Autobiography as Objectification: Re-presenting the Subaltern in Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*

Mustapha Bala Ruma[1]
University of Malaya, Malaysia

Abstract
This paper examines the rhetorical strategies employed in Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927). Specifically, the paper focuses on how Gandhi constructs his narrative of identity by purporting to represent the interests of subaltern Indians in British India and South Africa. Its central argument is that in the process of framing the narrative of self, Gandhi's autobiography objectifies the Indian masses by employing negative tropes to describe their attitudes towards cleanliness and sanitation. The paper demonstrates that by projecting them as dirty and unamenable to change, Gandhi indirectly creates a binary opposition between himself and the subalterns. It concludes that, in spite of his claims of solidarity with the oppressed, Gandhi ends up objectifying them as "others."

Keywords
Gandhi, autobiography, objectification, identity, difference, other

Introduction

In her diachronic review of the study of autobiography titled "Autofictional Practices" (2005), Danielle Chassin de Kergommeaux has delineated three observable waves in the study of autobiography beginning from the early twentieth century. The first wave, according to her, was concerned with establishing the constitutive features of an autobiography. In this sense, then, the first wave was preoccupied with issues of definition. In this regard, most theorists take autobiography to be the retrospective narrative of a "self-interested individual intent on assessing the status of the soul or the meaning of public achievement" (Smith and Watson 2).

Scholars of the second wave, on the other hand, focused on interrogating the concept of the self in autobiography. They were particularly interested in interrogating the assumed unity of the autobiographical "I." In this regard,

[1] Mustapha Bala Ruma is a lecturer at the Department of English and French, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina, Nigeria. He is currently a doctoral student at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. His research interests include postcolonial literature, life writing, modern drama and literary theory.

autobiographies were read to unearth how they manipulate identity-construction through textual encoding. Researchers were particularly interested in how autobiography attempts to fix something that is admittedly constantly in flux by conferring a forced unity upon it. Indeed, in the process of questioning the authenticity of the identity constructed in autobiographies, scholars also challenged the transparency of texts and the authority of the writing "I" in telling an objective story about itself.

The feminist perspective marked the third wave in autobiographical study. Researchers of this period were particularly interested in studying how autobiographical texts are performances in the sense in which Judith Butler (1993) describes them. These theorists see identities created by and in autobiographies as no more than an "act," a display, or a spectacle. Viewed this way, the identity projected in autobiography does not exist prior to its encoding in the text, but is rather a production of textual performance. In this connection, then, the self that is created in autobiographical narrative is a fiction. In broader terms, seeing autobiography as performance also jeopardises its truth-claim. In this light, we come to see autobiography as a text that does not retell the truth but rather creates it through narrative performance. Indeed, this view invites a more thorough consideration of the notion of truth in autobiography. It needs to be noted that some writers of autobiography, notably Barthes and Nietzsche, have vehemently discounted any notion of veridicality in their texts. Thus, in Nietzsche's formulation, we are not to seek for truth in autobiography because truth is nothing more than "[a] moving army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms… illusions whose illusionary nature has been forgotten…" (cited in de Man 110). In a word, then, the third wave focused more on agency, positionality and dialogism. By so doing, it sought to undermine the solid foundation of autobiography as a document of self-revelation. A good illustration of this is the argument by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, leading voices of the third wave:

> Theorizing performativity contests the notion of autobiography as the site of authentic identity. Theorizing positionality, with an emphasis on situatedness, contests the normative notion of a universal and transcendent autobiographical subject, autonomous and free. And theorizing dialogism contests the notion that self-narration is a monologic utterance of a solitary, introspective subject. All of these concepts enable more flexible reading practices and more inclusive approaches to the field of life narrative. (146)

Smith and Watson have succeeded in delineating the areas that autobiographical studies have so far paid particular attention to. These areas are "performativity" (autobiography as performance), "positionality" (how autobiography relates to a life in flux) and "dialogism" (autobiography as the story of self and others). But as we have seen above, the interrogation of each of these areas in the end raises

more questions than answers. In fact, it could be noted from this brief review that despite the extensive reach of autobiographical study in the areas of both theory and practice, scholars have not paid attention to how autobiographers employ their narratives to objectify the non-writing "he, she, it," that is, those who are (mis)represented by the writing "I." This paper therefore intends to look at how the genre of autobiography objectifies the non-writing other by examining the rhetorical strategies employed by Gandhi in his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927).

Autobiography and the Semiology of Self-representation

Autobiography as a literary mode of expression is the story of the life of the *self*, written or narrated by that self. It is an especially promising discourse in which the self is arguably assured of its existence and continuity through the medium of writing. It is an idealistic dream for self-preservation formed and framed through a textual encoding of self-presence. Consequently, the narrator of an autobiographical tale is central to that tale. In other words, the narrator of an autobiography lives within that narrative rather than outside it. She or he is the consciousness or the "I" that narrates and propels his/her story through the aid of memory and the employment of literary tropes. Viewed this way, then, the "I" outside the text is contiguously related to the "I" that inhabits the text. Thus, writing autobiographically allows the author-narrator to historically and textually imbue their life with greater cultural and political significance. In this view, autobiography is as much a filter as it is a mirror through which the desire for self-transcendence is textually projected through the medium of writing.

There are clear insights to suggest that autobiography is relevant in explaining life beyond the beckoning of the immediate situation, of the here and now. Indeed, writing the self autobiographically is a complex mixture of subjective experience, the re-framing of those experiences in discourse, and the interrogating of memory for intuition and interpretation of those experiences. From this point of view, we can argue that autobiography is an excellent example of clear and distinct individualism where the *cogito* is a dominating presence. However, it is important to note that the life represented in autobiographical narrative is diverse and disjointed, full of gaps and inconsistencies. It is indeed in the realisation of the self's dominating appetite to "storify" a life that is simultaneously too diverse and too disjointed to be exhausted that autobiographers try to artfully define, shape and frame their narrative as a meaningful discursive ontogeny. As a corollary, it can be rightly deduced that autobiography is a creation, a discovery and an imitation of the self through the act and art of writing. This is because it is through the process of writing that the self and its representations become organically related and integrated, take on an emblematic form, articulate a particular shape and image and reflect that image back and forth. Simply stated, autobiography is a selective

recounting of past experiences that are based on recollections from memory. This is why in organising their material, autobiographers may leave out whatever they wish and include anything they want; they may turn their book into a litany, a confession, an apology, a cathartic act, a collection of anecdotes or gossip, or even a place to wash dirty laundry.

Authors may also turn the autobiographical act into a space for aggravating differences between themselves and others. They do this most often by demonising the non-writing other through a process of objectification, that is, they frame their narratives through the trajectory of overarching social hierarchies that include the making of binary categories such as them/us, inside/outside, good/bad, native/stranger, strong/weak. Similarly, they may choose to disclose truth about themselves and their loved ones, or they may hide certain unpleasant events from the prying eyes of the reading public.

Furthermore, in autobiography the author is also the narrative voice. For this reason, the author-speaker in an autobiographical tale directly addresses the reader through the medium of narration where events are carefully selected and interpreted to suit the intentions of the writer. In fact, as noted earlier, autobiographical narratives are self-reflexive accounts of the life of the biographee-subject. However, there are times when the autobiographer will deploy their powers of reflexive monitoring with the aim of objectifying people, religions or ideologies. Here the author-speaker will exploit the strength of what Philippe Lejeune calls the "autobiographical pact,"[2] a sort of an unwritten agreement between the autobiographer and his or her reading public who a priori assumes that what they are saying is verifiable and a matter of fact. Armed with this knowledge, the autobiographical subject would then proceed to transfer onto the "other" the properties of an object by usurping the power to narrate as well as interpret the life and actions of the "othered" in a way that fits their ideological, political or religious agenda.

Likewise, as noted earlier, autobiographical texts are in the final analysis nothing but representations. In this context, it is worth noting that an autobiographical subject's text is, to all intents and purposes, both a seeing and textualising form, a kind of writing strategy, which as Derrida would argue,

[2] Philippe Lejeune describes the "autobiographical pact" as a condition where the reader of an autobiographical text is convinced that there is unity between the author, the narrator and the subject in the text. This presupposes that the pronoun "I" in an autobiographical text reflexively refers to the person whose name appears on the cover of the text (Lejeune 193, 202). For Lejeune, this pact is sacrosanct and inviolable. It is indeed the necessary condition for the existence of autobiographical texts. However, Lejeune has failed to take into cognisance Saussure's argument that the relation of the signifier to its signified is contingent and arbitrary rather than fixed. In this sense, then, there is no inherent connection between the name on the cover of the autobiographical text and the nominated "I" that inhabits the textual world of the autobiography. This is the full implication of Roland Hayman's observation that [in autobiography] "… there is no fundamental connection between the name and the thing, between signifier and signified" (Hayman 3).

however, never touches the soil, as it were; for the writer has only created a representation of *reality*,[3] rather than the real, matter-of-fact reality of his or her life or biographical details, for all such details are their own *visual*[4] imaginative and semantic practices within the textual spaces of narrativity. Viewed this way, then, autobiography is a metaphorical and often hyperbolic narrative that has an axiological pretention toward reality. To put it in yet another way, Gandhi's book does not portray or reflect a real, factually active life, or *historical* self, but necessarily and inescapably a metaphorical self, a self which has been reduced to its semiotic and linguistic play, to, in the words of Terence Hawkes, "the shape and structures of the activity of writing" (*Structuralism and Semiotics* 144). In a nutshell, the author's narrative accounts of life are only a text. In this sense, an autobiographical narrative is not factual knowledge about a real person, or about other people's languages, cultures and landscapes, but a text – an impossible dream of holism, in which the self is no more than a system of distinctions and hierarchical oppositions. Indeed, the argument that autobiography, in its contemplative mirroring of personal experiences, most often vacillates between fact and fiction, disclosure and concealment is an interesting element that has opened it to a variety of critical assessments. The present paper is an attempt in this direction because it examines the ways in which Gandhi subtly objectifies the subaltern in his autobiography.

Gandhi and the Objectification of the Indian Masses

In providing the foregoing context for my discussion, I will proceed from the notion of autobiography as a conjuncture of the private and the public, the individual and the communal. Viewed in this sense, autobiography is a narrative encoding of the experiences of the author-writer that most often involves the

---

[3] Reality" is a highly complicated concept that acquires meaning through individual usage and perspective. In fact, the word "reality" is loaded with meanings and thus has what Valentin Volosinov (ctd. in Hartley 22) has called "multi-accentuality," a condition in which words and concepts are made to generate a multiplicity of meanings. In other words, "reality" as a "sign" does not have a fixed internal "meaning," but merely meaning potentials, which can only be actualised in usage or context. Indeed, the word "reality" is used with caution in this paper because most often what is termed "reality" or the "real" is no more than the perspective of the observer making the observation.

[4] It is my contention that most of the content of autobiographical narratives is derived from visual observation or experience rather than tactile or olfactory experience. In line with this, the visual, or what Johannes Fabian (ctd. in Bello-Kano 61) has called "visualism," is fundamental to re-creating and re-presenting experience through autobiographical textual encoding. In fact, visualism plays a key role in organising the story into a coherent narrative. Even more important, it is visualism that furnishes the writing "I" in autobiography with the observable details described in the text. Thus far, the writing "I" in autobiography, is, to quote Bello-Kano, "the writing-seeing 'I'" (59) that depends on the efficacy of visual comprehension to re-create and narrativise his or her text. It is at least arguable that in autobiographical narratives the writing-seeing "I" must see before she or he observes, recognises and textually reports.

recounting of the nonself "other" or "others" (Marcus 273). As a narrative form, therefore, autobiography is inevitably implicated in the ideological promotion of ideas and practices that may not be apparent at first glance. Indeed, the narrative mode of representation, of which autobiography is one, has most often been a veritable tool that can be used to create "object" and "subject" positions for the characters that the autobiography is about. In fact, many scholars (Barthes; White; Miller) have noted the ideological character of narrative. For instance, Miller has argued that narrative and narrativity most often function as "basic assumptions of a culture about human existence" (71). Similarly, Barthes sees narrative as something that is integral to human life and existence because it is "international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" (79). Even more fundamentally, the efficacy of narrative in creating the "subject" of power and hierarchy (à la Foucault), "capable of bearing the 'responsibilities' of the law in all its forms," is what, among other things, gives narrative its peculiar character as a bearer of ideology (White 13). In fact, narratives are most of the time structured around a conflict "in which power is at stake" (Abbot 55). This struggle for power is mostly exhibited in the dialectical terms of either domination or resistance to that domination. It is thus pertinent to note that Gandhi's autobiography is also constituted around two basic features of power, that is, enforcement and resistance. However, before I delve into a fuller discussion, it is pertinent to clarify the concepts that form my paper's basis of contention.

Objectification is a notoriously vexed concept in social theory and analysis. Consequently, it has been defined by scholars working in various disciplines. For instance, Immanuel Kant sees it as a process that involves stripping a person of their personhood (ctd. in Gervais 44). Nick Haslam, on the other hand, associates it with a loss or disregard for an individual's emotions, autonomy and liveliness. This process, he argues, further alienates the persons involved, turning them into things (ctd. in Gervais 74). Martha Nussbaum (ctd. in Gervais 6) similarly suggests that objectification is a process that "entails making into a thing, treating as a thing, something that is really not a thing" (ctd. in Gervais 6). She further argues that this process turns what is objectified into objects and tools that are "inert, violable, fungible, or interchangeable with similar objects, as well as lacking in self-determination" (ctd. in Gervais 6). In yet another formulation, Jamie Goldenberg describes objectification as "any instrumental subjugation of a people by those with more power (ctd. in Gervais 81). Sarah Gervais on her part sees objectification as a process whereby "a person's body parts or functions are separated from the person, reduced to the status of instruments, or regarded as capable of representing the entire person" (2).

With reference to the foregoing discussion, I will seek a working definition of objectification by incorporating the ideas of Kant, Nussbaum and Haslam.

Thus "objectification" as used in this paper implies the "thingfication" of the non-self (the "other") by the attributing of negative qualities to it. The non-self/other in this sense becomes the object of the autobiographer's scorn, ridicule and mockery. More importantly, objectification as a concept used in this paper is viewed as a process of identity formation based on the taxonomy of difference in the social world of the author-narrator that is shaped by her or his desires and beliefs. Hence, it is my view that most often this narrative of difference is framed through a trajectory of overarching social hierarchies such as, among others, "them/us," "inside/outside," "good/bad," and "clean/dirty." In broader terms, I argue that objectification can be achieved through association of the objectified with certain qualities, traits, symbols and images. Moreover, these qualities, traits, symbols and images are most often negatively presented from the vantage point of the author-narrator.

It is in line with this that the present paper aims to show how autobiography involves a process of *objectification*. With this in mind, the paper focuses on how autobiography shifts from being the story of the self to the story of others, often with negative consequences or outcomes. In this context, the paper draws on theoretical developments linking autobiography with identity formation processes by scholars such as Paul de Man, Leigh Gilmore, Julia Watson, Sidonie Smith, Linda Anderson, Domna Stanton and Elizabeth Bruss. But it goes further in that it explores how autobiography is used to narrate the story of the non-self which, in the process, is made to mutate into an object and subject of difference. In this regard, the paper is specifically concerned with how Gandhi's autobiography deploys the dichotomous notions of "dirt" and "cleanliness" to objectify the Indian subalterns. Thus, the central argument is that Gandhi's autobiography is an identity-creation project that is anchored on the rhetorical strategy of difference. In the text the writing-remembering-seeing "I" is concerned with creating a public identity through the textual encoding of carefully selected, filtered and structured experiences. Hence, in trying to forge and give shape to these experiences in the form of a coherent narrative, Gandhi's autobiography is encoded as an aesthetic ontology of difference, largely through the deployment of negative tropes as rhetorical tools for projecting and articulating his identity and that of the subaltern groups of India.[5]

[5] The word "subaltern" was first used as a critical term by Antonio Gramsci to refer to the non-elite classes in European societies. The term acquired more purchase when a group of progressive Indian historians appropriated it to challenge the dominance of elites in colonial and neo-colonial Indian historiographies. In this regard, they formed a Subaltern Studies collective with the aim of freeing Indian historiography from the clutches of the elite class by "writing histories from below" (Guha 3). They sought to restore the agential power of the peasants in Indian historiography. Their actions were, however, challenged by scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who in her essay "Can the subaltern speak?" dismisses the utopian goals of the Subaltern Studies collective by showing the impossibility of restoring voice to the subalterns through discourses that are framed in

It is indeed worth noting that "dirt" and "clean" are classificatory concepts that include as well as exclude groups and social formations. They can also be deployed to create class hierarchies and social boundaries in narratives. Indeed, contrary to commonly held opinions, "dirt" and "clean" are value-laden concepts that can be used to create and enforce social order in societies. When this is taken together with Zygmunt Bauman's (1991) observation that "To classify means to set apart, to segregate…" (1), the exclusionary thrust of classificatory concepts such as "dirt" and "clean/liness" will begin to manifest itself. This is pivotal to the very idea of the difference between the "self" and "other" that is posited again and again in autobiographical narratives such as Gandhi's. Indeed, scholars such as Adeline Masquelier, Suellen Hoy, Elizabeth Shove, Mary Douglas, and Campkin and Cox have noted the ideological content inherent to the concept of "dirt" in social discourse. For instance, Shove has argued that "Describing people, things or practices as clean or dirty is not a socially neutral enterprise." She elaborates that whenever such "classificatory schemes" are deployed in social discourse they create asymmetrical distinctions "like those of class, race, gender, and age" (88). In a similar fashion, Campkin and Cox have noted the structuring power of dirt and cleanliness in social intercourse by arguing that "beyond the specific architectures of hygiene, notions of dirt and cleanliness can be said… to influence the arrangement and occupation of all interior and exterior space, informing the minutiae of human behaviour and actively influencing relations between people" (4). Notice how "dirt" and "cleanliness" are in this sense important signifiers of class difference. In yet another formulation, Douglas argues that anxiety about dirt invariably involves anxiety about "the relation of order to disorder, being to nonbeing, form to formlessness, life to death" (5). In fact, Douglas suggests that notions of "dirt" and "cleanliness" are central to enforce social normativity in societies. In this regard, "dirt" and "cleanliness" are convenient mechanisms for labelling and enforcing exclusions, especially against a perceived "other." This point is eloquently supported by Masquelier who contends that "Because dirt often stands for deviance, anyone that cannot, will not, or should not fit into a particular social system or pattern can be defined as 'dirty,' polluting, or impure, regardless whether that individual agrees with such a definition or even understands it" (10). The power of this conceptualisation lies in its canny observation about the justifying foundation of

Euro-elitist language that is totally inaccessible to them. I use the term in this essay to refer to the voice-less and dispossessed groups that lack interlocutionary power because of their limited education as well as their economic status as lower class peasants in India and as members of a minority ethnic community in South Africa. In his autobiography, Gandhi specifically refers to them as people that require special protection by elites like himself. For more on this, see Ranajit Guha, ed. *Writings on South Asian History and Society*; Vinyak Chaturvedi, ed. *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*; and A. Dirk Moses, ed. *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*.

social exclusion based on the perceived or assumed "dirtiness" or otherwise of the different "other." In this regard, it does not matter whether the person being labelled is in agreement or not. Suffice to say that when notions of "dirt" and "clean" are used in this sense, they invariably become repositories of social as well as ideological differences. This much can be gleaned in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

It needs to be underlined that reading Gandhi's autobiography is like reading a philosophy manual. The discourse of the text sounds more like an excerpt from the works of Descartes, Hume, Kierkegaard, Locke and Marx. Indeed, the story encoded in the text is that of a soul seeking metaphysical, corporeal, ethereal and spiritual transcendence. Fundamentally, Gandhi's narrative is a cerebral tale of exhortations and restrictions framed through the trajectory of self-denial and self-imposed moral discipline. But it is also a text that in the process of framing the story of its protagonist incorporates the story of its "other." Indeed, it is my argument that the penchant to narrate the story of the "other" and in the process to create that "other" in our own image, suggests a characteristically fashionable turn to objectification in autobiographical writings (recent examples include Mahathir Mohamad's *A Doctor in the House* and Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*).[6] This can be observed from Gandhi's autobiography where he uses the subaltern Indian masses as a palimpsest on which to inscribe his identity. Using the economies of difference, he documents how his identity is in sharp contrast to that of the Indian subaltern groups he comes in contact with. He uses among other things, the trope of "dirt" as an index of difference between himself and the Indian masses. Thus, for him "dirt" becomes the conceptual trajectory through which he emplots his narrative of identity construction. For example, there are numerous lamentations about the insanitary behaviour of the Indian subalterns in his autobiography. At various points in his narrative, he bemoans the lack of will among the majority of Indians to observe simple environmental sanitation.

[6] Mahathir's autobiography is organised around the figurative economy of race. He uses race to codify and fix differences between and among individuals and groups. For him race is a convenient mechanism for labelling and enforcing exclusion against a perceived "other" which in this case are the Chinese and the Indians. For instance, whereas he praises the Malays for their "distinctive aptitude for social harmony and administration" (27), the Chinese and the Indians are metonymically reduced to "coolies" and "destitute indentured labourers" respectively (90). In fact, in Mahathir's text "Malayness" is the positive image against which the negative images of the Chinese and the Indians are contrasted. Similarly, Mandela in his autobiography harps on the political tension between his party, the African National Congress (ANC), and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) as well as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) on the other to construct his preferred image. In his narrative he variously contrasted the peaceful and civilised disposition of the ANC with the militant and violent eruptions of the IFP and PAC (227, 229, 574, 591). Here too the positive image of the ANC and its members is contrasted with the violent negative image of the IFP and PAC. Thus in Gandhi, Mandela and Mahathir the "other" becomes the surface, created and sustained by the power of discourse, on which to bounce off the contrasted image of the self.

He cannot fathom how they can live "obliviously to the need or nicety of cleanliness" (Hoy 7). He could thus complain that "It was too much for people to bestir themselves to keep their surroundings clean" (205). This behaviour, according to him, is what made the insinuation that "the Indian was slovenly in his habits and did not keep his house and surroundings clean" difficult to dismiss (205). However, he also makes it abundantly clear that he is not part of this "ignorant, pauper agriculturalists" (265) by testifying to his "cleanliness, perseverance and regularity" in matters of personal hygiene, physical grooming and economic management (218). In fact, Gina Philogene aptly notes that "What defines individuals is their processing of difference with others on the basis of which they integrate their identity fragments" (32). By contrasting his self-representation in this way, the image of the "other," that is, Gandhi's "ignorant, pauper agriculturalists," is made to become a sign of essential difference between the subaltern groups and the Gandhian-self, and through this constant manipulation of ascribed difference an identity is generated. The point is that even though Gandhi is an Indian like the subalterns in his text, he is yet different from them because of his class-status as an educated lawyer. It is thus easy for him to question their revolt against change from the vantage point of a detached observer who wields enormous textual power over their lives.

As an educated Indian elite and advocate of change, Gandhi must have been conscious of his privileged position vis-à-vis subaltern Indian groups in both South Africa and India. By and large, Gandhi is an ardent believer in a broader commonality irrespective of ethnicity or religion. He is thus fired by a desire to reform the Indian masses in his own image. However, he is largely unsuccessful in this task, especially in transforming the aesthetic consciousness of the Indian masses. Thus, it is not surprising that in the narrative he sees himself in the guise of a rejected "reformer" who gets nothing from his society but "opposition, abhorrence and even mortal persecution" (206). He complains endlessly about the collective will of the subalterns to reject positive change in matters of hygiene and cleanliness. He detests this complacency, noting that, "Sanitation was a difficult affair. The people were not prepared to do anything themselves. Even the field labourers were not ready to do their own scavenging" (381). Again and again, we see this pattern of complaint about environmental and sanitary neglect being repeated in the narrative of *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (165, 166, 212, 352, 381, 386). It is my contention that Gandhi's over laden concern with "cleanliness" and "dirt" is a direct upshot of his privileged middle-class consciousness. Indeed, Suellen Hoy rightly notes that, "Like other factors of progressivism, public sanitation and personal cleanliness retained a lingering middle-class, indeed upper middle-class tincture" (86). Viewed this way, it can be argued that Gandhi's attempts to structure the moral and physical landscape of the Indian masses are in line with his middle-class temperament.

It is evidently clear that in his autobiography Gandhi maintains a semantic authority over the body as well as the physical geography of the Indian subalterns. He thus visually colonises them by textualising their daily lives. Moreover, in his text he is simultaneously the gazing body as well as the speaking-writing body assiduously documenting the routines of the subalterns. In fact, the Biblical imagery of the shepherd is distinct. Consequently, as the narrative unfolds, the subalterns are objectified through "the nomination of the visible" (Spurr 27). For instance, in his train travels in India, Gandhi observes how "Third Class Passengers" behave towards one another. He complains about their "rudeness, dirty habits, selfishness and ignorance" (348). He also bemoans their insensitivity by pointing out that "they often do not realize that they are behaving ill, dirtily or selfishly" (348). In this light, we come to see how Gandhi has visibly screened the subalterns in the construction of his narrative. By employing what Mary Louis Pratt calls "the Monarch-of-all-I-survey" trope, Gandhi deploys his powers of reflexive monitoring to exert enormous pressure on the shared social world of the subalterns. Thus, to him, in addition to being empirical givens, the subalterns are also epistemologically transparent selves.

In particular, I want to stress that Gandhi uses the concept of dirt in his text to effectively stigmatise and eventually isolate the subalterns as the different "other." This is achieved by his constant reference to their rigidity and resistance towards personal and environmental hygiene (227, 348, 352, 381). In this regard, I follow Bauman (67) who argues that stigmatisation is most often achieved "when an observable – documented and indisputable – feature of a certain category of persons is… made salient by being brought into public attention, and then interpreted as a visible sign of a hidden flaw, iniquity or moral turpitude." Bauman further points out that the main reason for stigmatisation is to foreground difference in order to justify exclusion. However, my contention is that while Gandhi is eager to emphasise difference between himself and the subalterns, he does not seek to exclude them from their shared social environment. In this sense, he is more concerned with domination rather than exclusion.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that Gandhi is able to classify and categorise the subalterns as "dirty," "abnormal," "retrogressive," and "rigid" because of the asymmetrical power relations that exist between him and them. It is my argument that the cultural capital he wields over them as a result of his privileged education is what allows him to script their life as well as their existence in his text. It is thus easy for him to assert his command over the means of textual production by creating them in his chosen image. Indeed, we might be tempted to ask why Gandhi is so averse to the "dirt" and unruly behaviour of the subalterns. A possible answer might be that it is because he sees himself in them or rather, as Merleau-Ponty might put it, "he" and "them" are "the obverse and reverse of each other" (83, 160). In fact, seeing traces of

the subalterns in him becomes a very uncomfortable experience for this "genuinely imperial figure" (Brown 3). He thus constantly castigates them for their recalcitrance and intransigence in order to distance and set himself apart from them. However, he is largely unsuccessful in this regard because no matter how hard he tries to contain the effects of their debilitating behaviour, they keep coming back to his consciousness in the manner of the "repressed," in the Freudian sense of the term. Thus, his constant distaste, dissatisfaction and bewilderment with their conduct can arguably be explained as an attempt to recover his threatened positive image that is at the risk of distortion because of their shared social identity.

It is my fundamental argument that Gandhi's attempts to create a gap between himself and the subalterns through the kind of textual framing and social semiotics we see in his autobiography are important strategies in his identity creation project. It hardly needs saying that the activity of writing demonstrably offers Gandhi an avenue to objectify the subalterns. But having said all this, I want to stress that Gandhi still needs the subalterns' identity for the construction of his contrasted identity. In fact, as I have demonstrated so far, it is easy to see that Gandhi and the subalterns are dialectically interdependent in this narrative of clear binaries. Following from that, in this narrative of self-creation, there is a deep connection between the existence of the subalterns and Gandhi. This insight suggests that the insistence and continuous presence of the subalterns in his autobiography is a vital necessity rather than a conscious choice because he could not possibly project his chosen positive image in the absence of a contrasting negative image, which the subalterns symbolise in every respect.

Conclusion

This paper has examined autobiographical representation through objectification in Gandhi's re-presentation of the voice-less subalterns who occupy a space of centrality in his narrative. We have seen how the text deploys negative tropes to represent this marginalised group, "thingifying" them by means of a textual-aesthetic encoding of difference framed through a trajectory of overarching social hierarchies such as clean/dirty, obedient/revolting, normative/transgressive, liberal/conservative and rich/ poor. Through this mode of representation, Gandhi is able to transform the subalterns into epistemological objects as well as subjects of difference. More noticeably, Gandhi also flattens them into homogeneity by using the differential markers of dirt and cleanliness. Undoubtedly, there is a hierarchical power structure that plays out in the text. This arrangement places Gandhi at the apex of the power pyramid with the subalterns occupying bottom place. Consequently, his position at the very top renders Gandhi a place at the centre of the text's narrative consciousness. Occupying a place of centrality, however, is not without its

problems. This is because there cannot be a centre without a margin or a periphery, with the latter always posing a danger to the former. In other words, the margin will always challenge the power of the centre. Therein lies the significance of Parker's observation that "the margin is where the centre's ordering capacity begins to ebb" (8). This could be gleaned in Gandhi's narrative where the subalterns constantly exhibit reluctance and resistance towards his demands for moral propriety, personal cleanliness and hygiene.

By thus objectifying the subalterns, Gandhi succeeds in diminishing their unity-in-difference, their plurality, as well as their particularity as human subjects capable of normative self-actualisation and positive agency. Indeed, by variously describing the subalterns as dirty, retrogressive and revolting, he is perforce questioning their metaphysical integrity as well as interrogating their social normativity. When this is seen in relation to his contrasting projection of himself as clean, dutiful, responsible and sociable, we begin to see how he has drawn a clear dividing line between himself and the subalterns. It is evident that such favourable characterisations of himself as opposed to the negative descriptions of the subalterns provide him with a platform to articulate his preferred identity. Thus, in spite of what is ostensibly an unabashed display of solidarity with the subalterns, Gandhi in fact demonstrates that he is everything the subalterns are not.

Works Cited

Abbot, H. Peter. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. 2nd edition. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2008.

Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991.

Bello-Kano, Ibrahim. "Travel, Difference, and Gaze: A Literary Economy of Body in Conrad's *The Congo Diary*." *African Literary Journal* (2005): 57-78.

Brown, Judith M. Introduction. *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*. Eds. Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2011. 1-8.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

Campkin, Ben and Rosie Cox, eds. *Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007.

Chassin de Kergommeaux, Danielle C. "Autofictional Practices: Self-Fashioning in Diana Thorneycroft's Self-portraits." Unpub. M.A. Thesis, McGill Univ., Canada, January 2005. http://www.oatd.org/kergommeaux/pdf. 5 December 2013.

Chaturvedi, Vinyak, ed. *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. London: VERSO, 2000.
Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. London: Routledge, 1984.
De Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.
Gervais, Sarah J., ed. *Objectification and (De)Humanization: 60th Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*. New York: Springer, 2013.
Guha, Ranajit, ed. *Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1982.
Hartley, John. *Understanding News*. London: Methuen, 1982.
Haslam, Nick, et al. "The Psychology of Humanness." *Objectification and (De)Humanization: 60th Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*. Ed. Sarah J. Gervais. New York: Springer, 2013. 25-51.
Hawkes, Terence. *Structuralism and Semiotics*. London: Methuen, 1983.
Hayman, Roland. *Nietzsche: A Critical Life*. London: Penguin Books, 1980.
Hoy, Suellen. *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.
Lejeune, Philippe. "The Autobiographical Contract." *French Literary Theory Today*. Ed. T. Todorov. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982. 192-222.
Mandela, Nelson. *Long Walk to Freedom*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1994.
Masquelier, Adeline Marie, ed. *Dirt, Undress, and Difference: Critical Perspectives on the Body's Surface*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2005.
Maurice, Merleau-Ponty. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Ed. Claude Lefort. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanstone, IL: Northwestern UP, 1968.
Miller, Hillis J. "Narrative." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Eds. F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1995. 66-79.
Mohamed, Mahathir. *A Doctor in the House*. Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: MPH Group, 2011.
Moses, A. Dirk, ed. *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2008.
Parker, Noel. "A Theoretical Introduction: Spaces, Centers, and Margins." *The Geopolitics of Europe's Identity: Centers, Boundaries, and Margins*. Ed. Noel Parker. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 3-23.
Philogene, Gina. "Social Representations of Alterity in the United States." *Social Representations and Identity: Content, Process and Power*. Eds. Gail Malony and Iain Walker. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 31-42.
Pratt, Mary Louis. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
Shove, Elizabeth. *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality*. Oxford and New York: BERG, 2003.
Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.

Volosinov, Valentin. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Moscow: Seminar Press, 1973.

White, Hayden. "Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased: Literary Theory and Historical Writing." *The Future of Literary Theory*. Ed. Ralph Cohen. London: Routledge, 1989. 19-44.