of biographical truth: a life reshaped by recollection, with all of recollection's conscious and unconscious omissions and distortions." Therefore, it presents a sort of life in relation to what the autobiographer has experienced at certain stages of life by borrowing self-consciously from the methodological procedures of imaginative fiction (Renza, 1980, p.269).

The above arguments undeniably illustrate that the concept of the "self" is central to an understanding of the autobiography. This is however a concept that has an extensive body of knowledge with varying perspectives from a wide range of theorists. This research will try to focus on the literature that reinforces the position of the work in relation to binary opposition. It is an attempt that is necessary in order not to deviate extensively from the core issue behind this research.

According to Eakin (1989, p.43) the self is defined by and lives in relation to others. Eakin's

position illustrates that man lives and experiences the environment and its institutions in a series of relationships. It is through these relationships that man constructs a distinct identity. Consequently, all identity is relational with a central reference point in the individual. Thus, the autobiography, as illustrated by Eakin (1989, p.43), is characterized by relational identity rooted in the self. It is through this process that the autobiographer is able to present their worldview in relation to other individuals and institutions by imposing a pattern on a life in order to construct a coherent story (Pascal, 1960, p.9). The reality of this position is illustrated by Smith (1988, p.6) in the following words: "none of us lives without reference to an imaginative singularity which we call our 'self'." The autobiography is very much defined by the idea of a self central to the narrative. Wang (2012, p.36) writes that, "Autobiography is inevitably conditioned by the prevailing conception of self, with the writer's deep involvement in the process of introspection, self-analysis, self-delineation, and even soul-searching…"

Thus, the self is continuously in a state of flux. Man evolves individually over time shaped by a variety of factors. This is central to the autobiography. Most autobiographers illustrate this flux and how it affects their individuality over time. Accordingly, Gusdorf (1980, p.47) writes that, "The writer's self is reflected while simultaneously being constructed in the autobiographical process." The autobiographer relies on memory to demonstrate the continuous evolvement of their self and identity. Therefore, the self as presented in the autobiography forges a link between selves past and present (Eakin, 1985, p.94). The construction of this link is however based on context which alters the nature of what is recalled and presented (Rosenfield as cited in Eakin, 1985, p.19). Thus, the autobiography appears as an evolution of the individual across time and space. This is very much present in Assad's *The Road to Makkah.* Asad presents his story based on perceptions which, to borrow from Eakin (1985, p.18), "are newly occurring in the present

rather than fixed and stored in the past…" Blowers (2000, p.109) accordingly maintains that "The past is not simply there in memory, *but it must be articulated to become memory*." It is through this process that the autobiographer selects and presents items from an earlier developed autobiographical memory.

The complex and multifaceted nature of self is evident in *The Road to Makkah,* as well as in other autobiographies. The dynamism in its evolution is aptly captured in Gappmaier (2009, p.28) by the psychologist Ulrich Niesser in his essay "*Five Kinds of Self-Knowledge*" (1988). Neisser distinguishes between the following types of self:

(1) The ecological self: the self perceived in a physical environment
(2) The interpersonal self: the self as engaged in immediate social interaction
(3) The extended self: the self of memory and anticipation
(4) The private self: the self of conscious experiences that are not available to anyone else
(5) The conceptual self: the extremely diverse forms of self-information – social roles, personal traits, theories of body and mind, of subject and person

(Eakin, citing Neisser, p.36 - 50)

Neisser, accordingly, maintains that the ecological and interpersonal selves evolve before the other three selves in the development of a child. The two selves are present from early infancy. Yet, the individual is always unable to directly relate experiences in relation to the period of their evolution. They are therefore tied to intersubjectivity (Neisser, 1988 in Gappmaeir, 2009). Another important aspect of the ecological and interpersonal selves according to Eakin (1985, p.23) is that they are "unmediated by reflex consciousness of any kind". This is because they are

developed before language acquisition takes place in an individual. On the other hand, the extended, the private and the conceptual selves are only obtained when a child masters language. Therefore, they are culturally encoded and also influenced by the conceptual models available to the individual. Consequently, the self-reflection and – introspection in the autobiography is narrated from perspectives based on these three selves.

It is through relating, analyzing and commenting on a history in relation to the last three selves that an individual is able to narrate their autobiography. The extended self allows the individual to recall relevant important events and, even, anticipate the future. Exploring the private self enables the autobiographer to open up on who they actually are in relation to their life and experiences. The conceptual self, on the other hand, makes it possible to view the individual in relation to wider social contexts. Thus, it can be argued that the idea of self is one of the core issues that define the autobiography. This argument also raises the issue of the self in relation to language. According to Gappmaier (2009, p.29), "the self is said to be entirely constituted by language, [therefore] the meaning of a life is not given or found, but *made* – it is inscribed *by language."* Olshen (2001, p.799) also argues that "personal identity is constituted by structures that exceed and encompass individual consciousness." The positions of Gappmaier (2009) and Olshen (2001) will, however, only be justifiable when it is taken into consideration that verifiable fact seems to be at the root of any autobiographical narrative. Language merely takes the role of an interpreter that makes the narration possible. It does not usurp or attempt to delimit the role of selfhood, memory and experience, etc. in making the autobiography possible. Language acts as a medium and canvas upon which the autobiographer illustrates the story of their life.

Accordingly, Olshen (2001, p.800) also argues that there is an important distinction and relationship between language and reality in terms of the autobiography. It is that of existence and textuality. The basis of the argument is that "having a life is different from writing (or speaking) a life" Olshen (2001, p.800). He also goes further to draw a polarity between "the autobiographical self" and "the autobiographer's self". The "autobiographer's self" belongs to the living individual (the autobiographer) while the "autobiographical self" is bound in text (Gappmaier, 2009, p.30). The latter is therefore a textual signifier through whom a life story is narrated. Thus, the uncertainty of the authenticity of the autobiographical "I" as argued by Marcus (1994) is unjustifiable as a basis for consigning the autobiography to fiction. Consequently, it is through narrative that the individual explores their identity and selfhood through the act of self-narration that seeks to "make sense of the fabric of the past" (Freeman, 1993, p.8).

Therefore, the autobiography is simply an immersive narrative of an individual life. It is a specialized form of narrating about the self that enables us to "invent and reinvent ourselves and the world around us" (Hanne, 2001, p.634). Thus, it is an avenue of examining self-knowledge in relation to one's own life and experiences through narrative. Brooks in Hanne (2001) vividly points out the central role of narrative in relating one's story:

> Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semi-conscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the interaction of several stories not yet completed. (p.634).

However, the story that a narrator tells is bound by the resources that make a narration possible. This is seen in *The Road to Makkah*. The text is inextricably coded up through the use of binary operations. These operations are made use of by Assad in relating both his personal and social experiences. Both the content and form of the story are made possible by the author's extensive use of binary operations. Central to the autobiography's reliance on binary operations is the expression of time in the story told. Brockmeier (2001, p.876) maintains that the autobiography is a narrative of "the self in time and temporality." The form always relates to at least two interlocked temporal levels. The past is accessed in relation to the present of writing about it. Blowers (2000) captures this centrality of time to the success of a narrative:

> [Any narrative] must represent time in a plausible and recognizable way. It is impossible to escape the strictures of time whether writing science fiction or biography, since without time there is no narrative and, subsequently, no meaning. Even when we are not writing chronologically, we still maintain a sense of time, which is inherent to the narrative or story or plot. (p. 106).

Therefore, the autobiography refigures time, particularly the past, in relation to the writer's present. The past is, however, gone. It no longer exists. It is only through representation that a writer is able to represent it. Stanley (2000) illustrates this point accordingly:

> 'the past' is not a time and place that 'exist' […] – it does not go on its own sweet way whether I visit it or not. Its time is over and done with and it exists, now, only in and through representational means. Its 'then' no longer has existence except through now and those moments of apprehension concerned with it. (p.6).

Thus, the autobiographer relates a past from memory. The present, on the other, hand influences the writer's evaluation and judgement of the past events. The representational means, on the other hand, enables the presentation of a trace of the past. In *The Road to Makkah* this evaluation and judgement is very visible due to the author's reliance on very vivid binary oppositions. It is

these operations that form the core of the representational means in Asad's work. The form of the entire work is, to a large extent, dependent upon these operations.

The operations easily enable the autobiographer to select and structure experiences from memory (Cockshut, 2001, p.79). The reason behind the selection and structuration is due to the fact that an autobiography does not relate everything that the writer has experienced. At the same time, the autobiographer is also making out meaning out of a life spent while putting it down in writing. Thus, the narrative technique employed by the autobiographer becomes a very important part of the meaning-making process which autobiography involves (Gudmundsdottir in Gappmaier, 2009, p.41). In *The Road to Makkah* Asad noticeably deploys binary operations to arrange the significant elements of his narration. In reading this spiritual autobiography it is discernible that the work might probably not have been possible without the excessive deployment of binary operations by Asad.

An area of the autobiography where binary operations become very vivid is in terms of narrative distance. In *The Road to Makkah* the autobiographical-first person narrative is employed. According to Stanzel (1984, p.201) the autobiographical-first person narrator "is at one and the same time the main character, standing at the center of the action, and the narrator." Therefore, it is a situation, as in Asad's autobiography, where the hero of the story and the narrator are identical. This is despite each of them contributing to the development of the work from different perspectives, even, though the relations between both seems to be based on equilibrium. This is despite the experiencing self looming larger across most of the narrative. However, the narrating self is also continuously present in most areas of the work.

The autobiography is a self-referential writing that reflects the experiences and worldview of its writer. It is a genre of writing where the autobiographer becomes the fulcrum upon which the story is based. Consequently, the form enables its writer to make use of textual representation in exploring a period of a lifetime. In *The Road to Makkah* Asad utilizes binary operations as the basis for most of his textual presentation. These operations determine most of the meanings of the various anecdotes that constitute the primary text. In reading the autobiography it also becomes glaring that relationships are central to what constitutes reality. A structuralist analysis clearly illustrates that *The Road to Makkah* is a narrative based on differences and interrelationships. A study of the book on the basis of these relationships and differences reveals significant insight on Asad's narrative.

CHAPTER THREE

BINARY OPPOSITION IN *THE ROAD TO MAKKAH*

3.1 Introduction

According to Winslow (1995, p.3) the autobiography refers to "the writing of one's own history, the story of one's life written by oneself." Yet, the story of any individual's life is intertwined with the stories of other individuals, institutions and society. In some cases such individuals, institutions and societies might even go back some generations before the autobiographer's time. The autobiographer, nonetheless, makes mention of such because of their association with his or her history and existence in one way or another. Consequently, the autobiography is often intertwined with multitudes of anecdotes. These anecdotes could be involved directly with the author while some only have an indirect relationship to the writer. Asad's *The Road to Makkah* is also populated by such anecdotes. However, most of the anecdotes in Asad's autobiography share a common feature in terms of a structural configuration based on binary oppositions which the writer uses to create meaning through difference (Lye, 1996).

3.2 Coercer

Similarly, the deployment of most autobiographical elements in *The Road to Makkah* illustrate the use of binary oppositions in the presentation of the narrative, the relationship between its contents, and also how meaning is perceived. This is evident from Asad's discussion of an interaction between him and an unnamed coercer. It is from this discussion that the reader learns of the autobiographer's motivation to write the book. It is a discussion that goes back in time to question the very relationship between Islam and the West. The starting point of this interesting debate comes from Asad's Western friends' perplexity as to why an accomplished man of

Western background would transfer his allegiance to another cultural heritage and environment (Islam). Asad (2006) responds to the perplexity in these terms:

> Now why, I asked myself, should my Western friends take this for granted? Had any of them ever really bothered to gain a direct insight into Islam – or were their opinions based merely on the handful of clichés and distorted notions that had been handed down to them from previous generations? Could it perhaps be that the old Graeco-Roman mode of thought which divided the world into Greeks and Romans on one side and 'barbarians' on the other was still so thoroughly ingrained in the Western mind that it was unable to concede, even theoretically, positive value to anything that lay outside its own cultural orbit?
> Ever since Greek and Roman times, European thinkers and historians have been prone to contemplate the history of the world from the standpoint and in terms of European history and Western cultural experiences alone. Non-Western civilizations enter the picture only in so far as their existence, or particular movements within them, have or had a direct influence on the destinies of Western man; and thus, in Western eyes, the history of the world and its various cultures amounts in the last resort to little more than an expanded history of the West. (p.2).

Asad's position on the relationship between the West and the rest of the world illustrates the use of binary oppositions in a pattern of relationships. At the heart of his narrative is the presentation of Islam and the Western world as standing on opposite divides. The mention of "…clichés and distorted notions" is also another binary in relation to the writer's silence on a truthful presentation of "Islam". Thus, the presentation and relationship of the West and Islam is based on difference. It is the use of difference that makes the reality of the relationship vivid.

However, it is in questioning this Western prejudice that the writer portrays the use of binary oppositions. The unnamed coercer, whom Asad, describes as "a man of considerable intellectual attainments and a scholarly bent of mind …" is of course skeptical of Asad's perspective (Asad, 2006, p.3). Consequently, he argues that the West is increasingly more tolerant towards other cultures and ideologies. Asad, however, argues that any increasing Western equanimity towards other cultures and ideologies is not extended equally to Islam (Asad, 2006, p.5). He maintains that this prejudice is "*because* the values of Islam are close enough to those of the West to

constitute a potential challenge to many Western concepts of spiritual and social life…" (Asad, 2006, p.5). Thus, the relationship of Islam and the West is also based, to some extent, on similarities. However, these similarities are mostly related to the Islamic and Christian faiths.

The exchange between Asad and the unnamed coercer unavoidably delves back into history in a quest to reveal the source and beginning of Western prejudice towards Islam. Asad (2006) accordingly maintains that:

> To find a truly convincing explanation of this prejudice … one has to look far backward into history and try to comprehend the psychological background of the earliest relations between The Western and the Muslim worlds. What Occidentals think and feel about Islam today is rooted in impressions that were born during the Crusades. (p.5).

This allusion to a distant past in terms of the Crusades illustrates a past and present binary relationship. Mention of the thorny issue of the Crusades expectedly perplexes the unnamed coercer and he responds accordingly: "'The Crusades!' exclaimed my friend. 'You don't mean to say what happened nearly a thousand years ago could still have an effect on people of the twentieth century?'" (Asad, 2006, p.5.) Asad's response to the question is itself based on a series of binary oppositions. Accordingly, the autobiographer mentions that prior to Pope Urban II's famous speech at Clermont, in November, 1095 where he declared war on Islam and the Arab world Europe had no cultural unity. Thus, according to Asad (2006, p.7), Pope Urban II "probably without knowing it himself [proclaimed] – the charter of Western civilization".

Additionally, Asad (2006, p7) points out that "The traumatic experience of the Crusades gave Europe its cultural awareness and its unity; but this same experiences was destined henceforth also to provide the false colour in which Islam was to appear to Western eyes." In mentioning the impact of the Crusades on Western unity the autobiographer illustrates, even though, without mentioning it directly, the prior disunity in Europe. However, it is the deliberate poisoning of the

European mind following the Crusades that has had a lasting influence in the relationship between Islam and the Western world. Asad (2006, p.7) expounds on the subject in the following words "The damage caused by the Crusades was not restricted to a clash of weapons: it was, first and foremost, an intellectual damage – the poisoning of the Western mind against the Muslim world through a deliberate misrepresentation of the teachings and ideals of Islam." This raises the ideas of fact and falsehood in the Western perspective of Islam and the Muslim world. These also stand in direct binary opposition. The idea of the Crusades also evokes a more poignant relationship in terms of war and peace. Asad does not make direct mention of the peace but his silence on it after mentioning the Crusades is enough to evoke its picture in the mind of the reader. This is another opposition in terms of silence and telling.

3.3 Ideology, identity and binary opposition

In this autobiography the identity and experience of Asad are based on the presentation of opposing elements. His identity is clearly shaped by two historically opposing cultural and ideological orbits. However, the substitution of his Jewish faith with Islam is also a defining experience for the writer. This is made mention of both directly and through allusions in most parts of Asad's narrative in the book. For example, in trying to comprehend on some aspects of his life Asad (2006, p.48) writes thus "For when I ask myself, 'What is the sum total of my life?' something in me seems to answer, 'You have set out to exchange one world for another – to gain a new world in exchange for an old one which you never really possessed." Asad makes mention of both an "old world" and a "new world". These stand in a direct binary relationship. The old and the new, even though, both connect to shape the life of the author are on two different extremes. The writer has to discard one in order to fully immerse himself in the other. This is despite the strong connection that one might feel to the land and culture of their birth. For Asad

this substitution of the culture and land of his birth with that of the Muslim world and Islam is central to his identity and experience.

It is a substitution that was total from the autobiographer's point of view. Asad (2006) opines on the issue in these words:

> The legends connected with this sky [of Arabia] and its stars are more familiar to me than the home of my childhood … How could it be otherwise? Ever since I came to Arabia I have lived like an Arab, worn only Arab dress, spoken only Arabic, dreamed my dreams in Arabic; Arabian customs and imageries have almost imperceptibly shaped my thoughts; I have not been hampered by the many mental reservations which usually make it impossible for a foreigner – be he ever so well versed in the manners and the language of the country – to find a true approach to the feelings of its people and to make their world his own … My coming to this land: was it not, in truth, a home-coming? Home-coming of the heart that has espied its old home backward over a curve of thousands of years and now recognizes this sky, my sky, with painful rejoicing? (p.49)

In mentioning his home-coming to Arabia Asad consciously or subconsciously evokes the idea of a journey from one destination to another. He invariably makes mention of his early childhood years in Central Europe where his early memories and identity developed. A binary relationship is present in this presentation. Europe is seen as the starting point of his journey physically, emotionally and psychologically while Arabia and the Muslim world are presented as his final destination.

Being a spiritual autobiography, Asad delves significantly into matters of ideology. Of particular significance is his upbringing and its resultant effect in terms of how he viewed himself, the Jewish faith and the world. As earlier mentioned, the autobiographer was born of Jewish parents in Lwow in Austria. Naturally, he was raised to also grow up Jewish. He even mentions of his grandfather who was a Rabbi and that a rabbinical tradition exists in the family for several generations. Yet, he makes mention of a disconnect he felt towards Judaism. Furthermore, Asad (2006) maintains that:

> … I soon developed a supercilious feeling towards many of the premises of the Jewish faith. To be sure I did not disagree with the teaching of moral righteousness so strongly emphasized throughout the Jewish scriptures, nor with the sublime God-consciousness of the Hebrew prophets … It also occurred to me that this God was strangely preoccupied with the destinies of one particular nation, the Hebrews. The very build-up of the Old-Testament as a history of the descendants of Abraham tended to make God appear not as the creator and sustainer of all mankind but, rather, as a tribal deity adjusting all creation to the requirements of a 'chosen people' … (p.55).

The above argument by Asad draws on binary oppositions in his presentation and perception of Jewish teachings based on the Old Testament. To the autobiographer and to any observer there is a clear dichotomy between a 'chosen people' (Jews) and the rest of Mankind.

Asad however mentions that his disenchantment with Judaism did not lead him on a quest to discover any other spiritual truth. He instead drifted away from accepting any institutionalized religion. This was during the first two decades of the twentieth century. According to Asad (2006, p.57) it was a time when "All the ethical valuations to which Europe have been accustomed for so many centuries had become amorphous under the terrible impact of what happened between 1914 and 1918 [the first World War], and no new set of values was yet anywhere in sight." Therefore, Asad's disenchantment with religion in his early youth occurred at a period when the glamour of religion was evaporating from European consciousness. Like many Europeans of the time, he became an agnostic. Consequently, this raises the question of belief and disbelief in the divine religions. This binary relationship is very pronounced in most of the opening pages of *The Road to Makkah*. Asad also makes mention of a great-great uncle of his who renounced the Jewish faith to accept Christianity. This evokes a parallel comparison to Asad's own experience and identity.

The autobiographer also mentions of a growing restlessness that troubled him in those early years of his youth. It is a restlessness brought forth by his experience and identity in terms of his

worldview and religious upbringing. It is also a restlessness that bordered on questions of how he perceived of his place and calling in the world. He reflects on the subject in the following words "My restlessness grew and made it increasingly difficult for me to pursue my university studies. At last I decided to give them up for good and to try my hand at journalism" (Asad, 2006, p.60). This marked the turning point in his life. He left a life with some semblance of certainty to embrace an uncertain future when he moved away from his family over his father's disagreement on his decision to drop out of university. It also marks a departure point for Asad. The final destination was to come later in Arabia. It is immediately discernible that several binary oppositions are at work from the autobiographer's revelation. One, it marks a rebellion and rejection which is a direct opposition to the status quo of accepting to follow his father's chosen track. Secondly, it also places him and his father at dissimilar positions in direct opposition on the subject of staying at school to graduate. Thirdly, the incidence also heralds Asad as an independent young man free from any dependence on his family. Thus, independence and dependence are juxtaposed in this instance. Therefore, Asad's discussion of his early years in Europe illustrates the use of several binary oppositions. A closer look at his perception and his views at the time opens up a window into his identity and experience. The autobiographer comments retrospectively on his early years in Europe (Asad, 2006):

> They had been strange years, those early Twenties in Central Europe. The general atmosphere of social and moral insecurity had given rise to a desperate hopefulness which expressed itself in daring experiments in music, painting and the theatre, as well as in groping, often revolutionary enquiries into the morphology of culture; but hand-in-hand with this forced optimism went a spiritual hopelessness with regard to the future of man. (p.70).

The spiritual hopelessness made people to search for an alternative hope. Accordingly, the search for hope led many to the worship of material progress. Asad elaborates on this in the following words "… things were no longer right in the … European world. Its real deity, I saw, was no

longer of a spiritual kind: it was comfort (Asad, 2006, p.70).” Asad further claims that this hedonistic attitude led to an ethical frustration emanating from a resultant confusion about the meaning of “Good and Evil” Asad (2006, p.70). It is apparent that the autobiographer is juxtaposing religion against hedonism. The two stand in direct opposition. This clearly troubled Asad and prompted an inner yearning within him to find a hope which he felt was elusive in the European worldview of his time. This hope Asad yearns for is also another opposition to the hopelessness earlier mentioned by the autobiographer. Asad (2006, 71) writes accordingly on the issue: “I saw all this: but somehow it never seriously occurred to me – as it never seems to have occurred to any of the people around me – that an answer, or at least partial answers, to these perplexities might perhaps be gained from other than Europe’s own cultural experiences.”

3.4 Experience, embedding and meaning

A close analysis of Asad’s narrative illustrates how he makes meaning from his experiences. Such an examination also opens up unto how his identity evolves in the work. The key issue, however, is that the presentation of his narrative as it regards his identity and experience are determined by differences in most of the narrative. As Phillips (2015) argues “It is thus the system of differences that makes possible and **to a certain extent** governs meaningful experience.” The suggestion by Asad that answers to some of Europe’s problems of spiritual guidance could perhaps be sought from elsewhere invariably evokes another binary operation. This is, of course, based on the idea of the existence of other parallel ideologies that could offer something that was missing in the European outlook. It is, for Asad, the realization of such a parallel idea in Islam that ultimately determines his worldview. This is a case of substitution based on binary representation as he gradually develops a worldview different from his prior perspectives as determined by Judaism and a European outlook.

In this autobiography it is equally evident that the relativity of binary operations enables Asad to classify and organize reality. This is, of course, based on the notion that language, through its resources enables the representation of reality; and reality is based on relationships. Asad, therefore, structures his narrative according to a series of relationships, events and incidences, histories, discussions and ideas that enable him to utilize binary relations. It is the binary operations in most cases that illustrate the reality of events that the narrative presents. The autobiographer's voyage to the East aboard a ship and then a train come to the fore in this regard. On board the ship Asad had an animated discussion with a Christian priest on the subject of faith. In the course of the discussion the autobiographer makes it clear that he had no faith. This was at a time when Asad had lost interest in his Jewish faith. Their discussion is intertwined in a series of binary operations. Asad presents himself, at the time, as a young avowed atheist while the priest is illustrated as an elderly man with a strong faith in Christianity. Two binary operations immediately become apparent. One, there is the presentation of faith and a lack of it. Second, there is the presentation of youth and its accompanying exuberance against old age and its accompanying reservations. The idea of the journey across two cultures that have always been polarized also marks a departure from one point to another. The oppositions indicate a gradual movement for the young Weiss away from Judaism and the West.

On the same journey towards Palestine, his initial destination in the East, Asad (2006) also presents several series of binary relations in a tightly knit narrative.

> The train carried me through the Sinai Desert. I was exhausted, sleepless from the cold of the desert night and the rocking of the train over rails resting on loose sand. Opposite me sat a Bedouin in a voluminous brown abaya. He also was freezing and had wrapped his face in his headcloth. He sat crosslegged on the bench, and on his knees lay a curved sword in a scabbard ornamented with silver. It was nearly morning … I can still remember how the dawn broke … (p.82).

In this extract, the writer presents the idea of day and night with the day symbolized by dawn. This is a characteristic of Asad's narrative in this autobiography. He presents a narrative that illustrates a deep consciousness in contrasting time in order to portray a vivid picture to the reader. Asad also mentions of a Bedouin who sat opposite him in the train compartment. It is a presentation rooted in binary operations. The Bedouin and Asad are clearly from different regions. Asad hails from Europe while his companion is of the East. Asad also mentions that "To the right was the desert; to the left the sea." This similarly illustrates another binary relationship in the contrast between the sea and the desert. It also evokes a similarity between the two: both are wide expanses and difficult to navigate. It is evident that the autobiographer uses the oppositions to propel the narrative forward. He relies on the oppositions as the basis for his remembrance and contemplation which are central to the autobiographical form. In the course of presenting the account of this initial voyage to the Orient Asad (2006) elaborates further on his initial contact with the East:

> Several times we stopped at small stations, usually no more than a few barracks of timber and tin … The bedouin opposite me rose slowly, unwound his headcloth and opened the window … he bought a piece of cake, turned around and was about to sit down, when his eyes fell on me; and, without a word, he broke his cake in two and offered me half. When he saw my hesitation and astonishment, he smiled … and said a word which I could not understand then but now know was *tafaddal* – 'grant me the favour.' I took the cake and thanked him with a nod. (p.83).

The above narrative illustrates a parallelism based on binary operations between Asad and the unknown Bedouin. The narrative also demonstrates both contiguity and substitutability which are central to structuralism (Lye, 1996). It is a parallelism that is additionally highlighted by the latter's gesture of sharing a cake with Asad. The breaking up of the cake, itself, also illustrates another binary operation based on similarity. It is also ironic that it is in this simple gesture that

the autobiograoher, years later, ascribes his love for the Arab character and world. Asad (2006) narrates accordingly on the matter:

> When I now think of this little occurrence, it seems to me that all my later love for the Arab character must have been influenced by it. For in the gesture of this bedouin, who, over all barriers of strangeness, sensed a friend in an accidental travelling companion and broke bread with him, I must already have felt the breath and the step of a humanity free of burden. (p.83).

In the above narrative the mention of "barriers" by the autobiographer easily illustrates and sums up the presence of binary operations. So also is the mention of "companion". Finally, Asad mentions the perceiving of "a humanity free of burden" on the Bedouin. This stands a direct difference to the turmoil which Asad perceived in the Europe of his youth. He observed in the bedouin a simplicity that was a direct difference to the complexity of European existence in his time.

Therefore, meaning in the autobiography is based on relationships. This is very apparent for most part of *The Road to Makkah* if examined on the basis of its writing, reading and interpretation. It is through relationships that the autobiographer conveys the message of the narrative to the reader. It is through the series of relationships that Asad shows the story. This way, he is able to remain outside the story while at the same time narrating it as an insider and observer of what is being narrated. It is a technique that brings to the fore the idea of presenting a story based on how relationships illustrate meaning based on certain rules. In terms of relationships in *The Road to Makkah,* the autobiographer's relationship to the late Saudi monarch and founding father of modern Saudi Arabia King Abdulazeez Ibn Saud stands out, perhaps, more prominently than any other relationship in the book. It is also a relationship that is presented based on binary operations for most part of the narrative. Additionally, the relationship of Ibn Saud to several of his people also forms a significant part of the narrative.

The relationship is depicted as one between a guest and a host, and also between a monarch and a foreigner of significance. It is also illustrated as a relationship between two individuals whose outlook on the future is based on very divergent opinions. Asad believes the Kingdom needs to modernize in order to be relevant in the future. It was a vision which the monarch was not so keen to follow. Yet, it is also an interaction based on mutual respect and admiration based on reciprocity. As earlier mentioned, the relationship and interaction of Asad and the late Saudi monarch occupies a substantial portion of this autobiography. However, it is not the intention of this thesis to trace how this interaction evolves. Only an examination of some of the highlights and outcome of this relationship will be illustrated in order to examine the interaction. It is a relationship that, however, granted Asad significant privileges in the Arab world. In one instance he mentions (Asad, 2006):

> To be friend and guest of a great Arabian *amir* means to be regarded and treated as friend and guest by all his officials, by his *rajajil*, by the shopkeepers in his capital, and even the beduins of the steppe under his authority. The guest can scarcely mention a wish without its being fulfilled at once, whenever it can be fulfilled; from hour to hour he is overwhelmed by the warm, unquestioning graciousness which envelops him in the market place of the town no less than in the wide halls and corridors of the castle. (p. 162).

The relationship with the king afforded Asad, for example, the privilege to travel into the interior of Saudi Arabia. This was unheard of for foreigners at the time. On an occasion of the king inviting the autobiographer to ride with his motorcade to Riyadh from Makkah Asad (2006, p.20) comments thus: "I was dumbfounded, and so, obviously, were the other people present. Such a spontaneous invitation to a stranger was almost unheard of." However, in return for such gestures Asad also assists the king through his writings in the European press for the autobiographer had come to Arabia as a journalist for a German newspaper. Thus, it is a relationship also based on parallelism.

Similarly, the autobiographer's relationship with his first wife offers insight into one of the most pressing questions raised by reading the book. For most part of *The Road to Makkah* Asad portrays himself as unsettled with an unalloyed longing for travel and exploration. The true motivation for this behavior on his part seems to rest in the loss of his first wife, Elsa. She died during his first pilgrimage to Mecca with her. It was a devastating loss to him, for in her, he had found someone who understood his every yearning. He narrates about this relationship in the following words "And because Elsa intuitively understood what I tried so inadequately, like one who gropes in the dark, to convey in these stammering words [his newspaper correspondence], I strongly felt that she, and she alone, could understand what I was after and could help me in my search …" (Asad, 2006, p.144). This was not to be for, as earlier mentioned, she died on their maiden pilgrimage to Mecca. It was a shock that Asad never truly recovered from. He subsequently became unable to settle fully in any one place and the thought of returning to Europe was almost entirely non-existent.

It is evident that Elsa somewhat appeared to Asad as his last remaining connection to Europe. She is presented as a metaphor symbolizing Europe. The binary relations between death and life are illustrated here in the narrative. With Elsa alive the autobiographer was content to stay in one place. However, her death which according to him left him bitter and unsocial created a desire in him to wander. He thereafter remained unsettled for a substantial part of his life. It is thus apparent that Elsa, in the narrative, symbolizes life for the autobiographer. Consequently, her death extends beyond her alone. It also signified a dying of some part of Asad too. It is this part that he so much sought to rediscover through travel and exploration of other cultures. This is a position that Asad conveys through the process of writing, reading and interpretation.

Similarly, his companionship with Zayd his guide across Arabia also illustrates another relationship that holds significant meaning in the narrative. Substantial parts of the narrative are related to Asad's reminisces with Zayd in the course of their travels across the desert. Even the opening of the book alludes to Zayd when Asad (2006, p10) writes "We RIDE, RIDE, two men on two dromedaries, the sun flames over our heads, everything is shimmer and glimmer and swinging light. Reddish and orange-coloured dunes, dunes behind dunes beyond dunes, loneliness and burning silence, and two men on two dromedaries in that swinging gait which makes you sleepy, so that you forget the day, the sun, the hot wind and the long way." It is a presentation encoded in a series of binary relationships. This is evident starting from the two "RIDE"s mentioned by the autobiographer. He also mentions "two men" and continues to state "two dromedaries" and also the idea of "dunes behind dunes beyond dunes". All these statements particularly the idea of "two men" being Asad and Zayd illustrate a binary relationship. For it is a master – servant relationship based however on mutual respect and admiration. Zayd is a native of the desert. According to Asad (2006, p.11) "This country here is his homeland … The moods of the desert are in Zayd's blood, and his heart beats with them." Asad, on the other hand, is new to the desert despite his love for it. Therefore, he relies solely on Zayd as both a guide and companion.

However, it is not only through Asad's direct relationships and interactions that meaning is created in this autobiography. The relationship of others also plays a significant role in the narrative. For example, the relationships of Ibn Saud, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, also illustrate significant insight in the story. The story of Ibn Saud is so numerously mentioned in Asad's autobiography that this embedding almost makes the story as much about the autobiographer and also the monarch. On Ibn Saud, the history of how he overcame significant

odds, particularly a rivalry with a clan that had usurped the kingdom of his ancestors is of importance. The usurpers are mentioned as the house of Ibn Rashid. Their rivalry to the house of Ibn Saud is portrayed by Asad as being very vicious. According to Asad (2006, p.165) "For it was entirely by his own efforts that Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud won his vast kingdom. When he was a child, his dynasty had already lost the last remnants of its power in Central Arabia and had been superseded by its one-time vassals, the dynasty of Ibn Rashid of Hail." Naturally the alternation from royalty to living as subjects of another sovereign was difficult on Ibn Saud. Asad (2006, p.165) writes accordingly on the issue "Those were bitter days for Abd al-Aziz. The proud and reserved boy had to watch a foreign amir governing his paternal city of Riyadh in the name of Ibn Rashid …" This revelation is also bound in binary relations. The two contesting houses for the rulership of Saudi Arabia are clearly on opposite ends.

In the revelation on Abd al-Aziz's re-conquest of the throne of his forefathers Asad also illustrates another binary operation. This is signified in the presentation of both Abd al-Aziz and his own father, Abd ar-Rahman. The latter is presented as ordinary in personality without the fiery zeal and accomplishments of his son. Asad (2006, p.164) presents the father in the following words "The father – Abd ar-Rahman – whom I knew in my early days in Riyadh, was, though a kind and pious man, certainly not an outstanding personality like his son, and had not played a particularly spectacular role during his long life." This is a sharp contrast to Abd al-Aziz whom Asad clearly views as being spectacular in both personality and deeds. The autobiographer describes him as a spectacular man who stopped only a step short from actualizing true greatness. Therefore, it can be seen that Asad clearly illustrates both father and son using binary operations to show how they differ. However, Asad was nonetheless a friend to both. He was acquainted to both till the end of their lives.

The reference to real life individuals presented in a verifiable narrative is one of the reasons that illustrate the autobiography as a form closer to reality than fiction. Additionally, such individuals are only presented within the realm of the autobiographer's experiences and outlook on himself, other individuals and events. Therefore, such experiences, individuals and perspectives only come into play in the autobiography when they are "… directly connected with his [autobiographer] practical experiences, with the joys and sorrows he has experienced, with his moods and needs." Stanzel (1984, p.93)" Stanzel (p.93) further maintains that "Everything that is narrated in the first-person form is existentially relevant to the first-person narrator." In *The Road to Makkah* Asad's presentation of the Israel – Palestine conflict readily comes to mind as a narrative based on binary operations on the basis of individuals, experiences and joys and sorrows.

3.5 Binary opposition in presenting a historical perspective

The autobiographer's first trip to the Middle East which was to open up another world to him was at the invitation of an uncle living in Jerusalem. This was at a time when the Jewish state was being conceived of with efforts to bring it to attainment. Asad's residence in Palestine altered his understanding of the issue from how he had viewed it before coming to the Middle East. The autobiographer argues accordingly on the subject (Asad, 2006):

> Although of Jewish origin myself, I conceived from the outset a strong objection to Zionism. Apart from my personal sympathy for the Arabs, I considered it immoral that immigrants, assisted by a foreign Great Power, should come from abroad with the avowed intention of attaining to majority in the country and thus to dispossess the people whose country it had been since time immemorial. (p.93).

It is apparent that the Palestine – Israel conflict mentioned by the autobiographer is discussed from the viewpoint of binary opposition. Additionally, the autobiographer clearly illustrates another binary relation in terms of the Jews coming to Palestine as immigrants to dispossess the

original inhabitants of the land. This is another instance of a binary opposition. There is also mention of Arabs vs. Jews in the conflict. That also illustrates another binary operation. Another binary operation very relevant is the issue of possession of land and the dispossession of the same land. Thus, the narrative is richly endowed in binary operations based on the autobiographer's contact and first-hand experience in the conflict.

Additionally, Asad's discussion with Dr. Chaim Weizmann is grounded in binary operations. The autobiographer had asked Weizmann about what would amount to the Arabs should the Jewish state be actualized. Weizmann had retorted that the issue of the Arabs was inconsequential because the Jews were only taking back what had originally been their country. Weizmann mentioned that the Arabs had only conquered the land. Asad (2006) responds in the following words:

> 'Forgive me,' I retorted, 'but it seems to me that there is some historical oversight here. After all, the Hebrews also came as conquerors to Palestine. Long before them were many other Semitic and non-Semitic tribes settled here – the Amorites, the Edomites, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Hittites. Those tribes continued living here even in the days of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. They continued living here after the Romans drove our ancestors away. They are living here today. The Arabs who settled in Syria and Palestine after their conquest in the seventh century were always only a small minority of the population; the rest of what we describe today as Palestinian or Syrian "Arabs" are in reality only the Arabianized, original inhabitants of the country. Some of them became Muslims in the course of centuries, others remained Christians; the Muslims naturally inter-married with their co-religionists from Arabia. But can you deny that the bulk of those people in Palestine, who speak Arabic, whether Muslims or Christians, are direct-line descendants of the original inhabitants: original in the sense of having lived in this country centuries before the Hebrews came to it?' (p.95).

The discussion makes mention of Semitic and non-Semitic tribes. Both stand in direct binary opposition. The anecdote also makes mention of Romans and the ancestors of the Jewish people. They stand in direct binary opposition. In the debate Asad also brings up the issue of a "small minority" in comparison to "the rest…" The rest simply illustrates a majority of the Muslims in

Palestine and Syria who are not direct line descendants of Arabs. It is clear that the autobiographer uses binary opposition to illustrate his position on the topic. Asad (2006) prophetically sums up his disappointment and views on the subject:

> How was it possible, I wondered, for people endowed with so much creative intelligence as the Jews to think of the Zionist-Arab conflict in Jewish terms alone? Did they not realize that the problem of the Jews in Palestine could, in the long run, be solved only through friendly co-operation with the Arabs? Were they so hopelessly blind to the painful future which their policy must bring? – to the struggles, the bitterness and the hatred to which the Jewish island, even if temporarily successful, would remain forever exposed in the midst of a hostile Arab sea? (p.96).

The autobiographer's premonition on the conflict is sadly being enacted for more than five decades. However, it is his use of binary opposition in the structuring of the narrative that is of concern to this work. It is apparent from the account that Weizmann and Asad stand in binary opposition. The narrative also alludes to a future which might result in hardship and pain – for both Arabs and Jews – as a result of the eventual dispossession of the Arabs of Palestine of their ancestral land. The idea of a present and a future also stand in binary opposition. The mention of the Arabs being both Christian and Muslim also illustrates another binary operation. The historical reality presented by the autobiographer is made noticeable by the positioning of the different parties in the conflict based on similarities and differences. These similarities and differences are not only visible in ascribing meaning to the narrative but also in determining the underlying structure of the story.

3.6 Historical time, the self and binary opposition

In *The Road to Makkah* Asad also demonstrates that it is the interaction of textual elements in the writing that illustrate the story of the author's life and self. In a simple definition of autobiography Eakin (How, Preface), one of the leading scholars in the field of autobiography

studies, suggested that "It is the story of the self." According to Gappmaier (2009, p.18) this definition by Eakin clearly illustrates the centrality of "selfhood" to the autobiography. Equally important is also the realization that it is through interaction with the presented self of the author that the reader of the autobiography is able to have a grasp at the author's life. However, the story through which a reader comes into contact with the various facets of the author's self and their realization are bound in textual significations. In *The Road to Makkah* these textual significations that illustrate the autobiographer's life, self and by extension identity are significantly encoded in binary oppositions.

Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that selfhood and identity are very subjective matters. According to Olshen (2001, p.799), "Much of the difficulty in understanding the self is that, if it is granted meaning at all, its meaning will of necessity be entirely experiential, entirely subjective." This is inevitable because as Smith (6) in Eakin (1989) points out, "none of us lives without reference to an imaginative singularity which we call our self." It is also a fact that one cannot live without this sense of self. It is through it that humans formulate their conception of who they are in the world and of what significance is life to them. However, any sense of self and identity is equally relational both textually and in reality. Conversely, the self becomes subject to the rules used in the formulation of a textual presentation as in the autobiography.

The above positions on self and identity are richly illustrated in Asad's autobiography. The autobiographer clearly presents his story as that of a man in the midst of two different cultures and ideologies. The West is illustrated as his starting point while the East (Arabia) is his end destination. Similarly, he comes to accept Islam as against Judaism which is the religion to which he was born. However, Judaism and Christianity are illustrated as belonging to the same orbit by the autobiographer. Therefore, they stand in binary opposition to Islam despite the

parallel relationship between them on many issues. This parallelism has mostly been displayed by Asad through exhibiting an intertextual connection between his autobiography and other religious texts such as the Old Testament or Torah.

Asad also makes use of such intertextual connections to fuse both historical time and autobiographical time in telling his story. In arriving at a desert village where he meets some Bedouin women Asad (2006) narrates that:

> … they wordlessly [the women] take the bucket rope from my hands and draw water for my camels – just as, four thousand years ago, that woman at the well did to Abraham's servant when he came from Canaan to find for his master's son Isaac a wife from among their kinsfolk in Padan-Aram.
>
> *He made his camels kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, the time that women go out to draw water.*
>
> *And he said, 'O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. Let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shally say, "Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink," – and she shall say, "Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also"; let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast showed kindness unto my master.*
>
> *And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebecca came out … with her pitcher upon her shoulder … And the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher.' And she said, "Drink, my lord'; and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, 'I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking.' And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camel…* (p.43).

The above narrative enables Asad to pass comments on two events that occur over vast differences in time. It allows the autobiographer to establish a connection with a historical occurrence which is not only relevant to him as a Jewish descendant but also of importance to the lineage of the Arabs who had become his adopted brethren.

Asad then writes further on the significance of the Biblical account to his own narrative:

> This Biblical story floats through my mind as I stand with my two camels before the well of a little oasis amidst the sands of the Great Nufud [desert] and gaze at the women who have taken the bucket rope from my hands and now draw water for my animals … far away is the country of Padan-Aram and Abraham's time: but these women here, with the power of remembrance their stately gestures have evoked, obliterate all distance of space and make four thousand years appear as of no account in time. (p.43)

Such accounts by the autobiographer, although rooted in binary oppositions, also illustrate that the autobiography also makes use of time in binary relations. The autobiography, particularly, spiritual autobiographies such as *The Road to Makkah* establish a relationship between autobiographical and historical time. In addition, such a relationship allows Asad to deploy temporal parallelism in examining his own existence and relationship with the dwellers of the desert against that of the Prophet Abraham several thousands of years ago. It is a technique that is made possible and very vivid through the deployment of binary oppositions.

3.7 Conclusion

The narrative in the primary text is constituted of several anecdotes that share a common feature based on the use of binary oppositions to convey meaning. It is through these oppositions that the autobiographer creates a vivid narrative around his story. This is seen from the opening pages of the autobiography where Asad mentions his interaction with a coercer who motivates him into writing *The Road to Makkah*. Similarly, the autobiographer's identity and experience which occupy a central place in the story are illustrated based on the presentation of binary opposing elements. His relationship with the Jewish and Islamic faiths and the shift of his allegiance from the West to the East easily demonstrate such binary oppositions. The same pattern is also discernible in his use of intertextual connection in relation to historical and autobiographical time.

CHAPTER FOUR

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS AND BINARY OPPOSITION

4.1 Memory and Experience

The majority of definitions of the autobiography allude to it as a narration of past events. It is an allusion that inevitably leads to the view that the autobiographical form is based on the representation of previous events in the present. Gappmaier (2009, p.39) aptly elaborates on this idea in the following words "As a specific form of narrative locating 'the self in time and temporality' … autobiography involves at least two different yet interlocked temporal levels, i.e. the past (past experiences as accessed via memory) and the present (the writing, and experiences at the moment of writing which influence the mnemonic process)." The autobiographer, then, depends on memory to narrate past events in such a way as to situate that experiential history within the present (Smith and Watson, 2010, p.22). Memory and experience are thus central issues in the autobiography. The two are intertwined because memory is an interpretation of past events which are experiences for the autobiographer.

In the autobiography, it is, however, discernible that the autobiographer is consciously involved in a process of reinterpretation of events based on both memory and experience. Consequently, memory becomes an interpretation of the autobiographer's past which takes place in the very act of remembering (Smith and Watson, 2010, p.22). Viewed from this perspective, Schacter (2001) maintains that "Memories are records of how we have experienced events … we construct our memories from fragments of experience that change over time." The autobiography is one of such constructions that are made possible from fragments of individual and sometimes, even, collective memories. In *The Road to Makkah* the narration by Asad derives form from the significant deployment of binary oppositions in the construction from the various episodes of his

life. His use of such oppositions makes it possible for the autobiographer to render meaning in the form of reinterpretation based on the positioning of the significant elements in his narrative. This is easily discernible in questioning some of the deeply-rooted decisions that underpin Asad's connection with Arabia and the Muslim world. He mentions thus (Asad, 2006):

> Why is it that, even after finding my place among the people who believe in the things I myself have come to believe, I have struck no root?... Two years ago, when I took an Arab wife in Medina, I wanted her to give me a son. Through this son, Talal, who was born to us a few months ago, I have begun to feel that the Arabs are my kin as well as my brethren in faith. I want him to have his roots deep in this land and to grow up in the consciousness of his great heritage of blood as well as culture. This, one might think, should be enough to make a man desirous of settling down for good, of building for himself and his family a lasting home. Why is it, then, that my wanderings are not yet over and that I have still to continue on my way? Why is it that the life which I myself have chosen does not fully satisfy me? What is it that I find lacking in this environment? (p.47).

The above narrative by Asad illustrates a characteristic use of binary oppositions in the representations from his memory and experience. The use of these oppositions illustrates the autobiographer's feelings, beliefs and his innermost yearnings. It is noticeable from the anecdote that the narrator and protagonist are fused. This is despite the fact that the latter is only illustrated on the pages for the reader. The narration is thus based on a parallelism between the two.

Similarly, Asad mentions that he has found his place in Arabia while at the same time mentioning a deep sense of dissatisfaction. The phrases "settling down for good" and "to continue on my way" if juxtaposed against one another add to the autobiographer's uncertainties based on the palpable restlessness from the presentation. The two expressions stand in binary opposition. It is a presentation that vividly illustrates a deep yearning to settle down in the place where Asad sees as home yet the writer feels an unfathomable yearning to continue with his wanderings. A few pages later he writes that *"If water stands motionless in a pool it grows stale*

and muddy, but when it moves and flows it becomes clear: so, too, man in his wanderings" (Asad, 2005, p.48). It is an analogy based on polarity with the aim of giving meaning to the autobiographer's life. According to Cowley (2015, p.3) "The autobiography will try to say something about the author's life as a whole, to distill the essence or meaning of that life, to show what its author stood for." Thus Asad, uses binary oppositions in the earlier statement to metaphorically illustrate that his travels keep him refreshed just like the flow which keeps water fresh.

Asad also makes mention of taking an Arab wife in Medina. At this point in reading the book the reader is already aware that the autobiographer is originally Jewish and from Europe. This background knowledge brings to the fore a series of binary oppositions. Despite the silence on his own origin at this point the notion of an "Arab wife" instinctively arouses the idea of Asad as "a husband who is European and an ethnic Jew". Talal, the son from his Arab wife also stands in a binary relationship with Asad, the father. Similarly, the son and his mother is another representation based on binary opposition. The writer also poignantly mentions of having "struck no root" in Arabia while hoping for Talal to "have his roots deep in the land". It is evident that the writer is juxtaposing his situation with that of Talal. The son is a native who is born in Medina while Asad perceives himself as a settler. The autobiographer also mentions "of building for himself and his family a lasting home". The pronuoun "himself" which denotes Asad stands in a binary opposition to "family".

It is evident from the above arguments that the autobiographer's past only becomes memory when it is articulated. Through this process of representation in Asad's autobiography the writer depends considerably on handling the "autobiographical I" to illustrate important elements of his narrative. It is a representation which is based on parallelism in several anecdotes in *The Road to*

Makkah. It is a presentation that follows in the pattern of Peters (2016) argument when she mentions that:

> In an autobiographical narrative, the author who claims individual responsibility for creating his text (the "I" in real life) identifies with the narrator (the "writing I" in the text), and this narrator establishes a relationship of identity with the principal protagonist in the text (the "written I"). The narrator, and the protagonist overlap as a powerful, unitary ego, ensuring a privileged linear narrative. This means, as Annete Kuhn notes, "the adult who is writing 'now' is contained within the child he writes about; events are ordered retrospectively from the standpoint of the present, the moment of telling, which is often also the moment of narrative closure. In consequence, the story is ordered and read as if this life could have been lived in no other way. (p.27).

This unity and overlap between the narrator and protagonist is thus central to the autobiography. Similarly, in the primary text both narrator and protagonist merge in the process of telling the story of Asad's life. One noticeable strategy repeatedly deployed by the autobiographer is the use of the narrator in setting out the theme of discussion and subsequently relying on the protagonist to elaborate further. In a melancholy mood on the subject of knowledge while in a library in Medina Asad (2005) narrates thus:

> As I look at these books in their tooled-leather covers, the discrepancy between the Muslim Yesterday and Today strikes me like a painful blow …
> 'What ails thee, my son? Why this bitter look on thy face?'
> I turn toward the voice – and behold, sitting on the carpet between one of the bay windows, a folio volume on his knees, the diminutive figure of my old friend, Shaykh Abdullah ibn Bulayhid. His sharp ironical eyes greet me with a warm flicker as I kiss his forehead and sit down by his side. He is the greatest of all the ulama of Najd and, in spite of a certain doctrinaire narrowness of the Wahhabi outlook, one of the keenest minds I have ever met in Muslim countries… 'I was thinking, O shaykh, how far we Muslims have travelled from this' – and point toward the books on the shelves –'to our present misery and degradation.' (p. 282).

It is apparent that the narrator starts off the discussion on the "discrepancy" while the protagonist responds to the Shaykh's question- at the end of the conversation. The two, though apart, always

seem to co-exist in a paradoxical relationship that gets the story moving while also giving meaning to the issues being discussed by Asad.

4.2 Identity

Writing in *Memory, Brain and Beliefs* Schacter and Scarry (2001, p.3) maintain that "Memories are shaped by beliefs, so too are beliefs shaped by memories." The beliefs that invariably lead to most of the ways that one articulates meaning from memory originate from the various identities through which humans exist. Another implication that can be drawn from the position of Schacter and Scarry (2001) is that the representation of experience which is subsequently articulated as memory is intertwined with identity. Accordingly Smith and Watson (2001, p.40) argue that, "The stuff of autobiographical storytelling, then, is drawn from multiple, disparate, and discontinuous experiences and multiple identities constructed from and constituting those experiences." Therefore, autobiographers integrate numerous models of identity in the course of presenting their stories. It is a technique which is very much utilized in the primary text.

In *The Road to Makkah* the autobiographer presents a story through multiple identities which in turn navigate the intersections of gender, age, profession, ethnicity, ideology and nationality, etc. It is an approach that enables the autobiographer to discuss various historical and cultural issues because identity cannot be isolated from the two. Watson and Smith (2001, p.40) accordingly maintain that "There is no universal identity of "man" or "woman" outside specifities of historical and cultural location." Their position is apparently visible in reading the primary text. The autobiographer's beliefs, decisions, yearnings, aspirations, actions and hopes seem to be tied to historical periods and cultural locations and allegiances. This is because "… experience is a cultural phenomenon" as argued by Heddon (2008, p.22).Consequently, Asad is seen as a young

European, a Jewish boy, an avowed atheist, an enthralled traveler, a Muslim, a mature diplomat, an intellectual, and a journalist, etc. In one of his journeys while writing for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Asad (2005) writes thus:

> IN TIME, KURDISTAN receded into the past. For nearly eighteen months I wondered through the length and breadth of that strangest of lands, Iran. I came to know a nation that combined in itself the wisdom of thirty centuries of culture and the volatile unpredictability of children; a nation that could look with a lazy irony at itself and all that happened around it – and a moment later could tremble in wild, volcanic passions. I enjoyed the cultured ease of the cities and the sharp, exhilarating steppe winds; I slept in the castles of provincial governors with a score of servants at my disposal, and in half-ruined caravanserais where at night you had to take care to kill the scorpions before you were stung by them … Persian became almost as familiar to me as Arabic. I held converse with educated men in cities, soldiers and nomads, traders in the bazaars, cabinet ministers and religious leaders, wandering dervishes and wise opium smokers in wayside taverns… (p.213).

The passage vividly incorporates several identities such as a wanderer, intellectual and journalist. It is a passage that is also structured based on binary opposition. It mentions "IN TIME" by which the writer implies the present to which he later mentions the past. These are binary opposing concepts. There is also the idea of length and breadth both of which are binaries. The writer similarly points out the "wisdom of thirty centuries" against a "volatile unpredictability". He also writes of "a nation that could look with a lazy irony at itself and all that happened around it – and a moment later could tremble in wild, volcanic passions." The "lazy irony" which metaphorically arouses a sense of nonchalance stands in a binary opposing relationship to the idea of "wild, volcanic passions". The passage also places in a binary opposition his staying in castles and in "half-ruined caravanserais". In talking about his learning Persian, Asad also uses Arabic to place both in a binary opposing relationship. Subsequently, the autobiographer discusses his interactions with different people across the strata of Iranian society. A closer look at the mentioned classes belies the idea of a division into two binary opposing classes. On the

one hand, he mentions “traders in the bazaars, cabinet ministers and religious leaders” while on the other he writes of “opium smokers in wayside taverns”.

One noticeable feature of the narrative in the primary text is the deployment of mini-narratives within a central narrative. In one of such mini-narratives Asad portrays his relationship with his first wife, Elsa. The passage also presents the autobiographer as a caring and loving individual. This is a clear contrast to most of the images of Asad in the work which illustrate him as an avowed traveler and adventurer without a will to settle down. After one of his Iranian wanderings Asad mentions that (2005, Asad, p.300), “IT WAS AT THIS TIME that I married Elsa. The two years I had been away from Europe had not weakened our love but rather strengthened it, and it was with a happiness I had never felt before that I brushed aside her apprehensions about the great difference in our ages…” The mention of being away from Europe brings to the reader’s mind the autobiographer’s sojourn in Arabia despite his silence. The two stand in a binary opposing relationship. He also draws the reader’s attention to Elsa’s apprehensions due to a great difference in their ages. The difference and the binary opposition in their ages is illustrated when Asad (2005, p.300) elaborates further on the issue “But how can you marry me?” she argued. ‘You are not yet twenty-six, and I am over forty. Think of it: when you will be thirty, I will be forty-five; and when you will be forty, I will be an old woman …’” Thus, Asad is much younger than Elsa. Nonetheless, their mutual affection is a case of parallelism which the writer uses to reinforce his identity as a caring and loving personality.

4.3 Space

Looking back at the above discussions on identity, memory and experience it is noticeable that the autobiographer’s investigation into these concepts is related in most cases to the idea of

space. Asad seems to allocate a significant amount of attention to the discussion of geographical areas and places in *The Road to Makkah*. It is a noticeable strategy in several autobiographies as mentioned by Boileau (2007) in relation to the autobiography "… the author seems to be obsessed with the remembrance of geography and places." She further adds that the "autobiography develops around the classical association of life with a journey. It is worth mentioning that the insistence on places contributes to reinforce the referentiality of the text." Boileau's (2007) position raises a germane issue because place literally shapes most autobiographical works. Furthermore, Regard (2003, p.20) maintains that "… the autobiographical author, had always been in some way dependent on geographical knowledge". This is not surprising because the events that shape a person's life take place always within a geographical entity.

The deployment of space in the primary text is very intense. It could perhaps, even, be read as a work of space. Asad uses very vivid descriptions that intensify the images that he presents to the reader. On his first arrival at Aleppo, he presents the city in the following words (Asad, 2005):

> I came to Aleppo. Its streets and buildings reminded me of Jerusalem: old stone houses that appeared to have grown out of the soil, dark, arched passageways, silent squares and courtyards, carved windows. The inner life of Aleppo, however, was entirely different from that of Jerusalem. The dominant mood of Jerusalem had been the strange side-by-side of conflicting national currents, like a painful, complicated cramp … But Aleppo – although a mixture of Arabian and Levantine, with a hint of nearby Turkey – was harmonious and serene. The houses with their stony facades and wooden balconies were alive even in their stillness. The quiet industriousness of the artisans in the ancient bazaar; the courtyards of the many old caravanserais with their arcades and loggias full of bales of goods; frugality with gay covetousness, and both free from all envy; the absence of all hurry, a restfulness which embraced the stranger and made him wish that his own life were rooted in restfulness: all this flowed in a strong, winning melody. (p.199).

The writer describes Aleppo using binary opposition to illustrate similarities and differences between it and Jerusalem. He mentions its "old stone houses" and "silent squares and courtyards". The houses symbolize private spaces while the silent squares allude to open public space. Asad also mentions that the city is a mixture of Arabian and Levantine with a hint of nearby Turkey. Here, Arabian and Levantine stand in a binary opposing relationship. Additionally, both Arabian and Levantine also exist in binary opposition to "nearby Turkey" which is later mentioned. The autobiographer also illustrates the houses that are alive in their stillness and subsequently mentions the many old caravanserais. The houses bring to mind the people of the ancient city while the old caravanserais allude to the continuous stream of strangers and travelers such as Asad that come and leave the city.

The description of Aleppo highlights how the autobiographer uses a description of geographical places to highlight other issues that might seem unconnected with space. Asad writes of a "frugality" that coexists with "gay covetousness" in Aleppo. He also nostalgically observes a restfulness which permeated the city. It is a restfulness which he wished to possess. However, his life is a continuous flow as he states that "all this flowed in a strong, winning melody." This alludes to Asad's penchant for travel and exploration of other lands. Thus, it is noticeable that the description of Aleppo using binary opposition serves not just the purpose of bringing images before the reader; it also highlights some important issues in relation to the autobiographer. This implies that the parallel presentation of the two cities is used to present a deep meaning in relation to his inability to stay in one place.

Asad also uses his depictions of space to go back in time while demonstrating his attachment to Arabia. His account on the plain of Arafat clearly illustrates his connection with the geographical

entity and the society associated with it. The narrative easily reinforces the notion of life as a journey. Asad (2005) nostalgically comments on the subject:

> Not far from here, hidden from my eyes in the midst of this lifeless wilderness of valleys and hills, lies the plain of Arafat, on which all the pilgrims who come to Mecca assemble on one day of the year as a reminder of that Last Assembly, when man will have to answer to his Creator for all he has done in life. How often have I stood there myself … And as I stand on the hillcrest and gaze down toward the invisible Plain of Arafat, the moonlit blueness of the landscape before me, so dead a moment ago, suddenly comes to life with the currents of all the human lives that have passed through it and is filled with the eerie voices of the millions of men and women who have walked or ridden between Mecca and Arafat in over thirteen hundred pilgrimages for over thirteen hundred years … (p.373).

The writer uses hills and valleys which stand in direct binary opposition to begin the above narrative on Arafat. This reinforces the notion of the high and the low of which the multitudes that throng to Arafat come from annually. The passage also evokes the idea of a parallelism or similarity amongst the pilgrims when they descend on the plain. The autobiographer also draws another parallelism between the idea of "one day" against the other day symbolized by the "Last Assembly". The writer also mentions standing on a hillcrest while gazing down on Arafat which is a plain. The plain and the hillcrest are once again instances of binary opposition as used by Asad. He also illustrates that the plain which was dead a moment ago suddenly comes to life. This evokes the notion of life and death which are binary opposing concepts.

Asad's emphasis on life and death is very vivid in most of his descriptions of space, particularly, the desert which is central to Arabia. He uses such illustrations metaphorically to demonstrate his perplexity with the Arabian landscape. In one of such accounts he writes (Asad, 2005):

> Life in its majesty … you always feel it in the desert. Because it is so difficult to keep and so hard, it is always like a gift, a treasure, and a surprise. For the desert is always surprising, even though you may have known it for years. Sometimes,

> when you think you can see it in all its rigidity and emptiness, it awakens from its dream, sends forth its breath – and tender, pale-green grass stands suddenly where only yesterday there was nothing but sand and splintery pebbles. It sends forth its breath again – and a flock of small birds flutters through the air – from where? Where to? – slim-bodied, long-winged, emerald-green; or a swarm of locusts rises up above the earth with a rush and a zoom, grey and grim and endless like a horde of hungry warriors … (p.12).

In the foregoing passage the autobiographer uses binary opposition to convey his astonishment with the desert. He finds the desert surprising despite knowing it for years. He also mentions that out of its rigidity and emptiness life, in the form of "tender, pale-green grass" sometimes crops up. Likewise flocks of birds and swarms of locust sometimes appear out of nothing. Thus, the richness of the desert emanates simultaneously from its emptiness. In reading the primary text it is apparently noticeable that there is a corollary between the sudden coming to life of the desert and the suddenness of the change in his worldview particularly with regard to religion and ideology.

4.4 Emplacement

It is thus, deducible, from the forgoing use of space by Asad that the autobiographer is a positioned subject in *The Road to Makkah*. Location seems to add to or reinforce how Asad views himself and the world around him. Consequently, it is arguable that in the autobiography that emplacement is the juncture from which self-articulation emerges (Smith and Watson, 2001, p.42). Therefore, the concept of location emphasizes various coordinates such as that of nationality, ethnicity, and ideology, etc. It is a position that is very visible across most of the accounts in the primary text. His association with Islam is primarily borne from his residency and travels across Muslim lands. The story of his life is similarly an indication of his long residency and association with Arabia and its peoples. Therefore, his attachment to the land plays a pivotal role in the formulation of the primary text. Regard (2003, p.20) writes accordingly "The

autobiographical author had always in some way been dependent on geographical knowledge." This is naturally because an autobiographer's story is conjugated within a geography of social relationships (Regard, 2003, p.21).

The dependence of the autobiographer on geographical knowledge as illustrated above by Regard (2003) arises from the fact that certain places arouse the remembrance of particular events from a person's life. According to Smith and Watson (2001, p.24) "Acts of remembering take place at particular sites in particular circumstances … we rememeber our history as national citizens in the context of parades and national holidays. Similarly, the memory invoked in autobiographical narrative is specific to the time of writing and the context of telling." For example, Asad's reminiscences on the annual Muslim pilgrimage of Hajj take effect on the plains of Arafat. The autobiographer consequently had to go back in time to one of his pilgrimages in order to be able to give an account of his time at Arafat.

This going back and forth, thus, becomes a process of identification for the autobiographer (Lee-Brown, 2004, p.22). In the case of Asad it allows him to identify with the larger community he sees at Arafat while also simultaneously perceiving himself as an independent observer and commentator. He uses this relationship with the larger community to see the world not only from his own perspective but also through the eyes of the global community of pilgrims. In recounting his first arrival at Makkah and on viewing the *Kaaba* at the Holy Mosque in Makkah Asad (2001) posits accordingly:

> This, then, was the Kaaba, the goal of longing for so many millions of people for so many centuries. To reach this goal, countless pilgrims had made heavy sacrifices throughout the ages; many had died on the way; many had reached it only after great privations; and to all of them this small, square building was the apex of their desires, and to reach it meant fulfillment. (p.367).

The passage is rooted in binary oppositions. He mentions the Kaaba being a goal of longing at the beginning of the excerpt; and at its end the writer uses the words "desires" and "fulfillment" to sum up the presentation. Desire and fulfillment are binary opposing expressions. Asad also mentions of some pilgrims who had died on their way and others who had made it to the pilgrimage. These are also binary opposing ideas. Similarly, in mentioning the other millions of pilgrims, Asad draws a parallelism between himself and them which goes across ages. There is a parallelism in their desire and longing for the Kaaba as well as his own desire to see it. Such parallelisms in the text suggest a pattern which the autobiographer uses to maintain a structure and a format in the presentation of the narrative.

4.5 Embodiment

The alternation between the past and the present through which Asad draws upon such parallelisms relies significantly on embodiment for most part of the book. He uses embodiment to initiate a link between the past and the present as well as to illustrate important points on various issues which are topical to his narrative. His emotional attachment to the lands that have come to shape his life is demonstrated through reference to a physical aspect of the autobiographer. While contemplating that he can almost see the lives of two men when he looks back at his life, Asad (2005) reflects thus:

> I lift my head and see the round piece of sky over the rim of the well, and stars. As I stand very still, for a very long time, I seem to see how they slowly shift their positions, moving on and on, so that they might complete the rows upon rows of millions of years which never come to a close. And then, without willing it, I have to think of the little rows of years that have happened to me – all those dim years spent in the warm safety of childhood's rooms in a town where every nook and street was familiar to me; thereafter in other cities full of excitements and yearnings and hopes such as only early youth can know; then in a new world among people whose mien and bearing were outlandish at first but it time brought forth a new familiarity and a new feeling of being at home; then in stranger and

> ever stranger landscapes, in cities as old as the mind of man, in steppes without horizon, in mountains whose wildness reminded you of the wildness of the human heart, and in hot desert solitudes; and the slow growth of new truths – truths new to me … (p.46).

In the passage Asad is emphasizing the interrelationship between his physiology and memory and experience (Vickers, 2011). The thought elicited from the action of lifting his head and observing the sky is what at this point initiates the deep contemplation on the parallels between his childhood days and the subsequent years of adventure and excitement in Arabia. The childhood years are characterized by warmth, safety and familiarity; and knowledge of every nook and street. This is in sharp contrast to the latter years which he spent in "stranger and ever stranger landscapes" and wild territories. Their unfamiliarity is a binary opposition to the familiarity of years in the city of Lwow in Europe. Asad also mentions that new truths emerged to him in those wild solitudes. This evokes the notion of the previous truths of his early years in Europe. The two are those set off in a relationship of similarity. This is despite his silence on stating the particular truths. It is however the context of the reading that draws out the peculiar truths which the writer is alluding to in the excerpt.

It is notable that Asad consistently uses embodiment in the elaboration of themes which revolve around knowledge. In portraying his deviation from the norm of staying at school he points out that (Asad, 2005):

> For about two years after the end of the Great War I studied in a somewhat desultory fashion, history of art and philosophy at the University of Vienna. My heart was not in those studies. A quiet academic career did not attract me. I felt a yearning to tome into more intimate grips with life, to enter it without any of those carefully contrived, artificial defences which security-minded people love to build up around themselves; and I wanted to find by myself an approach to the spiritual order of things which, I knew, must exist but which I could not yearn discern. (p.57).

It is apparent that the mention of "My heart" in the excerpt and subsequently "studies" is based on parallelism because of the association between the two. The autobiographer subsequently states his aversion to a quiet academic career as against an attraction for more practical approach to life through venturing out. The two ideas are binary opposites. He also makes mention of his belief in the existence of a spiritual order of things and his inability to yet discern that order. These are binary opposites rooted however rooted in their association with the author's heart. Thus, there is also a binary relationship between the spiritual yearning and the autobiographer's heart. This is based on the idea that spirituality is closely associated with the heart.

The excerpt additionally encapsulates a binary opposition which might not be present from only a passive observation. The autobiographer states in the passage abandoning his studies at the University of Vienna. However, his subsequent narrative illustrates that the dropping out is simply because the university studies were inadequate to him. There is an irony in the argument because the university despite being the epitome of the center of human learning seems unfulfilling to Asad. He feels that his absence from it will give him the required knowledge which he needs in life. He expresses the notion that the knowledge which he seeks is not confined within the walls of the university but outside it. Thus, he presents an argument based on binary opposition on the inside of a university and the outside world.

It is also important to point out that in discussing his dropping out from the University of Vienna as well as in venturing out to other lands from Europe the autobiographer exhibits a reluctance to fully accept those decisions. This is normal for most autobiographical writings. Stanzel in Gappmaier (2009, p.46) accordingly maintains that "most first-person narrators choose not to identify completely with the experiencing self." Gappmaier (2009, p.46) additionally maintains that the through embodiment "the narrator strives to distance himself/herself from his/her past

mistakes or confusions by means of displaying his intellectual faculties of cerebration, remembrance and imagination." It is a narrative technique that originates from the narrators memory and experience relating to human feelings which generate in an autobiographer the need to deeply interrogate their past decisions and actions.

In addition, embodiment illustrates that the first-person narrator, as in the case of Asad, "belongs to the represented reality, the … world in which the characters live" (Stanzel in Gappmaier, 2009, p.46). In the case of *The Road to Makkah*, as in other cases of autobiographical first-person narrative situations, the embodiment is characteristic of both the experiencing and narrating selves. Consequently, the motivation to tell the story of the embodied narrator is existential as argued by Vickers (2011). Therefore, there is an existential unity between the experiencing self and the narrating self. Gappmaier (2009) further elaborates on the matter in the following words:

> Depending on whether he/she feels close or distant to his/her earlier self, the narration can have a faithful, inevitable and compulsive quality or it can be used on the part of the mature self to satisfy the need to organize and give meaning to the chaos of the past. No matter how big or small the narrative distance, the narrative urge is always existentially determined, for the narrator's experience and the narrative process are inseparable. (p.46).

It is deducible from Gappmaier's position that the allocation of meaning to events by the autobiographer is a constituent part of the narrative process. Narrative, from this perspective, becomes a process of interpretation for the autobiographer. Additionally, the autobiographical narrative becomes an avenue for allocating meaning to past events (Gudsmundsdottir, 2003, p.59). At the core of this argument, is the idea that the autobiography is based on the interrelationship of a multiplicity of temporal levels. The past is accessed via the present by the autobiographer (Huyssen, 1995, p.2).

In *The Road to Makkah* Asad's narrative when examined from Gappmaier's position above is a case of a mature self examining the actions taken earlier by a young and immature self. In the process the autobiographer questions the rationale behind those earlier decisions and judgments. The narrative subtly illustrates the idea that the present is what makes the reassessment possible. Meaning, then, in the autobiography is a product of this interconnection which allows the writer to deploy narrative in the process of establishing causality and continuity. Consequently, experience and narration become merged in the process of narrating the story.

Lastly, in *The Road to Makkah* memory and experience are two central elements that play a pivotal role in the formulation of the narrative. They are crucial to the development of the story because the reinterpretation of events by Asad is based on constructions of his worldview on several topical issues. For example, his connection with Arabia and the Muslim world is mainly portrayed as a construct from memory. A recurring strategy utilized by the writer is the deployment of binary oppositions in the presentation of most anecdotes in the autobiography. The use of such oppositions is also apparent in the discussion of space in the primary text. This is very important because the work is extremely rich in the employment of space by the autobiographer. He illustrates an interrelationship between space and the formulation of his identity based on a multiplicity of worldviews that shape and define the autobiographer.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This research argues that the autobiography is a referential form in which the individuals present a story in relation to their life. It is a mode of representation that is written, read and interpreted based on the notion that the narrative revolves around the life of the autobiographer. The understanding that it revolves around the autobiographer's life has given rise to various debates which have undoubtedly complicated understanding of the form. However, in relation to this thesis the idea of Lejuene (1986) on the autobiographical pact is central to understanding the form. There is, therefore, an unwritten agreement behind the form both in its production and consumption. The autobiographical pact maintains that the story presented by the autobiographer is factual and verifiable. It is this position that many scholars such as Strawson (1989) find irreconcilable with the reality of narrative as a means through which any story is constructed and consumed. For narrative is more or less fictional. The position of writers such as Strawson and numerous others particularly from Deconstruction is primary based on the argument that autobiography depends almost entirely on the methodological procedures of fictional writing.

It is however noticeable in the course of this research that the autobiography is also based on the existence of a narrative identity system. It is a system which is (1) unwritten and (2) a social arrangement. Consequently, the autobiography is a representational form which can only be fully understood and appreciated when examined from two positions. First, it is unarguable that the form utilizes narrative at the core of its presentation. This is unavoidable for narrative is what gives form to human thoughts and feelings allowing individuals to share same with others. The autobiography is as such a story. Secondly, the autobiography is a specialized form of narrative practice because of its being subject to the dictates of the narrative identity system. As elaborated

in Chapter One of this work contemporary society assumes that individuals have a narrative identity that could be expressed and shared with others. The autobiography happens to be the leading aesthetic form through which people cast their narrative identities. Thus, the form can only be fully appreciated when viewed from the foregoing positions of its being a representational form which is however bound by a social arrangement that perceives it as a narrative of and about a particular individual. An examination of the autobiography from only one of the positions will only reveal an incomplete understanding of the form.

The research also maintains that the subjection of the autobiography to the dictates of a narrative identity system reinforces the understanding that the form is based on a referential aesthetics that is different from those of other narratives. It is a form where the observing subject is also the object of investigation, contemplation and remembrance. This is very noticeable in the primary text. The story is written by Asad and at the same time the protagonist and the narrator in the text also simultaneously point back at him. This is peculiar to the autobiography. Additionally, the autobiographical pact also springs forth from this uniqueness. For their can only exist such a pact where there is unity between observing subject and the object of investigation. It is this unity that makes retrospective teleology possible in the autobiography. The writer can conveniently comment and question various elements of their past and present self in the process of constructing their narrative. It allows the writer to relive their past life as though it were being lived in the present of the writing. The writer is able to pass several moral, ethical, spiritual and ideological comments on their history as well as of those related to their world. In *The Road to Makkah* Asad is able to examine some of the key notions central to his journey. It is a narrative which examines both his physical travels as well as his ideological, religious and emotional

movements. He explores his shift of allegiance from one cultural and religious orbit to another while maintaining a connection and attachment to both.

Asad relies extensively on a narrative technique that has made it convenient to present multiple cultures, time and environments within a tightly-knit narrative. He makes use of a central narrative while interspersing it with mini-narratives. This technique makes it possible for him, for example, to narrate his experiences on a journey while also commenting on a past relationship to the time in the narrative. He uses this technique in the early pages of the book to mention his relationship with the Saudi Arabian monarch Abdulazeez Ibn Saud. The monarch was introduced while Asad's narrative was on a journey in the middle of the desert. However, an encounter with a bedouin whom the autobiographer had once met at the monarch's palace some years back is what triggers the discussion on the royal. In the process of reading the reader feels as though the narrator consciously introduces the discussion without the writer's interference. It is a case in point where narrator and author seem so clearly demarcated. Additionally, the entire narrative in the primary text is based on this demarcation between a central narrative of a physical journey to Makkah and the mention of several mini-narratives. These mini-narratives are often triggered by events such as the encounter with the bedouin or a particular experience on the part of the narrating object or narrating subject. Such encounters and experiences are extremely numerous in the primary text.

The research also demonstrates that elements in the narratives in *The Road to Makkah* mostly combine and contrast in the development of the story. There is a clear demonstration of contrasting relationships in majority of the anecdotes presented in the work. In reading the primary text it becomes apparent that Asad uses binary opposition almost as a foundation upon which the story is built. These oppositions are presented in various forms via differences and

similarities between various concepts and elements in the work. An example of these differences and similarities are glaring even in the case of the autobiographer. The work presents two glaring pictures of Asad. There is the Asad who becomes present in the writing of the story. This is an Asad who is seen as a Muslim and a widely travelled journalist and a diplomat. The image is that of a mature man with a sense of purpose. It is an image that is in clear contrast to the younger Asad who is Leopold Weiss. Weiss is seen as a European who is an atheist despite been raised as a Jew. Weiss is also pictured as a non-conformist willing to go to all lengths to achieve his dreams despite strong objections from his father. This causes a considerable strain in the relationship between father and son. However, it is not only the difference that sets apart Weiss and Asad as presented in the story. The two are also portrayed with similarities. Both are adventurous with a penchant for travel and exploration. They are accustomed to taking risks that could have otherwise caused them significant troubles. For example, as a teenager during a war in Austria Weiss ran away from home and enlisted in the army despite being underage. Similarly, Asad indulges in dangerous expeditions such as a journey into Italian occupied Libya to render assistance to the Libyan resistance.

In addition, the autobiographer relies on such contrasts to comment on ideas based on different temporal levels. For example, on arriving at a particular desert settlement the looks and gestures of the beduin women bring to Asad's mind a biblical narrative. Through this narrative and the encounter with the women the autobiographer draws a comparison between the present and a past which is almost four thousand years at the time of writing the story. Here Asad examines two different temporal levels simultaneously vis-à-vis the time of writing the story. In the presentation of the story Asad floats through time to the time of Abraham and presents a picture of that time through a biblical narrative that comes to his mind both at the time of writing the

story and presumably at the time of the encounter. It is out of the contrast that the meaning becomes glaring for there is a similarity between the characters from the biblical narrative and Asad at the time of his travels in the desert. Both events happen at a place named Tayma and both Asad and the character from the biblical narrative were assisted by women who drew water for them and their camels. There is also a contrast of male – female relationship in the story.

The study also illustrates that the deployment of most autobiographical elements in the primary text is dependent on binary opposition for their function, meaning and relevance. This is apparent especially in the writer's handling of elements such as identity, memory, experience, space, embodiment and embedding. The anecdotes related to Asad's employment of these elements follow a pattern based on binary opposition. Their message and meaning only become apparent following a close scrutiny of the oppositions in the anecdotes. A closer examination of the oppositions, in most cases, expresses a deeper meaning than what is otherwise visible from a surface look at the narratives. Similarly, the function and relevance of the narratives tend to be expressed in the oppositions present within them. Thus, the oppositions convey an interrelationship between the various narratives in terms of the overall meaning which the autobiographer expresses in the text. This is discernible in the way that the anecdotes convey similar messages despite being presented based on sometimes different themes.

In the autobiographer's use of embedding, for example, he discusses several personalities such as the late Saudi monarch King Abdulazeez Ibn Saud, King Hussain of Jordan and Riza Khan of Iran. However, common amongst all the narratives of the individual is the use of binary opposition in illustrating their stories and the interaction of the autobiographer with each of them. Thus, their stories are entirely different with themes that are different while at the same time with some similarities. Nonetheless, the autobiographer delves into the narratives of each

individual using binary opposition to portray some of their actions, personalities, challenges, hopes and ambitions, etc. Therefore, he uses binary opposition to relate their history to his own history within the context of his autobiography. It is through an examination of these oppositions that the reader is able to make meaning of the picture of each individual within the context of Asad's autobiography.

Through the embedding of the stories of the prominent characters Asad also highlights his connection with Arabia and the Muslim world. In the case of the Saudi Arabian monarch, for example, the autobiographer depicts a picture of a man who faces several rivalries before becoming an absolute ruler. These rivalries and challenges are all illustrated based on binary opposition. Thus, the history of the monarch is totally presented on the basis of binary opposition. It is through this presentation that the reader perceives the royal being discussed in the autobiography. Asad paints him as a man who, even, in his youth had to grow up in a foreign land because his hometown of Riyadh had been overcome by a one-time vassal, the house of Ibn Rashid. The subsequent challenges Ibn Saud went through such as oppositions to his early rule including violent uprisings are all depicted using binary opposition.

The portrayal of Asad as someone sympathetic to Ibn Saud is also based on binary opposition. The autobiographer establishes a parallelism between himself and the royal. While the King grapples with the challenges of governing a vast kingdom the autobiographer is faced with covering a vast region for the European press. It is a parallelism which might not be obvious at the surface. However, it is apparent that Asad utilizes his relationship with the king to gain unfettered access to Arabia. The royal on the other hand gets the autobiographer to write positively about issues associated with his rule and to also engage in risky espionage trips for the king. In this symbiotic relationship both Asad and Ibn Saud seem sympathetic to the travails of

each other. The autobiographer depicts them as individuals faced with an ever changing world moving at a very fast pace.

Furthermore, Asad draws a parallel between his family life and that of Ibn Saud. He writes about being totally different from his father in terms of their worldviews and aspirations in life. Asad's father had objected to his dropping out from school as earlier mentioned. However, the autobiographer subsequently dropped out and left home unceremoniously. In the case of Ibn Saud Asad mentions that he was different from his father in terms of character and ambition. The father, Abdulrahman, had given up the kingdom to the rival house of Ibn Rashid. It was Ibn Saud who went on to reclaim the lost kingdom. Thus, both Asad and Ibn Saud are seen as having different opinions to their parents. The two are also seen as eventually becoming successful in their chosen paths despite serious objection from their parents. The narrative also illustrates a binary opposition in the closing years of their parents. Asad never reunited fully with his father who died in a Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War while Ibn Saud maintained a close relationship with his own father till the death. Therefore, the depiction of their family lives is predicated on similarities and differences. It is by examining these oppositions that a reader is able to have an in-depth understanding of this aspect of the narrative.

In addition, binary opposition plays a crucial role in the exploration of both experience and memory by Asad. The autobiographer presents aspects from both which reveal his feelings, beliefs and yearnings. However, the narrative makes use of oppositions which enable him to present vivid images to illustrate clear pictures to the reader. During his sojourn in Medina, for example, he mentions of a deep attachment to the city. He also states that he always felt a yearning to travel away despite having a wife and a child in the city. Accordingly, he states that *"If water stands motionless in a pool it grows stale and muddy, but when it moves and flows it*

becomes clear: so, too, man in his wanderings" (Asad p.48). The passion to travel and explore is thus a strong motivation for Asad. All his experience and memory is connected with this penchant which keeps him wandering from place to place. The above analogy which he uses to figuratively illustrate this yearning is itself based on binary opposition.

In reading the text it is apparent that the autobiographer presents multiple identities that spring forth as a result of the various experiences in his life. It is a strategy that is employed in order to present various historical and cultural contexts in relation to the autobiographer. This gives the reader an insight into Asad's identity and personality at various times indicated in the narrative. It is a technique based on the notion that identity is intertwined with cultural and historical contexts. Conversely, the autobiographer is presented as a young Jewish boy, an avowed atheist, a young Muslim, a journalist, a mature diplomat, a family man and a passionate explorer and traveler. Each of these identities is rooted in a different worldview which is simultaneously examined at the time of writing. Thus, two worldviews are at work in the illustration of these identities.

In addition, the anecdotes depicting the various identities illustrate binary oppositions that are easily discernible to the reader. In narrating his journey in Iran Asad narrative follows a similar pattern in both form and content. In the passage which has been highlighted in Chapter Four of the study the words illustrate binary opposition. For example, he uses the words "IN Time" to illustrate a moment in the past which was also the present at the time of the event while also subsequently mentioning "… the past". This is a juxtaposition of the present and the past which are always present in the lives of individuals. However, Asad uses this depiction to portray himself as a traveler and explorer when he mentions that it is Kurdistan that receded into the past over time in the course of his journey. Thus, he moves into Iran to continue with his exploration.

He also mentions his exploration of the "length" and "breadth" of Iran. Both exist in a binary relationship. He subsequently uses several binary oppositions to portray his travels and encounters with people in Iran. At the end the passage evokes a picture of a man who is persistently engaged in travel and exploration of other lands. It is a technique that is used extensively in the primary text when the autobiographer is mentioning aspects related to his identity.

Writers such as Boileau (2007) have maintained that space literally shapes most autobiographical works. As mentioned earlier Asad is also persistent in the depiction of geographical spaces in the primary text. His use of space is very intense. However, the narratives all follow a pattern in the writer's use of binary opposition in the depiction of geographical areas. His description of the city of Aleppo readily comes to mind in terms of binary opposition as used by him in portraying places. In this case he uses similarities and differences to compare and contrast Aleppo to Jerusalem. It is through the comparison that the reader is able to visualize the city. However, the strategy not only gives a picture of Aleppo but also that of Jerusalem which the autobiographer had earlier written about before the anecdote where he describes the Syrian city. The descriptions also illustrate a nostalgia which Asad feels for the land and also symbolize his attachment for most of the places which he invariably sees as home. Such an attachment to the land is seen in various descriptions of geographical places in the primary text such as in the depiction of the plain of Arafat as highlighted in the previous chapter.

Finally, this research work illustrates that the autobiographical form, and in this case, *The Road to Makkah*, is based on well-articulated rules which the writer uses to structure a coherent narrative based on his experiences. Asad makes use of a central narrative based on spatial movement from one destination to another interspersed with mini-narratives that he reflects upon

to present his story. The eventual narratives are substantially based on the deployment of binary opposition in structuring both the content and form of the stories. Consequently, most of the elements of his narrative combine and contrast to produce meaning. It is through this use of differences that the reader is able to delve into Asad's memories and experiences as well as those related to the societies that play a part in shaping him as an individual. It is this reliance on well-articulated rules by the autobiographer that makes *The Road to Makkah* a significant work of literature worthy of a study like this one.

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