

The Multicultural Relevance of Erikson's *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*

AUGUSTINE NWOYE, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

ABSTRACT *This article proposes that Erikson's Young Man Luther, published over half a century ago, in 1958, still retains its importance and relevance for facilitating our understanding of the conditions of success in identity development work among young people growing up in our contemporary, multicultural, unstable, and technologically advanced societies. This conclusion is informed by the fact that its ingenious description and analysis of the course of identity crisis and resolution in the life of Martin Luther is found to be highly consistent with the valuable new construct of "developmental individualisation" formulated by Côté and his colleagues to explain the identity development trajectories of creative, visionary young people, like Luther, in uncertain times and unstable societies like ours. A review of Erikson's Young Man Luther against the background of this important construct was undertaken to sharpen a new appreciation of Erikson's identity theory in the fields of human and personality development.* Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: Erikson; *Young Man Luther*; identity crisis; identity theory; developmental individualisation; default individualisation

BACKGROUND

One fundamental theme of the psychoanalytic tradition, particularly that of the Freudian persuasion, is the view that the crafting of human mentalities is heavily dependent upon the quality of an individual's biological equipment and early experience, especially the nature of the child-rearing practices to which the individual has been exposed. But Erik H. Erikson, one of Freud's outstanding followers, while agreeing that biological drives and other related factors, the quality of the parent–child relationship, early childhood tragedies and traumas, and unconscious thoughts and feelings, have parts to play in the making of a personality, argued that there is an equal need to factor in the contributions of environmental resources or sociocultural factors. In other words, that intrapsychic elements in combination with early childhood experiences in interaction with larger life and sociocultural factors lie at the root of

Correspondence to: Augustine Nwoye, Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, Private Bag X01, Scottsville, 3209, South Africa.
E-mail: nwoye@ukzn.ac.za

human personality formation. This is the principal argument of his classic book *Childhood and Society* published in 1950.

Erikson arrived at this position out of his wealth of experiences as a lecturer at Harvard, Yale and the University of California, including his private counselling practices, his study of American Indian tribes, his research on children, and his service as a psychotherapist for soldiers during the Second World War (Biehler, 1978). Out of such multiple and cumulative experiences, Erikson was led to conclude that Freud's tendency to stay in Vienna and interact with only a small and very select group of individuals was what prevented him from appreciating how larger societal and cultural factors can influence the construction of mentalities. Hence Erikson formulated a theory of human development that was not only anchored in Freudian psychoanalytic theory of the influence of early experience on human personality formation but which also highlighted the point that such development is equally influenced by society and culture. He framed his theory in terms of stages and the crisis handled at each, success or failure of which impacts on the quality of the personality that will eventually emerge (Colarusso, 2010). One of those stages arises in adolescence and the major challenges it brings are those of identity definition and attainment. The basic crisis relates to sex role identity formulation, occupational choice and commitment.

The magnitude of the challenge presented by this identity definition issue, according to Erikson, depends on the psychosocial influences to which the individual has been exposed. Brought up with warm and favourable early family experiences, and in a society in which there is little or no confusion about appropriate behaviour characteristics and activities for males and females (in which people are fully directed in what they can become in life by the consistent guidance of the tradition in which they are born and bred), the individual, according to Erikson, is unlikely to fall into the anguish of sex–role identity confusion. Likewise, in a stable society in which there are few or no fluctuations in the occupational market and a very limited number of occupations to choose from, the individual will not find it difficult to decide on their occupational choice or what to become in life.

On the other hand, according to Erikson, handling these issues in uncertain times and in unstable and technologically advanced societies can be daunting and disturbing, as it calls for decisions which will have far-reaching consequences. Thus, for Erikson, the identity definition problem is a crisis issue or a turning point in a person's life, essentially because it forces an individual to engage in decisions and choices that are both serious and committing.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this article is to show that Erikson's assumption made many years ago, namely that resolving the problem of identity is a daunting challenge in uncertain times and unstable, technologically advanced societies like ours where young people have at most only ambiguous or hazy guidance on which options to adopt in fashioning a successful identity for themselves, aligns with current theoretical perspectives in the field of developmental psychology. This observation is made against the background of the important research and writings by Côté (1993, 2000), Côté and Allahar (1994, 1996), Côté and Schwartz (2002), and Schwartz, Côté, and Arnett (2005). Through their writing we now know there are two ways of conceptualising the paths followed by young people growing

up in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Social structures have become less well defined and more ambiguous, while collective support for identity formation processes is less available (Côté & Allahar, 1994, 1996). According to Côté (2000) and Côté and Schwartz (2002), in exploring the significance of these social trends and the individual's reactions in coping with them, two distinct trajectories of identity formation have come to the fore, distinguishable from each other in terms of the nature and quality of the individual's interactions with his or her social environments. These are referred to as "developmental individualisation" and "default individualisation".

Developmental individualisation describes the experience of consciously and deliberately searching for or identifying with growth opportunities, particularly those identity options that are consistent with and enhance one's perceptions of one's self and one's potential. The person following this trajectory is said to transact with the environment in a bidirectional and purposeful way, and may even utilise the lack of structure in late-modern society as an opportunity to form a unique and self-directed sense of identity. Thus the growing individual who has the capacity for developmental individualisation is able to evaluate identity opportunities according to those opportunities' potential to further and enhance their self-development and to secure personal benefits and advancement. Opportunities that are perceived to potentially have a contrary outcome in the life of the individual will, therefore, be resisted or avoided.

On the other hand, default individualisation describes the trajectory in which the individual selects identity options and elements without much effort or consideration due to a tendency to conform unquestioningly to the opinions and guidance of others. This other-directed stance may involve following the latest trends and fashions in personal appearance and behaviour because this does not require much psychological effort. Individuals who follow this trajectory can be distinguished by their tendency to pay little attention to the ways in which their life or identity choices might enhance or damage their future options and progress; that is, their self-development, or the quality of their lives (Côté, 2000; Côté & Schwartz, 2002). In the view of Côté and Schwartz, individuals who adopt default individualisation tend to make choices dictated to them by trends and forces in the social environment (such as, in the West, the mass media or, in the African context, the forces of tradition, without significant personal input. Therefore, the primary difference between default and developmental individualisation lies in the intrapsychic response to, and interplay with, the environment. In other words, individuals characterised by developmental individualisation take advantage of societal resources in the process of developing and revising an identity (see Kerpelman, Pitman, & Lamke, 1997), while individuals characterised by default individualisation are more likely to be passive receptors of environmental and contextual influences. Obiechina (1975) described this as being tradition-directed.

Experiencing the social environment, reacting to it and absorbing its effects without a significant intrapsychic contribution has the effect of minimising the bilaterality of the person–environment interaction. Certainly, the environment itself may be modified by the individual's reactions to it but, without an independent contribution from the individual's inner world, it can be argued that conditions in the existing social environment dominate the interactive context. Similarly, the evolution of the social environment is diminished when the individual is not an agentic participant.

This article argues that Erikson (1950) had anticipated these contrasting trends and had characterised passive receptivity during the identity stage (referred to above as default individualisation) as a benign form of identity confusion rather than an acute identity crisis. Such identity confusion, in his view, may involve an absence of self-direction and clear sense of purpose but not psychiatric symptoms such as severe anxiety or depression. This means the default-individualisation person may believe that he or she has established a sense of self (i.e. integrated his or her self-definition from the influences of significant others), but when put to the test in situations of stress and crisis such an other-directed identity may not be capable of sustaining independent functioning (see Marcia, 1994).

However, although Erikson addressed identity transformations in his writings, particularly in his case studies of Ghandi and Luther, he did so in a clinical, figurative sense. Greater specification on identity processes would allow for the design of more focused and targeted interventions to facilitate identity formation. It would also help to identify individuals who could benefit most from such interventions.

One attempt to specify the mechanisms underlying identity formation was developed by Waterman (1984, 1999), who posed the question of whether identity development is a process of construction (i.e. using person–environment interactions to build a sense of self from the ground up) or a process of discovery (i.e. using person–environment interactions as a means of discovering and actualising an optimal self or set of unique potentials). Waterman argued that these perspectives are mutually exclusive and that identity formation could be viewed as a process of self-construction or self-discovery, but not both.

This, however, is where the main problem lies. For it can be argued that the construction and discovery views of identity formation are associated with different mechanisms of identity change and consistent with Erikson's (1974) focus on the potential interplays between self and context in stimulating ego-identity formation. Hence a discussion of the implications of the construction/discovery issue for Eriksonian theory, and for identity theory and research in general, could help facilitate further specification of the intrapsychic and transcendental processes underlying development and individualisation. Such a discussion would require exploring the so-called incompatibilities between the construction and discovery views of identity, as identified by Waterman (1984), and resolving his assumption of mutual exclusivity. If this were to be accomplished, the construction and discovery perspectives could be integrated into Erikson's broad vision of identity formation to provide a more precise understanding of change and development in one's sense of self. To this end, we begin with a review of Erikson's work of reconstructing and representing the course of identity crisis in Martin Luther's life. In doing this, the questions to bear in mind are:

1. To what extent does Erikson's biography of Luther demonstrate or anticipate the operation of developmental individualisation or default individualisation in his identity struggles?
2. In what way (following Waterman, 1984) could one characterise the actions of Luther in Waterman's work on identity definition: through identity construction, or identity discovery processes, or both?

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF ERIKSON'S *YOUNG MAN LUTHER*

In the book *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, Erik Erikson (1958) used Martin Luther, a German, one-time Catholic monk of the Augustinian Order, in a bold attempt to demonstrate what identity crisis looks like in a typical individual's life, how it can be difficult to resolve and how one can get over it in time, as Luther did. In a scholarly and masterful manner, Erikson drew out the nature and complexities of the identity formulation problem, the factors (psychological, social/cultural and spiritual) that can influence its development, why the problem is difficult for the adolescent, and how, at times, resolving it can drag on for years in the life of a gifted youth.

Erikson showed that a number of factors influence how an individual handles his or her identity definition problem: early experience, parental beliefs and philosophy of life, parental occupation and aspirations, religious dogmas and ideologies, the political sense of the time, the world-view of the people or the spirit of the times (the *zeitgeist*), the state of the world economy, personal interests, beliefs, talents, fears, aspirations and urges, friends, peers and mentors. Erikson came to this conclusion through reconstructing and representing the course of Martin Luther's identity crisis.

He used Luther's case, for instance, to illustrate the fact that in the course of an identity construction struggle an individual can change from one tentative identity to another until he or she finds one that seems most comfortable and congenial. Luther was advised by his father to opt for a vocation in law but he was unable to follow this advice and later found himself within the four walls of a monastery on account of his impulsive/religious interpretation of a thunderstorm. With that decision he started his career as a devoted monk of the Catholic Church but ended up later as the greatest religious revolutionist of his day, and thereafter became a renowned Protestant theologian and a "breaker" of the vow of priestly celibacy. By this account and emphasis, Erikson could be said to suggest that identity definition is full of dichotomies and contradictions, shocks and regressions, and cannot therefore be understood as consisting of either construction or discovery processes, as Waterman (1984) would see it. Indeed, according to Erikson, the identity definition process, particularly among gifted young people like Luther, does not usually follow a linear path, but rather traverses curves and vacillations and even, in some cases, revolutionary practices. This is another way of saying that, according to Erikson, it is the phenomenon of developmental individualisation rather than default individualisation that is most useful in explaining and understanding what happens in the life of a young individual engaged in the critical process of working out his or her self-identity.

In the same book, Erikson introduced certain concepts to highlight fundamental occurrences during the identity crisis period, including psychosocial moratorium, negative identity, and attachment and flexibility to ideological systems. Psychosocial moratorium refers to a period in the life of a young individual marked by a tendency to procrastinate about coming to a decision that involves a commitment for life. This is witnessed mainly in regard to the career choice challenges confronting adolescents. Luther's stay in the monastery represents the period of such a psychosocial moratorium experience. In Erikson's view, this psychosocial moratorium should be a period of adventure and exploration, a period during which society allows a young person sufficient time to think through and make up his or her mind about what to do in life, and a period that will have a positive or, at least, a neutral impact on the individual and society.

In Erikson's (1958) view, on the other hand, a negative identity is "an identity which an individual has been warned *not* to become, which he/she can only become with a divided heart, but which he/she nevertheless may find him/herself compelled to becoming, protesting his or her whole-heartedness" (p. 102). According to Erikson, Luther's struggle can be described as an aspect of identity diffusion crisis, giving rise to a situation of negative identity. In this way, becoming a monk and clergyman represents a negative identity in the life of Luther, who had been warned by his father not to become a monk or clergyman but rather to become a lawyer, but who found himself compelled to becoming a monk by the push of his impulsive religious fears and orientations emanating from the thunderstorm episode.

Erikson's account similarly suggests that adolescents are greatly addicted to flexibility in relation to ideological systems. This is so, he averred, in that they stand between the past and the future and, having no "time perspective" and ability to take the "in-between attitude". They tend to look for ways of life that are not so tied up with the past or so given to the future. In Luther's time, religion was one of the principal carriers of such ideologies; hence the drastic influence of religion on Luther's identity definition struggles. In making these points, Erikson appeared to anticipate the operation of the process of developmental individualisation as articulated by Côté and Schwartz (2002), a process through which the creative and active individual refuses to be a mere passenger or follower of tradition in undertaking the arduous process of carving out a successful identity.

Through his description of Luther's life, Erikson showed that people like Luther may find themselves cognitively endowed to survive in a period of upheaval like our own, where there is no stable structure about the best options for living, and where the former certainties are fast losing their appeal to some influential members of the younger generation.

Thus, in Chapter 1 (pp. 13–22), Erikson encourages the understanding that the psychological phenomenon of identity crisis occurs in that period of life when each youth must forge some central perspective and direction, some working unity, out of the remnants of his/her childhood experience and the hopes for his/her anticipated adulthood. It is at this time that one must discern some meaningful resemblance between what one has come to see in oneself and what one's sharpened awareness tells one others expect one to be. Erikson emphasises that this point tends to sound like common sense to bystanders but, like all health, it is a matter of course only to those who happen to possess it, and appears as the most complex achievement to those who have tasted its absence. For only during ill health does one appreciate the intricacy of the body chemistry, and only in a crisis of identity definition/diffusion does it become obvious what a sensitive combination of interrelated factors make up the human personality (the product of identity definition). In some classes, at some periods in history, according to him, this identity definition struggle will be clearly marked off as a critical period, and a kind of "second rebirth" (p. 14). Although this is a difficult issue to confront and contain, Erikson says that people like Luther emerge out of its clutches not only with victory but also with rich contributions to make towards the reshaping of the ideologies and beliefs that played a big part in their and other people's struggle to discover and to construct themselves.

Erikson, therefore, clearly suggests that the point Waterman (1984) later made regarding whether people engage in the construction or discovery of their identity cannot be answered in an either/or manner, but in terms of "both ... and ...". Luther not only waited to *discover* what his identity could be but also took an active and creative part in his search for it. In

that process, he took a number of risks that involved categorical refusals to adopt other people's vocational aspirations and recommended identities. He searched for relevant guiding ideologies on which to anchor his life, engaging in necessary delays and waitings before coming to important and committing decisions. All this was geared at helping him to come to terms with *constructing, not just discovering*, an identity he would be happy to call his own.

Using Erikson's account of Luther's life so far, one can say that great people like Luther do not just discover their identities, they also create them through deliberate, active and creative engagement in actions and manoeuvres that promote the eventual construction of the discerned right path for the achievement of their successful identities.

Chapter 2 (pp. 23–48) contains a sustained description of the influence of religion, parental beliefs and early experience on the identity struggles of Martin Luther. Erikson delineated these influences by means of psychoanalytical and historical methods; hence the book's subtitle, *A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*. In this discussion, Erikson's major aim appeared to be to illustrate that creative young people like Luther do not take up their parental beliefs and religious dogmas as truths cast on stone. Rather, they often receive such truths and beliefs positively but might later seriously question them. Therefore, family influences are not guaranteed to draw rigid loyalty from children, particularly children with visionary and gifted dispositions.

In Chapter 3 (pp. 49–97), Erikson showed that in identity definition struggles an individual may be disobedient to his or her parents' warnings and reject their values and counsels as well as those of society. Erikson attempted to demonstrate that identity work in developmentally individualising adolescents involves a call for decisions about whose and what values and value orientation to accept and reject. By this account Erikson meant to show that for creative young people the phenomenon of developmental individualisation as formulated by Côté and Schwartz (2002) prevails rather than the phenomenon of default individualisation. The latter is the bane of non-creative adolescents who follow through life like mere passengers in a train, satisfied with thinking others' thoughts and living their lives according to ready-made formulas dictated by friends and peers.

Chapter 4 is largely a description of the basic tendency of the creative adolescent to go for the best or for nothing at all, rather than for whatever is available. This explains, Erikson said, why such adolescents, like Luther, find it difficult to settle on one conviction for long and why they find it difficult to make serious choices that involve committing for life, e.g. choosing a vocation. According to Erikson, this tendency to go for the best is the foundation for greatness and an essential avenue for human rejuvenation, as it is this rebellious expression of human consciousness which alone can keep pace with technological and social change and advancement in every generation. This suggests that for Erikson identity definition was not just a process of discovering but also of creating or constructing an identity which one would be happy to call one's own.

In Chapter 5, Erikson made the point that the steps taken by a developmentally individualising adolescent in his or her identity formulation struggles are open to serious re-evaluation and revision by the same individual. He notes that through such re-evaluations, revisions and reflections, what the same individual had previously endorsed, he or she may, with all the energies of the youth, later repudiate. Luther, according to him, illustrates this feature very well. A one-time submissive monk who put faith in the dogmatic teachings of

the Church on such issues as the confession, Holy Mass and celibacy came eventually to question the grounds for such belief. Rebellion and repudiations followed this questioning.

Similarly, Chapter 6 is an account of Luther's efforts at redefining some of the dogmatic teachings of the Church and at reinterpreting many religious issues which the theologians of his day took for granted as being completely settled and clear. In this, Erikson meant to show that struggles for identity in visionary human beings are related to ideological and doctrinal rejuvenation of society. Erikson showed how Luther seized the chance to work out (that is, to construct, and not just discover) a better way of understanding his religion, God and man's relationship to God. From this account, Erikson showed that in a developmentally individualising person's identity definition struggles, a time comes when he or she not only shakes off and repudiates old ways of life (to which he or she had previously remained submissive) but also tries to *construct a new way of understanding and acting* that squares better with his or her emerging value systems and sense of how things ought to be. In demonstrating that these features are normal in the identity definition struggles of creative individuals, Erikson used the psycho-historical method of analysis, which stresses the contributions made by the past experiences of the individual, the spirit of the times, and the world image of the society in which the individual lives.

Chapter 7 of the book is an account of what follows identity crisis in Erikson's scheme of personality development, namely, crisis of intimacy, crisis of generativity and crisis of integrity, and an account of their resolution in Luther's life (Colarusso, 2010). The main point in this chapter appears to be that the way a developmentally individualising person resolves his or her identity definition crisis enables and impacts his or her progress in subsequent stages. Luther's identity as a monk brings him the problem of isolation and an inner torment incited by the fires of concupiscence and the oppression of an obsessively scrupulous conscience. According to Erikson, Luther resolved this crisis when in mid-life he decided to shake off the bondage of the celibate tradition to take care of his sexual needs as soon as a dignified solution could be found: marriage. He resolved this crisis in order to achieve sexual satisfaction and to share friendly relationships with men and women – experiences which went a long way to help ease his emotional life generally.

In the epilogue, Erikson made it clear that the integrity crisis is the last to emerge and described its resolution as the feeling that one (usually the developmentally individualising identity) has achieved meaning and order in one's life; including a feeling of pride that one's life-plan, decisions, accomplishments, mind-style, and history have been worthwhile and can be confidently defended. This reassuring feeling, according to Erikson, arises when the individual has successfully resolved the previous seven stages of psychosocial development. In his view, with this stage of integrity and the psychological stability and satisfaction that it ushers in, an individual feels satisfied with his or her life as he or she has fashioned and lived it. In Erikson's view, when this happens, the fear of death loses its sting.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions emerge from the above discussion. The first is that although Erikson did not use the expression "developmental individualisation", as articulated by Côté (2000), Côté and Schwartz (2002), and Schwartz et al. (2005), he presents ample illustration of the presence and salience of such a phenomenon in the identity struggles of Martin Luther.

Similarly, although Erikson did not use Waterman's (1984, 1999) concepts of "identity discovery" or "identity construction" in his description of Luther's identity-development trajectory, he makes indirect references to both constructs.

This conclusion is consistent with the point made by Côté and Schwartz (2002), who observed that Erikson's writings and later research on identity were largely inspired by Western culture in which commitments can be based on individual exploration and choice rather than duty and obligation, and in which identity can be defined as "what we make of ourselves" (cf. Josselson, 1996). Similarly, Luther's society and culture are representative of societies in which cultural expectations, gender, social class, and family do not readily set tight limits on an individual's pathway and thereby determine his or her identity. In this way, Luther's identity work matched, and indeed anticipated, the view articulated by Côté and Schwartz (2002) and Schwartz et al. (2005) that active identity formation strategies have become increasingly important in our postmodern age characterised by individualisation, relativity of values and restructuring of social systems (Côté & Schwartz, 2002; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

Also Erikson's rendering of the course of identity development in the life of Martin Luther appears consistent with the prevailing view in developmental psychology literature that identity work cannot be regarded as a straightforward process (e.g. Josselson, 1996; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999; Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992). Thus from Luther's life one discovers that individuals may move in and out of identity statuses in a manner characterised by variability and individual differences, rather than in a linear fashion as originally postulated in the psychoanalytic literature. Luther's identity stabilisation later in life also points to the view that identity commitments made after a period of sound exploration (as Luther did) gives rise to internalisation of self-regulatory mechanisms and a relatively mature mode of psychosocial functioning. Therefore, the above analysis of Erikson's *Young Man Luther* shows that an individual's identity achievement status as reflected in Luther's life represents the most developmentally sophisticated and mature status, while identity diffusion represents the least sophisticated, both conclusions being consistent with Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity theory (Waterman, 1999).

In summary, a close review of Erikson's *Young Man Luther* affirms, as corroborated by contemporary identity researchers, that neither environmental contexts nor individual characteristics are on their own the primary source of identity formation. Rather, these factors interact to form the necessary conditions for successful identity development. Even though the developmental history of an individual is undoubtedly an important determinant in the identity development process, it is not sufficient for successful identity development. This suggests, for instance, that when giving vocational guidance to children, parents and other caregivers should do so in such a way that children and young people have the freedom and opportunity to think over the proposed options. As Erikson's story of Luther demonstrates, children, like adults, have agency and should be able to exercise that agency in their identity definition process.

RELEVANCE TO THE AFRICAN SITUATION

In considering the relevance of the above discussion to the African situation, it is clear that people like Luther who forge their own identities abound in African fiction and biography; for example, Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) and Steve Biko (1946–1977).

Mandela's (1994, 1995) autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, for instance, is replete with examples that corroborate the view that he, like Luther, did not achieve his identity by merely following other people's thoughts or by fearing to question unjust laws and practices. Rather, he was a courageous and visionary leader and activist who was ready to suffer any consequence in order to bring freedom and justice to South Africa. Like Luther, who created an alternative model of Christian life, Mandela dismantled the apartheid order and created a new political order where citizens with multiracial identities could live as members of one nation.

A similar trend is reflected in the life and identity struggles of the South African activist Steve Biko, who lost his life in tragic circumstances for resisting to own an identity imposed on him and his fellow black people by the apartheid ideology. The common denominator in Biko's identity work and that of Luther and Mandela was their resistance to a system that hindered them in developing their preferred identity – an identity that each had been warned not to become but which each found themselves compelled to pursue.

Other African models of people like Luther can be found in the literature. For instance, the fictional world of Alasan Mansaray (1996), a Sierra Leonean, as summarised by Eustace Palmer, depicts the protagonist called Yaya, a 25-year-old accountant, who discovers to his dismay that he has been selected by his dying grandmother to succeed her as one of two traditional bone-healers in the country. The person selected to practise this mystic art must accept, because refusal, according to prevailing myth, incurs the wrath of the ancestors. If Yaya accepts the role he must abandon his hitherto brilliant career and retire to a remote part of the country. As he has an unflinching belief in the efficacy of traditional assumptions and practices, it seems he has no choice but to accept his new destiny and be of service not only to his tribe but to the entire nation. However, before his grandmother could seal the deal, Yaya stated:

Not quite yet, Grandma Fatu! He tried to get up, to run and free himself, but felt glued and had no control over his body, even as his mind kept telling him: "Run, run, run, Yaya!"

He realised it was hopeless. He tried to speak but his mouth was heavy. There were tremors in his temple, yet he couldn't utter a word. Yaya wished to scream: "No, Grandma, no! Please let me go! I don't need this gift or any bond! I love my ancestors and that's enough. Now, can't you see, this is not for me? I already have a career in the civil service and I live differently in Sobala. Please, it's a big family. Give it to Wasu, your son, or anybody, but ..."

Grandma Fatu had gotten up. She came to stand over him, casting a shadow over his body like a cage. (Palmer, 2006, p. 24)

However, by the story's end Yaya chose the option of self-exile from his country to ensure that the ancestors could not find and punish him. Therefore, although his life was severely disrupted, he chose this as a better option than taking over the identity of bone-healer.

A very similar story is presented in Wole Soyinka's novel, *The Interpreters*, published in 1966. This story concerns Egbo, a young intellectual who has been exposed to African and Western culture, the traditional and the modern, and who is now called upon "not to reconcile the two or to simply interpret one to the other, but to choose one and abandon the other" (Palmer, 2006, p. 23). Egbo is asked to leave his lucrative modern job in the Nigerian foreign service and become his grandfather's successor as traditional ruler of his people. This would enable him to be of real service to his people and lift him to a position of honour. However, Egbo, unlike Yaya, has a choice and he chooses in the end to throw in his lot with the modern and abandon the traditional.

A common factor running through these stories is the idea of a heightened bilaterality between the individual and the forces of the environment in the making of identity, a trend that is consistent with Erikson's presentation of Martin Luther's battle in making his own identity. Thus, like in the study of Luther, the lesson one learns from the lives of Mandela, Biko, Yaya. and Egbo is that the grip of the traditional or the prevailing political ideology is never total and impregnable. For, like Luther, all were able to resist the options of their inherited environments in search of a more fulfilling identity.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Each of the above stories shows that in an identity definition struggle the individual is typically challenged to make an important choice in the course of his/her self-development. In each case discussed above, the individual was able to refuse to follow the psychologically easy path and could create and chart for themselves the way of life that best suited them. Therefore, like Luther, great identity achievers live a life of inner direction, or a life that is anchored on the values of self-direction or, in the new language of current psychological scholarship, developmental individualisation, where the individual is able to rely on their visionary and creative capabilities when searching for a life path, rather than inheriting that which is imposed upon them.

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Augustine Nwoye is Professor of Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and a member of the School of Applied Human Sciences. He is well-known, both continentally and internationally, for his original and unique contributions to the definition and study of African psychology as an emerging specialisation very much in demand in the curriculum of many departments of psychology in the South and other regions of Africa.