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Richard Ford's *The Bascombe Trilogy* from Ego Psychology Perspective

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Seyedeh Samaneh Hosseini Ziya  
Narges Montakhabi Bakhtvar

(Corresponding Author)

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages  
Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch  
Tehran, Iran

## ABSTRACT

Richard Ford's *The Bascombe Trilogy* manifests vivid traces of psycho-social and intrapersonal conflicts. The deep correlation between the historical and the personal in Ford's trilogy can be analyzed from the perspective of Erik Erikson's ego psychology and the emphasis he puts on the social and cultural factors on identity formation. The last four stages of ego development proposed by Erikson are utilized in this research to unravel the mechanisms behind the main character's individuation. "Role diffusion" and "repudiation" in adulthood, "intimacy" and "isolation" in young adulthood, "generativity" and "stagnation" in middle adulthood, and finally, "integrity" and "despair" in old adulthood compose the theoretical framework of this study. The main question to be answered in the process of this study is: How does Ford depict the multiple social, cultural, and historical impacts of American nationalism on Frank's character from his childhood to adolescence? The researchers show that the first two stages result in role confusion and isolation due to the lack of solid historical background, absence of reliable role models, and traumatic experiences such as war. The point is, in these novels, Ford weaves personal identity with national identity, displaying multiple historical and cultural subjectivity models already set for American-ness as his main character seeks solutions to evade them through therapeutic self-fashioning. Tracing the last two stages of Erikson's ego psychology in the novels bears witness to the possibility of generativity and integrity only through reconciliation with mortality and putting into practice the senses of communality and nurture. It can be concluded that Ford's trilogy is looking for a loophole from all the confusion, isolation, and alienation in the postmodern mediatized world of political lies and personal illusions; a spark of integrity that is lit not by self-delusion and shibboleths, but realizing the reality of mortality, the need for communality and nurture.

**Keywords:** *Ego Identity, Role Diffusion, Intimacy, Generativity, Stagnation, Integrity*

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## 1. Introduction

Richard Ford with his masterpiece, *The Bascombe Trilogy*, composed of *The Sportswriter* (1986), *Independence Day* (1995), and *The Lay of the Land* (2006), has been nominated as the post-World War II "pragmatic realist" in America. "Ford's pragmatism [. . .] is rooted most significantly in his long-standing enthusiasm of Emerson, 'the patron saint of novelists' whose ideas are referred to directly, and frequently throughout Ford's *The Bascombe Trilogy*" (McGuire, 2015, p. xviii). He won the Pulitzer Prize and Pen/Faulkner Award for the second novel of the trilogy, *Independence Day* in 1995. Indeed, Ford's novels render a vivid picture of contemporary American life and identity in the late twentieth century. They offer "the

individual's sense of alienation, restlessness, displacement, and fragmentation; the sense of rootlessness, of being cut off from the past, which so often characterizes life in an increasingly mobile society; the disintegration of community; the breakup of the family; and the impoverishment of all human connections" (Guagliardo, 2002, p. 5). As "the definitive novel[s] of the postwar generation" (Lyons, 1996), the stories play a crucial role in mirroring the sociopolitical and cultural motors of American society from which masculinity can be highlighted. In spite of the fact that many writers in America have attempted to depict a critical and an evaluative picture of masculinity and patriarchy, Ford's triad puts more stress on the reconstruction of a nurturing and sentimental father figure.



Having an extensive psychoanalytical viewpoint, it remains imperative to conduct a detailed survey on Ford's oeuvre, in particular *The Bascombe Trilogy* from a new perspective. Erik Erikson's neo-Freudian psychosocial theory can provide a fertile critical ground for the purpose of this study due to the nexus it creates between psychology and sociality. It is undeniable that the considerable effectiveness of history, culture, and milieu on individual personality has been neglected in Freud's psychosexual theory. Erikson "sought human understanding through not only psychoanalysis but the study of history, and of individuals (Luther and Gandhi) who made a difference in history" (Coles, 1999, pp. 19-20). Through a comprehensive biopsychosocial lifespan model, Erikson, fortunately, opens a new door to psychology by carrying out an in-depth analysis of social issues and dilemmas such as war, race, culture, religion, and history and their impacts on identity diffusion during a particular period of life. In *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968), Erikson elaborates that "each successive step, then, is a potential crisis because of a radical change in perspective. The crisis is used here in a developmental sense to connote not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential" (p. 96).

The central objective of this study is to investigate the processes through which Ford's *The Bascombe Trilogy* sets forward ego construction and inevitable identity crisis. There is no particular study on Ford's trilogy based on any psychological approach. In order to compensate for this lack, this research surveys the novels according to the psychosocial developmental elements in Erikson's theory. In truth, the foundation of American identity and nationhood is under question by Frank's narration of his milieu. Thus, this study applies Erikson's stages of personality development to Frank's character and his society in the three novels. The researchers do not pursue simple application of Erikson's thought to literature, but provide a platform for assessing the advantages alongside the limitations of his psychosocial framework. For that matter, it is shown that gradual formation of identity in Ford's fiction is based on "differences" rather than mere imitation of standards, orthodoxies, and predetermined values. This is the point where Erikson's notions of personal

"sameness" and historical "continuity" are questioned and critiqued in this research. It will be revealed how a distorted sense of selfhood can rise above conflicts induced by illusion, isolation, skepticism, and despair and reach therapeutic pulses of self-analysis, hope, will, judgment, care, and love pertaining to "integrity" in Erikson's theory. This study can contribute to the areas of literary criticism, psychoanalysis, and sociology as it tries to achieve a new view towards the interrelationship between American nationalism and identity development.

## 2. Literature Review

Peter Latham in his thesis, *Existential Suburbia: The Influence of Sartrean Existentialism on US Fiction* (2016) examines Ford's fiction with Sartre's existential outlook. In an interview with Elinor Ann Walker, Ford asserts that his writings are the indicators of an optimistic viewpoint based on "Sartrean sense that to write about the darkest human possibility is itself an act of optimism because it proves that those things can be thought about" (16).

In *Richard Ford and the Ends of Realism* (2015), Ian McGuire introduces Ford as a pragmatic realist among other contemporary realist writers. Focusing on the historical development of realism in America, McGuire views Ford's fiction in the vicinity of pragmatic realism: "Ford's realism is in this sense inherently modest in its claims, but it is also inveterately hopeful - there is a truth, it suggests, a truth that exists and can be usefully distinguished from error, even if that truth does not have timeless metaphysical foundations" (xviii). McGuire argues that Ford is inspired by Emerson's pragmatic tradition, which is evidently echoed in his trilogy.

Reuben Peinado Abarrio in his article, "Richard Ford's Frank Bascombe as an American Everyman" (2014) discusses the typology of Frank's character in an American context. In the Bascombe stories, the reader faces some tokens of gender, race, or class conflicts in Frank's character that he/she can relate to (49-50). In fact, Ford weaves together the national with the personal in a manner that all American readers regardless of identity specificities can understand.

Tim Foster in his thesis, *Escaping the Split-Level Trap: Post-Suburban Narratives in Recent American Fiction* (2012) states that Ford depicts Frank as a driving figure who moves from the suburban spectacle to a

post-suburban one. Ford's aim is to illustrate fragmentation and uncertainty in postmodern man's life. Foster believes that Ford's fiction illuminates how the boundaries between the urban and the suburban disappear due to globalization and transnationalism (78-79).

Joseph M. Armengol-Carrera studies Ford's works in "The Buddy as Anima? Revisiting Friendships between Men in Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter*" (2010). This article sets forth construction and deconstruction of male homosexuality in Ford's *The Sportswriter*. The writer argues that Ford's novels demonstrate a kind of contemporary revision of the classical myth of male friendship in American literature. In fact, Ford conceives of "*The Sportswriter* as a literary deconstruction of the myth of indissoluble friendship between men in U.S. literature" (42).

The discussions by different critics compiled in *Richard Ford and the Fiction of Masculinities* (2010) pivot around Ford's male characters. Elinor Ann Walker contends that despite all the masculine implications in Ford's fiction, he is "a genderless writer" (7). Walker believes that "Ford's views on literature and literary criticism, it should come as no great surprise that he does not regard gender as a determining social factor his fiction" (qtd. in Armengol 10).

Juan A. Tarancón, in an article titled "Reading the Short Fiction of Richard Ford" (2007) brings to the forefront the realistic and nonrealistic (deconstructive) aspects within Ford's short stories by scrutinizing his stylistic and narrative strategies. Ford's storytellers are persistently prevented from giving meaning to their absurd existence. As a resolution to this dilemma, they look for reality and accuracy in the well-arranged characteristics of the narrative (59).

*Perspectives on Richard Ford* (2000) by Huey Guagliardo offers a collection of nine essays on Ford's style of writing, his worldview, and the historical context of his works. Providing the readers with Ford's biography, his literary works, and prizes, this book is one of the most comprehensive analyses on Ford's oeuvre. In an explanatory note on Ford's trilogy, Guagliardo asserts that "the characters in Ford's novels are relegated to the shadowy margins of existence where much is uncertain and uncontrollable" (4).

### **3. Theoretical Background**

Erikson is widely celebrated as a prominent neo-Freudian ego psychologist.

Being a student of Anna Freud, he does not reject Freud's ideas radically, but presents his own conception of ego as a completion to Freud's theory, making a balance between psychosexual and sociocultural development of identity (Erikson, 1975, pp. 32-34). Indeed, a lifespan model of individual development is introduced by Erikson for the first time, which includes eight psychosocial stages: "newborn/infancy," "early childhood," "play," "school age," "adolescence," "young adulthood," "middle adulthood," and "old adulthood." The last four stages are the target of this study due to the focus Ford puts on adolescence in his fiction. Erikson asserts that identity is not limited to one peculiar period of life, nor to one specific psychological derive. As a matter of fact, many social factors such as family, history, war, race, religion, community, and culture are engaged in the construction of identity: "The biological and psychological [are] so interwoven within a social context that this simultaneous unfolding of life goes on from the beginning of life to the end of life" (Brenman, 1992, 15:30").

As Duane P. Schultz and Sydney E. Schultz articulate in *Theories of Personality*, Erikson's thought mostly pivots around social and cultural dynamics of identity, diverging from Freud's sexualization of ego formation. Therefore, he expands Freud's five stages in psychosexual growth to eight stages in his psychosocial approach (2006, p. 217). In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson's opening gambit is Anna Freud's formulation of ego; the triumphant factor that restrains progression of distress and tension by the means of its defensive measures. Ego builds the balanced relations among Id, Superego, and other external forces (1963, p. 175). Ego's Freudian formation is highly debatable in Erikson's mind as he tries to find out the exact role environment plays in psychological growth. Erikson clarifies his uncertainties by observing children's playtime. Their roleplaying unfolds different sorts of social norms and gender clichés deep-rooted in the (un)consciousness. Children acquire the pillars establishing and stabilizing the ego such as obligation, limitation, punishment, and reward through the game rules, and get prepared to function efficiently in the society. The point is that culture and its norms interfere in the process of defining sexuality. As a result, through repetitive actions and acquisitions, children learn how to master social functions and maxims (Erikson, 1963, pp. 93-95; 211-12).



In addition, Erikson criticizes Freud's accentuation of the psychosexual apparatus, especially centrality and universality of the Oedipus conflict. Instead, Erikson emphasizes both the pre-Oedipal and post-Oedipal steps (Burston, 2007, p. 94), as for him identity is undeniably processual.

The main concern of this study is to survey the ego formation of the main character, Frank, in Ford's trilogy according to the last four stages of Erikson's psychosocial theory. The first four periods of Frank's lifetime are not discussed in this research due to the scarcity of references to his past life in the novels. In the fifth stage, "adolescence," Erikson examines "role diffusion," "untrustworthiness," and "repudiation" as the building blocks of adolescence. In the sixth stage, "young adulthood," the emotional and sexual problematic of "intimacy" and "isolation" are discussed. In the seventh stage, "middle adulthood," "generativity" and "stagnation" are meditated upon. Finally, the last stage, "old adulthood" assesses ego "integrity" and "despair".

#### **4. Discussion**

##### ***4.1. The Adulthood Stage: Role Diffusion and Repudiation in the Sportswriter***

Ford's *The Bascombe Trilogy*, with strong signposts of postmodern fragmentation of identity orchestrates an array of psychological/social problems. According to *Perspectives*, Ford's novels depict a very "unique view of alienation in contemporary American culture" (Guagliardo, 2000, pp. xiii-xii). This section studies the first novel in Ford's trilogy, *The Sportswriter*, based on the conceptual tools of the fifth stage in Erikson's ego psychology. To accomplish this task, the main character, Frank Bascombe's adolescence is microscopically viewed and dissected. "Role diffusion," "untrustworthiness," and "repudiation" are the trademark features of adolescence.

According to Erikson's assertion in *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, adolescence (12 to 18 years old) is the stage that prepares the child to develop the initial capacities for social skills and competence. Through puberty, young adults start conscious identity formation by the means of duty and service (Erikson, 1968, pp. 128-29). In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson points to the significance of ego identity during puberty: "It is the accrued experience of the ego's ability to integrate all identifications with the vicissitudes of the libido, with the

aptitudes developed out of endowment, and with the opportunities offered in social roles. The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity of meaning for others, as evidenced in the tangible promise of a 'career'" (1963, p. 235). Role confusion can be avoided if this stage is properly developed and passed. Through the fruitful negotiation between childhood and adulthood, "fidelity" and "trust" emerge: "We postulate the emergence of the strength of fidelity, this is not only a renewal on the higher level of the capacity to trust but also the claim to be trustworthy, and to be able to commit one's loyalty to a cause of whatever ideological denomination" (Joan Erikson, 1982, p. 61). However, "the lack of fidelity will result in such pervasive symptomatic attitude as diffidence or defiance, and even a faithful attachment to different or defiant cliques or causes" (Joan Erikson, 1982, p. 62)

In *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968), Erikson explains that ego's emergence depends on mutual communication between the child and the caretaker. "Consistency" and "sameness" are the mechanisms through which the child learns to unify the inner and the outer world (Erikson, 1968, p. 82). That is to say, in the process of identity development, the child has to imitate adults, their stories, and histories. He/she is easily impressed by their ethos of action as ideal and tries to internalize their values and norms. However, with the emergence of adolescence, the contradiction between such infantile ideals and adult world realities could lead to internalization of disappointment, guilt, violence, and hysterical denial (Erikson, 1968, pp. 121-22). When children step into the adolescent period, despite all their efforts to become independent beings, they end up in role identification with their father or mother (Erikson, 1968, p. 116), desperately looking for "a reintegrated sense of self, of what one wants to do or be, and of one's appropriate sex role" (McLeod, 2013, p. 3). Henceforth, "sameness" and "consistency" as the main features of the previous stages of ego development should be put in use moderately in adolescence; on the one hand, too much imitation of the parents can deprive the young adult of independence, and on the other hand, lack proper role models in childhood can cause role confusion and repudiation of social structures in adolescence.

*The Sportswriter* portrays Frank, a psychologically paralyzed young southerner narrating his life story in the form of confessional monologue. Two years ago, he lost his son, Ralph, because of Reye's Syndrome. Now Frank lives by Ralph's memories and constantly dreams about him. He has lost his job as a novelist and because of his dreaminess, his marriage with Ann has fallen apart to the point that he longer visits his other children, Paul and Clarissa. Changing his career from a fiction writer to a sportswriter, he has tried to render a truthful version of himself by avoiding implications and haziness in his style of writing as the book begins as such: "My name is Frank Bascombe. I am a sportswriter" (Ford, 1986, p. 9). Ford describes Frank's dilemma: "He was born into an ordinary, modern existence in 1945, an only child to decent parents of no irregular point of view, no particular sense of their *place* in history's continuum, just two people afloat on the world and expectant life most others in time. [. . .] This seems like a fine lineage to me still" (1986, p. 30). Ford conceives of Frank as a contemporary American everyman with "no conscious ancestral past. No family burden, not only no grandfather but no brothers and sisters, no cousins-no cousins that are until the end of the story" (Hobson, 2000, p. 89). His (lack of) background indicates that he is a new rendition of American citizenship deprived of a vivid sense of family, past, and above all, patriotism, as Frank postulates: "The past can explain nothing about us and we can get on with life. Whose history can ever reveal very much? In my view, Americans put too much emphasis their pasts as a way of defining themselves, which can be death-dealing" (Ford, 1986, p. 30).

Accordingly, lineage and ancestral background are both appealing and appalling to Frank from his preadolescence to adolescence. His family's miscommunication with their surrounding world has marked his mind with mistrust and doubt as he tries "to minimize his past and achieve a fullness of being, identity, and sensation in the present" (Duffy, 2008, p. 15). According to Erikson, "in search for the social values which guide identity, one therefore confronts the problems of *ideology* and *aristocracy*, both in their widest possible sense which connote [. . .] a defined world image and a predesigned course of history" (1963, p. 236). Thus, it can be interpreted that Frank's disavowal of his past is transferred to him from his parents through

"consistency" and "sameness." As a result, neither does he trust his family, nor his past, and struggles to set himself loose from the past. Frank's broken ties with the past culminate in his unstable and fragmented present.

Psychologically speaking, Frank encounters a severe mental crisis because of false identification. Lack of trust in his parents, his father's death, his mother's marriage and distance, his laconic uncle, and his act of joining the military service all make him very isolated. In fact, he has lost most of his chances of "sameness" and "continuity" intergal for internalizing the norms and standards of society. Eventually, all these factors result in lack of a role model to be imitated for establishing the sense of manhood and fatherhood. This is the reason why Frank is concerned with the story of his family because his "father's died when he was fourteen, and he did not see a lot of his mother after that, and he is happy to consign his parents to that distant, and now forgotten, past" (Duffy, 2008, p. 33). For Frank, the family narrative is actually "a list of problems and hatreds to brood about - a bill of particular grievances and nostalgias that pretend to explain or trouble everything" (Ford, 1986, p. 35). Throughout the text, he is at pains to disconnect himself from the past; apart from some vague hints to his parents, the narrative refuses to yield any locatable time and place in Frank's past life.

The palpable and tracable impact of loss of history surfaces in the novel when Frank joins the Marines in the middle of the war, and one of his friends is killed in Vietnam. From then on he experiences a new dimension of his ego formation: "This event happened when I was twenty-one years old, and I report it only because it was the first time I remember feeling dreamy in my life [. . .] I used to lie in bed in the Navy hospital [. . .] and thinks about nothing but dying, which for a while I felt interested in" (Ford, 1986, p. 41). His confession demonstrates the need for illusion transferred to him from his mother through "sameness" and "continuity." Therefore, his parents' oscillation between presence and absence causes not only false identification, but overidentification in Frank's mind. In the next phase, he repudiates his identity by the means of fanaticism and delusion in the wartime. Indeed, his parents have not taught him how to cope with life's contingencies and difficulties as they have been trying to disconnect themselves from their society.



In this respect, Frank tries to cut his life from the real world and always lives in deep hallucination. This reveals the trauma of the Vietnam War in which he lost his friend. Such a disturbing experience of loss reminds him of his dead father, leading him to live in an illusionary world. The point is that destructive influences of his family background along with the trauma of the war consistently construct Frank's ego as he is continuously surrounded by dualisms of death and life, illusion and reality, success and loss. Thus, "Frank's character struggles to reconcile *past* with present, deals with wartime *guilt* (he was discharged)" (Walker, 2000, p. 66). Even after the war, he is still clearly obsessed with loss, and death, facing role confusion as a form of identity crisis in his adolescent stage. As stressed by Erikson, the early adolescence is a critical moment for individuals in ego development for if they cannot pass the previous stages successfully, they will be "struggling with an 'identity crisis' that included 'identity diffusion' and 'role confusion'" (cited in Schlein, 2016, p. 69). He adds that "identity confusion" and loss of "ego identity" can lead to psychosis: "The loss of a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity, with a hopeless estrangement and isolation, and self-doubt [. . .] where amnesia and confusion cause a loss of time [. . .] where one's ego identity (and sense of self) has fallen apart into bodily, sexual, social, and occupational fragments" (p. 162).

Undergoing role confusion and repudiation, Frank negates all the cultural clichés of American-ness such as patriotism, glory, family, and citizenship imposed on him since his preadolescence. In this novel, Ford moots forward a critical perspective on American lifestyle, religion, and national holidays as he substitutes the ideal of middle-class conformist life in the American suburbs with the image of a deteriorated family. Being ashamed of himself, Frank is unable to manifest an idealistic or even realistic image of himself. In *Developmental Psychology*, David R. Shaffer and Katharine Kipp assert that for Erikson, "individuals without a clear identity eventually become depressed and lacking in self-confidence as they drift aimlessly, trapped in the diffusion status" (2007, p. 492). It can be concluded that the lack of a historical backbone in Frank's past results in his adolescent delirium and confusion as he desperately seeks and then refuses anchors of identity.

#### 4.2. *The Young Adulthood Stage: Dilemma of Intimacy in the Sportswriter*

The young adulthood stage (18 to 35 years old) in Erikson's theory is marked with the concept of "intimacy" which means the ability to connect with others; a lover, a friend, a neighbor, or a colleague. In this period, the main presumption is that an individual has reached a clear sense of his/her being and no longer needs to fear "losing" himself/herself, like many young adolescents do. One of the significant requirements to safely enter this stage is each partner's development of a strong and stable identity. However, the dilemma is that it is difficult for the partners to grow and mature together if they do not self-develop separately. As Sudhir Kakar in "The Human Life Cycle" clarifies, the young adult "who has consolidated his identity is ready for 'intimacy' with another. The task of this stage lies in the resolution of the conflict between 'intimacy' and 'isolation,' and the resulting strength is mature 'love'" (1968, p. 132).

*The Sportswriter* narrates the tragedy of a man's alienation in the late-twentieth century milieu of uncertainty and paradoxes. Frank's young adulthood in his mid-thirties has its essential conflict and crisis of intimacy: "An inability to develop meaningful relationships with others can harm an individual's personality; it may lead individuals to repudiate, ignore, or attack those who frustrate them" (Santrock, 2011, p. 452). The first major sign pertaining to Frank's issues with intimacy emerges in his language and style of narration. His use of short and broken sentences, having something to do with his job as a sportswriter, uncovers his fear of intimacy and pathological seclusion. Frank's inability to connect with people surfaces in the short, monosyllabic, and vague words he uses that always leave the readers waiting for more to come. Frank's language does not initiate communication neither with himself, nor the readers.

The problem of emotional and sexual intimacy highlights Frank's young adulthood. It can be stated that, in this novel, intimacy and identity are shaped side by side. As noted in *Identity and the Life Cycle*, "the youth who is not sure of his identity shies away from interpersonal intimacy, but the surer he becomes of himself, the more he seeks it in the form of friendship, combat, leadership, love, and inspiration" (Erikson, 1980, p. 68). Joan Erikson, Erikson's wife

alludes that "all the strengths arising from the earlier developments in the ascending order from infancy to adulthood (hope and will, purpose and skill, fidelity and love) now prove, on closer study, to be essential for the generational task of cultivating strength in the next generation [. . .] the 'store' of human life" (1982, p. 67). In this regard, Frank's failure in the previous psychosocial stages has resulted in lingering psychosis, not being able to make a reasonable choice at critical moments of intimacy. Being haunted by his son's memory as the major unresolved conflict in his previous stages of ego development, Frank cannot establish closeness with others: "My only wish is that my sweet boy Ralph Bascombe could wake up from his sleep-out and come in the house for a good Easter tussle like we used to, then be off to once-a-year services. What a day that would be! What a boy!" (Ford, 1986, p. 210).

Accordingly, "intimacy counters isolation in young adulthood," and removing fantasy, alienation, terror, and neurosis "always requires reaching out to others in the social world and within one's circle of family and intimates" (Hoare, 2000, p. 187). However, Frank's unknown, yet haunting past inflicts neurosis and trauma on him. His dead son threatens other parts of his personality, his marriage, and social relations. Young adulthood can provide an adequate field for young adults to consolidate their identity. Their identity relies on how much love they receive from their partner: "Men, in addition to erotic attraction, have developed a selectivity of mutual love that serves the need for a new and shared identity in the procession of generations" (Schlein, 1987, p. 745). Frank's failure at this stage can be traced in his sexual intimacy with multiple women without feeling any intimacy. This is a solution to affirm his sense of lost masculinity embedded in his history, family, wife, children, work, and friends. Promiscuity as a reaction or defense mechanism is Frank's method for avenging his lost social position, or compensating for all the lacunas in his life, as he confesses: It is "full immersion," in an attempt "to be within myself being as nearly as possible *within* somebody else" (Ford, 1986, p. 136). Frank confesses that after Ralph's death, he "romanced all those eighteen women in all those major sports venues" (Ford, 1986, p. 234), without feeling intimacy or true romance. According to *Identity and the Life Cycle*, one of the conflicts emerging in

intimacy could "be an impulsive flight into sexual promiscuity acted out without sexual satisfaction or any sense of participation" (Erikson, 1980, p. 97). Thus, promiscuity is introduced by Ford as a symptom of the malaise and malfunction of intimacy in the young adulthood stage,

Another façade of intimacy at this stage unveils itself in the Independence Day as Frank remembers Ralph: "Three singers of the Declaration of Independence are buried in sight of my son's grave" (Ford, 1986, p. 10). Ford cleverly creates an interconnection between intimacy, identity, and nationalism. The point is Ralph's death reminds Frank of the American Revolution as both events are tinged with loss, absence, and trauma. The glory of the Independence Day, the celebratory sense of patriotism and intimacy with one's homeland all evaporate through the recurring memories of Ralph. Ford is trying to chain personal intimacy to national intimacy or patriotism as both perish in Frank's character. The monuments, glories, and hallmarks of national history can never fill the gap in one's personal history; quite contrarily, they accentuate the dilemmas and tensions in the ego development. The illusion of national solidarity and victory symbolized via the Independence Day is shattered by Frank's utter detachedness from *America* as his picture of the country repudiates intimacy on both personal and national levels.

Another manifestation of failed intimacy emerges when Frank interviews Herb Wallagher, the ex-football player, now paralyzed in a ski accident. Frank has always admired Herb's heroic life before and after his disability. However, the interview reveals a painful dimension of Herb's personality; he is not satisfied with his present life and condition and all he can think of are all the lost glorious days, the championships, celebrity lifestyle, and media spotlight fixed on him in the past. Frank ponders upon the interview: "I don't think it will make a very good interview. Interviews always go better when athlete feel fairly certain about the world and are ready to comment on it" (Ford, 1986, p. 163). He realizes that the media and accoutrements of the American Dream inculcate illusions of success and satisfaction; Herb has been hiding his pain and torment from the outside world. He has provided the media with fake images of national and personal intimacy. It can be claimed that Frank's refusal to write Herb's story determines the first step in his healthy



identity development. As a matter of fact, he prevents his ego from being shaped based on ideological and illusive "sameness" and historical "continuity," thence, his action contradicts Erikson's notion of "consistency." In reality, Frank decides to shape a framework of his personality according to "differences." Here again, social and historical authenticity, orthodoxy, and algorithm are questioned. As a sportswriter, he decides to report reality of his country without any prejudiced and patriotic outlook. It can be argued that the unreliability of historical accounts and anecdotes contaminates American-ness; history, either personal or collective, is always already narrated, censored, polished, and filtered in order to guarantee maximum efficiency in the citizens.

Thus, Erikson's idea of historical sameness and continuity for the means of securing a well-functioning individual can be critiqued when national identity and ideology are considered. Frank knows that the only solution for the tyranny of imposed history and shallow intimacy is reorientation: "When the facts are made clear. I can't bear it and run away as fast as I can" (Ford, 1986, p. 89). So the "pervasive feelings of disgust, rejection of others, and self-loathing" (Hoare, 2000, p. 194) that according to Erikson could cast shadow over young adulthood are the aftermaths of illusions of intimacy *and* patriotism.

#### 4.3. *The Middle Adulthood Stage: Generativity and Stagnation in Independence Day*

According to Erikson, in middle adulthood (35 to 60 years old), individuals seek stability and perfection: "At this stage, one begins to take one's place in society and to help in the development and perfection of whatever it produces. Generativity and self-absorption are the key features of this stage. And one takes responsibility for that" (Evans, 1981, p. 33). "Generativity" is an essential stage "on the psychosexual as well as on the psychosocial schedule, where such enrichment fails altogether, regression to an obsessive need for pseudo-intimacy takes place, often with a pervading sense of stagnation and personal impoverishment" (Erikson, 1963, p. 240). In *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, Erik Erikson, Joan Erikson, and Helene Kivnick state that generativity is an authoritative characteristic of the adult's maturity and self-perfection; if he/she "gives up the official positions of responsibility in the family and community, he/she may

confront the middle adulthood with the feeling of stagnation that impede generative activity" (1986, p. 44). Generativity, productivity, and active social engagement are the loopholes from self-absorption and stagnation that could dominate the middle adulthood. Erikson's perspective on generativity not only means childbearing, but also teaching, writing, invention, arts, science, social activities, and community services. Behind this selection, generativity guarantees survival, improvement, and creativity. Hereupon, not only is parenting considered as a manifestation of generativity, but also adults can become generative through their careers or volunteer work.

Frank's middle adulthood depicted in *Independence Day*, the second novel of the trilogy, shows his gradual immersion in stagnation and stepping away from generativity. Now divorced and working as a realtor, all his social and familial interactions have come to naught; he shows forty-five houses to his clients without gaining a contract, and he is not aware of his ex-wife's remarriage and his children's feelings as his attempts to bond with his son, Paul, fail. Accordingly, Frank's stagnation and distorted generativity appear in his gradual silence; that is, his conversations and words with people around him begin to lose their vitality, clarity, and transparency. Words fail him as he fails them: "My job is to familiarize them with our area, let them decide if they want to settle there . . . by not saying a house is interesting or has the potential if I think it is a dump; and finally by not trying to make people believe in me (not that I am not untrustworthy – simply I do not invite trust" (Ford, 2006, p. 41). The irony is that as a realtor he has to be a maestro of words and euphemisms, but he consciously chooses to become more and more silent. Burdened with the pressures and traumas of the previous stages, with loss of history and closeness, he prefers muteness: "*Silent intimacies* - when spoken words, divulgements, promises, oaths are almost insignificant" (Ford, 2006, p. 96).

Frank's stagnation is further deteriorated by Claire Devane's death. She was his black colleague at the real estate agency whose tragic life had haunted Frank's mind for a long time. Her position is immediately filled by someone else at the agency and no one is allowed to speak of her mysterious death anymore, as if she had not existed at all: "It can . . . seem as though

Claire Devane had not fully existed in anyone's life but her very own" (Ford, 2006, p. 145). Claire's gruesome life and sudden mysterious death accelerate Frank's fall into silence and anti-productivity. The darkness behind her death pushes Frank into unsolvable riddles about his own life and existence, augmenting his doubt and uncertainty. The crucial fact to bear in mind is that Claire's death coincides with the Independence Day, raising the concepts of nationalism, freedom, and individuality once again in Ford's trilogy. The only generative impulse that sparkles in Frank's middle adulthood despite all the self-absorption and impotency is his outburst against the Independence Day and what it represents; conspiracy, suppression, racial cleansing, and discrimination in America.

#### 4.4. *The Old Adulthood Stage: Integrity and Despair in The Lay of the Land*

According to *Identity and the Life Cycle*, the noteworthy outcome of old adulthood (around 60 years old) is the stabilization of ego identity. Erikson argues that wisdom and logical decision-making give birth to "integrity" at this stage. True wisdom and spiritual insight can pave the way for self-definition, self-assertion, and liability: "Wisdom is in its many connotations from ripened 'wit' to accumulated knowledge, mature judgment, and inclusive understanding" (Erikson, 1968, p.140). Thereupon, the individual can successfully perform his/her social roles in a specific category such as religion, politics, economy, art, and science (Erikson, 1980, p. 70). In order to achieve this result, national identity and personal identity must efficiently collaborate with each other. If an individual fails at this level, he/she will not be assimilated into a particular social group. In this regard, in *Life-Span Development*, Erikson introduces integrity/despair binary opposition as the characteristic of the last stage in ego development: "During this stage, a person reflects on the past. If the person's life review reveals a life well spent, integrity will be achieved: if not, the introspective glances likely will yield doubt or gloom-the despair" (qtd. in Santrock, 2011, p. 24). Erikson adds that "despair is often hidden behind a show of disgust, misanthropy, or a chronic contemptuous displeasure with a particular institution and particular people" (1968, p.140).

In *The Lay of the Land*, the last novel in the trilogy, the fifty-five-year-old Frank lives in the Sea-Clift, suffering from the prostate cancer and recent departure of his

second wife, Sally Caldwell. What recues Frank from being ensnared by "despair" at this stage is his new life agenda which he calls "Sponsoring": "We offer other human the chance to be human; to seek and also to find. No donations (or question) ask" (Ford, 2006, p. 14). As a matter of fact, his cancer stimulates him to appreciate people around him and take responsibility. His ultimate self-discovery leads to the idea of "lived life" supported by Frank. Through Sponsoring, Frank starts communicating with his folks, his wife, and children, trying actively to be engaged and at the same time, assertive. For Erikson, life-review can provide a valid picture of the self, ameliorating the tensions and traumas piled up over the years. "Maturity," "wisdom," and "self-recognition" (cited in Santrock, 2011, p. 495) can be the offspring of this stage, beating off despair and isolation.

Integrity crowns Frank's ego as he regrets the fact that he did not donate Ralph's organs at the time of his death, because he could not "stand to have strangers thank us for our 'gift,' and would never forgive ourselves once the deeds were done" (Ford, 2006, p. 532). In search of compensation, he decides to donate his own organs after death. Frank discovers that his presence in the society through Sponsoring and his absence through death should revitalize and regenerate other people's lives. Cancer convinces of him legitimacy of fear, the fact that there is a particular "sweet satisfaction" (Ford, 2006, p. 290) in mortality. Sponsoring sets a goal for him: "Nothing more than to help people . . . the idea that many people with problems need nothing more than a little sound advice from time to time . . . you have a common sense conversation about, you'd feel a helluva lot better" (Ford, 2006, p. 13). The climactic moment in the novel pertaining to Frank's integrity occurs when he refuses to go to Ralph's grave: "I've learned by trial and much error to accept that Ralph is not coming back to his mother and me" (Ford, 2006, p. 66). In an interview with Harold K. Bush and Fred Arroyo, Ford comments on Frank's transformation: "It comes to him a sense of acceptance about the death of his son, and in some ways comes to realize that he hasn't really experienced acceptance all these years, even though he thought he had. He coexisted with his son's death, but he'd never accepted it. So I had to come up with a language of acceptance" (2008, p.3).

#### 5. Sum Up



Studying *The Bascombe Trilogy* from the perspective of Erikson's ego psychology reveals the fact that Ford as a postmodern writer persistently repudiates internalization of ideological values and standards of America. Mere imitation of dominant discourses such as nationalism, democracy, and freedom results in overwhelming identity crisis, alienation, and illusion. Frank tries to disavow "sameness" and "consistency" in adulthood and young adulthood stages due to the fact that these two periods of his life are overpowered by ideological and illusive impacts of American media exemplified in the national holidays such as the Independence Day and the Vietnam War. On the personal level, these two stages are also marked with the senses of loss, trauma, and lack of intimacy. It can be claimed that Erikson's notion of proper role model in adolescence and intimacy in young adulthood are not materialized in Frank's character as he goes deep into the pitfall of role confusion and repudiation in his adulthood and isolation in his young adulthood. However, towards the end of his middle adulthood, through the interview with Herb, Frank ignites the motor of integrity which comes to fruition in his old adulthood and death. It can be concluded that Ford's trilogy is looking for a loophole from all the confusion, isolation, and alienation in the postmodern mediatized world of political lies and personal illusions; a spark of integrity that is lit not by self-delusion and shibboleths, but realizing the reality of mortality, the need for communality and nurture.

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