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ANNA-KATHARINA KRÜGER

The Birth of the (Non)European Author

Or the Deconstruction of Authorship in Testimonial Narration

Anna-Katharina Krüger

The Birth of the (Non) European Author. Or the Deconstruction of Authorship in Testimonial Narration

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The Birth of the (Non) European Author

Or the Deconstruction of Authorship in Testimonial Narration

von
Anna-Katharina Krüger

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Preface

This project began as an idea, which came at the end of my master studies and has since developed into my doctoral thesis, generously funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgesellschaft (DFG), the LMU Graduate Center, and the inspiring input of countless colleagues, friends, and family. I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Robert Stockhammer, who, while acting as my supervisor at the DFG Research Training Group *Globalization and Literature – Representations, Transformations, Interventions* at the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich, was a straightforward reader and a propellant advisor. He urged me to think beyond the circuits of production and to combine analysis of the book market with close readings.

As a doctoral student of the Research Training Group I was lucky to be able to draw inspirations and ideas from countless discussions with doctoral colleagues who became dear friends along the way. I extend thanks and love to this large network of people who helped me throughout the years: Franziska Jekel, Neele Meyer, Thoren Opitz, Peter Maurits, Hanna Strass, Fabienne Imlinger, and of course Matthias Kanziora.

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13.08.2020 Anna-Katharina Krüger

1 Introduction. *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* and the Idea of Testimonial Narration

This book draws together the literary genre 'testimonial narration' and thoughts on the challenges of (post)colonial authorship. By analysing the creation of an authorial persona as an economic as much as political decision, the function of the author gives information about the purpose of a corpus of texts which I suggest to call 'testimonial narrations'. The notion of authorship is situated as a key theme of the texts discussed.

As a selling point, testimonial narration introduces itself to open the literary and political sphere for marginal voices to be heard and taken into account; it addresses and aims to capture cultural and political violence wherever it is forced onto a collective. As survivor, the testimonial subject narrates the injustices felt and endured by a whole community it represents. However, it is not only the humanitarian rhetoric supporting the political agenda that must be named as the defining feature of 'testimonial narration'. While testimonial narration displays the overcoming of the discriminating status as subaltern, the writer's/witness's literary emancipation, these texts also battle a paradoxical system of inclusion and exclusion. A system, which demands the writer's affirmation of his/her otherness in order to conquer the predominately-white book market as an accepted and successful author. The self-awareness for these problems, the meta-reflexivity with which the genre discusses and often also determines the writer's specific author persona, invites to carefully (re)examine and question the relationship between representational writing and authorship. Expressions of self-consciousness as well as self-assertion are at the centre of this book.

Theoretically based on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"(1988) I will draw a brief genealogy of testimonial narration by looking at the Latin American *testimonio* of the 1960s till 1980s as well as the slave narrative of the 18th and 19th century. I will highlight the unbalanced power-relations between 'witness', 'writer', and 'author'. This introduction will set testimonial narration against the Latin American *testimonio* and other forms of literary self-expression.

Expressions of self-consciousness as well as of self-assertion are at the centre of these genres, but demand a more defined analysis when it comes to testimonial narration. This book analyses the problematic relationship between the testimonial subject as narrator and the professional writer as juridical author in particular: One of the significant aspirations of *testimonio* circulates around the seemingly authentic representation of what has been conceptualised by postcolonialism as the *Other*. In the following, testimonial narration's core ideas of 'Writing Back'[1] and 'giving voice to those who do not have one' are examined as the genre's post-colonial heritage and market-value, stressing the relationships between testimonial authorship and the production and consumption of the genre. The relationship between authorship and the role of the narrator/protagonist is analysed to highlight the unbalanced distribution of power within the field of literary production and the publishing process of testimonial narration itself.

To clarify the particular circumstances of writing and narrating testimonial narration, this introduction summarises the controversial publishing history of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (henceforth *Me llamo*) and the unresolved copyright dispute between editor and originator. It will look at the presented authorship as a concept defined by mechanisms of literary production, contextual positioning, and by rhetorical strategies. Further, this introduction critically examines definitions of testimonial narration and its relationship to other life-writing genres such as autobiography, memoir, and Latin American *testimonio*. The determining relationship between market-demands and life-writing is not singular to Latin American *testimonio*. Many of the defining features of Menchú's narration can be detected

1 'Writing back' derives from the title *The Empire Writes Back*, published by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in 1989, which is concerned with the writing of people formerly colonised by the British Empire. In this publication, the three authors agree to use the term 'post-colonial' to refer to all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the time of colonisation to independence and the present day (cf. 2). The authors understand 'writing back' as literature opposing hegemonial discourse and literary production: "The development of independent literatures depended upon the abrogation of this constraining power and the appropriation of language and writing for new and distinctive usages. Such an appropriation is clearly the most significant feature in the emergence of modern post-colonial literatures" (6).

in the slave narratives of the 18th and 19th century. The slave narrative follows a carefully constructed literary design, both selling and achieving awareness for the political cause of the abolitionists as much as for the author's personal cause. Narrations like *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African* (henceforth, *The Interesting Narrative*), and later *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. An American Slave* (henceforth *Narrative*) as well as *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (henceforth *The History*) reached large audiences, and flourished even on the international market due to the international distribution network of the Anti-Slavery Society.

The abolition of the slave trade was an endeavour of great international interest and conflict, its international reach and political zest lead to a new rhetoric, namely that of the human rights. This humanitarian rhetoric gives birth to the politically charged testimonial narration. These narrations criticised the slave trade as dehumanising institution eroding the core of social identities. By encouraging the commodification of human subjects, slavery positions the slave at the margins not only of society but also of human nature itself. To regain their humanity, former slaves, intellectually and financially supported by British and American abolitionists, take on the authority to speak of their experiences as a narrating 'I'. The slave narrative quickly develops to be the most successful propaganda tool for the Abolition of Slavery. As eyewitness report, it gives the mission the urgency and human appeal it needed to reach a broad and international audience.

The core of this book looks at contemporary testimonial narrations depicting genocide and child soldiery as forms of violence especially prominent to the African continent. The presentation and marketing of testimonial narrations like the ones analysed in this third part of this book still shape the general image of 'Africa' and represent its history and present as that of war and violence. The three case studies deal with testimonial narrations invested in the representation of crimes against humanity and offer renegotiations of authorship formed by socio-political unrest.

Publishing *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*

Published in 1983, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* made the headlines not only because of its political investment and its consequent banning in Guatemala; Argentinean born anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray and indigenous Rigoberta Menchú achieved world-wide recognition due to the book's publication history. When disputes arose because the first edition had been published in French while the interviews were held in Spanish, international sales started to pick up. The English translation was published in 1984 and sold approximately 150.000 copies. In the following years, the book was translated into German, Italian, Dutch, Japanese, Danish, Norwegian, Russian and Arabic, marking its great international success. Focusing strongly on the immense market success, it certainly seems no coincidence that scholars coherently refer to *Me llamo* as the paradigm of the Latin American genre *testimonio.*[2] Theorists like John Beverley, Georg Gugelberger, as well as Elizabeth Sklodowksa claim the origins of the genre of *testimonio* to be specific to Latin America. In her book *Testimonio hispanoamericano* (1992), Elizabeth Sklodowska establishes that literary scholars understood and finally canonised *testimonio* as a genre specific to Latin America in the aftermath of the *Casa de Las Américas* literary prize award. In the 1960s, the journal and cultural centre *Casa de las Américas* aimed to build a communicational bridge between the countries of the continent by promoting texts with a strong documentary and political focus. Cultural institutions as much as political interest smoothed the way for the emergence of *testimonio* as a genre.

During the Cold War, political formations in Latin America established the revolution as national interest, invading the cultural and the literary sphere in particular: "Cultural workers of all shades in the political spectrum were forced to confront the revolutionary question […] The perception of culture was therefore heavily determined by national

2 Even though *Me llamo* marks the worldwide recognition and the branding of the genre, scholars like Sklodowska, Nance as well as Beverley refer to two different texts as equally influential for the genre. One of these texts is *Biografia de un cimarrón,* published in 1966 and written by writer and ethnologist Miguel Barnet, who conducted interviews with 103-year old slave Esteban Montejo, the other text, *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (1967), was written by French-born journalist and writer Elena Poniatowska.

politics" (Moreiras 1996, 193) and influenced the production of literature immensely. Literature had the purpose of stabilising national identity as revolutionary resistance against Western hegemony and power (194). In that sense, the Cuban *literatura de campaña* (Bunke 1988, 11) constitutes the framework for the emergence of *testimonio* on the Latin American continent, beginning with the war diaries of the 19th century up to the records of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara.[3] Equally important for the rise of the genre of *testimonio* was the restoration of the dictatorship and its legacy on the Latin American continent, especially in Argentina, where *testimonio* constitutes an effort to confront the dictatorial past. Here, *testimonios* are written to voice what happened *to los desaparecidos* (the disappeared): a term referring to the people abducted and killed under the mechanism of governmental terrorism.

Me llamo's publication success profited from this demand for politically enriched cultural production. It received the *Casa de Las Américas* prize in the category for 'best *testimonio*' shortly after its publication date. Recognised by literary critics as well as institutions like schools and universities, "[t]estimonio's readership increased substantially as the genre was incorporated into new canons of Latin American studies, and 'non-western' studies in general, and as events such as Menchú's Nobel Prize and debates about 'culture wars' lent further visibility to the genre" (Nance 2006, 50). This visibility not only lead to a worldwide recognition of a seemingly new genre, it also made Rigoberta Menchú "the most famous indigenous leader in the world" (Pratt 2001, 29). Thanks to both, the widespread recognition of the testimony and Menchú's face, "many Guatemalan lives were saved" (ibid.). However,

3 However, to describe *testimonio* simply as a genre emerging from historically important moments of revolutionary spirit ignores socio-cultural factors influencing the production of new literary genres that shaped Cuban texts, especially those written after 1959. The production of documentary art increased radically in Latin America, especially in Cuba, due to the newly won development possibilities for the cultural sector (18). In 1966, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara published a paper redefining Cuban's cultural politics, calling for a political path to be followed by cultural (literary) institutions and their agents. He criticises socialist realism for its lack of credibility and advocates a literature that does not lose its social and political authenticity and credibility. This idea was highly approved of in the 1970s. The Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) were involved in cultural affairs and demanded a stronger involvement of writers in the revolutionary process, by pushing their own ideological interests (Bunke 1988, 62).

the success was a calculated one. When Menchú was introduced to Elisabeth Burgos-Debray in Paris in 1982, the anthropologist was already planning to write a political text about Guatemala's people. Well established in the academic and publishing world, she was the perfect agent for this literary project. She became Menchú's spokesperson, agent, and editor. While Menchú's own political agenda was promoted, nevertheless Burgos-Debray controlled the publication, its influence and perception. By creating a chapter-by-chapter guide to a foreign culture, a "first-person ethnography" (Grandin 2011, 1), she introduced an underprivileged, oppressed indigenous culture to the world of Western academics and intellectuals.

The Role of the Editor

This strong editorial influence on the process of publication determines the context as well as the semantics of the text; it shapes the textual appearance of the narrator and her narrative 'voice'. This duality of two speech-levels, namely 'writing' on the one hand and 'voice' on the other hand, constitute the genre's unique aesthetic quality as well as its selling point. The carefully constructed testimonial script, oscillating between 'writing' and 'telling', creates an asymmetry which is especially prominent in the publishing history of *Me llamo*. The book's editor, Burgos-Debray, claims authorship for the life-story of Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú, while introducing the indigenous woman as the authoritative 'voice' of the text. Even though Burgos-Debray explains in the foreword how she supposedly takes her editorial self out of the narration, she actually positions herself as the controlling force behind the text. She determines form, structure, and not least style and content. However, although Burgos-Debray claims that the format of a monologue was specifically chosen to give the narrative an authentic appeal, and that she aimed to vanish behind Menchú's voice, she cannot disappear completely. As an academic and anthropologist, Elisabeth Burgos-Debray created a report on Guatemalan history by setting a chronological order for the chapters. The prologue exhibits the text's construction as a well-planned anthropological narrative, while at the same time – paradoxically – it aims at establishing the narration of Menchú as a spontaneous monologue:

> Leí atentamente este material una primera vez. A lo largo de una segunda lectura, establecí un fichero por temas: primero apunté los principales (padre, madre, educación e infancia); y después los que se repetían más a menudo (trabajo, relaciones con los ladinos y problemas de orden lingístico). Todo ello con la intención de separarlos más tarde en capítulos. Muy pronto decidí dar al manuscrito forma de monólogo, ya que así volvía a sonar en mis oídos al releerlo. (Burgos 1996, 25)

Testimonios often feature such a foreword or prologue to discuss their production, yet if they do not entirely hide the impact of the influential editor on the shaping and translating process, they aim to downplay the altering mechanisms and try to conceal their manipulative nature by stressing the necessity. *Me llamo's* foreword proclaims the "erasure of the authorial presence" (Beverley 2004, 35), constructing the *testimonio* as monologue by erasing Burgos-Debray's questions to Rigoberta, which determine chronology and content. Instead of acknowledging the determining character of the interview, the foreword introduces the subsequent *testimonio* as a stand-alone monologue. This procedure constructs the testimonial narrator as the authoritative voice, masking the actual loss of authority. This loss of authority is addressed by Menchú herself in later interviews, and in her publication *La Nieta de los Mayos* (henceforth *La Nieta*), published in 1998. Menchú reasons that she did not understand the situation and the juridical implications of an international publication. In *La Nieta*, the answer to *Me llamo;* Menchú insists that when she participated in the interviews for the book, she simply did not know the rules and had no idea about an author's copyright. Menchú's narration becomes Burgos' product and her personal success: "Burgos became Menchú's collaborator, in an ambiguous relation whose outlines remain unclear" (Damrosch 2003, 239). Perhaps the outlines appear unclear, but the impact of this relation is apparent. Legally, this 'collaboration' had neither been registered in the book nor in the contracts as such. An openly announced collaboration between Burgos-Debray as editor/author and Menchú as contributor or co-author would have meant a sharing of the copyright. Instead, Burgos-Debray continues to be the exclusive holder of the copyright and beneficiary of the

royalties.[4] Menchú states in an interview: "What is in fact an absence in the book is the rights of the author… Because the authorship of the book, in fact, should have been more precise, shared, no?" (Menchú cited in Beverley 1999, 68).

The Testimonial Protagonist

Because for *testimonio*, the name of the protagonist and the verifiable existence of him or her is constitutive*, Me llamo* uses different techniques to establish the appearance of Menchú not just as the narrator but as the textual authority, overshadowing the actual author and editor. Even though *Me llamo's* foreword illuminates some of the problems the production of *testimonio* has to face, it mostly helps to detect the editor as the controlling force behind the text. This powerful affirmation of the editor by the foreword, however, is immediately challenged and contradicted by the opening lines of *Me llamo.* Describing *Me llamo's* first paragraph as an opening formula helps to understand the text and its protagonist as a specific speech act, or representation of a speech act that is prototypical for the genre:

> Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú. Tengo veinitrés años. Quisiera dar este testimonio vivo que no he aprendido en un libro y que tampoco he aprendido sola ya que todo esto lo he aprendido con mi pueblo y es algo que yo quisiera enfocar. Me cuesta mucho recordarme toda una vida que he vivido, pues muchas veces hay tiempos muy negros y hay tiempos que, sí, se goza también pero lo importante es, yo creo, que quiero hacer un enfoque que no soy la única, pues ha vivido mucha gente y es la vida de todos. La vida de todos guatemaltecos pobres y trataré de dar un poco mi historia. Mi situación personal englobe toda de la realidad de un pueblo. (Burgos 1992, 29)

In this first paragraph, Rigoberta Menchú is introduced as the crucial authoritative voice for the following text, which steers the perception of the book as an authentic eyewitness testimony. Menchú, the narrator

4 In the preface to *Who is Rigoberta Menchú ?* (2011), Greg Grandin explains the royalty dispute in detail while referring to David Stoll's notorious investigations, vif.

and protagonist, is introduced – ‘introduced’, because this appears as a deliberate strategy of the text, implemented by Burgos-Debray – as survivor and originator of the story. This opening formula is supposed to mimic an oral testimony spoken directly to the reader. It deliberately obscures the editorial influence, benefiting from the appeal of authenticity. Also, it displays Menchú’s connection to her people, as she will not just narrate her story, but the life of all poor Guatemalans. Her situation is as much the situation of her whole village. Interestingly, Menchú draws on the trope of the ‘book’. ‘The book’ as well as ‘writing’ become tropes that are frequently used in *testimonios* to deliberately establish the genre as ‘writing back’ or ‘counter discourse’ to the oppressive hegemony of Western literature and politics. Further, this trope serves to introduce the problematic distinction between discourse and what is commonly understood as its capacity to reference an imagined reality behind the text – thus grappling with the old dichotomy between fiction and non-fiction. Menchú explains that she had not learned the following story from any books; it is ‘as real as life itself’. With this, the *testimonio* deliberately distances itself from the notion of ‘writing’, marking a difference between ‘real encounters with oppression and brutality’ on the one hand, and its representation within literature on the other hand.

In *Me llamo* the trope ‘book’ stands in opposition to how it is appropriated in the slave narrative of the 18th and 19th century. While these early testimonial narrations also introduce the book as a tool of the white man for expressing power and superiority, they are eager to master the discourse/language to gain emancipation and liberation. For Menchú, the book exemplifies Western hegemony which manifests itself through the mechanisms of the production of literature, and therefore must be rejected, not appropriated. Menchú is portrayed as holding on to the traditions of her indigenous people: she uses the Spanish language as a weapon. The written word, and with that the medium of the book, are clearly marked as negative and as an opposition to Menchú’s experiences. This leads Beverley to argue that “[w]e could say that Menchú uses the *testimonio* as literature without subscribing to a humanist ideology of the literary, or, what amounts to the same thing, without abandoning her identity and role as Indian activist to become a professional writer.” (2004, 52). However, this argument ignores the tex-

tual construction of the narrative and narrator Menchú all over again. Beverley seems intent on presenting Menchú as an indigenous ambassador who holds on to her tradition without succumbing to the 'humanist ideology of the literary' and to the role of a professional writer, that he refuses her any other agency than that of an Indian activist.

The Art of Representation

Testimonio claims to be more than 'just literature', it is supposed to be an act of political involvement:

> Muy pronto decidí dar al manuscrito forma de monólogo, ya que así volvía a sonar en mis oídos al releerlo. Resolví, pues, suprimir todas mis preguntas. Situarme en el lugar que me correspondía: primero escuchando y [de j a n d o] hablar a Rigoberta, y luego convirtiéndome en una especie de doble suyo, en el instrumento que operaría el paso de lo oral a lo escrito. (Burgos 1992, 25)

What Burgos-Debray describes here is, in fact, not just the way she simply altered the manuscript of the interviews. It is the demonstration of her own power as editor: she *lets* Menchú speak; she *grants the permission to speak* and then turns the spoken word into writing, while erasing all traces of her role by eliminating the questions. This elucidates even further the authority she maintains over Menchú and her story. In the English edition 'dejando hablar' is translated into the more forceful "allowed her to speak". Even though the Spanish phrasing can be translated with 'let her speak', a less dominant gesture, both the Spanish and the English phrasing emphasize Burgos-Debray's dominance over Menchú. In both cases, it becomes obvious that the editor holds the position to allow someone else to 'speak up'. She turns the oral account into the textual form of the *testimonio*. She encourages Menchú to share her story, guiding the Guatemalan through the interviews and the publishing process. As editor, who essentially is not the aesthetical authority in the literary production, Burgos-Debray takes on all available positions of authority and suppresses Menchú who merely is the protagonist in her own tale.

The debate around Menchú and her editor Burgos-Debray results in a discussion about the possibilities of representation and power-relations structurally embedded in the process of representation in both the semiotic and the political sense. Discoursive practices like speaking for others, especially in the field of anthropological writing, have come under strong criticism. She questions the possibility to "adequately or justifiably speak for others" (Alcoff 1991, 6). The issue of representational writing and its intersectionality between a mimetic/semiotic concern and a political/ethical concern, inherent to the terminology, becomes apparent in the quotation above, where Burgos-Debray explains that she 'allowed her to speak' (Burgos-Debray 2009, xxi and Burgos 1996, 15) and permits her to make the transition from the spoken to the written word (ibid.). On the mimetic level of the text it is necessary to present this form of representation as 'authentic' and unfiltered as possible, to authorise the text as *testimonio*, and to advance its economic success. Menchú is represented as an 'authentic indigenous woman' and the text as an 'authentic testimony', catering to a broad readership and generating grand sales. In opposition to this, stand the problematic political implications of representational writing. Menchú is being spoken for, – represented as a member of a marginalised community with no access to political influence. Burgos-Debray not only portrays her as the indigenous women she appears to be, she also speaks for her, creating a certain political image of her for the audience. Burgos-Debray states in the foreword that she altered and cut the original text to create a certain appeal:

> Dicha repetición servía a veces para introducir un nuevo tema; eso forma parte del estilo de Rigoberta, y en esas ocasiones yo conservaba la reiteración. Decidí también corregir los errores de género debidos a la falta de cono-cimiento de alguien que acaba de aprender un idioma, ya que hubiera sido artificial conservarlos y, además, hubiese resultado folklórico en perjuicio de Rigoberta, lo que yo no deseaba en absoluto. (Burgos 1996, 18)

Burgos-Debray reveals her agenda and her influence over the narrative and, with that, over the protagonist. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's

essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) will structure my theoretical perspective on these power-relations between author and testimonial subject. Spivak refers to these with words by philosopher and theorist Louis Althusser, calling them a "domination of the ruling class in and by words" (2010, 226). This complicated and unbalanced relationship is especially displayed in the paratext of *Me llamo,* introducing a wide range of problems concerning the (re-)presentation and construction of authorship, authority, and authenticity.[5] As an anthropologist, Burgos intends to "re-present" Menchú's culture, which is understood by Spivak as a form of mimesis, but by altering the narrative and creating a certain image of the protagonist, she actually 'represents' or speaks for Menchú. She changes and distorts the narrative and diminishes Menchú's authority as the originator and narrator of the story. The practise of 'speaking for' and the act of 'speaking about' become indistinct in *Me llamo*. This unbalanced distribution of power between testimonial subject Menchú and editor Burgos-Debray reinforces hegemony. Rigoberta Menchú might "fight for the recognition of her culture […] and for her people's rightful share of power" (Burgos 1996, xiii), but she cannot gain power as the author herself. She stays without authority over her narration because of the overpowering agency of representation.
Spivak's analysis of these two forms of representation becomes especially relevant to discussing and revealing the power dynamics of authorship for testimonial narrations. This book discusses representation and its political importance in the context of slave narratives,

5 In the case of *Me llamo,* the introduction of the testimonial subject Menchú is as problematic as her image on the cover. In the Spanish edition, Elizabeth Burgos' name appears at the top, but 'Rigoberta Menchú' is highlighted in yellow in the title. It therefore has a more outstanding effect, supported by a photograph on the cover showing a striking image of the protagonist Menchú in her traditional apparel. The English edition, published by Verso, is even more blatant in this regard: the cover only shows the title underneath a rugged illustration of what appears to be a portrait of Menchú. Burgos-Debray is not mentioned as the author; her name appears on the second title page for the first time; Ann Wright is mentioned as the translator: "Edited and Introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray". Menchú's face serves as a marketing tool, creating an author function that draws in readers by stressing its indigenous authenticity. Simultaneously it helps the influential editor disappear behind the colourful appearance of the protagonist and alleged author Menchú.

literary depictions of genocide, and child soldiery. The first part of this book illustrates the political context of representation within humanitarian rhetoric. The staging of the slave author as the representative for the cause of the abolitionist movement becomes apparent when looking at texts such as *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself,* first published in 1789 and Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* in 1845 and five years later *My Bondage and My Freedom*. These narrations represent a political cause, the collective suffering of the oppressed slaves. While no editorial involvement shaped and possibly changed the stories, the appearance of 'authentic representation' of the slave as author and the author as slave is important to cement the political dimension of their narrations. Both Equiano/Vassa and Douglass understand representation as a rhetorical requirement to negotiate their author-persona as dependent upon, but also emancipated from, the political discourse of the abolitionists. The second chapter of Part II discusses Mary Prince's representation through footnotes. Representation here is not only political in the sense that her testimonial narration was published to support abolitionist's campaign; the editor's involvement highlights the uneven power relations between editor and Mary Prince. Prince is represented as former slave and author, but is entirely dependent on the editorial 'voice', which simultaneously authenticates and undermines her as female slave and author. Part III of this book is devoted to the review of texts published in the first decade of 21st Century. Dave Eggers *What is the What. The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (henceforth *What is the What*), Daoud Hari's *The Translator*, and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone. Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (henceforth *A Long Way Gone*), all published in the first decade of the 21. century. This section of the book examines political and mimetic representations of genocide and child soldiery as particularly 'African' narratives. In all of the three texts, representation is unmasked as a means to shape and control the narrative as well as the testimonial subject/narrator. 'Authenticity' and 'voice' are highlighted as rhetoric strategies. Both are renegotiated as narrative strategies to illustrate the possibilities and limits of representing human rights violations as well as the representation of the testimonial subject as author.

1.1 What is Testimonial Narration?

Precisely because most well-read and discussed *testimonios* were published at a point in time when Latin America was haunted by severe class struggles, guerrilla warfare, and liberation movements, John Beverley describes it as "a narrative form linked closely to national liberation movements and other social struggles" (2004, x). He argues that when looking at the Latin American continent and the particular moment in time (the 1960s up to the era of the Cold War), *testimonio* functions as a weapon – texts, essays, poems became "a crucial 'ideological practice' […] of the Central American revolutionary movements" (2004, xiii). However, looking at the Latin American continent and its literary history, *testimonio* cannot simply be defined as a product of the Cold War era. Like the idea of globalization, the genre of *testimonio* "reaches well beyond the two or three decades that we usually call 'our globalized world' (Habjan 2016, 1). If we agree to understand *testimonio* as an expression of the struggle of people everywhere against exploitation, as a literary movement towards ethnic and national liberation, it is not a new literary form, as most *testimonio* scholars maintain. It is a text form as old as economic and political exploitation itself: the time span from 1400 to 1650 is significant. It is the age of great expeditions, the time when Europe expanded through imperial claims to power and colonization, and the stabilization of what Immanuel Wallerstein calls the "world capitalist system!" (1974). It also is the age when, "under the impetus of humanism, a series of literary forms" like the essay, the short story or *novella ejemplar,* the picaresque novel and the autobiography, amongst others and secular theatre appeared (cf. Beverley 2004, 30). The genre of *testimonio* appears not only as a symbolic resolution of social contradictions, it primarily contributes to the creation of the subject form of the "European Man" by enhancing ideological practices (ibid.). Thus, *testimonio* cannot be limited to an expression of "the social forces contending for power in the world today" (ibid.); it serves as a mouthpiece for peripheral voices, but still follows the European 'style sheet'. This can be traced by looking at Equiano/Vassa's *Interesting Narrative*, his personal account of a slave's life and struggle for liberation, which wants to join the ranks of life writing in the tradition of the European Enlightenment

(cf. Whitlock 2015, 5), speaking, however, on behalf of a collective rather than stressing the singular authoritative 'I'. As a genre, *testimonio* focuses on the representation of non-European subjects.

Testimonio is described as a genre, which addresses contradictions of its environment and criticises established forms that came before by representing circumstances of oppression and injustice (cf. Habjan 2016, 2). Hence, writing as political commitment is neither limited to a specific point in time, nor is it limited to a specific place. Beverley suggests that narratives such as *testimonio* have been produced for a long time "at the margins of literature", depicting 'voices' excluded from "authorized representation when it was a question of speaking and writing for themselves" (2004, 31). Representational and political writing both constitute the core of *testimonio*. However, not every form of politically interested life-writing is necessarily *testimonio*. Beverley, Gugelberger, and Sklodowska argue that *testimonio*, as a form of resistance or counter-discourse, can be traced back to the 16th century, when Las Casas wrote openly against the torturing and oppression of the Indios, trying to catch the attention of the Spanish crown with a report entitled *La Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552). Seven years later, it was Álvar Núñez Cabeza who wrote and published his *Relación que dio Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca de lo acaescido en las Indias en la armada donde iba por Gobernador Pánfilo de Narvaez* around 1559, an eyewitness report in which he not only describes his success as a conquistador, but also the suffering of the indigenous. It is apparent that these intriguing early life-writings and their authors focus on Latin America – yet, they were not local themselves. While the Spanish authors write and publish to address problems in the colonies, unlike in *testimonio*, they do not speak up in the name of the oppressed. These texts cannot be called early *testimonios*, because they do not comment on or problematise a hegemonial structure of authorship, which I state as a core feature of the genre.

Beverley and Sklodowksa agree on certain factors that determine *testimonio*. Both see the length of a novel, the first-person narrative that recounts an individual's life-historical events or moments, a narrator who is not a professional writer, and the oral recounting of events to an interviewer as characteristic for the genre of *testimonio*. The narra-

tor testifying his or her life and the suffering of her community to the interviewer is the one who survived to tell the tale. The genre always oscillates between personal testimony of a subject on the one hand, and historical testimony of an event influencing a community on the other hand. *Testimonio* is a genre that comes into existence because of its specific authorship situation: two people come together with the agenda to publish a testimony about the protagonist's life. It is important to notice that one of these two people is a professional writer and the other person is an indigenous, 'uneducated' witness – this unbalanced relationship between the two positions is what marks a defining feature of *testimonio*.

To analyse the genre, its problematic set up of the agents involved (e.g. writers, narrators, readers, and, finally, authors) as well as its historical origin, it is necessary to not only focus on the Latin American continent. Other parts of the world have been similarly troubled by exploitation and political as well as social instability. Indigenous people of the so-called periphery (cf. Wallerstein 1974), have suffered mistreatment and oppression enforced by colonisation and capitalism. Most texts representing perspectives of colonialism were written by the superior, elite class. Subaltern people rarely had the chance to represent themselves through literature. If anything, through this exclusive form of literature, white and mostly male, the superior power of the West was established and maintained. This was challenged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a time when a multiplicity of slave narratives were written, marking the moment when Africa was exploited by European nations and North America via transatlantic trade routes as the organised deprivation of rights: Africans were turned into human commodities, and human money. I understand the well-known slave narratives as early testimonies, reflecting on personal, but above all on collective suffering. As political outcries, they ask critical questions about economy, race, and hegemony, and exemplify how the 'negro' learns to read and to write, and through it, to revolt. Due to their textual self-manifestation, Equiano/Vassa and Douglass find a way to 'write back' and to create awareness for the problematic situation in the West Indies and the slave economy in general.

The first part of this book will concentrate on the idea of a literary de-colonisation of the subject and the early appropriation of the international print economy and its social network of agents cooperating with each other to boost the book distribution on an international scale. Especially Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789) is a bold example of early self-fashioning as public figure and famous author. His own involvement in the marketing process stresses not only his political ambition as author; it is also an intriguing reference of the problematic circumstances of living and writing as a former slave. Tropes such as 'the book', 'writing', and 'voice' are frequently used to calculatedly establish the political ambition of the narrative, establishing it as 'writing back' or 'counter discourse' to the oppressive hegemony of Western literature and politics. Equiano/Vassa's narration serves as an example exploring the fine line between an author's 'authentic testimony' and a finely wrought piece of political writing representing a community. It needs to be stressed that Equiano/Vassa's *Interesting Narrative* cannot be easily referred to as *testimonio* since he is the sole author. It has not been written under the supervision of a white elitist writer, and therefore cannot be described as a collaborative effort. Nevertheless, his book displays awareness for its particular narrative structure and rhetoric, negotiating the possibilities of textual representation and authorship. Equiano/Vassa must be acknowledged as an early and very unique case of successful self-publishing. Although he did not write his narration in collaboration with a professional writer (*amanuensis)*, to market and sell his writings he still depended on the support of socially and politically influential personalities of the British upper class. Even though the *Interesting Narrative* bears witness to the transatlantic slave trade, the author had to affirm to a 'hybrid and diasporic' name and image that stood for both, his unique 'Africanness' and his effort and eagerness to appear as a true British gentlemen and serious author. The chapters on Equiano/Vassa, as well as Douglass and Prince will show that these early forms of testimonial narrations exhibit similar, if not the same narrative structures and rhetoric as *testimonio*. All three books are devoted to represent the community of slaves and the colonial/capitalist act of oppression, discuss the advantages and limits of authentic representa-

tion, and negotiate the instrumentalisation of these two aspects by the structures and dynamics of the book market.

Testimonio is often described as a sibling to the genres of autobiography and memoir. Even though much has been written about the similarities in structure and composition, it is necessary to distinguish testimonial texts from autobiography and memoir. On the one hand, this book draws the focus once more towards the asymmetry between editor and testimonial subject, which is characterised by an unbalanced distribution of power. On the other hand, the unique narrative position of the testimonial subject is focalised. Narrated in a first person perspective, stating details and events of the witness's personal life, a resemblance to autobiography and memoir seems obvious. While autobiography narrates an individual's life from the beginning to the end chronologically, memoir focuses rather on one specific event, or key aspect of the narrator's life. Memoir can start anywhere and can move a round in time and place more loosely. Memoir usually displays a strong focus on emotional truths and personal trauma; it appears less factual and research-based: "[M]emoirs thus blur the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, autobiography and report" (Treacy 1996, 133) but still put an emphasis on the individual and unique identity of the protagonist and narrator. All three text forms, autobiography, memoir and *testimonio*, narrate historical situations drawn from personal memories, and are often summarized under the umbrella term of 'life writing' (cf. Whitlock 2016, 2ff.).

Analysing the "testimonial contract" (Pratt 2001. 42), in contrast to what Philippe Lejeune established as the 'autobiographical pact', helps to define *testimonio* more profoundly. Philippe Lejeune argues in *Le pacte autobiographique* (1975) that in autobiographical texts every utterance stands in connection to the name on the book cover. This name signifies the real existence of the author and is supposed to be the only certain extratextual marker referring to an actual person claiming authority over the written words. Its relation to 'reference' and 'utterance' (cf. Lejeune 1994, 20ff.) defines the autobiographical 'first person'. 'Reference' means that the 'I' refers to the person stating the 'I'. 'I' always refers to the person 'speaking', without speaker no 'I'. Thus, that the autobiographical narrator is the narrating 'I', is understood as fact.

'Utterance', marks the identity of the subject of the utterance and the subject of the enunciation. This relationship, between the object of the utterance and the subject making the utterance, determines that protagonist and narrator both are the same person. The identity is immediate and excepted as fact. However, this relationship is an arbitrary claim, which can be trusted or not, and is especially complicated when it comes to written communication. In this case, the person who 'speaks' has to stress his or her position with markers like handwriting, a unique grammar, or a signature (23). The 'testimonial contract', however, presupposes a different narrating positon. As a genre it is produced transculturally, across the border between what calls itself 'centre' and what distinguishes the other side as 'periphery'. While the testimonial subject/narrator is asked to narrate his or her individual history, the 'testimonial contract' defines this narrating subject as a member of a group, which is experiencing 'an important historical transition'. The content, thus, is defined by the paradigms of individualism on the one hand, and that of collectively on the other hand. *Testimonio* is the project of communicating the subaltern's individual and collective reality to a Western audience (Cf. Pratt 2001, 42). This unique position highlights the genre's strong political and humanitarian agenda. If *testimonio* is characterised by the desire to represent voices that were silenced or defeated (cf. Beverley 1999, 175), it does so by overtly stressing its urgency and political agenda. Beverley sees this form of urgency and 'truthfulness' of the narrating voice as especially important for the genre. While he argues that autobiography is the ideology of individualism, built on the notion of a "coherent, self-evident, self-conscious, who in turn constructs for the reader the liberal imaginary of a unique 'free' autonomous ego as the natural form of being and public achievement." (1992, 41), testimonial narration 'speaks up' for a collective.

Thus, *testimonio* presents not simply a singular authoritative 'I', but an 'I' that speaks on behalf of a collective. While this particular narrating 'I' draws on "humanism and its thinking on the 'rights of man' to make a claim for recognition as a human being and social justice, rather than a commodity and a thing" (Whitlock 2015, 5) just like the 'I' in autobiography, it adds a more complex dimension. The narrating 'I' carries the genre's complex political positioning:

> If it loses this connection, it ceases to be testimonio and becomes autobiography, that is, an account of, and also a means of access to middle- or upper-class status, a sort of documentary bildungsroman. If Rigoberta Menchú had become a "writer" instead of remaining as she has a member of, and an activist for, her ethnic community, her narration would have been an autobiography. (2004, 41)

For Beverley, the main difference between *testimonio* and autobiography lies in the nature of the protagonist and subject of the narration, and her or his political interaction with the audience. While autobiography presents a strong and socially established narrating subject, which confirms the reader's elitist position, *testimonio* does the opposite. It establishes the 'I' as a reference to a community outside the reader's realm. The individual merges with or even dissolves within the community and the narrator becomes the witness for a whole community.[6]

This testimonial 'I' is described by Beverley as "what linguists call a shifter – a linguistic function that can be assumed indiscriminately by anyone" (Beverley 1999, 41), it has the ability to stand for the experience of his or her community as a whole (ibid.). In the first instance, this assumption is correct, yet, it simplifies the matter. Beverley clearly refers to Roman Jacobson's *Shifters, Verbal Categories, and Russian Verbs* (1957), in which Jacobson describes the 'I' as transformational, governed by certain rules that negotiate between the different dimensions of first and third person. This particular double nature of the testimonial 'I' as a representational marker for the narrating subject on the one hand, and the community on the other hand, can be supported by Émile Benveniste's and Giorgio Agamben's linguistically motivated thoughts on testifying and witnessing. Because language constitutes subjectivity, Benveniste contests that the 'I' can be never identical to a self, since it never proclaims an identity. The 'I' refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is uttered: "It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject,* because language alone

6 However, it remains highly problematical, that in this definition, Beverley fails to recognise the testimonial narrator as writer and with that as possible author. For *testimonio* it seems sufficient to stage the protagonist as political activist and nothing more.

establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being" (1958, 224). Giorgio Agemben's reading of testimony and witnessing relies on this specific idea of a constitutive link between language and subjectivity. In *Quel che resta di Auschwitz. L'archivio e il testimone* (1989) Agamben describes testimony as a language that does not signify but gives way to a non-signifying discourse. Referring to Primo Levi's contemporary witness account *Se questo è un uomo* (1947) he understands the origins of testimonial writing and narration as the legacy of the Shoah, and distinguishes two forms of witness, the *testis* and the *superstes* (1999, 17):

> The first word, the *testis*, from which our word 'testimony' derives, etymologically signifies the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party (*testis). The second word, superstes, designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it. (ibid.)

Testimony can only be given by the *superstes*, though it is characteristic that the validity of it depends on what is missing (32ff.): the true witnesses are those who actually cannot testify anymore, those who turned speechless under suffering. The *superstes* is the exception to the rule; those who suffered usually cannot speak, for them the *superstes* speaks. Agamben asks how to possibly testify Auschwitz when in fact the true witnesses are not the *superstes* but rather the silent voices of those who have died. It must be accentuated that when Agamben refers to Auschwitz, bearing witness becomes particularly difficult because it is related to the specific situation of genocide. In *'Literatur' nach einem Genozid (2010)* and *Ruanda: Über einen Genozid schreiben* (2005), Robert Stockhammer clarifies that Agamben's differentiation between *testis* and *superstes* only works as a clear-cut differentiation in relation to an historical event like Auschwitz. For this particular historical moment the state of the research is so profound that testimonials by concerned parties are not needed as sole sources for the investigation and inquiry for facts (2010, 27). I will show later on, that this differentiation becomes less distinct in more recent historical context. Here the testimonial sub-

ject is often asked to be both *testis* and *superstes*. For Agamben however, the *superstes* is the witness-survivor who gained immediate insight and therefore his testimony cannot serve in court: the *superstes* is not liable to juridical expressions of the truth (cf. Agamben 14, Stockhammer 2010, 27). It is exactly this structure, which constitutes the particular role of the testimonial narrator. While the narrator testifies her or his personal truth, she or he also automatically speaks for those who cannot speak anymore.

Agamben's *superstes* speaks for the dead of genocide by proxy. For *testimonio,* 'speaking by proxy' is further complicated by other agents involved in the production process. In the following, I will look in particular at texts where professional writers, journalists claim authorship for testimonies of *superstes*. The author is the propelling agent behind the making and publishing of the *testimonio*. Analyzing this particular agent reveals the many difficulties of this genre. It helps to critically consider the involvement of the author or editor in creating the genre's claim to give voice to a subject and the suffering of her community. It highlights the testimonial 'I' as a deliberate construction, rather than a marker referring to the 'real subject' or the 'authentic indigenous'.

This book aims to identify the texts' negotiations and implementation of their narrative structure and the recognition of their own literary modes of production. While Beverley's and Gugelberger fear calling *testimonio* 'literature', which, in their eyes, will corrupt its political agenda and its claim for 'authenticity' (cf. Gugelberger 1991, 4f. and Beverley 2004, 7). In fact, in *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, Beverley claims that *testimonio* "actively resists being literature" because its agenda and content would be 'compromised or betrayed by becoming literature' (2004, 49). Beverley, however, fails to explain what he understands as literature and why *testimonio* cannot be described as such. Further, Beverley's effort to establish *testimonio* as a genre that is more than just literature reveals a misunderstanding of the relationship between literature and political activism. By moving away from the term *testimonio*, the texts' negotiation and exhibition of the interconnection between narration, rhetoric and political involvement are highlighted.

In addition to the opposition to Beverley's claim that *testimonio* is not literature, this book moves away from the Spanish term *testimonio*,

because it is almost exclusively connected to the corpus of Latin American texts. While the term *testimonio* can be literally translated as either 'juridical testimony', 'proof/evidence', or simply as 'statement'; especially narrative elements of such a literary testimonial will be analysed. Therefore, this book suggests the term 'testimonial narration'. The specific circumstances of the production show that the genre should be defined in aesthetical terms, not only regarding its supposed link to a referent in a historical reality outside the narration. 'Narration' instead of 'narrative' emphasises the process through which the text (and the agents of the utterance, editing and literary production) conveys or withholds information. The term 'narrative' emphasises the mimetic aspect of all the events that are presented, arranged in their presumed causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency and location; the term 'narration' concerns the arrangement and presentation of the story, it refers to the specific procedures and strategies through which the text distributes the story in order to achieve specific effects. The term testimonial narration reflects the genre's mediated quality, its dramatic structure, and the excessive editorial work.

Because texts like Eggers' *What is the What* and Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed* negotiate and discuss their own 'make up', their own literary conventions and rhetoric, they will be categorised as meta-testimonial narrations. However, this negotiation of the mechanisms of production is constitutive for most of the texts discussed in this book. "Life-writing can be said to always contain both autobiographical and fictional aspects, but an awareness for this tension means the writer has constantly to negotiate the way in which the autobiographical and the fictional aspect of the writing process interact in the text" (Gudmundsdòttir 2004, 5). Instead of evoking the unproductive debate of 'fact' versus 'fiction', it appears more useful to establish the term 'fictional' in the context of testimonial narration as a word that helps to analyse the literary practices involved in producing testimonial texts, such as "structure, poetic or literary descriptions of people and places, ordering of events to create certain effects" (Gudmundsdòttir 2004, 4). Therefore, in place of focusing on the differentiation between 'fiction' and 'fact', different layers and techniques of the fictional or poetical within testimo-

nial narration will be identified. These narrative techniques are usually intertwined with the genre's aspiration of representing the 'real truth'.

Especially Part III of this book will examine the implications of this definition on the basis of texts which mark the tension between writing and narrating already within the narration. In the preface to *What is the What* the I-narrator openly addresses how narrative strategies are used to authenticate the story as historical and reliable. Further, they serve to reflect upon the problematic status of autobiographical narrating and writing in itself. The preface expresses that parts of the events had to be fictionalised due to the unreliability of the protagonist's memories. Simultaneously it is being reassured that "all of the major events in the book are true. The book is historically accurate, and the world I have known is not different from the one depicted within these pages" (Eggers 2008, xiv). This strategy of authentication establishes the following narrative as a report of historically real individuals and events of political impact. It bases itself on the high probability that even single invented additions stand in the same historical context due to their close similarity to already testified and authorised events (cf. Stockhammer 2010, 34). This makes any absolute differentiation between 'true' and 'fictional' events impossible: fictionality and historicity are relative, always mixed together in minor and major narrated events.

The method of production adds another defining feature to the genre. Analysing the production, the transcribing, editing, and writing highlights inscription of political and ethnographical representation as controversial, if not problematic. In most cases testimonial narration is narrated orally by a witness to an anthropologist, journalist or professional writer and in a second step shaped and edited. This second step requires the formatting and stylising of interviews as well as the construction of a narrative for an (international) audience. Damrosch agrees that these "rhetorically charged and artistically shaped narratives [are] often read like nonfiction novels" (2003, 232). This caused problems for the publishing process of *Me llamo*. Texts like *Me llamo* try to sell 'voices and lives' as 'authentic and indigenous' as possible, serving a specific (economic and political) purpose – beyond the one of truthfully recounting an individual's life (cf. Brookes 2005, 198). Testimonial narration plays with this assumption. The texts analysed in this book

however, do not hide anything. Instead, they discuss the representational agenda and its difficulties. When *testimonios* are marketed and sold as 'authentic', historical accounts, the production and literary structure is often disguised as a necessary measure to guarantee an accessible product to the reader. Yet, the strong emphasis on the genre's authenticity and historical factuality should not be allowed to distract from the texts literary construction; the genre conceals its construction and with that its inherent manipulative nature. Testimonial narration negotiates exactly this by deliberately highlighting the unbalanced power-relation of representation inherent to the production process.

1.2 Authorship in Testimonial Narration

Testimonial narration is characterised by its response to the 'representational gesture'. It roots in the methods of production, in the relationship between professional writer and testimonial subject. In the following, the social and political function of authors and editors will be analysed. They will be considered as influential and transformative agents who affect every stage in the production, distribution, consumption, and reception of literature. Especially the paratext plays a crucial role for the construction of authorship. As much as the narration itself, the paratext highlights the troubled relationship between editor and testimonial subject. Sarah Brouillette writes: "Each moment in an author's marketing instead becomes a part of the paratext for his subsequent works' reception. In turn those works become opportunities for a writer to engage in acts of self-construction and critique, and to explore the significance of authorship itself in contemporary literary culture" (2007, 2). However, testimonial narration is more than the opportunity for the testimonial subject to engage in the empowering act of self-construction, but has to be read as a place where power-relations and dependencies are displayed. Authorship is not simply connected to the artistic act of originating a story it is the interaction of editorial craftsmanship, the control over available material, and finally economic power, which considerably complicates the representational gesture of the text.

Due to their mediated quality, testimonial texts display a 'narrative asymmetry'. This asymmetry defines the relationship between juridi-

cal author (writer/editor) and the testimonial narrator, *superstes*. The testimonial subject is staged as the 'implied author'.[7] Here, the term is used to describe the way testimonial narration establishes the *superstes* as an author-like figure in the paratext, to support the appeal of an 'authentically' narrated life-writing, which obscures the impact of the juridical author. Precisely because these texts represent the lives of indigenous people, empowering the marginalised subjects they represent, their authorship situation becomes problematic when the *superstes* is introduced as an authority due to his or her role as witness and narrator. When Robert Young writes in his article "The Postcolonial Remains" "the postcolonial has always been concerned with a politics of invisibility: it makes the invisible visible" (2012, 23), he not only defines the "original impulse" (ibid.) of postcolonialism. He also gives a poignant description of testimonial narration's claim and intent: the dialectic of invisibility and visibility displays the witness, turned into a protagonist, highlighted by the light beam of power. In "La vie des hommes infâmes" (1977) Michel Foucault describes how autobiographical writing can serve as a means to achieve power and autonomy. To understand the many layers of this literary empowerment and its implications for testimonial narration, the positions of juridical author on the one side, representing and introducing an underprivileged, oppressed indigenous culture to the world of Western academics and intellectuals; and the protagonist's promotion of her own political agenda on the other side, need to be examined as interdependent. The orality of the witness's voice becomes the written product of the editor. The strong editorial influence determines the tone of the text, as well as the textual appearance of the narrator and protagonist. Also concerned with this issue is Linda Alcoff. In *The Problem of Speaking for Others* (1991) she argues that discursive practices like 'speaking for others', especially in the field of anthropological writing, have come under strong criticism. She questions the possibility to "adequately or justifiably speak for others" (6).

7 In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) Wayne Booth introduces the term 'implied author' for the first time.

Representing the Testimonial Subject

Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", the unbalanced power-relations between editor and protagonist in the production of testimonial narration are highligthed. Having pointed out the difficult situation of the competing authorial positions of indigenous narrator and Western editor with an anthropological background, the position of the indigenous narrator or 'subaltern' in testimonial narration now needs to be examined carefully. Spivak borrows the term 'subaltern' from Antonio Gramsci, who uses the term to describe social groups on the fringe of society. For Spivak, the term is the result of a hegemonic discourse, fashioned and constructed through social and political marginalisation. In her essay, Spivak focuses especially on the individual subaltern. Testimonial narration pivots between the individual and the collective; it is mainly marketed as "an oral narrative told by a speaker from a subaltern or 'popular' social class" (Beverley 2004, 47) that speaks up against hegemonic power for a collective. However, this proves to be more difficult than Beverley claims in his analysis of the genre. Spivak equates being subaltern with the exclusion from all intellectual, academic, and political discourse. Being a member of a 'popular' social class, as Beverley cynically remarks, is in fact the opposite of being subaltern. The testimonial subject, the protagonist, is not subaltern anymore; he or she is already being enabled to engage in a conversation, being heard by an audience. What remains difficult is the representation of the testimonial subject as subaltern.

Spivak challenges how "the third -world subject is represented within Western discourse", which tends to "conserve the subject of the West" (2001, 237f.) by presenting the "colonial subject as Other" (249). Thus, when Beverley claims for testimonial narration that neither editor nor narrator has to "cancel its identity as such" and describes the text form as a "discursive space where the possibilities of such an alliance can be negotiated on both sides without too much angst about otherness or 'othering'" (2004, 47), he not only chooses to ignore the unbalanced authorship situation of the genre. He also refuses to acknowledge the affirmative gesture of the paratextual elements of the genre, e.g. the foreword and the cover-design. All of which are contributing exactly to what must be called 'othering'. It must be noted that the protagonist

represented in testimonial narration is not subaltern (anymore). Further, being subaltern is nothing desirable; it is the condition of absolute impuissance, verbally and actively. So when the protagonist of testimonial narration speaks up and for a marginalised collective, he or she cannot be described as subaltern in Spivak's sense. Nevertheless, testimonial narration reproduces a situation in which the protagonist is pushed back into subalternity, simply by naming him or her such; due to the act of representation: the rhetoric of testimonial narration's representational practices mask the highly unbalanced power relations which the genre is not able to escape. As it has been already discussed for the case of Rigoberta Menchú, Spivak, differentiating between "representing" (*darstellen*) as in portraying and "representing" (*vertreten*) as in "speaking for" (2001, 33), suggests that any form of representation is always oppression. Spivak understanding of *Vertretung* in a political sense and *Darstellung* in an economic context frames the relationship between editor and witness within testimonial narration. 'Allowing to speak', permitting the testimonial subject to make the transition from the spoken to the written word is both political and economic representation. The protagonist is being portrayed as witness and survivor to an international readership as well as he or she is being spoken for, simply because the authority over the narration and the authorship is someone else's. This book discusses the interplay of these two different meanings of re-presentation and representation. The re-presentation of the testimonial subject and protagonist will be illustrated as an oppressive structure. The practise of speaking for as well as the act of speaking about become indistinct in testimonial narration. It gives the illusion of a speaking subaltern, when the subaltern as the testimonial subject is not only 'spoken for', but actually created in the act itself: The unbalanced distribution of power between testimonial subject alias 'the subaltern' and editor reveals itself, and, if anything, it secures hegemony.

The texts analysed in the following negotiate and question the possibilities of textual representation while they simultaneously invite to carefully examine the relationship between representational writing *and* authorship. This becomes especially apparent when reviewing the main text and its relationship to the paratext. However, while the texts reveal the illusion of 'voice' and problematise their appeal of 'authen-

ticity', to fully understand testimonial literature's ideology and its aesthetical power it is equally essential to consider the impact of the texts' claim to empowerment and its capability to open up a literary space for the marginalised.

1.3 Testimonial Narration on the World Market

Books as much as their authors circulate, driven by institutional and political forces, in a space often identified as the global market, the field where writing and authorship is created, negotiated, and traded. Therefore, a distinct division of autonomous and heteronomous cultural spheres becomes impossible The global book market, the network of multi-conglomerates, authors, and readers, can serve as fertile soil for authors and their writing, however, it also works as a determining force, influencing how authors present and market themselves. Dynamics of this 'global' literary market are often perceived as a battlefield where voices strain to be heard, and where commerce conspires with the needs of self-expression and self-promotion. Aesthetical autonomy, from this perspective, seems a myth, and authorship a product that obeys the rules of the market. The 21st century brought fourth multiple testimonial narrations with a strong focus on human right violations narrated by so called 'subaltern voices'. *A long Way Gone* (2007), *The Translator* (2008), and especially *What is the What* (2006) are prominent examples of this literary phenomenon.

These texts focus on historical events "in the sense of a brutal irruption, of catastrophe […] that breaks into the present community" (Jameson 1996, 187), like the oppressive mechanisms of capitalism, colonialism, genocide, and civil war, to name but a few. The books sketch an intersection between pre-capitalist village life and the new dynamics of capitalism. It is the "moment in which the 'modern' or the Western-capitalist and the older village form coexist in vivid brutality" (1996, 188). While Jameson claims that this intersection is made visible by literature, especially by what he sums up as "Third World literature" (ibid.), I argue that testimonial narration must be read as literature *about* the 'Third World' and its marginalised inhabitants. This becomes especially

apparent when looking at the paratextual marketing material, which advertises the testimonial subject as representative of the 'Third World' (cf. Brouillette, 2007, 61f.).

The literary production of the margins of Europe is already discussed by Wlad Godzich in "Emergent Literature and Comparative Literature" (1988). In his view, it is the task of comparative literature to examine literature that opposes and challenges the monumentalising view of national literatures:

> "Emergent literatures" are not to be understood then as literatures that are in a state of development that is somehow inferior to that of fully developed, or "emerged," literatures – our own disciplinary visions of "underdevelopment" or "developing" literatures, if you wish, which attendant "Third Worldist" ideologies – but rather those literatures that cannot be readily comprehended within the hegemonic view of literature that has been dominant in our discipline. In this view, emergent literatures will include writings by racial and ethnic minorities in countries such as the United States; literature by women in, let us say, Italy, France, or Australia; as well as much of the new writing from Africa, Asia and Latin America, including the Caribbean. (35)

Because these literatures call into question Eurocentric perspectives and hegemonic structures of socio-political discourse, they set out to dissolve a binary division of centre and periphery. However, it is not a new phenomenon, but emerged in the 18th century with the large-scale marketing of slave narratives. These texts already renegotiate concepts of autonomy, creativity, and power. In the close readings of the slave narratives (see Part II) as well as the testimonial narrations published in the 21st century (see Part III), the interaction of the market demands with both paratexts and the main text will be focused on. It will be analysed how and why these texts reflect their own position as textual products on the market, looking at paratextual and rhetorical strategies alike. While Godzich looks at texts that challenge hegemonic discourse from outside, Pascale Casanova argues that there is no literary production independent from the centre. In *La république mondiale des lettres* (1999) Casanova describes an established canon, which translates polit-

ical and national issues into its unique aesthetic, formal, narrative, and poetic terms. Here, literature is a "distinct world in opposition to the nation and nationalism, a world in which external concerns appear only in refracted form, transformed and reinterpreted in literary terms and with literary instruments" (2004, 86). Furthermore, Casanova claims that the world of letters is relatively independent from economic and political realms (cf. ibid.). She reads the prominence of political interest in (post)colonial writing as evidence of the field's underdevelopment. She argues that texts, which are invested in political, more than in questions of aesthetical representation are in themselves a sign that the quest for literary autonomy has not yet been fulfilled (cf. Casanova 2004, 193). In fact, she claims: "In worlds in which political and literary poles are still indistinct, writers are commonly made to act as spokesmen, in the strict sense of the term, of the people" (2004, 195). Autonomous countries forge the laws of literature and determine ultimately, who will be part of the world republic of letters. While the hubs of literary production are undeniably located in the 'Western world' (Paris, London, and New York), their interaction with each other opens the centre for the margins to move in. Looking at the publishing houses and places of writing, testimonial narration confirms the international impact of the world republic of letters: while representing the margins of Europe, the centre of production is always Europe or North America. A centre heavily controlled and guarded by what William Marling calls gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are defining the outlines and applying the rules of the field, and in doing so, they are creating and shaping authors and bestsellers by anticipating attractive positions on the field (cf. 2016, 4f.).

Acknowledging these interactions between agents, authors, publishers, and readers, David Damrosch presents his notion of 'World Literature' not simply as a literary canon like Casanova, but as a text corpus defined by modes of circulation and translation. Damrosch claims that especially due to the involvement of different international agents and a globally intertwined net of publication mechanisms and the reader's demands, texts refuse to be nationally located. One of his case studies is the publication history of Menchú's *testimonio*. "Menchú's testimony is a prime example of a work consciously produced within an international setting, intended from the start to circulate far beyond the

author the author's national sphere" (Damrosch 2003, 34). Unfortunately, Damrosch ends the chapter with a highly romanticised reflection of Menchú's author-persona. He calls her

> one of the most international of contemporary authors, her work produced for a global audience and often written on her laptop while traveling the globe as a now well-known human rights activist. Yet she also remains deeply tied to a small country where she still lives but where she can never return home, except perhaps in her poems and in dreams. (259)

For Damrosch, Menchú embodies the Latin American success story of a peripheral writer who claims her place in the field of world literature (cf. Marling 2016, 41). This view completely ignores the troublesome publication history and the notorious fight over the royalties.

In order to become attractive to globally operating networks, the testimonial narration must answer to market demands. Political activism must be paired with poetic sensitivity. The intricate interplay of the market's dynamics, its particular power structures and aesthetical demands, are the focus of this book. Testimonial narration often figures as a mirror for these dynamics and structures. The display of the discrepancy between the testimonial subject's self-portrayal and the power dynamics of the market will be looked at. Tension persists between these two positions. Slave narratives as well as contemporary texts such as Eggers' *What is the What* address this tension and comment on the discrepancy between representations of the author as indigenous and uneducated and as simultaneously artistically as well as politically meaningful. The genre's political agenda is especially charged, when social justice campaigns use testimonial narrations to support their claims. Activist organisations enlist stories as a form of moral suasion to reach potential advocates and volunteers, to raise money to underwrite campaigns, and to persuade governments to honour their commitments to the UDHR, other UN covenants, and, in some cases, their own national policies. In response, publishers seek out narratives for mass distribution. In the late 18th and early 19th century, one of these gatekeeping and field creating networks was the Anti-Slavery Society in Britain and America. The society efficiently supported the international

distribution of books and authors. Its goal was to spread the important mission of abolition; to this end, testimonies of ex-slaves were written and widely distributed. When it was the Anti-Slavery Society then, it is now the commitment of TV presenters or world-famous brands like Starbucks pushing certain publications to the top of the bestseller lists. (cf. Hall Source 2003. Accordingly, a *The Guardian* headline reads "sex doesn't' sell any more, activism does. And don't the big brands know it", pointing at global brands improving their image by marketing themselves as politically and socially aware and active (cf. Holder 2017). In the same way, books that cater to this surge of interest in political activism are 'hot' on the global (book) market. Deliberately designed for a Western audience, they become internationally successful.

George Hutchinson and John K. Young claim that gatekeeping is a structure especially prominent for African American literature. Their book P*ublishing Blackness: Textual Constructions of Race Since 1850* (2013) responds to recent trends in literature and scholarship. It urges to relocate the texts and their authors from the margins to the centre of the field, which is dominated by European and North American publishing conglomerates. Especially focusing on 'strategies of authentification', representation, and power-control, Hutchinson and Young look at the problems arising from white editorship and its agenda of authentification of slave narratives as well as today's phenomenon of the commercial influence of Oprah's Book Club. They sum up, for African American authors and their texts, gatekeeping happened as

> white authentification of slave narratives (…) to the immense commercial power of Oprah's Book Club, African American textuality has consistently revolved around the contents of cultural power inherent in literary production and distribution. Always haunted by the commodification of blackness and by forms of racial surveillance, from the era of slavery to the age of Obama, African American literary production interfaces with the processes of publication and distribution in particularly changed ways" (Huthinson and Young 2013, 4)

Hutchinson and Young primarily understand the act of gatekeeping as the oppressive domestication of black radicalism (cf. 1). They argue

that textual scholarship focuses only reluctantly on African American literature because textual scholarship depended on the established academic industry, which is in turn based on canonical texts and white male authors (cf. 2). The field of literary production is understood as a select club; entry is protected and granted by prestigious sponsors who select and recommend their new candidate, primarily based on their taste and liking (cf. Bourdieu 1993, 77 and Davis 2016, 139). Nevertheless, the notion of the gatekeeper as a person or institution controlling the access to the field oversimplifies the complex forms of interaction and negotiations between authors, agents, editors, publishers, and the reader (cf. Thompson 2012, 17), but also of political, social, and economic forces. This book dives deeper and differentiates some of these very diverse interactions in the following chapters.

Reconciling with Bourdieu's notion of the field of cultural production and observations about an internationally and interconnectedly operating book market is not as evident and unproblematic as it is presented by Marling. Considering editors, publishers, academics as well as critics and journalists as members of a team that forms and *sells* authorship and literary texts, allows for a new understanding of the figure of the author as less romantic, less embedded in the ideal of the isolated genius. Bourdieu indeed also recognises this in *Les Règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (1992). He very well acknowledges the publisher's role in creating the author, determining and producing the value of the work as literature. Nevertheless, it is important to question and reassess the Franco-centric model as applicable for the postcolonial context and internally operating book markets. Bourdieu's dualistic model is not sufficient to describe the motivation behind publishing testimonial narrations. In his model of the French literary field, works of art and literature are caught in a struggle for ascendancy between the two opposing principles of culture and commerce. As Caroline Davis argues in her study on the publishing history of Oswald Joseph *Mthali's Sounds of a Cowide Drum,* "Bourdieu pays little attention to political, or what he terms 'social art', and he argues that writers who 'demand that literature fulfil a social or political function' are relegated to a 'lower position within the literary field, at the intersection of the literary field with the political field'" (Davis 2016, 142f. quoting Bourdieu 1996, 133).

Unlike Davis' case-study on the publishing industry in South Africa, where authors with specifically political ambitions were excluded from the field of literary production, it is precisely the political ambition that makes testimonial narration appealing and constitutes its existence in the first place. Bourdieu's field as overall structure and network of social formations, which are systematically related to one another in terms of negotiation and distribution of cultural and economic capital evaluates writers according to their social status or 'habitus' (cf. Bourdieu 1984, 95 and Davis 2016, 139). While Bourdieu focuses on class distinctions based on subtle hierarchies and other forms of exclusion which amount to the practices of the field, all of which he sums up with the notion of 'symbolic violence' (cf. Bourdieu 1996, 358), testimonial narration as a genre does not answer to class distinctions only, but to the celebration of ethnicity or race. Especially in the case of testimonial narration it becomes apparent that Bourdieu`s setting of the field is not sufficient to grasp the dynamics of internationally operating structures invested in the production of cultural artefact like literary texts. Instead of excluding politically involved writers of 'exotic' ethnicities, the international publishing market welcomes them to celebrate its own political awareness.[8]

In *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2000), Graham Huggan refers to the production of what he outlines as postcolonial literature and points towards the danger of the "imperial gaze" (52) as well as the questionable marketing of literature as 'postcolonial' or 'exotic'. Huggan, extending Bourdieu's concept of the field by suggest-

8 At the same time as the *testimonio*-genre boomed, the post-colonial studies as an academic discipline was established and famously represented by scholars like Edward Said, Gayatri Chacravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhaba, who adapted the philosophical thoughts of Michel Foucault, Jaques Derrida, as well as Jacques Lacan (cf. Lazarus 2011). In a self-reflectory mode, it became crucial for the discipline to understand postcolonial studies as an intellectual endeavour deeply embedded and invested in the understanding of the mechanisms controlled by the institutions and people who shape the field (cf. Dalleo 2016, 3). Raphael Dalleo estimates that the strong interest of postcolonialism in Bourdieu's theoretical work and his notes on the field of literary production is due to the surge of interest in various forms of materialism (2016, 2). *In Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies*, he names Graham Huggan (2000), Neal Lazarus (2011), Pascale Casanova (2004), Sarah Brouillette (2007), and Caroline Davis (2013), among others, as the first scholars involved in comparative studies that bring together book history and literary studies, acknowledging the need to look at (postcolonial) texts also in terms of their interaction with capitalist institutions (Dalleo 2016, 3).

ing an analysis of postcolonial power-relations that relies on the category of race and ethnicity, uses Bourdieu's model as a theoretical basis that helps to understand Europe's margins as part of the field of literary production, which they at once serve and resist (vii). According to Huggan, "ethnic autobiographies, like ethnicity itself, flourishes under the watchful eye of the dominant culture; both are caught in the dual process of commodification and surveillance". This helps to explain "why the work of writers who come from, or are perceived as coming from, ethnic minority backgrounds continues to be marketed so resolutely for a mainstream reading public as 'autobiographical' (cf. Huggan 2000, 155). Literary texts like these emerge from the idea of "local oppositional discourse" but nevertheless need to be analysed as circulating as products of and in the global late-capitalist system (vii) pushed by publishing houses, influential writers and other agents of the extensive publishing network.

While for Graham Huggan 'postcolonialism' is the sociological methodology with which scholars look at and examine the global market, postcoloniality is the expansion, or intensification of the context of globalisation, namely the commodifying process of exoticism by the means of global capital. Under these circumstances, it seems impossible to neglect the material conditions of cultural production and consumption (cf. 2000, 309); a close examination of all people and agendas involved in the production of what is sold as 'postcolonial' literature lies at the heart of his *Marketing the Margins*. Writers respond to the field's rules based on their 'habitus'. However, in contrast to Bourdieu's model, today's writers do not stage a disregard for material rewards; instead, an awareness of the new rules of the field as much as a new and different framework for understanding it must be found. While some writers strive to win the game and become accomplished author brands, for others the field of literary production is not a game to play but a battlefield where their success is dependent on authorities. On the competitive field, the highest form of prestige is to have the right to control the game, to say with authority who can call themselves an author. Even if Bourdieu's notion of the field of literary production offers tools for a critical assessment of authorship and postcolonial publishing, too much of the research has been content to outline the rules of the global literary field, instead of also focusing on the context of "the broader con-

text of capitalist social relations" (cf. Brouillette 2016, 82). Authors are always determined by the conditions they work in. In a (post)colonial context, this means that authorship is always an assertion of authority and subjectivity. In other words, postcolonial authorship means the negation of the oppressive structures of hegemonial discourse. This revision of Bourdieu's thoughts is especially important, because even though he refers to the dependency of cultural production on economics and power, he fails to investigate its circumstance and conditions in detail (cf. Brouillette 2016, 81). Because Bourdieu mainly focuses on literary esteem or material wealth, discounting political ambition, it is particularly difficult to place the genre of testimonial narration within his notion of the literary field. Testimonial narration obeys the rules of the market and simultaneously shakes them.

Testimonial authorship is defined by commercialisation: the writer and the testimonial subject become united under the name of one author-figure or brand name. "The industry now brands literature more by authorship than by other aspects of or ways of approaching a given work's meaning. The popularity of authorial branding is in part attributable to the development of commercial media that facilitate proliferation of the many ways in which a book might be promoted." (94) Author names become brand names, promoting and influencing the sales of a publication tremendously. This rise of the author as brand name and product urges to understand authorship not as a name for originator and independently creating genius, but as a code for the whole set of people and institutions forming the brand name. Brouillette remarks that it has become quite common, indeed fashionable, for writers to incorporate "various kinds of meta-commentary" (95) about the realities of writing, literature's role within culture at large, and the self-reflexive role of the author within the main text as well as the paratext. This book is interested in the interplay of modes of circulation and the relationship between witness and professional writer. Thus, it will analyse how the interplay between testimonial subject and publishing agents such as professional authors and journalists affects the content of the stories and vice versa, how the stories reflect on the conditions and restrains of the creation and publication. As a genre, testimonial narration stresses the need to lay bare the methods of production and to

constantly remind itself and its readers of the problematic setting, the power struggle that must not be hidden but opened up for the readers to see and to discuss. The following close readings will consider paratexts and their interconnection with the main text, to highlight the genre's play with postcolonial buzzwords like 'authorship' and 'representation'. In meta-commentaries, the books reflect on their way into and their position within the field. The books negotiate and discuss the benefits and problems of recognising themselves as part and parcel of a globally expanding market (cf. Brouillette 2007, 3), incorporating these reflections into their narratives.

Both Huggan and Brouillette base their materialist and market oriented studies of postcolonial authors on the influence of a global reader figure who prescribes a certain image to the texts and authors. Huggan identifies this determining mechanism of cultural differences as 'strategic essentialism' or staged marginalisation, in which writer's balance their political agenda with the commercial viability as globally selling authors (cf. 83ff.). Brouillette focuses more on the aspect of self-fashioning as a narrative technique or strategy, used by the writers to enable the reader to look behind the façade, decoding the inauthenticity of the author-image and the imagery used within the narration as a "posttourist" (cf. 2007, 41).[9] And as Huggan rightfully reminds: "Much depends, as ever, on who defines these vexatious labels – 'minority' culture, 'minor' literature, 'marginal' writer'" (2000, 85). Already authors like Equiano/Vassa and Douglass negotiate their author-persona as a construct of commercial viability, balancing between Western appropriation and strategic marginalization. Books like *What is the What*, *The Translator*, and *A Long Way Gone* rely on narrative strategies that are close to what Brouillette calls post-tourism. They openly display their narrative strategies and recognize the staged authorship as such, guaranteeing a view behind the façade.

9 Sarah Brouillette borrows the term 'posttourism' from John Urry's study *The Tourist Gaze*, published for the first time in 1990, where he describes the phenomenon of 'posttourism' as the admission and acceptance of the lack of authenticity in touristic experiences. In a revised edition from 2002 he addresses in greater detail the influences of a 'globalised world' on the touristic experience, distinguishing between virtual travel through the internet, imaginative travel through TV, mobile phone, and radio, as well as corporeal travel along the infrastructures of the global travel industry (cf. Brouillette 2007, 40).

2 Slave Narratives. The Beginnings of Testimonial Narration under the Influence of the Anti-Slavery Society

International marketing and a broad distribution of books are not only central components of the global publishing market today, both originated in the tight-knit trade network of the 19th century. However, this following chapter argues that especially in the late 18th century the international print economy already included a social network of agents who cooperated with each other to boost the book distribution on an international scale. One of these networks efficiently supporting the international distribution of books was the Anti-Slavery Society in Britain and America. Its goal was to spread the important mission of abolition. Testimonial narrations like Olaudah Equiano's famous *Interesting Narrative* (1789), and later the *History of Mary Prince* (1831) as well as *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) reached large audiences, and flourished even on the international market.

The abolition of the slave trade was an endeavour of great international interest and conflict. In her detailed publication *The Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law* (2012), Jenny Martinez explains the abolitionist movement of the late 18th century as the birthplace of international human rights. It is also the moment of origin of the genre of testimonial narration. As the literary opposition to slavery, it openly criticises the slave trade as dehumanising institution that encourages the commodification of human subjects. To regain their humanity as much as to challenge their "status as a non-person" (Whitlock 2015, 19) former slaves, intellectually and financially supported by British and American abolitionists, take on the authority to speak of their experiences as a narrating 'I'. The agenda of testimonial narration, to appeal to the discourse of human rights activism, or more generally speaking, to humanitarianism, can be understood as a product of Enlightenment modernity (cf. 22), opposing slavery as the evil that erodes the core of social identities by positioning the slave at the margins not only of society but of human nature itself. The narra-

tives draw on an economy of affect, invoking a "language of recognition and benevolence" (ibid.) but also demanding awareness through the reporting of scenes of suffering and brutality. The slave narrative quickly developed to be the most successful propaganda tool for the Abolition of Slavery. As eyewitness report, it gives to the mission the urgency and human appeal to reach a broad and international audience. While the abolitionist movement first started out to be of British interest to ban slavery globally, it needed an international tribunal as well as the support of all seafaring and trading nations. To abolish the 'original crime against humanity' globally, an international law had to be brought into effect; judges of different countries had to gather in so called 'Mixed Commissions' to promote humanitarian objectives (6). As the first successful internationally operating humanitarian movement, international treaties and courts were its central features (14). However, although England banned the slave trade by 1807, only by 1900 "slavery itself had been outlawed in every country in the Western Hemisphere" (Martinez 2012, 13).

The humanitarian concern with slavery derived from religious and moral obligations of the Judeo-Christian society to end the practice. Thus, arguments against the slave trade and the institution of slavery were mostly part of a white man's rhetoric of the Enlightenment.[10] For this rhetoric, Haiti was the turning point. In 1804, the slave revolt led to the independence of France's most productive and lucrative sugar colony. The Haitian Constitution prohibits nobility, proclaims religious freedom, and attacks the well-protected concepts of ownership and slavery.[11]. The slaves radically detached themselves from all repressive

10 Martinez describes in great detail the genealogy of slavery from Roman times, where slaves were governed by the body of law known as *the ius gentium*, the predecessor of what is can be translated as the 'law of nations', which is the predecessor of what is now understood as he modern international law. As foreigners often captured in war, slaves fell under this particular law. In fact, the institution of slavery was considered to be a humanitarian deed, because slavery saved the prisoner form death. However, as Mbembe warns, this, of course, is a Western concept, regulating who is and who is not human and with that, part of society.
11 For an in depth historical overview of the Haitian revolution and its impacts in the Atlantic world, see Laurent Dubois' *A Colony of Citizens. Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean*, 1787-1804, (2004) and David Geggus' *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (2001). Both texts explore how economic as much as ideological influences that not only shaped the slave emancipation on Haiti but also influenced and challenged the European and North American continent.

power relations and made this 'Western' idea of freedom their own (cf. Mbembe 2014, 38). Inspired by this, both houses of the British Parliament finally passed the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807. However, to finally "enter internationally effective treaties that would give legal legitimacy to its actions" and, thus, to finally suppress the slave trade, "Britain had to persuade other countries to commit to the project and to enter internationally effective treaties that would give legal legitimacy to its actions" (28). However, ending the slave trade was unfortunately not the same as to end the institution of slavery. To promote the political as well as religious cause internationally, the abolitionist operated in widespread networks in which Britain functioned as the main driving force. The economically fruitful and morally unquestioned institution of slavery was, in a short time span of merely a century, condemned as "uneconomic and morally repugnant" (Walvin 2013, 10). Yet, to fulfil the universal claim of the Anti-Slavery Act and the Declaration of Independence, the slave not only had to be set free, but also had to be treated like an equal. Thus, the slave narrative was born. An autobiographic account of a slave's sufferings, describing the horrid crossing of the infamous Middle Passage, or the ordeal of the work on the cotton plantation. Slave narratives served to prove that the institution of slavery was an insult to the law of nature and God. The rhetoric was a conglomerate out of the strong Christian belief system and political philosophy. While the Bible clearly states that man is created in the image of God, classical liberalism supported the ideals of individual liberty and free markets.[12] The Anti-Slavery Society concerned itself with the anti-slavery campaign and with other international campaigns

12 Abolitionists refer to philosopher John Locke whose writings have often been reviewed in the light of the transatlantic slave trade. Locke opens his *Two Treatises of Government* with a precise denunciation: "Slavery is so vile and miserable an Estate of Man, and so directly opposite to the generous Temper and Courage of our Nation; that 'tis hardly to be conceived, that an Englishman, much less a Gentleman, should plead fort" (1823, 7). Central to this thought was his belief in natural rights, more precisely, the rights of life, liberty, and property as much as his belief that governments were formed to protect its people. Believing in natural rights, the anti-slavery position was unavoidable. Locke's rhetoric was appropriated to serve the international campaign against slavery and later infused the American Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. However, Locke was not an abolitionist himself, for him slavery was an acceptable consequence of just war, even more so he himself actively participated in the trade with human goods.

invested in the ill treatment of indigenous people, which led in the late nineteenth century to the eventual merger with the Aborigines Protection Society. What started as a religious Quaker movement soon developed into a strong internationally operating political campaign.

Abolitionists built a widespread network that, especially by the end of the nineteenth century, promoted the international distribution of already famous slave narratives, like Douglass'. Within this network, the members of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* worked as distributing agents, recommending titles and selling translations. The founders of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, E.D. Hayward, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Thomas Clarkson, Thomas Pringle, and Zachary Macauly were deeply involved in the international distribution of slave testimonials. The papers and minutes of the Anti-Slavery Society (1820-1951) reveal interesting insight in the use of slave testimonials as promotion material. A letter from Utrecht addressed to Mr. G.W. Alexander, a member of the society reveals that *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* was supposed to be translated and published in the Netherlands as a separate publication to reach wider circulation. The same letter discusses the benefits of a seal of approval of the authenticity of the book, adorned by the author himself, next to an image of him. Very aware of their partly reluctant and doubtful audience the letter points out: "But if we can make it interesting to the great body, that does not consider colonies with philanthropic eyes, we are in the best way to influence the community with more elevated sentiments" (Rueb 1846, MS).

The Anti-Slavery Society operated on a network that spun from England, with London, Edinburgh, Liverpool, and Dublin as headquarters, to America, where New York and New Orleans were leading cities, then later to Europe, where Berlin, Utrecht, Brussels, Paris and Milan were the centres of the movement. The minutes and letter correspondences confirm that books like Mary Prince's testimonial or Douglass' narrative travelled from America to Great Britain, or vice versa, and then to Utrecht and other European cities (cf. Rueb 1846, MS). The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* established itself as the distributing agency, not only handling immense print runs of 900 copies for London and Manchester (cf. Clarkson 1808, MS) but also sending out single copies to private households (cf. Hayward 1855, MS). As human rights activists

the members understood it as their primary obligation to “lay before the public of Great Britain the wrong that will be done to a people who cannot speak for themselves, a people who, we have given blessings of peace and freedom and promised our protection” (Hetherwick 1903, MS). They organised interviews with former slaves, wrote, published and sold autobiographic testimonials, answered readers' letters, vouching for the truthfulness of the former slave's voice wherever they could. James Olney gives a summary of the production of these narrations by outlining a set of conventions that serve a mould for all slave narratives (1984, 49). He singles out three defining features: a) engraved portraits, b) title page and its claim “Written by Himself” or “Herself”, and c) testimonials by sponsors, friends or famous people of public life. These three features show how the genre is born out of and dependent on the “triangular relationship” (51) between narrator, sponsor, and the audience. Because the texts mainly serve the demands of the sponsors and the audience, Olney argues, they “focus on the external reality rather than on internal individual life” (ibid.). I do not agree with this statement. Especially Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass' narratives do give revealing perspectives on the personal life and achievements of a former slave. In attesting the real existence of themselves as living human beings, both testimonial writers not simply authenticate themselves as former slaves but they strongly confirm their position as rightful author. The subtitle “Written by Himself” thus, indicates the writer's identity as *former* slave, now author. In the slave testimonial literacy and identity are intertwined Yet, a testimonial account like this could not stand on its own. The relationship between former slave as author and the audience was crucial. If the former salve was to be regarded as a legitimate testimonial, he or she had to gain the reader's trust. Thus, the explanatory style of the preface derives from the standing problem that the audience was sceptical of the narrator. The audience asked for a seal of approval, in most cases this was given by letters, testimonials or a preface written by the sponsor, editor, or the amanuensis. The eyewitness “was compelled to use all the resources of veracity to bear on the difficult task of convincing readers of the truth of the narration” (Constanzo 1987, 16). The authentication of the story is ensured by writing and publishing under the banner of the abolitionists.

Writing for such a large and partially sceptical audience required literary sensitivity and conscious for the position of his own (black) authorship on a white market. "To help counter the possible objection that the black narrator's particular experiences are limited, unrepresentative, or unusual" (Constanzo 1987, 31), the eyewitness becomes the omniscient narrator of not only *his/her* life. The testimonial narrator takes on the voice of the collective to represent the wider experience of other slaves. To create a dense, irrefutable narration, the narrator fills gaps with narrative techniques, inserts interviews and testimonies of other slaves. Gives evidence in the form of letters to politically relevant people, and subscription lists which prove his connection to the Anti-Slavery movement. Personal experiences and collective memory collide and present a seemingly neutral testimony. The following readings will show how the narratives of Equiano/Vassa, Douglass and Prince appear to maintain a 'neutral memory' and to give a picture of the situation as it truly was. While these undifferentiated notions of memory and truth serve as narrative 'strategies of authentication', the texts also reflect their own ambivalent status as narration and as the product of a writer dependent on specific power structures. Writing against human right violations and oppression is never only political and factual; these texts oscillate between universal claims and social protests on the one hand, and personal experiences and memory on the other hand. Further, these testimonial narrations always also comment on the status of the narrator and author, dealing with the consciousness of his or her life as a black person in a white society (cf. Costanzo 1987, 9).

2.1 Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* – Testimonial Activism

This chapter examines Olaudah Equiano/Gustavus Vassa[13], public figure and famous author, as a bold example of early self-fashioning. His

13 Paul Lovejoy discusses in his article "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa – What is in a Name?" (2012) the controversy of the usage of his name. The author of the *The Interesting Narrative* himself used his birth name, as the following chapters will show, as proof of his African descent. Lovejoy questions why literary scholars and historians usually refer to the author by his African name, when he explicitly chose not to do so, in fact, chose to

widely read autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* (1789) is a compilation of different popular genres of that time, like e.g. the travelogue and the autobiography, carefully designed to sell and achieve awareness for its author while marketing a strong politically agenda. Olaudah Equiano was born in 1745 in Eboe, today's Nigeria. When he was 11 years old, he was kidnapped and sold into slavery in the West Indies. He travelled extensively which helped the audience to understand national and international trading networks extremely well. He visited England, Holland, Scotland, Gibraltar, Nova Scotia, the Caribbean, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and South Carolina. After 21 years in slavery, he finally was able to purchase his freedom. Later Equiano/Vassa settled in England but this did not stop him from travelling more and further – in 1773 he accompanied Dr. Irving on a polar expedition. In 1789 he had turned his back on seafaring and published *The Interesting Narrative* as a two-volume work, a book that went through one American and eight British editions during his lifetime. Pushing the publication and distribution of his narrative, Equiano/Vassa travelled throughout Great Britain as an abolitionist and author, marketing the book and its political agenda.

The Interesting Narrative is a testimonial account of personal and collective suffering. As a political statement, is directs questions about the relationship between economy, race, and hegemony towards a Western audience. The publication is the author's personal and political way to talk back – or more to write back and to create awareness for the situation in the West Indies and the slave economy in general but also to establish himself as accomplished author on the book market. Equiano/Vassa was not just the pioneer for testimonial narration; he was a publishing pioneer. Because of his enthusiasm for his writing, his political believes and his energetic marketing agenda, he can be read as an extremely successful early case of self-publishing and self-fashioning as a public figure and famous author. He travelled through England to

be known under the name of Gustavus Vassa. The article suggest that the ignorant use of his birth name is deeply connected to politics of representation and a misguided political correctness of later generations of scholarship, and unfortunately disregards the intention of the author himself. To acknowledge both names and their importance in the strategic marketing of his narration, in the following both names will be used side by side.

promote his book and his cause in order to turn sympathetic readers into political accomplices. His text shows a strong interest in resistance and political involvement as well as profit. However, to understand his publishing success and his career as an author it is crucial to explore how his political interest gave him the tools to adapt to the British life-style and to conquer the international book market of his time.

Tracing Equiano/Vassa's publishing agenda, this chapter focuses on the set-up of his testimony and its usage of tropes such as 'the book', 'writing', and 'voice'. The trope 'book', and with it the notion of reading and writing signify the overcoming of economic exploitation, political subordination and cultural imperialism – and celebrate a way of writing back to the empire (cf. Johnson and Davis 2015, 18). *The Interesting Narrative* is a portrait of the author's personal journey from slave to freeman. Because during his life Equiano/Vassa himself is handled and traded as a body reduced to a commodity, the writing of his testimony is the author's opportunity to overcome his own discriminating status as property. To achieve personal success and political and economic authority, he invents a well-balanced author-figure that can hold stand to questions of authenticity as well as to questions of his political integrity. This was necessary, because Equiano/Vassa was not just simply any eighteenth century writer but a politically involved public figure of African descent. To be able to exist within the local publishing structures as well within the larger international market he presents himself as a marginal voice (cf. Brouillette 2007, 8ff.).

"Almost an Englishman" – Equiano/Vassa's Political Agenda and Publishing Achievements

"Great traditions demand great progenitors" (1993, 459) – Joseph Fichtelberg starts his article about Olaudah Equiano/Gustavus Vassa's description of trade and economy with this exclamation, introducing the former slave as successful example for the genre of slave narratives. Equiano/Vassa and his *Interesting Narrative* are famous; the book has long been established as the first slave narrative, a canonical text critically reflecting on the Middle Passage and the inhumane aspects of the slave trade. Furthermore, the author was the "first Anglophone writer of African descent to assume the status of the autobiographical 'I'" (Whit-

lock, 2015, 15). This is especially meaningful because this 'I' establishes status and identity and simultaneously links language to action. Action to not only oppose and object slavery, but a personal action, that, as a 'humanitarian narrative' proves the humanity of the author, his status as an individual human being, challenging his status as slave and non-being (cf. 19).

England's economic as well as political position greatly influences Equiano/Vassa's success: he writes and publishes within and about trade networks and a new world economy at a time when England was about to regain worldwide economic hegemony, a precious position it could only hold because of the import and export business of slaves. Africa became attractive due to the loss of the American colonies. England could only be established once more as a serious force on the international trade market by regaining and maintaining new lucrative colonies. Bristol and Liverpool quickly developed into prosperous slave ports and by the 1780s, the national economy depended heavily on the trade with human commodities. Equiano/Vassa travelled from Africa to America, to Europe – experiencing the infamous trade triangle first hand. Thus, his book provides a distinct "cartography of modernity's crisscrossing routes for the slave trade, the spread of empire, and developing systems of global capital" (Davidson 2007, 19). Trading networks and the economic market become an integral part of 18th century literature. Both phenomena are reflected and commented on by literature. Equiano/Vassa's testimonial narration takes it one-step further. On the one hand, it observes and discusses the market while on the other hand it reflects its own status as an essential part of the trade. Because trade and travel are nearly inseparable entities, the structure of The *Interesting Narrative* resembles popular travel literature of its time. This is not only because of the author's appetite for adventure and travel. It is also a market-oriented decision: travel literature illustrates the economic success of England; it presented international sea voyages as the source for the crowns power and gain.

While these topics and styles possibly guaranteed a readership for his book, Equiano/Vassa needed a way into the field of literary production. The ultimate boost for the publication was given by the abolitionist culture, which "gave rise to all manner of cultural production that, in

turn, yielded a new and lively marketplace for ideas, goods, and services related to the cause" (Rohrbach 2002, 2). Equiano/Vassa's text shows a strong interest in resistance and political involvement. To understand his publishing success and his career as an author it is crucial to explore how his interest in the political gave him the tools to conquer the British but also the international book market of his time. Because Equiano/Vassa himself is handled and traded as property, the writing of his story is his opportunity to overcome this discriminating status as property. Under the influence of the newly forming world market and its force to make a living in a capitalist world as a human being, Equiano/Vassa presents himself as the ideal self-made man "who measured his success in terms of his ability to create and adjust to market conditions" (ibid.). To convince and win a broad audience, Equiano/Vassa sets his testimonial narration in the moral discourse of humanitarianism, "invoking a language of recognition and benevolence that was a product of Enlightenment modernity" (Whitlock 2015, 22). *The Interesting Narrative* displays Equiano/Vassa as cunning narrator, appealing to his audience as who knew which rhetoric would appeal to his audience as survivor, in fact, as *superstes*:

> It is, therefore, I confess, not a little hazardous, in a private and obscure individual, and a stranger too, thus to solicit the indulgent attention of the public; especially when I won and offer here the history of neither a saint, a hero, nor a tyrant. I believe there are a few events in my life which have not happened to many; it is true the incidents of it are numerous; and, did I consider myself European, I might say my sufferings were great; but, when I compare my lot with that most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a *particular favourite of Heaven*, and acknowledge the mercies of Providence in every occurrences of my life. If, then, the following narrative does not appear sufficiently interesting to engage general attention, let my motive be some excuse for its publication. I am not so foolishly vain as to expect from it either immortality or literary reputation. (Equiano 1794, 31f.)

Equiano/Vassa pleas for empathy not for himself but for those who were not as fortunate as he was. Furthermore, he stresses that his only

credit to write the following narration, is not his expertise as writer or man of letters, but his status as *superstes*, as the one who survived to tell the tale. This follows a certain agenda: when Equiano/Vassa highlights his attributes as African survivor of the slave trade at the beginning of the narration, he conceals his attributes as African (and) author. Both will be used in the narration later on, when it is important to display Equiano/Vassa's development from eyewitness to author. In fact, in this preliminary paragraph, he consciously hides his status as author; to win the trust and esteem of the audience it is necessary to stress his experience as survivor. As survivor of horrors of the slave trade, he stands now before his audience, eternally grateful to God for the blessings of his survival, drawing on the "humanitarian ethics of sympathy and recognition" (Whitlock 2015, 22). He reverses the eurocentristic claim of perfection and hegemonic position and demands the inclusion of the subaltern into the discourse of Enlightenment and what it stands for, freedom and liberty for all mankind. He alludes to the bible by calling himself a "*particular favourite of Heaven*" (italics in original). With this, he ascribes himself to the law of God and opens the possibility for the expectance of the 'negro' as a subject of society, and not a commodity stabilising Western society.[14] Equiano/Vassa's testimonial narration opens the literary and political sphere for black voices to be heard and taken into account. Still, this does not read like a success story. Equiano/Vassa and his writing fellows like Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and Mary Prince are examples of marginalised voices crying out at a time when European thought was occupied with the expansion of its spatial horizons. This unfortunately also meant the constriction of its cultural and historical imagination, as Achille Mbembe argues, and culminates in the forming of national collectives by isolating and distancing the own collective against the Other. Mbembe

14 In *Existentia Africana. Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (2000) Lewis R. Gordon comments on the issue of 'black autobiography', he believes that if "the autobiography of a person of color revealed itself simply as autobiography, then the gap between colored and noncolored, between subhuman and human, would at least have been bridged on the level of inner life" (26). At the same time Gordon argues that texts written by 'black intellectuals' should not be read as biographical outings; this praxis dangerously ignores the contingency of historical circumstances and essentialises it as inevitable and fixed 'black' experience, cf. 23.

identifies the main problem as 'being black, or negro', which implies the invariably and definite exclusion of the hegemonic collective.[15]

This socio-political setting exhibits even more the risk Equiano/ Vassa takes on when publishing *The Interesting Narrative* as a means to discuss the exclusive and oppressive discourse of the time. However, the opportunity to speak openly and as narrating 'I', is given to him by the abolitionist movement. Under the protective wings of their political success, Equiano/Vassa expresses his concerns about the socio-political discourse concerning the institution of slavery. Careful not to affront his readers, he not only establishes slavery as force that oppresses Africans, he argues further that all humans are equally good in nature and Africans and Europeans alike are corrupted by the institution of slavery. Slavery is not a man-made evil, but a force that makes all man evil.

> Such a tendency has the slave-trade to debauch men's minds, and harden them to every feeling of humanity! For I will not suppose that the dealers in slaves are born worse than other men – No! (…) Surely this traffic cannot be good, which spreads like a pestilence, and taints what it touches! Which violates that first natural right of mankind, equality and independency, and gives one man a dominion over his fellow which God could never intend! For it raises the owner to a state as far above man as it depresses the slave below it; and, with all the presumption of human pride, sets a distinction between them, immeasurable in extent and endless in duration! (Equiano 1794, 111)

Within this astute argument, he embeds his own opinion on the institution, describing it as a 'pestilence' and condemning its cruel dominion over fellow human beings. Statements like these are placed all over the testimonial narration and display clearly the author's estimation of the book as the perfect medium for a political manifest. Equiano/ Vassa understood too well how to "convert sympathetic readers into political actors in the campaign against slavery (Whitlock 2015, 20 and cf. Bugg 2006, 1426). Again calling upon God, Equiano/Vassa's understanding of the Bible becomes one of the strongest themes in the testi-

15 A similar thought is expressed in W.E.B Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (cf. 1903, 359).

monial narration.[16] This move serves to establish the abolitionist idea of equality and marks himself as pious and humble man who would easily appeals to a broad (Christian) audience.[17] A little earlier, Equiano/Vassa refers to the 39th Act, "page 125, of the Assembly of Barbados" which states "any negro, or other slave" (Equiano 1794, 109), here the statement assumes the 'negro' as a legal object, not subject, which only exist as slave, namely as commodity: "[F]or they are universally insulted and plundered without the possibility of redress; or such is the equity of the West Indian laws, that no free 'negro's evidence will be admitted in their courts of justice. (122). This passage comments on more than the slave trade, it comments on the constitution of the law and the slave's right to be acknowledged as human beings.

Annotations about the slave's non-existence, their powerlessness in front of the law, are contrasted with literary statement, interviews, and poems. All of which build a network of testimonials negating the slave's status as soulless commodity ("I have already mentioned, that throughout the West Indies no black man's testimony is admitted, on any – occasion, against any white person whatever, and therefore my own oath would have been of no use", 162). Equiano/Vassa mixes his own testimonial writing with poetry and statements by people he met who suffered under slavery as much as he did. This narrative technique proves his accomplishment as author and intellectual, it highlights the ability of the 'negro' to write and to reflect upon art. Therefore, in a desperate hour when he is lost on a stormy sea, Equiano/Vassa "calls

16 With his writing and his political views, Equiano/Vassa supports the abolitionist campaigners, of whom most were devout Quakers. The abolitionist movement was heavily supported by a majority of Quakers, often described as the actual backbone of active anti-slavery organisation and communication. In *The Problem of Slavery in Western Thought* (1966) D. B. Davis writes that from the 1770 onward, "religion was the central concern of all British abolitionist leaders" and most support came from the churches. He concluded that the abolition of slavery was "a moral achievement that may have no parallel" (11ff.).

17 A similar rhetoric is used by founding member of the Anti-Slavery Society Thomas Clarkson. In his 1808 published *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament,* Clarkson claims that the slave trade was the greatest of the social evils conquered by the Christian religion. On the final page, he asks the reader to "retire to thy closets, and pour out thy thanksgivings to the Almighty for this his unspeakable act of mercy to thy oppressed fellow-creatures", (cf. ch. XXXIII). Clarkson knew Equiano/Vassa, supported his publication and later arranged his visit to Cambridge where the author would hold a lecture to promote the book and its cause.

on death" (97) to relieve him from the horrors he felt and dreaded and quotes a poem that was published 26 years before *The Interesting Narrative*. By connecting his writing to early texts, and in particular poems, of the abolitionist movement, Equiano/Vassa not only continues the campaign, he establishes himself as author.[18] Although he "conflates and misquotes lines from the first three editions of" (Equiano 1794, 268 footnotes) *The Dying Negro* by abolitionists Thomas Day and John Bicknell", the reference alone distinctly proves his expertise in compiling the narrative. Even in greatest danger, he is able to quote and to alter texts to create a deep and profound piece of literature himself. Of course, this is a political message as well. The author deliberately inscribes himself into the literary canon, quoting and referring to many literary masters and their work, like Milton's *Paradise Lost* (112). For Equiano/Vassa, as much as for all writing slaves before and after him, literacy is the vehicle that enables to join the discourse and appropriate the hegemonic style and genre, like the autobiography, and to determine their own self-image as "almost an Englishman" (77) and successful author.

At the beginning of *The Interesting Narrative* Equiano/Vassa presents the image of the 'uneducated barbarian', agreeing with the general understanding of Africa as place where literacy and scripturality cannot be found.[19] This framework of an oral culture is gradually abandoned. Both Christianity and literacy are set into focus, presented as a unit,-for his education of reading and writing is based on teachings from the Bible. However, Equiano/Vassa uses his newly won tool to further his own political ends. What makes Equiano/Vassa's testimonial so unique

18 Later, in the 19th century, when the abolitionist movement already was in full swing, and successfully operates on international scale, black literature serves as network, promoting and dramatising the character of the antislavery society. Dickson D. Bruce Jr. writes in "Print Culture and the Antislavery Community: The Poetry of Abolitionism, 1831–1860" (2006) that black literature travelled, transporting their political message conveyed in poetry: "In the abolitionist press, poetry was given a visibility that enhanced its role in promoting and dramatizing the character of an antislavery community". The answering of a poem with another poem created an international conversation, a "stylized interplay of poetic activity." (221).
19 Another literary technique used by Equiano/Vassa is that of a reversed perspective. Peter Hulme argues in *Colonial Encounters: Europe and he Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (1986) that Equiano/Vassa uses a variation of the trope of the 'first encounter' and assigns the European slave traders with barbarian, savage qualities. He depicts the slave traders from an African perspective, meaning (cf. Equiano 1794, 55ff.).

amongst the magnitude of published slave narratives, is that he wrote it without the help of a white editor. He utilises the English culture and language so adequately, that no *amanuensis* is needed. He imitates the people who hold him captive to achieve his goals and notably his favourite companions are generally white educated people who help him in his understanding of the Bible (cf. 65ff.). However, this imitation has its limits. After stating a conversation with a "poor Creole negro" (110) Equiano/Vassa writes that "in all the different islands in which I have been (…) the treatment of the slaves was nearly the same; so nearly indeed, that the history of an island, or even a plantation, with a few such exceptions as I have mentioned, might serve for a history of the whole." (111). Comparing his situation with that of his Creole friend, he concludes that all slaves are treated with the same disrespect. What follows is a crucial accusation of the impact of slavery on the constitution of humanity. Equiano/Vassa directly addresses the reader and asks: "[a]re slaves more useful by being thus humbled to the condition of brutes, than they would be if suffered to enjoy the privileges of men? The freedom which diffuses health and prosperity throughout Britain answers you – No" (ibid.). To establish his own intellectual status as former slave now author, he paraphrases a part from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and appropriates his language for his own rhetoric.

> When you make men slaves, you deprive them of half their virtue, you set them, in your own conduct, and example of fraud, rapine, and cruelty, and compel them to live with you in a state of war; and yet you complain that they are not honest or faithful! You stupify them with stripes, and think it necessary to keep them in a state of ignorance; and yet you assert that they are incapable of learning; that their minds are such a barren soul or moor, that culture would be lost on them (…) (Equiano 1794, 111f.)

This paraphrase is followed by a slight adaptation of Beelzebub's speech in *Paradise Lost (*cf. ibid and 274). These lines do not only affect Equiano/Vassa's self-presentation as well-read man and author, above all, they position him politically. He describes in a nonconformist manner the maltreatment of slaves in a society that constantly creates its own

counterpart. He introduces the idea that the term 'negro' is a product of racism and racial theory, a thought that finds its philosophical climax in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (1822-31).[20] Enlightenment and Capitalism need the slave to establish and confirm national concepts as much as capitalist ambitions. In this discourse, race is a state of degeneration, appointing to non-European cultures the identity of a minor being, even a zero point on any scale. What identifies the 'negro' and its equivalent the slave, is their absence. The 'negro' is a mere image which is constructed in exactly the way Equiano/Vassa refers to with the Milton quote: it is what gives a name to humiliation, it is a symbol of a being that is formed by the bullwhip and suffering, and it is a 'state of war' (cf. Mbembe 2013, 41ff.). In short, Equiano/Vassa argues that the figure of the 'negro' and slave only confirms what Europe deems him or her to be, if the determining mind set of Europe and North America does not change, the figure itself cannot either.

However, Equiano/Vassa successfully rewrites this discourse by communicating a new set of thoughts and by ascribing his testimonial narration to the idea of a world-spanning, indeed universal humanity (cf. Boulaga 1977, 184). His counter discourse starts with the appropriation of literacy, he reads the Bible. Rephrasing the idea of the uneducated slave, the book-less African, Equiano/Vassa draws on the trope of the "Talking Book", as Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes the slave's encounter with the European book on a slave vessel. The trope has been used by testimonial authors like Cugaono and Gronniosaw (cf. Davis and Johnson 2015, 3 and Gates 2012, xx) before and is often used to describe the narrator's "ability to interpret the culture of the Europeans from a distinctly African point of reference" (Gates 2012, xxi). The 'talking book' only reveals its knowledge and mysteries to the master – not to the slave. What Equiano/Vassa makes explicit here, is the difference between African culture and European culture by confirming the stereotypical believe that to the 'African culture' the book is an unfamil-

20 However, anthropological literature often argues that racial theory derives from French naturalist thinker George Louis Buffon. His thoughts are understood as highly influential in the understanding of human variations in the 18th century, see A. Montagu *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (1942).

iar object and even more, that the art of self-expression through writing is alien. Equiano/Vassa describes the silent book as his own lack of knowledge; it stands as a sign for his state of non-membership to the system of European manners and thoughts.

> I had often seen my master and Dick employed in reading; and I had a great curiosity to talk to the books, as I thought they did; and so to learn how all things had a beginning: for that purpose I have often taken up a book, and have talked to it, and the put my ears to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me; and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent. (Equiano 1794, 68)

The trope of the talking book as the hegemonial discourse of colonial domination stands in opposition to the Equiano/Vassa's authorship. Clearly, this reminiscence is used to highlight the author's book as his "means of writing back to empire" (Johnson and Davis 2015, 12). The book, and with it the practices of reading and writing, they all signify the survival of economic exploitation, political subordination and cultural imperialism – and celebrate the author's establishment. These oppositions are explained by Gates as two different voices: on the one hand "the simple wonder with which Equiano approaches the New World of his captors, and a more eloquent voice to describe the author's narrative present" (Gates 2012, xx). Gates argues further that the author contrasts his earlier self (Olaudah Equiano) with the self that narrates the text (Gustavus Vassa). His ability to show his readers his own naïveté, rather than merely to tell us about it or to claim it, and to make this earlier self the focus of his readers' sympathy and amusement, are extraordinarily effective rhetorical strategies that serve to heighten our identification with the openly honest subject. (Gates 2012, xxi) and simultaneously heighten the author's narrative talents. Tone and rhetorical technique shift so Equiano/Vassa can move from uneducated slave, or more accurately, from 'negro' who has been barred from European discourse, to authoritative author. He overcomes the objectivity that signifies the slave; he masters the book, as he masters the language to stand not simply amidst his readers, but above them.

"Written by Himself" – Title, Cover, and Subscription Lists

"A canny businessman and self-promoter, Equiano/Vassa used the networks of abolition movement to secure patronage for his book; in return he brought to the campaign it's most compelling and subjective account of the traffic in slaves" (Whitlock 2015, 20). By offering a reversal perspective of the African slave as accomplished author and politically authoritative writer, Equiano/Vassa's narration provided the literary ground base for the grand campaign to humanise the slave. In order to establish himself as authoritative figure, however, Equiano/Vassa had to take part in and master the literary field of production.[21]

A look at the paratext, the skeleton holding the body of the text together, grants information about Equiano/Vassa's understanding of the literary field of production. Especially enlightening is his choice of cover illustration. To literally illustrate his agenda of 'writing back', his ability to master the master's discourse, the cover depicts an "African man dressed as an English gentleman, a figure who visually combines the written identities of both Olaudah Equiano and Gustavus Vassa (…) The Bible in his hand open to Acts 4:12 illustrates his literacy and his piety" (Carretta 2001, 134). This front piece bears a thematic significance to the already discussed encounter of the author and the book. Vincent Carretta refers to it as the "first and last illustration of the trope of the 'talking book' the author uses to emphasize the significance in his autobiography of literacy and accumulation" (138f.). With this highly expressive cover image, Equiano/Vassa marks his successful mastering of the art reading and writing. While this illustration of the 'talking book' refers to Equiano/Vassa's self-publication and the repeatedly affirmed authorship, the title is chosen to reference the ambiguous situation of the author as an 'authentic African' – yet proper Englishman. Uniting both personas, Olaudah Equiano and Gustavus Vassa,

21 Literacy became the key to the movement's success. "By the 1800 between sixty and seventy per cent of adult males in England and Wales could read; the corresponding figure for women was probably somewhere in the region of forty per cent" (Oldfield 1998, 10). Literacy was the motor that stirred the retail sector, it fostered trade and business, in short it was "part of the agenda for modernity, the city and the Enlightenment, as well as for religious leaders and social reformers" (ibid.). The mass production of the printed word, like Equiano/Vassa's testimonial narration, was *the* medium to spread the abolitionist message and to influence the creation of legislations and Acts (cf. Whyte 2006).

the title consequently refers to the author's intellectual journey. The rather long title *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano – or – Gustavus Vassa, The African. Written By Himself.* highlights the author's position within the literary field he strives to enter. The choice is a determined positioning between the author's past as African and slave and his freedom as baptised Englishmen. The 'peripheral voice' (of an African) promises exciting and exotic images of far-away lands and adventures; accordingly, the first half of the title reads *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano.* It promises an adventure story, a descriptive analysis of his distinctive life alongside with narrative elements that guarantee an exciting, 'interesting' read about sea voyages and indigenous encounters. The *Interesting Narrative* aims to "to affect; to move; to touch with passion; to gain the affections; as, this is an interesting story" (Johnson 1805), affecting the readers and tuning observers into activists.[22]

To achieve political and economic authority, Equiano/Vassa invents a well-balanced author-figure that defies disbelief and disfavour. He utilises the exotic image of the 'writing African' to succeed within the local publishing structures as well as on the larger international market. His authorship rests, as Brouillette writes, "in the nature of his connection to the specificity of a given political location" (2007, 3f.). Equiano/Vassa's complex political position is addressed by the title: it mentions the author's birth name first; with this, he is referring to his life before slavery and to his 'authenticity' as a true African. To this statement the second half of the title is substantially connected. After insisting on writing and publishing under his birth name 'Olaudah Equiano', it is necessary for the author to mention the meaning of the second name featured in the title. One of his masters gives the name 'Gustavas Vassa' to Equiano. Yet, Gustavus Vassa is not simply his slave name: the author used this name throughout his life. In the title, it elucidates his self-description as "almost an Englishman" (Equiano 1794, 77 and cf. Lovejoy 2012). The interplay of these two names presented in the title side by

22 Following Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language, Volume II* the word 'interesting' indicates in this context "to affect; to move; to touch with passion; to gain the affections; as, this is an interesting story" (1805).

side and their different significances highlight Equiano/Vassa's awareness for his unique role as author. He narrates his journey from slavery to freedom, appropriating abolitionist rhetoric to appeal to the movement and its readership. The supplement 'Or Gustavus Vassa' validates the author as former slave who achieved freedom and now fights for the freedom of his peers: the name refers to the "heroic medieval king of Sweden (Gustavus Vasa) famous for protecting his people against the tyranny of Denmark" (Davidson 2006, 28). For an eighteenth-century reader the name bears meaning: Vasa was celebrated in England as an icon of freedom and liberty. Used in the title and throughout his life, the name Gustavus Vassa becomes Equiano's author persona. The author becomes the literary version of the historical Vasa, fighting against slavery with his testimonial narration. However, using this name alone was not possible; he still had to establish himself as an authentic testimonial voice. Another supplement to the title had to support his agenda; the author refers to his African descent. To establish himself as the authentic representative for all slaves, he adds "*The African*" to the title. Like a vicious cycle, this again calls for an assurance of his authority as a 'proper' writer, which the last supplement is supposed to secure. The author's authenticity was questioned: "Equiano's self-confident writing led one *Monthly Review* critic to ask whether 'some English writer' had participated in the writing of his narrative. Equiano/Vassa's text seems to anticipate such a response by making repeated references to his various lessons in literacy" (Gates 2001, xx). Taking the wind out of his reader's sails and thus fighting the doubts, Equiano/Vassa adds the last supplement "*Written By Himself*". This addition distinctly identifies himself as the author of the narrative, presenting not only an educated point of view, but also an African point of view. This chain of title supplements highlights how Equiano/Vassa, as political figure and author, is not simply a product of the discourse of the time, but a deliberately chosen persona. To stress his authority as author further, as much as to emphasise the autobiographical claim, Equiano/Vassa mentions the word 'author' in nine out of 12 chapter titles. While these headings serve as a brief summary of the chapter's content, they also emphasise the textual relevance of contemporary political events. Most of the chapter titles are expressions of the author's political view, e.g. chapter five:

Various interesting instances of oppression, cruelty, and extortion (Equiano 1794, 95). Chapter seven is titled *The Author's disgust at the West Indies* (131), and chapter twelve refers to his petition to the Queen and to "[d]ifferent transactions of the Author's life" (220). Equiano stresses his function as the authoritative political voice that speaks on behalf of all other slaves against the institution of slavery.

While the plot traces the journey from a free life lived in eastern Nigeria, "through European enslavement, to Anglican freedom" (Gates 2001, xix), Equiano/Vassa presents a detailed account of his interesting adventures and achieves to cater to a "readership broader than that enjoyed by any black writer before 1789" (ibid). The book's paratext, the detailed lists of subscribers and letter after letter, provide information about the production history and Equiano/Vassa's quest to gain not only economical but also social capital, as in the praise of his audience. Vincent Carretta agrees "[e]ven before he proved himself to be a master of the commercial book market, Equiano had promoted himself and implicitly his forthcoming book in a number of letters, including book reviews, printed in the London newspapers" (2001, 131). Equiano/Vassa established a particular author-persona before he actually published his *Interesting Narrative*. In 1788, he petitioned Queen Charlotte for the end to slavery. In the letter, he calls himself "[t]he oppressed Ethiopian" and speaks "in favour of the wretched African" (232 and 231). Equiano/Vassa refers to himself as Ethiopian to highlight his African background: he uses the "generic British term" (Gross and Kelley 2010, 351) which was reappropriated mostly by "Africans educated in Britain and the United States" (ibid.). Driving from the kingdom of Benin, Equiano/Vassa is one of the "first non-Ethiopians known to call himself" so (Uhlig 2006, 530). Even though this supplement feeds stereotypes in white Anglophone writing, it must be read as a deliberately chosen reference to the author's positioning within the political discourse of the eighteenth century. It exposes Equiano/Vassa as survivor and rightful testimonial, as *superstes* and paves the way for his authorship.

One year later, in 1789, he published his *Interesting Narrative* in England with Dutch and American editions printed in the following two years. The newly established author made use of a well-functioning and border crossing communication network. While he invested

most of his own money in the printing, he collected subscriptions by members of the abolitionist movement or otherwise famous names to secure his sales. With each new edition of the testimonial narration the subscription list grew.[23] When the first edition enlisted 311 subscribers for 350 secured copies, for the ninth edition, 804 subscribers are identified. Amongst them English, Irish, and Scottish buyers/readers. These subscription lists, printed as additional material to the text, were not simply a process necessary to publish a book at that time (cf. Fisch 2007, 52f.); they were used as purposefully placed paratext to ensure the author's credibility. Not only is the length of the list impressive, also, the names enlisted helped to establish the author as a name on the market: well-known former slave and abolitionist fighter Quobna Ottobah Cuguano[24] as well as "Gronniosaw and Phillis Wheatley (…) the Countess of Huntingdon" (Carretta 2007, 55) put their names on the list. It is very likely, that these names were deliberately placed, so the author would be associated with the politically relevant and "recognized tradition of African British authors" (56) of that time. Furthermore, these subscription lists helped to solicit an audience (cf. Smith and Watson 2010); this list of illusive names flatter future readers to be included and join the political quest. The growing number of Equiano/Vassa's guaranteed buyers grew and guaranteed his success on the English market. His credibility and stature were enhanced by the presence of the names of members of the royal family, the aristocracy, and other socially and politically prominent figures, such as men prominent in trade and the arts (…)" (Carretta 2001, 131).

What strikes as most impressive is the diversity of his audience. John Bugg understands Equiano/Vassa's audience as a very unique blend of different worlds: he not only appealed to the royalty and the more educated classes but also to "minors, glovers, and grocers, calling on a com-

23 Subscription lists were used to collect money up front to sponsor a planned publication, by interesting probable readers to pay a certain amount, they would help cover the costs of production and ensure their name inside the book as well as a copy send to them.
24 Former slave Quobna Ottobah Cuguano, also known under his Christian name John Stewart. Both, Equiano/Vassa and Cuguano were actively involved in the abolitionist movement. In 1787 Cugoano published a political statement against the institution of slavery entitled *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787), see Gates 1989, 146f.

munity of readers who, he hoped, would realize the transition from literary sympathy to political activism" (Bugg 2006, 1427). To ensure that each reader, abolitionist campaigners and sceptics alike, was confronted with his political ambitions, petitions like the one to Queen Charlotte[25] as well as letters to and from abolitionist leaders were added, combining adventure story with a clear political articulation. Furthermore, the author included a set of recommending letters, most of them written by his advocates. This paratexts, together with a specific foreword to the ninth English edition, serve to prove his authenticity as a writer with an African background. Furthermore, they display Equiano/Vassa's understanding of the market. He builds a well-functioning distribution network of individual readers by touring though England and performing his manifesto in public speeches held in bookshops and at abolitionist assemblies. Because of his personal commitment to the cause and his fierce self-promotion, "endorsing his book and authenticating his authorship" (Green 1995, 366) all over the British Islands, from London, to Bath, to Glasgow, to Dublin he became "the most famous and influential black abolitionist in Britain" (ibid). The book also travelled to the European mainland – a circumstance that is certainly owed to the abolitionist movement that quickly spread across Europe. Even when all translations were unauthorised and the author did not economically profit from them, he understood how to use them profitable. He found a way to use them to advertise the appeal of his book –

> Since the first publication of my Narrative, I have been in a great variety of scenes in many parts of Great Britain, Ireland, and Scotland, an account of which might well be added here; but as this would swell the volume too much, (…) Soon after I returned to London, where I found persons of note from Holland and Germany, who requested me to go there; and I was glad to hear that an edition of my Narrative had been printed in both, also in New York. (Equiano 1794, 235)

25 Equiano/Vassa tried hard to convince the royal family to support the abolitionist campaign. Several copies of his *Interesting Narrative* were sent to King George III and other leading politician; nevertheless, he failed to persuade the royal family to change their opinion.

Equiano/Vassa not only describes his national and international success by referring to his successful book tour through England and to his translated editions. He establishes one last time a metonymical connection between himself and his book. While *The Interesting Narrative* depicts his life and travels as a commodity on the international trading market – he devotes the last page of his book to reflect the book's status as a commodity travelling and selling internationally. Even more so, the book is not only the mere reflection of his life and sufferings, it literally becomes him. It is his narrative voice in writing that dominates the trading networks of his time – making him not only probably the most well financially situated English author of African heritage living in England but also a significant voice against slavery throughout time.

After *The Interesting Narrative*

From his subtitle 'Written by Himself" and a signed engraving of the black author holding an open text (the Bible) in his lap, to more subtle rhetorical strategies such as the overlapping of the slave's arduous journey to freedom and his simultaneous journey from orality to literacy, Equiano/Vassa's strategies of self-preservation most certainly influenced the shape of black narrative before 1865, especially those of Douglass and Harriet Jacobs (cf. Gates 2001, xix). Trading networks formed by supporters of the abolitionist movement recognised the mixture of travelogue, sailor's yarn, economic tract and testimonial narration for that time as its unique selling point. Thus, Equiano/Vassa's *Interesting Narrative* became the blueprint for later slave narratives. Due to its immense international success it is, up to this day, recognised as the first publication in the history of black writing: as testimonial narration it references the author/narrator's personal growth from slave to educated Christian, this text form was the classic statement of African remembrance in the years of the Atlantic slave trade (cf. Walvin 1998). Chinua Achebe and Henry Louis Gates refer to him as the father of African and Afro-American literature (cf. Mezu 2006 and Gates 2012). Equiano/Vassa's death was the end to his success and his influential role in the abolitionist campaign dwindled drastically. The ninth edition printed and sold for the author in 1794, was also the last edition produced during the author's lifetime. The nineteenth century produced five edi-

tions in total, out of which three were published in England (Leeds, Penryn, and Belper) and the other two in America, the last know edition was published in 1837 in Boston.[26] Abolitionist campaigners of the nineteenth century selected testimonial voices such as Douglass to help promote the cause; Equiano/Vassa's testimonial was almost forgotten for nearly 150 years (cf. Walvin 2000). The abolitionist political agenda of the nineteenth century focused not on the British-dominated transatlantic slave trade, but on the abolition of slavery on American plantations (cf. Carretta 2012, x).

2.2 Mary Prince and Frederick Douglass – Authorship and Testimonial Writing on a White Market

The most prominent figure in the American abolitionist movement was Frederick Douglass, who started his career as public speaker, journalist and above all, as abolitionist, in 1840 in Nantucket, Massachusetts. His canonical *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, published at the Anti-Slavery office in 1845 in Boston, echoes strongly Equiano/Vassa's testimonial in structure and style. Like his British predecessor, Douglass recounts the realities of the institution of slavery. Douglass politically motivation was fostered and determined by the "interplay of narrator, sponsors, and audience", all of which greatly influence the testimonial narration in its "theme, content, and form" (Olney 1984, 53). In the making of Frederick Douglass as author and political figure, one person figures prominently: William Lloyd Garrison, editor of *The Liberator*, the most influential mouthpiece of the abortionist movement, co-worker, editor, and supporter. Garrison and Douglass became acquainted during a meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society where Douglass was asked to publicly testify his life in slavery and his escape. In 1845, Garrison extensively helped to

26 Literary scholar Paul Edwards 'rediscovered' the text and wrote an introduction to a facsimile of the 1789 edition in 1967. It was Edward`s historical interest in Equiano/Vassa which helped to re-establish the testimonial narration and its author as the key figure in what was considered as 'African and black literature' (cf. 193).

publish Douglass' testimonial narration, which quickly became the bestseller of abolitionist writing. He took a great risk publishing Douglass' testimonial and made it his personal duty to look after the author. When Douglass appeared in danger of being reclaimed by his former master, Garrison organised a book tour in England where Douglass was able to raise enough money to finally purchase his freedom.[27]

As a newspaper, *The Liberator* was "concerned with morality, money, and veracity" (1)[28]; it gave its readers articles about the current affairs and helped to popularise testimonial narration. Douglass' *Narrative* first appeared as a series, but soon *The Liberator* started advertising critical books about slavery and finally the newspaper published Douglass' testimony as a single volume. Calling for political change and furthering moral principles, these books were directly advertised to a conscious and supportive readership. Promoting the books in his paper with the fitting slogan 'truth stronger and stranger than fiction', Garrison saw the potential of literary texts that were indebted to the humanitarian cause. Douglass' *Narrative* became an instant bestseller in 1845. It went through five print runs to accommodate the market's demand. In the run of nearly forty years of journalism and authorship, Douglass rewrote and reassessed his first testimonial narration to publish *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855 and a third volume, *The*

27 Douglass tried to escape from slavery several times until he met Garrison. To be protected from being returned to his former owner, he chose a new name and changed it from Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey to Frederick Douglass. Passed by the Congress in 1793, the first Fugitive Slave Act demands that slave owners arrest and take back escaped slaves from any territory or state. In 1852, Douglass addresses this issue in a speech to the National Free Soil Convention at Pittsburgh: "[t]his Fugitive Slave Law had the support of the Lords, and the Coxes, the Tyngs, the Sharps and the flats. It is nevertheless a degradation and a scandalous outrage on religious liberty; and if the American people were not sunk into degradation too deep for one possessing so little eloquence as I do to describe, they would feel it, too." (Douglass 1852).

28 Unlike Equiano/Vassa's publishing encounter, *The Liberator* was not sold and financed with the help of subscription lists. Garrison feared to endanger his political and moral reputation and decided against trusting people or institutions. Instead he sold advertisements to cover the operating costs of the paper (Rohrbach 2002, 3). Furthermore, Rohrbach describes how *The Liberator* identified a lucrative emerging market of customers who, due to their political and religious believes, wanted nonslave-products: "Inspired by an earlier movement of antislavery Quakers, such as the Hicks and Motts in the 1830s, abolitionists supported a boycott of the products of slavery."(9).

Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, in 1881. Next to becoming a recognised and acclaimed author and editor of his own abolitionist paper *The North Star*, Douglass served in government positions under several administrations in the 1870s and throughout the 1880s.

Another successful book used for the abolitionist campaign was Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (1831). Born into slavery in Bermuda in 1788, she travelled together with her owners to England in 1828 where she ran away and finally found freedom. In England, she met Thomas Pringle, the abolitionist writer and secretary to the Anti-Slavery Society. With the help of an amanuensis, a woman who lived in the Pringle household (cf. Prince [1831], 229), and great editorial interventions of Pringle himself, Prince published her testimonial as the first woman to testify and write for the Anti-Slavery Society. Her narration *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (henceforth *The History*) was a key text for the anti-slavery campaign in nineteenth-century England and is a remarkable testimonial account of the continuing horrors of the institution of slavery, especially concerning the life on the plantations for a female slave. Her text and her authorship advertised the abolitionist case especially in England, just as much as Equiano/Vassa years before her.

Both testimonial narrations, Douglass' *Narrative* and Mary Prince's *History* demonstrate writing as an act of self-liberation. However, both texts, just like Equiano/Vassa's *Interesting Narrative*, are dependent on the assistance of white supporters such as editors and amanuensis who shape the testimonies into narrations. This results in a clash between enactments of self-liberation as much as emancipation on the one hand and the foreign control by the white agents on the other hand. The 'collaboration' between Mary Prince, the narrator and seemingly author, Thomas Pringle, the influential editor, and Miss S— the female *amanuensis* reflects in the narration. While Pringle promoted the text and worked as mediator between author and audience, the role of the *amanuensis* was to enable the transcript from spoken eyewitness account to written narration. Pringle's involvement and contribution is clearly identifiable: his *Preface* and footnotes comment and shape the text largely. Miss S—'s influence, however, is more subtle, and "suggests a seamless, dialogic collaboration" (Baumgartner 2001, 267) between her

and Prince. Miss S— can be understood as an "intermediary who assists in the recovery of the voice of the (ex)slave" (ibid.). Caught between Pringle's footnotes and explanations, interrupting the narration and contesting Prince's narrative voice, the author struggles to take control and authority over her own narration. Thus, Prince's direct and outspoken attempts at emancipation, following the strategy to achieve not only legal and social independence through literary emancipation, are challenged repeatedly. William Andrews suggests that these unusually excessive interruptions happen due to her gender (cf. Andrews1988, 26f.). However, these interruptions and editorial commentaries are a common theme for both Prince and Douglass. Douglass' testimonial narration also remarks the author's struggle with the involvement and interferences of his editor. The Franklian ideal of the self-made man is questioned by its most prominent representative; the depiction of the possibility of becoming an individual through the act of writing are challenged by Douglass in the second volume of his testimonial works. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass critically reflects on his role as token-slave in the abolitionist campaign, raising the complaint that at public readings and lectures he was merely introduced as a slave but not as a freeman.

Early testimonial narrations like Mary Prince and Frederick Douglass' show that the humanitarian aim to represent a suppressed community through the image and speech of one individual is a difficult literary undertaking. The claim to represent 'the truth' is therefore the biggest issue. Testimonial narrations have to prove their authenticity, their relatedness to the actual violations of human rights they depict. In doing this, they resort to creating a very specific author persona dedicated to pragmatism; unfortunately, this can compromise the authentication strategies. This vicious cycle becomes all the more apparent in an advert for *My Bondage and My Freedom*. The advertising newspaper proudly announces to have sold 500 copies in two days and explains the popularity of the volume with the promise of "earnest, startling truth" (Rohrbach 2002, 26):

> "Why so popular?"
> "It is the work of an American slave,
> Therefore excited American Sympathy!
> Every line and letter are his own,
> And it is a Volume of Truth and Power!
> It tells the earnest, startling truth,
> Without ranting or madness!
> It addresses the intellect and the heart!
> Every free Press chants its praise,
> Every free Voter will read it,
> And every Bookseller supply it." (ibid.)

My Bondage and my Freedom addresses 'the truth' more vigorously than its predecessor does. Douglass' testimonial narration reformulates knowledge and challenges the hegemonic discourse by addressing its manifold problems and it can negotiate the social status of the testimonial narrator's utterances. However, as Sarah Brouillette argues, when authors seek to sell themselves on the market, they are constructed and thus often restricted by market demands (cf. 2007, 61ff.). Obeying these demands and rules to enter the market, testimonial authors are created in the image of what they ought to represent. Even though the testimonial witness speaks and even writes, the form and range of his or her expressions are constrained by the agents who control the market.

"But they put a cloak about thetruth" – The Role of the *Amanuensis* and Literary Resistance in the *History of Mary Prince*

Mary Prince's testimonial narration chronicles her life in bondage and states the experiences as a female slave in Antigua, Bermuda, and the Turks Islands during the early nineteenth century. Taken to England by her last owners in 1827, she decides to flee and contacts the Anti-Slavery Society to help sue the Wood family for her freedom. Claiming that the family violated elements of the Consolidated Slave Acts of 1824, her narration serves as testimony. However, when a journalist at *Blackwood's Magazine* condemns her narrative publicly and convinces a judge to disbelieve the authenticity of her experiences, her legal bid for transatlantic freedom fails.

Even when the notion of writing as a solitary creative act has long been outdated, the image of the writing artist is the personification of genius and authority. The understanding of authorship as collective practice, influenced by various agents like editors, publishing houses, and even readers, all composing the author-persona and the text seems fitting. While this notion of authorship might express the actual production of testimonial narration, for a writing former slave this was not an option. The image of their independent authorship is a direct expression of the achieved emancipation. Mary Prince's narration was dictated and transcribed by a white *amanuensis*, the aspiring writer Susannah Strickland. Thomas Pringle, edited the text. Prince's *History* records the interesting ideological exchanges and struggles between those three, Prince, Strickland and Pringle. The involvement of Pringle and Strickland in the production of the text dominates Prince's authorship. A crass example of this is a statement given by Pringle. Trying to prove Prince's testimonial authenticity, Pringle answers to the doubtful readership, that Prince was inspected and he can guarantee that the "whole of the back part of her body is distinctively scarred (…) chequered with the vestiges of severe floggings" (cf. Ferguson 1997, Appendix a).

Pringle proofreads the transcript provided by Strickland, which was "written out fully, with all the narrator's repetitions and prolixities" (Prince [1831], 230). Though the original transcript is not available today, the Preface overtly explains Strickland's and Pringle's involvement: while Strickland tries to transfer the spoken words into an 'authentic' transcript of Prince's oral narration. Pringle claims to keep her "exact expressions and peculiar phraseology" (ibid.). Further, he explains to the reader that the following narration is "essentially her own, without any material alteration farther than was requisite to exclude redundancies an gross grammatical error, so as to render it clearly intelligible" (ibid.). Even though he understates his own influence in shaping the narrative, Pringle introduces himself as the one in control. This not only emphasises his editorial role, it especially establishes his superiority over Prince; the editor decides content and style of the text as well as the appearance of the author. He remarks that he was "carefully examining her on every fact and circumstance" (ibid.). On the one hand, the preface strategically introduces the text as 'authentic' by overtly underlining

the original sound of Prince's words, while on the other hand, Pringle's strong editorial influence shapes the tone of the text as much as it determines the textual appearance of the testimonial narrator and her narrative voice. The claimed authenticity due to the original oral narration gives the text its unique selling point; however, the constructed testimonial really creates an asymmetry that becomes prominent when considering the content of Pringle's commentary footnotes and the last words of the preface:

> I shall here merely notice farther, that the *Anti-Slavery Society* have no concern whatever with this publication, nor are they in any degree responsible for the statements it contains. I have published the tract, not as their Secretary, but in my private capacity; and any profits that may arise from the sale will be exclusively appropriated to the benefit of Mary Prince herself. (Prince [1831], 230)

After publication in 1831, *The History* became so popular, a year later three more print runs followed. Enabled by well-developed distribution networks operated by provincial anti-slavery societies all over Britain. Because he functioned as the secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society in England, it seems peculiar that Pringle deemed it necessary to stress that the text was published on his own undertaking and not in collaboration with the Society. As secretary as well as editor of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter,* he was experienced in publishing material on the maltreatment of slaves and the abuses of civil rights and humanitarian ideals. However, when Thomas Cadell published pro-slavery attacks on Mary Prince and Thomas Pringle in *Blackwood's Magazine,* the caution not to associate *The History* with the society turns to account. At that time, more and more anti-abolitionists issued complaints about the abolitionist's recirculation and publication of "stock stories of cruelty" (Thomas 2005, 113). Especially the third publication was followed by a series of attacks, the most prominent one written by James McQueen for the *Glasgow Courier* and by Thomas Cadell, prompting Pringle to sue Cadell in 1833. A year before, Pringle was sued for libel by Prince's former owner. In the hearing, Prince herself briefly took stand, which is the only known record of her words outside the testimonial narration. Prince's former

owner won by default, since Pringle could not provide witnesses from the West Indies validating Prince's allegations as presented within *The History*.[29] When her testimony could not hold stand in court, her word as *superstes* was all the more important. The narrative frame of testimonial narration gives authority to the silenced voice. Yet, due to Pringle's dominating influence, Prince's remains a voice within a text. Like Rigoberta Menchú, Prince was financially dependent on Pringle who would provide her with a little fund for her future benefit, an allowance of ten shillings a week from his own income since June 1832 (cf. Thomas 2005, 130)

Pringle's dominant role denies Prince the authority over her own text, negating the possibility to appear as legal author. This dominance is especially evident in Pringle's use of extensive footnotes: the footnotes interrupt the text eighteenth times, explaining, correcting, and validating Prince's story. Even though supplemental material like footnotes, recommendation letters, prefaces, and introductions, is a usual part of testimonial narrations, serving as authentification strategy, Pringle's influence actively competes with Prince's control over her story and its meaning (Baumgartner 2005, 261).[30] The additional supplement written by Pringle is "nearly as long as Prince's narrative (thirty pages long as compared to Prince's thirty-eight pages. Moreover, Pringle floods Prince's text with his own explanatory footnotes (eighteen in all)" (ibid.). The last addition to Prince's testimonial narration is a two page long narration of the African boy Louis Asa-Asa. As Baumgartner remarks, both preface and supplement together with the additional story frame Prince's story, which appears inadequate to stand on its own and dependent on the authority of men (both white and black). Pringle's intrusive editorial decisions only widen the gap between him and the female testimonial narrator. Pringle's editorial influence becomes most apparent in the foot-

29 As editor of all three editions and prosecutor in the case, Pringle expressed desire to respond to the libels in a planned fourth volume of the History. The reports of the trials published by the *London Times*, have been reprinted as appendices in a 1997 revised edition by Moira Ferguson and are now object of scholarly critique and discussion. (cf. Thomas 2005, 114 and Ferguson 1997, Appendix 5, 136–9 and Appendix 6,140–49).

30 John W. Blassingame notes in "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems" (1985) that nearly all slave narratives, self-published or recorded and written with the support of white editors, were viewed critically and with suspicion especially by historians as well as literary scholars.

notes where he seems to offer a chapter-by-chapter guide to a foreign culture and general information about the slave's life. The footnotes serve as anthropological guidance for the reader, explaining Bermuda's currency (cf. Prince [1831], 236), the daily routine on the plantations, as well as foreign terminology (cf. 238). Some footnotes do not only comment and accompany Prince's narration, but also serve to directly establish Pringle's authority over the text and the general context of slavery:

> Let the reader compare the above affecting account, taken down from the mouth of his negro woman, with the following description of a vendue of slaves at the Cape of Good Hope, published by me in 1826, from the letter of a friend, – and mark their similarity in several characteristic circumstances. The resemblance is easily accounted for; slavery wherever it prevails produces similar effects. – (236)

Pringle uses the footnotes, as well as the *Preface* and the *Supplement*, to enhance his visibility as abolitionist expert, publisher and person of social influence. His power as editor culminates in a comment concerning the testimonial subject's name. Pringle refers to a book in Prince's possession, which states her name as "'Mary, Princess of Wales'", he explains that it is "an appellation which, she says, was given her by her owners. It is a common practice with the colonists to give ridiculous names of this description to their slaves (…) In printing this narrative we have retained Mary's paternal name of Prince" (Prince [1831], 254). This comment completely overwrites Prince's narrative and assumes her name as an interchangeable construct that has been given to her by others. Pringle's interference deprives Prince of any possible autonomy as author. Pringle copies the act of naming the slave, denying Prince an important act of liberation (cf. Rauwerda 2001, 401 and Higman 1984, 25). For Equiano and later also Douglass, the choice of the name as author, its use as an important title supplement, suggests the overall importance for names as an expression of emancipation and liberation.[31]

31 In the case of Mary Prince, Pringle's choice is particularly intriguing, because he could choose between at least three different names: "Prince's petition to court in 1829, two years before the publication of the narrative, allows for the names 'James' and 'Prince' but also adds the name given to her by her slave owners, 'Molly Wood'" (Rauwerda 2001, 401).

The female body as testimony

As editor, Pringle constantly oscillates between his roles as commentator on the one hand and as enabler of Mary Prince's 'authentic' testimony on the other hand. "These strong expressions, and all of a similar character in this narrative, are given verbatim as uttered by Mary Prince" (Prince [1831], 237). This footnote assures the words within the text as originally and authentically uttered by Prince. Yet, it stresses an intellectual difference between editor and testimonial subject. Another discrepancy has to be addressed when analysing the relationship between Pringle and Prince, namely that between white Englishman and slave woman. As slave and woman Mary Prince is doubly marginalised, thus, *The History* serves not only to establish her humanity but also her standing as a woman in a male dominated society and business. Dependent on Pringle for his expertise in publishing and in the abolitionist movement and its jurisdiction, her *History* is literally in his hands. The narration begins in conventional autobiographic fashion by relating the place of Prince's birth. This is followed by an account of her childhood, then moving on to her life in slavery and the endured sufferings: the testimonial narration introduces the reader to a happy and healthy child, ending the tale with an image of a woman whose body has been consumed and broken by the institution of slavery. *The History* highlights slave women's resistance to slavery as shaped by their gendered circumstances. Prince engages in a passive resistance by refusing to exploit her body working for others. While the economy of slavery denies the female slave's access to agency over her own speech and body, nevertheless, women like Mary Prince resisted her economic exploitation in ways that reflect the peculiarity of her situation. In her narration, she addresses physical and mental abuse as much as the restraint to speak. Further, she discusses how slave women were valued according to their reproductive capabilities. The ways in which slave women's resistance was shaped by their gendered circumstances is discussed by Barbara Baumgartner. In "The Body as Evidence: Resistance, Collaboration, and Appropriation in 'The History of Mary Prince'". Baumgartner argues that especially Prince's *History* illustrates the testimonial subject's passive resistance to slavery by refusing to work for others: "In the part of the text that relates the most physically destructive and arduous periods

of her life, Prince characterizes herself as a passive, silent victim, recording the 'unmaking' of her world" (cf. 2001, 253). Also Gates introduced Prince's narration as a means to illuminate the English audience about the "sexual brutalization of the black woman slave – along with the enforced severance of a mother's natural relation to her children and the lover of her choice – defined more than any other aspect of slavery the daily price of her bondage (Gates 2012, xxv). Centralising Prince's body as the sight of resistance, Baumgartner claims, that Pringle sexualises Prince's body in his commentaries and supplements. Again it is Pringle's editorial influence that denies an act of liberation for Prince. Most problematic in this is the need of most supplements to debate and question Prince's chastity. As Baumgartner remarks: "At the same time that Pringle assigns a sexual dimension to Prince's body and text through the content of his supplement, he tacitly reinforces Prince's deployment of her body as site of resistance and recuperation through the addition of two addendums that discuss the state of her body and health" (264). She claims further, that due to this discussion of Prince's chastity, her body and voice, both introduced within the narration as tools of resistance, lose their strength and endanger her authority as author and narrator and push her freedom and the abolition of slavery to the margins (cf. 263).

Nevertheless, *The History* demonstrates particular ways in which the dominating agency of male voices and interventions can be decentralised and pushed (back) into the margins. Even when the moral demands and conventions of the time as well as the audience urged Prince to a form of (self-)censorship, she depicts her body's vulnerability at the mercy of her owners. Her narration thus omits the narration of sexual abuse by Master Wood and probable sexual engagement with men like Captain Abbot. Instead, she emphasises her shame and disgust when forced to wash Mr. D–, a man brutal and cruel towards women of all skin colour and social status:

> He had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked, and ordering me then to wash him in a tub of water. This was worse to me than all the licks. Sometimes when he called me to wash him I would not come, my eyes were so full of shame. (Prince [1831], 249)

While this scene depicts Prince as enslaved courtesan, she makes clear that she did not approve of the situation and refuses the task, choosing beatings over sexual assaults. However, the decision to exclude descriptions of sexual assault cannot simply be understood as an act of self-choice by Prince, but must be read as a societal notion of feminine respectability, which all three parties deemed necessary in presenting the story and representing the testimonial subject as authentic and credible. While a truthful and authentic narration allowed for the description of repeated violence, sexual assaults and abuses can only be hinted at if at all (cf. Whitlock 2000, 21). Thus, Prince insinuates the vulnerability of the female body in the hands of brutal and lustful men: "To strip me naked – to hang me up by my wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow-skin, was an ordinary punishment for even a slight offence" (Prince [1831], 239). This depiction of the female body exposed to violence and sexual exploitation was daring and could compromise the editor's but also Prince's credibility in testifying against her owners and slavery in general. Especially in this context Prince's depiction of her body exposes the "hegemonic rhetoric of political disembodiment" (Sánchez-Eppler 1993, 1) practised and supported by the institution of slavery. Prince starts the narrative with an image of idyllic family life, which "was the happiest time" of her life (Prince [1831], 231). This is disrupted by a comment on the reproductive role of a female slave in a white household: "My mother had several fine children after she came to Mrs. Williams, – three girls and two boys" (ibid.). What first reads like a warm and affectionate description of her siblings turns into a description of the brutal dehumanisation of the slave trade affecting families. Guiding her daughters to the market, the mother has to oversee the auction of her own children, listening to white men advertising Prince's qualities, turning her around, examining her bodily features, talking about her shape and size (cf. 235f.). Particularly remarkable is that *The History* starts by illustrating the reproductive duties of a slave woman, yet Prince herself does not mention children of her own. The absence of any articulation of desire to bear children is suggested as Prince's refusal to support the system of slavery whenever possible (cf. Baumgartner 2001, 260). Even if she was a mother, by not mentioning the children in her testimonial narration, Prince denies male appro-

priation and submission of her body and takes back control – at least within the narration.

This resistance brings 'body' and 'voice' together. What cannot happen outside the text, namely taking control over her own body, becomes the central part of the testimonial narration. The inscriptions on her body, inflicted by abuse and torture, serve as a bodily testimonial account, which validates the narration. In writing, she takes back her lost agency over her body. And vice versa, to authenticate her story and bring credibility to her voice Prince chronicles all beatings and physical forms of abuses in a factual and unemotional manner. Sentiment and emotions are reserved for describing partings with family members, but not to describe physical pain. Baumgartner traces this narrative strategy by reference to the shifting meaning of the word "sore". While the first part of the narration uses the word to describe "an intense emotional feeling or an extreme reaction", it signifies in the later part of *The History* merely the "physical condition of the body". Baumgartner concludes that this "change in meaning indicates the overall shift in narrative perspective that reflects a growing literalization and contraction of experience down to the body" (2001, 256). In the same manner, knowledge and education are linked to the body:

> The next morning my mistress set about instructing me in my tasks. She taught me to do all sorts of household work; to wash and bake, pick cotton and wool, and wash floors, and cook. And she taught me (how can I ever forget it!) more things than these; she caused me to know the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cowskin, when applied to my naked body by her own cruel hand. (Prince [1831], 239)

Unlike for Equiano/Vassa and later Douglass, where emancipation is achieved by gaining knowledge and literacy, Prince's education is primarily limited to domestic tasks, and to afflicted pain. Even though she learns to read (the Bible), this event does not take up any significant space in the narration. Prince resorts to establishing her body as book of proof, where the torture instruments of her owners inscribe the message into her flesh, authenticating her testimonial narration for

the English readership. To voice her testimony, Prince draws on the metaphor of the violated body. She represents her body as a broken commodity. The narration of the destruction of her body due to illness, of her physical disability serve to defy the ideology enabling the institution of slavery. Unable to continue the hard labour, her broken body serves to oppose the system. Escaping the unequal dynamics of the master/slave relationship by refusing to work and criticising the owner without risking serious consequences was unlikely, thus, even her indirect form of resistance is only effective within the testimonial narration (cf. Baumgartner 2001, 253 and 258). This portrayal of her weakened body allows Prince to speak up. Her indirect critique, refusing to work, becomes a direct critique when she takes the courage and declares

> that I would not be longer thus treated, but would go and trust to Providence. This was the fourth time they had threatened me to turn me out, and go where I might. I was determined now to take them at their word; though I thought it very hard, after I had lived with them for thirteen years, and worked for them like a horse, to be driven out in this way, like a beggar. My only fault was being sick, and therefore unable to please my mistress, who thought she never could get work enough out of her slaves; and I told them so: but they only abused me and drove me out. (Prince [1831], 258)

Having followed her owners to England, Prince knew well that she was under British law, not a slave anymore but a free-woman. However, she had no acquaintances nearby and, as she stresses, leaving her family after over ten years of service was hardly comprehensible for her. It seems rather unlikely that the printed monologue was really given by Prince herself. It is rather likely that it is a dramatic monologue, marking her narrative liberation. Prince, the phrasing now slightly altered, repeats the monologue:

> I am going out of this house, as I was ordered; but I have done no wrong at all to my owners, neither here nor in the West Indies. I always worked very hard to please them, both by night and day, but there was no giving

> satisfaction, for my mistress could never be satisfied with reasonable service. I told my mistress I was sick, and yet she has ordered me out of doors. This is the fourth time; and now I am going out. ([1831], 259f.)

In these two monologues testimonial subject and narrator are united by one voice, Prince addresses her owners as well as her readers and forms a subject position from which she can speak, oppose and finally escape "the brutality which had previously shaped and defined her; it enables her to refuse to capitulate to further demands of servitude" (Baumgartner 2001, 253). Prince uses her narrative voice to write back.

Shaping *The History* to tell her personal tale of survival and revolt, Prince uses her voice to speak in the name of the other oppressed slaves. She explains several times to the reader that she understands her experiences and her story not as unique, but as paradigmatic for the life of others: "In telling my own sorrows, I cannot pass by those of my fellow-slaves – for when I think of my own griefs, I remember theirs" (Prince [1831], 247). Prince's admits her 'privileged' position of telling her own sorrows due to her escape from slavery. Her resistance becomes an awareness for her *self*, speaking for herself *and* others (cf. Paquet 1991, 138). Prince employs her role as testimonial subject and narrator to speak not only in her name, but to testify for others. She illustrates slavery as oppressive structure that defines who is and who is not human. This becomes already apparent in the market scene, where Prince is auctioned and examined in the manner "that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he as to purchase" Prince [1831], 235). The narrator draws on the tropes and images employed by the abolitionist movement, illustrating the "beastialization of both the enslaved and those who participate in their trade" (Whitlock 2015, 47):

> They tie up slaves like hogs – moor them up like cattle, and the lick them, so as hogs, or cattle, or horses never were flogged; – and yet they come home and say, and make some good people believe that slaves don't want to get out of slavery. But they put a cloak about the truth. It is not so. All slaves want to be free – to be free is very sweet. (Prince [1831], 263)

Prince's singular fate serves as proxy for the universal horrors of slavery. Speaking up for the community of slaves, *The History* represents a universal claim, namely the acknowledgment and protection of humanity as a universal trait. However, one must keep in mind that the testimonial subject Mary Prince is a textual composition created by Pringle. His footnotes on the representation of Prince's speech as 'true and authentic' ones more eludes the fact, that the testimonial subject's voice is a narrative construction.

Within the context of representational writing, Prince's emancipation is possible but also limited. While her testimonial narration achieves to present the problems and inhumane conditions of the slave trade and slavery as an institution as well as it achieves to present the testimonial subject herself as human and autonomous, the relationship between the editor and the testimonial "I" must be taken into consideration. As a textual construct, Prince cannot truly speak for herself. The appendices show that journalists and readers attacked Prince, questioning her chastity and decency – not her authenticity as survivor. Her representative role as survivor is troubled by her womanhood. In Mary Prince's *History*, the excessive use of paratexts such as footnotes, prefaces, and appendices, is the actual place where power-relations and dependencies are being displayed. *The History* is not only an opportunity for her to engage in the empowering act of self-construction as a freewoman and to articulate the demand to abolish the institution of slavery in the name of all slaves, but another battlefield where her subject-position is challenged by a male editor and a male dominated society.

"Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave" – Frederick Douglass' emancipation as author

As active member of the American Anti-Slavery Society himself Douglass' offered his testimonial narration as promotional material to further the equalisation of man. However humanitarian and equalising the cause of the abolitionists was, differences between black and white people, even among the abolitionists remained. An immense difference in payment and salary was the standard and the mode of transportation was not equal. While white speakers rode to lectures, black speakers had to walk. The main difference, however, was the possibilities, or more

precisely, the impossibilities of language. White speakers were able to introduce themselves, black abolitionist speakers had to be introduced by white members. Douglass' "opponents were willing to work for an end to slavery but not a beginning to equality (Sekora 1994, 611).While the *Narrative* was used as a marketing device by the abolitionist movement, his later publication *My Bondage* was the author's personal emancipation from the "white ventriloquists" (612).

Douglass' *Narrative* is titled to succeed the style of the Equiano/ Vassa's *Interesting Narrative,* though only the title shows similarities: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written by Himself*. The narrative is in length more like an essay, eleven short chapters that carry no descriptive titles, no cover image of the author himself. Nevertheless, the title stresses the author's personal and political achievements in the same duality of writing and identity featured already in Equiano/Vassa' narration. The last supplement "Written by Himself" indicates simultaneously his existence and his accomplished literacy. Again, writing becomes an important "thematic element in the retelling of the life wherein literacy, identity, and a sense of freedom are all acquired simultaneously and without the first, according to Douglass, the latter two would never have been" (Olney 1984, 54). His 'identity' as freeman is a deliberately chosen identity, which helps to differentiate slave from author. The part of the title that reads "An American Slave" is not only a "terrible irony" (ibid.), which reflects upon the shattered national identity of slaves born in the United States. It serves as a comment that, in fact, locates the political agenda and marks the abolition of slavery an American issue. The first part of the title, the author's name reveals the title as deliberate interaction of different aspects of Douglass' author persona. His name 'Frederick Douglass' frames the *Narrative* from title page to the last words the narration. It enabled him to pursue his new public role as representative of black abolitionism: the birth of Frederick Douglass is simultaneously the death of his former life as slave. The printed name on the title of his *Narrative* is the textualisation (rather than personification) of "freedom from slavery, freedom from ignorance, freedom from non-being" (ibid.).

Douglass' incredible career from slave to freeman, to finally journalist and author began with the publication of the *Narrative* in 1845,

this testimonial narration, as well as its revision *My Bondage* were successful promoter's not only for the abolitionist movement, but for the author himself (cf. Quarles 1968). Shortly after the publication of his testimonial narration, he started his journalistic career with the founding of the *North Star* in December 1847. As editor of his own newspaper, he became an influential agent in control of the production of his own literary propaganda material.[32] His new social role results in the publication of his own testimonial narration: *My Bondage and My Freedom*. This newly acclaimed authorship allowed him to take part in the literary production, penetrating societal institutions and to renegotiate accepted types of knowledge: "To be an editor meant for him not only the ability to select his own words, but also to determine their final form and disposition" (Sekora 1994, 150). Overcoming the oppression not only exerted by the institution of slavery but also by the abolitionist movement using him as 'token-slave', Douglass creates his own platform of counter-discourse. Presenting himself on the market as political speaker but above all as accomplished author, he overcomes his marginal position as slave.

The differences between the two volumes are remarkable. For the 1855 volume, Douglass' chose a shorter title, abandoning the similarity to Equiano/Vassa's testimonial narration. As already famous author, Douglass did not need the link to the Anti-Slavery Society anymore. Instead, the title *My Bondage and My Freedom* clearly emphasises his emancipation and freedom as author. Furthermore, the second volume finally features the famous print of his portrait underneath it his signature, showing the author in his mid-thirties. The portrait was an important feature of most slave narratives published between 1845 and 1870. While "six out of ten slave narratives published in the United States" (Rohrbach 2002, 31) provided a lithograph of the author, Dou-

32 John Stauffer and Timothy Patrick MacCarthy describe the significance of black printing for the propagation of political discourse. Inscribing themselves in to an already well established 'republic of letters' by claiming a public voice and demanding the attention of a white audience (cf. 2006, 117). Newspapers like Douglass' *The North Star* and *Freedom's Journal* (founded by black abolitionists John Brown Russwurm and Samuel E. Cornish in 1827) made it "possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" as Benedict Anderson describes the relationship between nationalism and print culture in *Imagined Communities* (cf. 1991, 36).

glass' first volume did not provide such an image. Lithographs were used to authenticate the author as truly black, fighting possible accusations of fraud. But they not only established the 'blackness' and physical presence of the testimonial narrator's, they also, and most importantly for Douglass' agenda, identified and marked the former slave as writer: "Such portraits contextualize the writer in the tradition of writers whose portraits – from Byron's famous open-collared portrait on – pressed upon the volume the seal of authorship" (ibid.). Douglass leaves the slave behind and inscribes himself into the tradition of famous authors. Just like them, he is traveller, thinker, poet, and writer. By linking the portrait with his signature, he emphasises his capability of writing and with that, his authority as writer and narrator of the following narration. The appearance of the author's signature underneath his portrait next to the title page indicates the author's shifting position from emergent culture to the level of the dominant culture (cf. Rohrbach 2002, 33).[33]

The differences between the first and the second volume determine Douglass' new role within American society. Though Olney claims that the relationship of Garrison as sponsor to Douglass as narrator did not affect Douglass' *Narrative* (cf. 1984, 64), the author of *My Bondage* reflects sharply on the circumstances of publication and the role he had to play promoting book and cause. Douglass really settles a score with the Anti-Slavery Society and its influence on him as a private and public person. He remarks that he "was generally introduced as a '*chattel*' – a '*thing*'– a piece of southern '*property*'– the chairman assuring the audience that *it* could speak" (Douglass [1855], 265). Douglass shows awareness for his own market value for the campaign and writes further: "Fugitive slaves, at that time, were not so plentiful as now; and as a fugitive slave lecturer, I had the advantage of being a '*brand new fact*' – the first one out" (ibid.). Douglass' description of himself as a 'brand new fact' does not echo the style of advertisements for commodities unintentionally, as token-slave, he is used to narrate his experiences of oppression and bondage:

33 By using the terms 'emergent' and 'dominant' Rohrbach follows the model of culture set out by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (1977, 122–27). "With the appearance of the author's signature as part of the front piece, the slave narrator moves from the position of emergent culture to the level of the dominant culture" (2002, 33).

> "Let us have the facts," said the people. So also said Friend George Foster, who always wished to pin me down to my simple narrative. "Give us the facts," said Collins, "we will take care of the philosophy." Just here arose some embarrassment. It was impossible for me to repeat the same old story month after month, and to keep up my interest in it. It was new to the people, it is true, but it was an old story to me; and to go through with it night after night, was a task altogether too mechanical for my nature. "Tell your story, Frederick," would whisper my then revered friend, William Lloyd Garrison, as I stepped upon the platform. I could not always obey, for I was now reading and thinking. New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing* them. I could not always curb my moral indignation for the per-petrators of slaveholding villainy, long enough for a circumstantial statement of the facts which I felt almost everybody must know. Besides, I was growing, and needed room. "People won't believe you ever was a slave, Frederick, if you keep on this way," said Friend Foster. "Be yourself," said Collins, "and tell your story." It was said to me, "Better have a little of the plantation manner of speech than not; 'tis not best that you seem too learned." (361–62)

Douglass remarks that the use of his experiences as told in lectures and in the 1845 *Narrative* pins him down for the facts, for the truth, but ignores his role as a thinking subject. Douglass wonders about the possibilities of growing, changing into the person he chooses to be while still being dedicated to his political cause and the credibility of himself within this campaign. He is caught between his role as the authentic and reliable spokesperson for all slaves, in which he is meant to mirror the "plantation manner of speech". The abolitionist campaigner's demand of Douglass to speak like a true slave, otherwise he would lose his credibility. By this the abolitionists silence the person Douglass really is, creating, or even maintaining the unequal relationship between them and Douglass the (former) slave. In this, speech and silence are both used to limit, remove, or undermine the legitimacy of Douglass' own use of language. Douglass highlights the problematic discrepancy of the person he ought to represent and the person he wants to represent by italicising and contrasting two important words: "It did not entirely

satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing* them" (Douglass [1855], 361). Douglass realises that he can be more than an entertaining narrator; he is a narrator with a political voice. The representative of all slaves demands a wider, creative latitude, "for he is now reading and thinking" and writing. He was "growing, and needed room" (ibid.). These statements mark his understanding of himself as author. He is not merely the narrator of a testimony, but the writer, and published author of political views and opinions.

While the *Narrative* was still dependent on introductory letters by sponsors and white members of the Anti-Slavery Society, for the publication of *My Bondage* Douglass renounces Garrison's advocacy. The 1855 publication stands without introductions and letters of recommendation of white abolitionists. Instead, well-known black activist Dr. James McCune Smith introduces the narration and author. Smith's *Introduction* is not just an ode to the intellect of the author, but the clear formulation of the author-persona Douglass wants to impersonate:

> When a man raises himself from the lowest condition in society to the highest, mankind pay him the tribute of their admiration; when he accomplishes this elevation by native energy, guided by prudence and wisdom, their admiration is increased; but when his course, onward and upward, excellent in itself, furthermore proves a possible, what had hitherto been regarded as an impossible, reform, then he becomes a burning and a shining light, on which the aged may look with gladness, the young with hope and the down-trodden, as a representative of what they may themselves become. To such a man, dear reader, it is my privilege to introduce you. (Douglass [1855], 9)

Douglass second testimonial narration introduces Douglass as a beacon of hope for those who suffer; he is the figure that represents not the horrors of slavery, but the life after slavery. Smith refers to the ideal of "human equality" and establishes the author as one of the "living exemplars of the practicability of the most radical abolitionism" (10). Douglass testimonial narration illustrate his achievement in "civil, religious, political and social rank" but especially it illustrates his "genius, learning and eloquence" (ibid.) Smith's *Introduction* highlights Douglass'

struggle against the image of him as former slave, which was created and exploited by the Anti-Slave Society. Leaving behind the slave, now the author appropriates the medium book for his own political agenda. Even though Douglass still speaks up as a former slave, his new constructed identity as freeman and American is now central. Acknowledging this, the book is split in two: the first half reports on the author's life as a slave and the second half focuses on his life as freeman. While Douglass' rhetorical sophistication fuelled the pro-slavery movement, he could not abandon his personal achievements for the greater political goal of Garrison's campaign. Elucidating the humanitarian agenda and the call to action both, *My Bondage* and the *Narrative* demonstrate the author's understandings of the market and the conditions of production under which his testimonial narration emerged. The open display of Douglass' particular awareness for his situation as emerging author on a white dominated market is what makes the text more than autobiography. Douglass does not merely give justification for why he run away, reflecting upon the tremendous implications of the various *Fugitive Slave Laws* and criticising the cruelty and inhumanity exerted by the institution of slavery. He rather uses both of his narrations to illustrate how he assumed "typographical and editorial control over his story at the same time that he redirects it politically" (Sekora 1994, 620).

While Douglass negotiates his freedom as author and political activist in *My Bondage*, the *Narrative* serves as a platform to demonstrate his mastery of language as the chosen tool of emancipation. Douglass quotes his knowledge of the alphabet and his appropriation of script and language as the overcoming of the dominating white culture. Douglass starts to learn the written language of his oppressors by learning single letters written on the planks of a ship. Language presents itself to the young boy as dismantled and fragmented. Only later, the narrator will learn how to internalise language and to use it as tool for his own agenda. However, the description of his first encounter with the alphabet already foreshadows his final success: in *Chapter VII* Douglass explains his yearning for an education as his own pressing motivation to personally further his knowledge. When in the beginning it is his mistress who teaches him the alphabet, later it is Douglass himself who seeks out other opportunities and other teachers such as boys on the

street and sailors. Shortly after Douglass starts with the alphabet, his owner Mr Auld disregards his wives humanitarian efforts as a teacher as "unlawful, as well as unsafe" and forbids it with the words: "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell" (Douglass [1845], 338). This scene is intriguing because it not only refers to the oppression of slaves through the deprivation of knowledge; more so, it already demonstrates Douglass' mastery of the tools he once was forbidden to use. On a meta-level, this scene highlights Douglass's skill to create a narration that demonstrates the author's rhetorical abilities. Gates writes "to attempt to employ a Western language to posit a black self is inherently to use language ironically" (Gates, 1987 117). Douglass uses dramatic irony to describe his success in learning, the reader already knows that Mr Auld's warning came true, Douglass took the "ell"; he did not only learn to write, but also to think and to act and it is because of this that the readership is able to hold the book in their hands. A little later in the narration, Douglass describes his mistress' efforts to stop him from reading a newspaper and educating himself. He remembers that

> nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper. (…) She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other. From this time I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell" (Douglass [1845], 341)

These words echo like a warning; the narrator's urging desire to read and to write triumphed. Finally, he turns his life, his experiences into the most successful literary weapon of the abolitionist movement. Douglass' literary education does not stop there: he starts reading *The Columbian Orator*, which contains a philosophical dialogue between master and slave where the master lays out the argument for slavery and is refuted by the slave. Douglass describes the book as a "bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights" (343). The book

also contains a reprint of a speech arguing for the emancipation of Irish Catholics and for human rights generally. The reading of *The Columbian Orator* inspires Douglass to fully articulate his case against slavery, but it also furthers his disgust and hatred for the institution of slavery. As his master predicted, education will lead to the slave's misery, for Douglass now has the tools to understand his situation and comprehends the inescapability of a live in slavery. Douglass enters a period of despair, however, when he stumbles upon the word "abolitionist" he feels drawn to it "whenever that word was spoken, expecting to hear something of importance to myself and fellow slaves" (344). This episode marks his future actions as abolitionist and meta-reflexively comments on his empowerment as author. As writer, he is able to create a narration with dramatic elements. By foreshadowing events and pointing towards the importance of his own statements, he establishes himself as important abolitionist author. The same dialogue between his master and his mistress is narrated in *My Bondage*. Here, Douglass intensifies his own reaction, which is now more eloquent and outspoken:

> His iron sentences – cold and harsh – sunk deep into my heart, and stirred up not only my feelings into a sort of rebellion, but awakened within me a slumbering train of vital thought. It was a new and special revelation, dispelling painful mystery, against which my youthful understanding had struggled in vain, to wit: the *white* man's power to perpetuate the enslavement of the *black* man. "Very well," thought I; "knowledge unfits a child to be a slave:" I instinctively assented to the proposition; and from that moment I understood the direct pathway from slavery to freedom. (Douglass [1855], 109)

The dominant discourse creates the slave as the personification of 'nothing', an empty vessel only created to produce for others and all that he produces is take from him, the fruits of his labour, his kin, his intellectual products. Douglass realises that in this, he can never be the originator of anything – unless he gains knowledge. Moreover, with knowledge he gains freedom from the state of 'suspended humanity' (cf. Mbembe 2012, 98). Thus, Douglass emphasises his rebellion as a written revolt, as an intellectual revolt. Both, the *Narrative* and espe-

cially *My Bondage* show a distinct understanding for the oppressive power structures of nineteenth-century racial discourse. By keeping the slave uneducated, the *white* man establishes his power to perpetuate the enslavement of the black man. Douglass realises that slavery is a discursive construct, he was a slave as long his master "wanted [Douglass] to be a slave" (Douglass [1855], 109). Douglass breaks this circle of oppression by mastering the art of storytelling. As educated author, Douglass blends his former self, the object of the narration, poetically with his author-persona, the testimonial narrator. Continuously reminding the reader that both are ultimately one: "My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes." (Douglass [1845], 333). The author imagines himself in a situation that brings together the past and the present. While he sits down to write the *Narrative,* he feels his ripped feet of the testimonial subject, his younger self. He sees the wounds of his past that could swallow the pen he uses to write with now. The scene asserts a co-existence of freeman and slave, author and uneducated child. This diegetic amalgamation of narration time on the one hand and the moment of writing on the other hand is used to emphasise the author's personal accomplishments, as much as the efficacy of the represented experiences. What seemed like an unbalanced interaction of not only past and present, but of foot and pen, the writing tool usually associated with the hand and not the foot, is purposely placed to narrate the bond between past events and the author's present. The foot enables the hand to write. Three pages later into the narration, Douglass uses this clash once more; here the concurrence of past and present within the *Narrative* serves as strategy to establish credibility and veracity as author and narrator:

> I look upon my departure from Colonel Lloyd's plantation as one of the most interesting events of my life. It is possible, and even quite probable, that but for the mere circumstance of being removed from that plantation to Baltimore, I should have to-day, instead of being here seated by my own table, in the enjoyment of freedom and the happiness of a home, writing this Narrative, been confined in the in the galling chains of slavery. Going to live at Baltimore laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity. (336)

By running away from the plantation, the author is now able to sit at the table and to profit from his past, remembering, narrating, and selling the *Narrative*. Knowledge unfits the child to be a slave, but knowledge alone does not make Douglass an author. It is his past as a slave, which enables him to tell his story.

Douglass writes a testimonial narration about his personal empowerment and his status as emancipated and intellectually independent black author. His textual productions refer to him as accomplished author and vice versa, his narrations sell him as author-persona, uniting the images of Douglass as "self-liberator, public intellectual, abolitionist, and, of course, as author and editor" (Ryan 2016, 87). Writing is not only reflected as a way to account for the past, but as the profession and monetary recovery. In this, authorship and ownership interact, both reflect the image of the self-made man and emphasise self-taught knowledge and wealth as important stimulus for the idea(l) of the 'free man' (cf. Nissley, 2003). In a speech held in 1872, Douglass defines the self-made-man, a term that coins American thought up to today:

> They are the men who, in a world of schools, academies, colleges and other institutions of learning, are often compelled by unfriendly circumstances to acquire their education elsewhere and, amidst unfavorable conditions, to hew out for themselves a way to success, and thus to become the architects of their own good fortunes. They are in a peculiar sense, indebted to themselves for themselves. If they have traveled far, they have made the road on which they have travelled. If they have ascended high, they have built their own ladder. From the depths of poverty such as these have often come. From the heartless pavements of large and crowded cities; barefooted, homeless, and friendless, they have come. From hunger, rags and destitution, they have come; motherless and fatherless, they have come, and may come. Flung overboard in the midnight storm on the broad and tempest-tossed ocean of life; left without ropes, planks, oars or life-preservers, they have bravely buffetted the frowning billows and have risen in safety and life where others, supplied with the best appliances for safety and success, have fainted, despaired and gone down forever. (Douglass [1872])

The ideal of the self-made man means to own oneself and to be the sole determinant of one's labour and the products of this labour; simultaneously it defines self-possession and ownership of the products of the labour. This labour need not be physical. While the self-made man always implies the connection and dependence on the individual's achievements, as in "'Literary Men,' 'Successful Men,' 'Men of Genius,' and 'Men of the World,' (Douglass [1872]), it leads irresistibly to the understanding of man as a subject of thought and inquiry. For Douglass, manhood and thus also the idea of the self-made man are, in their individuality, dependent of mankind: "I believe in individuality, but individuals are, to the mass, like waves to the ocean" (ibid.). Douglass describes himself as a self-made man who, under peculiar difficulties, has attained knowledge, power, and position. The source for realising himself as self-made man and the example for manhood is work and education; the one desirable asset can only be gained by physical, mental, as well as moral labour, for which his literary work stands as an example to be followed by the mass. This logic establishes Douglass doubly as an example for mankind: slavery as physical labour and writing the *Narrative* as moral labour, both prove the Douglass' capability of being a self-made man and illustrate him, above all, as "example and a help to humanity". As self-made author, Douglass openly uses his position to appeal to the nation's commitment to humanitarian ideals like the civil rights[34] and racial equality by simultaneously positioning himself as authority and socially accepted self-made man.

34 Testimonial narrations appropriated for the abolitionist cause, mid-19th century, use the same rhetoric as the early works of Equiano/Vassa and Prince. Their antislavery arguments based on the assertion of legal subjectivity and the association of natural and legal rights is used by Douglass as well. In fact it is quite probable that both Douglass and Jacobs were familiar with the West Indian narratives. In 1831, Joseph Phillips sent William Lloyd Garrison a packet of documents from the Anti-Slavery Society in London. Phillips was one of the individuals instrumental in bringing Mary Princes case before the London Anti-Slavery Society (cf. Aljoe 2011, 354).

3 Reinventing Testimonial Narration in the 21st Century

The 21st Century reinvents the genre of testimonial narration: books like Ishmael Beah's *A long Way Gone*, Dave Eggers' *What is the What*, and Daoud Hari's *The Translator* take over the bestselling lists and are hitting the headlines. This following chapter examines how the presentation and marketing of testimonial narrations like these continue shape the general understanding of Africa as the home of human rights violation tales. Furthermore, the books by Beah, Hari and Eggers raise intriguing questions about 'Africa' and 'Africa-ness' as constructs that are produced and consumed in North America and Europe. In all three of these testimonial narrations, the plot is set in Africa. Contrary to the slave testimonial, these books do not present Africa as a starting point from where the protagonist is kidnapped, or as a home of which the customs have to be overcome in order to gain freedom and emancipation. Now, the African continent ascends to the major scene of the setting. However, even though Africa plays a more central role in these texts, it still is presented as the place that has to be abandoned for the act of writing to begin. Again, it is the trope 'writing', as it was for the slave narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, that becomes the sign for an escape from the violence that still is associated with the African continent (cf. Mbmebe 2015, 18). These narratives respond to the market demand for stories, which assume a relation between violence and ethnicity. These two factors have been inscribed into the history of the African continent by European dominance and control, from the era of the slave economy up to today. Evocative of the slave trade, the texts analysed in this chapter use 'violence' as a specific motive to market them as 'authentic', 'humane', 'personal' and above all, 'African'.

The slave economy and its socio-political and economic effects continue to influence and shape European thoughts about 'Africa' and its inhabitants. 'Africa' and the 'African protagonist' both became inventions of Western discourse. The desire to depict 'Africa' is replicated by a "broader editorial desire to expand literary horizons" (Krishnan 2014b, 13), which started with the initialisation of Chinua Achebe as

Africa's literary ambassador and the publication of the *African Writers' Series* by Heinemann. What was true then still rings true today: the international market demands books, which educate the readership about socio-political conditions, bringing into focus 'Africa's many wars. *What is the What*, *The Translator*, and *A Long Way Gone* negotiate their structural and textual heritage as the legacy of the slave testimonials in three defining ways. First, these three texts echo the content and style of the slave narratives by appropriating human rights rhetoric and imagery to highlight the testimonial subject as *superstes* – as witness and survivor. Human rights interventions are emphasised and supported by the first person narrator/protagonist, who similar to the slave narrator, uses the narration to demonstrate his or her ability to write and narrate. For the child soldier testimonial this is especially important because it promises the successful rehabilitation of the child. This success is proven by the depiction of the former child soldier as author and human rights activist. Testimonial narrations depicting war, or even genocide, promise the authentic representation as well as reappraisal of the circumstances by staging the testimonial subject as the ultimate survivor. 'Writing' is an obligation. It is the proof for survival and the tool to speak for the dead. While the act of writing or the 'act of narration' is always already a reference to the aesthetical imperatives of the texts, it also marks the narrations as expressions of human rights activism. Secondly, recognising the abolition of slavery as the first systematic effort to express human rights and the first successful international human rights campaign in the form of a narration, the texts that will be discussed in the following chapters continue this tradition. They present 'writing' as method to cope with the individual and collective experiences but also as means to become part of the "human community through the action of first-person narration" (Murphy 2016, 127), asserting the humanity of the black protagonist and exploring their rights as humans. The protagonists assume agency and control through writing. However, this means not only the overcoming of the dreadful experiences as trauma-work on a personal level. What these texts focus on is a collective goal: expression of the inherent humanity and acknowledgment of the testimonial subject as an emancipated human being. These texts strive to attain authenticity and legibility (Murphy

2016, 130). On the one hand, they fight for the recognition as survivors and on the other hand, they write Africa's presence into the narrative of global history. By drawing on the vocabulary of the humanitarian imaginary, these texts are shaped to cater to the ethical and aesthetical expectations of a broad international readership (cf. Whitlock 2015, 197). The protagonists do not simply portray the suppressed 'negro' who argues against incredible injustice; instead, they stress the testimonial subject's humanity, staging the protagonist and narrator as the subaltern who speaks up against human rights violations, regardless time and space. Highlighting the testimonial subject's accomplishments as published author, the narrations discuss 'writing' and 'witnessing' as means to overcome subalternity. In this, the narrations serve as a "rich and compelling case study for the way first-person testimony can have significant impact on global politics and international law" and how it supports "challenges to institutionalized and systematic inequalities" (Murphy 2016, 127). Furthermore, the texts refer to the tradition of the slave testimonial by staging ethnicity and suffering as dependent on each other. Due to the stereotypical representation of 'the African protagonists' as subaltern, both ethnicity and suffering equally give content and meaning to the empty signifier that is Africa. However, while self-reflexive comments illustrate and challenge the genre's dependency on market demands, images of violence and oppression are being questioned as literary tools for the 'representation of Africa' within human rights violation tales. The idea of 'writing back' is presented as a revolt which does not accept 'Africa' as a metaphor for a continent of 'darkness and savagery', as it was once depicted in *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad.

These three testimonial narrations discuss what Makau Mutua establishes as the 'savage-victim-saviour-metaphor' (cf. Mutua 2001, 202ff.). Mutua understands the 'SVS-construction' as a compound metaphor, constructed by human rights movements, in which each dimension is a metaphor in itself. Its general subtext depicts an epochal context that pits 'savages' against 'victims and saviours'. Africa as the 'barbaric state' is the operational instrument of savagery; it is depicted as illiberal and antidemocratic. To be saved, it must accept the subordinate role of human rights discourse. The 'savage' threatens the human being whose

"dignity and worth" (ibid.) have been violated and who is now left a powerless, helpless, and above all innocent victim. The victim is saved by the "good angel" (ibid) who establishes and protects the human rights corpus. Western states, the United Nations, NGOs, academics amongst others build the collective of authors creating and nurturing this black-and-white discourse in which the image of the 'savage' refers to barbarism and even more blatant, to the negation of humanity. The compound metaphor of 'savages against victims and saviours' is also a product of the literary market: Africa is an especially desirable subject for literature because it is the great unknown, "which can be, will be, and, to a large degree, already has been made transparent in a global imaginary" (Krishnan 2014a, 10). The global imaginary of 'Africa' as a savage place "still in need of the firm guidance of a wiser and more just West" (ibid.) obscures other possible understandings and readings of this vast continent: 'Africa' and its inhabitants thus are made passive trough and within literature. The image of 'the negro' and 'Africa' itself are nameless, without meaningful signifier and genre. Both only serve as empty images, not reflecting the actual referent they both signify. Instead, they represent whatever 'the world of words seems fit' (cf. Mbembe 2014, 44f.). Africa as a unified entity itself is a colonial invention; it merely "embodies the constant struggle of representation" (Krishnan 2014b, 115). The empty image of Africa is simultaneously transparent and opaque; it is as much what the readership wants it to be and what it cannot grasp: "Africa stands as a paradox that speaks as much about us, its readers, as it does about the place and its people" (ibid.). It continues to exist as "a place of exotic fascination and unspeakable suffering (…) across a variety of forms and media" (2014a, 8).

This is true and false for testimonial narrations. The genre especially benefits from this anthropological exotisation and political interests, both of which shape the imaginary African continent, but simultaneously criticises these traits. The involved authoritative agencies such as the U.N., NGOs, but also commercial corporations, publishing houses and editors can be well hidden by the texts, making it difficult to recognise the different political claims made by the involved survivors on the one hand and the team of creative writers, editors, and organisations on the other hand. However, the texts use meta-commentaries to discuss

these opaque power structures. The problematic influence of human rights discourse exerted by the U.N. is particularly discussed within *The Translator* and *A Long Way Gone*. Both testimonial narrations look at the influential alliance between literary production and the human rights agenda and highlight the narrations as torn by hidden political forces and aesthetical commitment. The following close readings of the *The Translator*, *A Long Way Gone* and *What is the What* discuss the increasing self-awareness of the genre's oscillation between representations of political turmoil and collective suffering as well as the aesthetic means and claims to authenticity. The texts are actively engaged in the deconstruction of images of Africa as a conflicted continent in need of the Western saviour, as promoted by human rights discourse.

Marketing 'Africa' in the Name of the Human Rights Narration

As already argued, testimonial narrations are defined by three aspects: first, they are the product of an unbalanced division of labour. They can either be written with the help of an amanuensis, or are produced and influenced by an editorial team. The second prominent factor defining testimonial narration is the emphasis of the protagonist's journey from victim/savage to human being, echoing the liberating journey from slave to freeman. Third, the testimonial narrator is highlighted as survivor who becomes the politically involved spokesperson for a collective that he or she represents. This is one of the most defining traits of testimonial narration. Between the year 2000 and 2010 a great number of books about 'Africa' and with 'African protagonists', is written in English and published in North America or Europe[35] for an audience outside the African continent (cf. Priebe 2005, 46). Motivated by the human rights discourse of the, publications like *A Long Way Gone* and *The Translator* portray conflict on the African continent for the Western world. Both testimonial narrations adjust to the discourse aesthetically and contextually: *The Translator – A Memoir* is a testimonial narration written by Sudanese Daoud Hari and published by Penguin Random

35 Of course, the other prominent market for the so called 'African literature' is France. Labelled 'Francophone African literature' it referencess texts from the sub-Saharan region, written in French by authors living in Africa or abroad (cf. Priebe 2005 and Kapanga 2005).

House in 2008, the same year Darfur's president Omar al-Bashir had been charged with genocide by the International Criminal Court. In the tradition of testimonial narration, Hari's main motivation is to tell not simply his story, but that of the people who suffered and of those who lost their lives. In an interview for the *Independent* Hari states "[m]y goal was to make Darfur a priority everywhere. It's disappeared from the world's radar and I want to correct that" (quoted in Soares 2008). The testimonial narration describes Hari's work as a translator for NGOs and journalists in the Darfur region of Sudan as well as it gives background information about the political situation. As first-person narrator, he describes the dramatic scale of the Dafur genocide. Hari's first assignment as translator is to accompany the US investigators who were researching and investigating the suspicion of genocide. Later, Hari joins a group of foreign journalists from *Channel 4* and *The New York Times*, working as a translator for them – and, metaphorically, translating the events for the reader.

The blurb describes the narration as "a suspenseful, harrowing, and deeply moving memoir of how one person has made a difference in the world, a on the ground – account of one of the biggest stories of our time: the brutal genocide under way in Darfur" (Hari, back matter). This description illustrates the core idea of human rights discourse as specification for testimonial narration. The victim makes a difference in the world by educating the reader about genocide, humanity, and the human rights agenda. The blurb of Ishamel Beah's *A Long Way Gone,* published by Sarah Crichton in 2006, gives the same dramatic description. Here, the blurb introduces the testimonial narration as a humanitarian and hopeful answer to violence and war trauma.

> At the age of twelve, Ishmael Beah fled attacking rebels in Sierra Leone and wandered a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. By thirteen, he'd been picked up by the government army, and Beah, at heart a gentle boy, found that he was capable of truly terrible acts. At sixteen, he was removed from fighting by UNICEF, and through the help of the staff at his rehabilitation center, he learned how to forgive himself, to regain his humanity, and finally, to heal. (Beah, back matter)

Both blurbs present Africa as more than simply a geographical place on a map (Krishnan 2014b, 1), but as a place in which great evil threatens the core of 'human nature' (as defined by a Western human rights discourse). Books like *A Long Way Gone* and *The Translator* are written with the humanitarian agenda to restore peace and end war. To accomplish this, both narrations are written and constructed not only by their authors, Daoud Hari and Ishmael Beah, but are the product of a group of influential literary gatekeepers, like two co-authors in the case of *The Translator*, and an influential editor in the case of *A Long Way Gone*. As their literary predecessors, Beah and Hari both reflect openly and expressively the publishing agenda that ultimately gives birth to the text as well as their author-personas; they reflect upon the shared authority within the textual production. Their meta-reflexions negotiate and criticise the human rights agenda within the main narration; context rebels against form.

Both books promote the cause of the United Nations and the human rights movement. As the blurbs express. Daoud and Hari's testimonial narrations appear as the depiction of the oppositional duality of 'savages' on the one hand, against 'victims and saviours' on the other hand. While this duality is reproduced by the rhetoric of the human rights campaign to motivate sales, the main texts of these two testimonial narrations aims to deconstruct this simple opposition. This dualism arises from the Western logic and philosophy; it constantly constructs and reproduces historical imperatives of the superior and the inferior, or in other words, of the 'barbarian and the civilised' (cf. 2001, 201). Mutua refers to David Slater's article "Contesting Occidental Visions of the Global: The Geopolitics of Theory and North-South Relations" (1994) and submits that, within the logic of this opposing dualism, "history is a linear, unidirectional progression within the superior and scientific Western civilization leading and paving the way for others to follow" (ibid.), it is a "black and white construction that pits good against evil" (202). Criticising the Western comprehension and implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Mutua makes an argument for three dimensions of the 'savage-victim-saviour' metaphor. The first dimension evokes images of barbarism ("Hari's village was burned to the ground, his family decimated and dispersed" Hari 2008, back matter)

and is presented as a negation of humanity. He explains further that it is the state, which becomes savage "when they choke off and oust civil society" (Mutua 2001, 202). The idea of the 'evil state' is already placed in the blurbs: "By thirteen, he'd been picked up by the government army, and Beah, at heart a gentle boy, found that he was capable of terrible acts" (Beah 2007, back matter); "In 2003, Daoud Hari (…) was among the hundreds of thousands of villagers attacked and driven from their homes by Sudanese-government-backed militia groups" (Hari 2008, back matter). The relationship between testimonial subject and its community is introduced by substantiating the belief that the 'evil state' must be controlled and cleansed by internalising human rights (cf. Mutua 2001, 202).[36] The second dimension is the victim of such governmental actions; victimhood is defined by a conglomerate of attributes such as powerlessness, helplessness, and innocence (cf. 203) and probably is best epitomised by the image of the innocent child or the survivor of genocide. The third and last dimension Mutua introduces, is the concept of the saviour, as which the West constructs itself. The human rights agenda is deeply inscribed into both narrations, it creates and shapes a very specific image of Africa which seems to consists of nothing but the everlasting structure of "savage and savior, victim and perpetrator, and [the continent] as the irredeemable space of postcolonial failure" (Krishnan 2014b, 2).

On the textual level, *A Long Way Gone* and *The Translator* renegotiate Mutua's metaphor, especially the images of saviour and victim: *The Translator* uses ironic remarks and a detached rhetoric to indicate a more complicated relationship between these two opposing terms. *A Long Way Gone* sets out to question the prejudiced belief that 'Africa' always equals a lost childhood and war. Yet still, the image of the African continent as a zone of socio-political trouble tremendously shapes the form of these two testimonial narrations, visual in the paratexts

36 Mutua stresses the state as a structure or a vessel; the state only becomes barbaric when 'bad' culture overcomes or disallows the development of its opposite, 'good culture' (cf. 2001, 202). His analysis recalls Spivak's interpretation of the relationship between coloniser and colonised: The coloniser as the white man is the protector and saves 'brown women from brown men' (cf. Spivak 2010). Here, it is the citizen who has to be saved from the savage state that is ignoring its human rights and needs.

like the already discussed blurb, the cover-designs and other paratextual material, such as maps, forewords, acknowledgments. All of these paratexts stress the book's political agenda, which threatens to overshadow the aesthetical function of the narrations. In his famous article How to Write about Africa (2006), Binyavanga Wainaina criticises the undertaking of creating 'African literature', respectively representing 'Africa' in literature:

> Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness or 'Safari' in your title. Subtitles may include the words 'Zanzibar', 'Massai', 'Zulu', 'Zambezi', 'Congo', 'Nile', 'Big', 'Sky', 'Shadow', 'Drum', 'Sun' or 'Bygone'. Also useful are words such as 'Guerillas', 'Timeless', 'Primordial', and 'Tribal'. Note that 'People' means Africans who are not black, while 'The People' means black Africans. Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Massai or Zulu or Dogon dress. (Wainaina 2006)

When looking at the cover design and the advertisement of *The Translator* and *A Long Way Gone,* it becomes obvious that Wainaina's ironic observations are accurate. The elements named are used to represent Africa and to market emergent African authors. Even though *The Translator* presents no image of an African on its cover, the 2009 Random House trade paperback edition shows earthy coloured patterns and motifs, which could be perceived as 'tribal'. The first hardback edition features the imagery of a big blue sky and a figure clad in white traditional robes that walks away from the viewer into the seemingly endless Serengeti. *A Long Way Gone*, Ishmael Beah's child soldier narrative, shows a boy dressed in rags, carrying a Kalashnikov on his shoulders. In an interview, Beah's editor Sarah Crichton expresses her choice for the cover as a means to attract a broader audience. She explains her "role was to get his story to a shorter length, to give it a colorful, eye catching jacket so that that (sic.) audiences could find him. Word of mouth remains the best way to sell books" (Patrick 2014). The colourful and eye catching jackets of both publications promote the image of Africa as an exotic place, they invite the reader to explore the continent as

the place of the unknown, but also simultaneously already-known by reproducing familiar images of what is perceived as 'African' or 'Africa'. These representations portray the continent as incapable of escaping a constant anthropological exotic on the one hand and as deeply influenced by the socio-political and humanitarian idea of Africa as a place of suffering on the other hand. The marketing of *A Long Way Gone* and The Translator reveals the dialectic relationship between literature and human rights activism: on the 16th of February 2006, UNICEF hosted the book launch for Beah's child soldier testimonial in New York. The collaboration with UNICEF arises from Beah's text itself, which chronicles not only the violent past of his life as a child soldier but is advertised mostly for its description of the help and support of the UNICEF rehabilitation programme which, as stated by the text itself, helped Beah to find his way back to reclaiming his humanity. In the event's opening speech Beah exclaims: "We are capable of regaining humanity when given the help and support we need" (Okafor 2007). Beah took on another cooperation. Initiated and strongly supported by the editor Sarah Crichton and publisher Jonathan Galassi, the book was marketed and sold by the Seattle coffee chain *Starbucks*. Galassi states in an article in the *Seattle Times* that this unusual collaboration "provide[s] the book with a lot more exposure than it would normally get" (Allison, 2007). Furthermore, he was very excited about the courageous choice of such a "fresh new voice" (ibid.). This propelled the sale of 62,000 copies in the first three weeks and in the first year a total 116,000 copies at the chain. Since 2007 480,000 sold copies including those sold via the coffee chain as well as other outlets such as booksellers and online retailers are recorded by Nielsen BookScan. The marketing power of the chain is hailed for its success in promoting the book and the 'fresh voice' of the emerging author Ishmael Beah (cf. Yagoda 2009, 4), pushing the book to the top of the bestseller list while at the same time promoting Starbucks as a globally conscious, humanitarian dedicated company. This is enhanced by the coffee company's promise to donate a portion of the proceeds back to the UNICEF rehabilitation program for former child soldiers.[37]

37 However, the promotion of Beah's testimonial narration was not the most courageous and adventurous choice for the global coffee chain. Ben Yagoda writes in his work on the

While *A Long Way Gone* praises the humanitarian work of UNICEF and other NGO's that are involved in the rehabilitation of child soldiers, it is the work of other agents that presses ahead with the production of the texts and the making of the author. The editorial interest in presenting Beah as a unique and fresh voice, as a 'courageous choice' is a profitable calculation, financially and socially. This statement simultaneously presents the author as raw and uncouth, as authentic, and it presents the editorial team as humanitarian and generous risk takers. Beah's 'voice' is by default the one outstanding aspect of the text form itself, and it is used as the unique selling point of the book. On the textual level 'voice' refers to the crucial and link between human rights work and storytelling, as much as it refers to the link between the idea of witnessing as truth telling and the (im)possibilities of literary representation (cf. McClennen and Schultheis Moore 2016, 12). Beah's narration reflects on the form of testimonial narration as a means to verbalise and market human rights advocacy through the unquestioned agency of the witness. The text discusses how human rights activism can appropriate the singular story of a testimonial subject to promote a general case and agenda. In *A Long Way Gone* the paratextual introduction of the testimonial subject as survivor and witness creates the imagination of 'authenticity'. This is brought into question by metafictional comments in which the testimonial subject highlights the text as a literary product complicit in the creation and marketing of stereotypical images and representations.

The Translator is written and narrated by Daoud Hari whose geopolitical yet personal description of the war in Darfur is introduced as testimony of those who cannot speak for themselves. Hari is the representative 'voice' for the victims; as *superstes* he labels the Darfur crisis explicitly as 'genocide' and as *testis* he urges the United Nations to act

history of memoirs (this includes for Yagoda both, autobiography and testimony, 2ff), according to Nielsen BookScan total sales in the different categories of the genre of memoir "increased more than 400 percent between 2004 and 2008" (Yagoda 2009, 3), which he understands as a partial result of book clubs initiated by media mogul's like Oprah Winfrey as much as consumer temples such as Starbucks. Institutions like these create and exploit the market for testimonial narrations, while at the same time promoting their own political involvement and humanitarian agenda by supporting a young African writer.

and intervene.[38] The book serves as a political stepping-stone for Hari. As both, *superstes* and *testis*, he speaks up. In the summer of 2008, Hari testifies in the hearing *From Nuremberg to Darfur: Accountability for Crimes Against Humanity Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law.* Hari's testimony and his testimonial narration both use the interplay of personal story and geopolitical explanations to stress the severe implications of the war. The blurb exclaims the Darfur crisis as "one of the biggest stories of our time: the brutal genocide under way in Darfur" (Hari 2008, back matter), already prestaging the implications of storytelling, narrating, and the impossibility of testifying genocide.[39] By presenting the Darfur crisis as genocide, the testimonial narration sets Darfur into a context of globalisation (cf. Mamdani 2009, 20f), and calls America and the 'world' into responsibility. "If the world allows people of Darfur to be removed forever from their land and their way of life, then genocide will happen elsewhere because it will be seen as something that works" (Hari 2008, viii). Calling upon the "human power and astounding moral clarity" of the book, the paratextual material campaigns strongly for an ethical intervention. *The Translator* features a print of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, calling upon the United Nations to save Darfur and

> other people around the world who need protection in living balanced lives on the earth. In exchange for this protection, the full human rights of the men and women of these areas, the same rights so beautifully described by Eleanor Roosevelt and others in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, must be added to the ancient customs. The Universal Declaration has long been accepted as international law (Hari 2008, 191)

38 The interconnection between the usage of the term and the obligation to intervention were loosened between 1994 and 2004 (cf. Stockhammer 2016, 249).
39 The issue of representability of genocide within literature is discussed by Robert Stockhammer in '*Literatur*', *nach einem Genozid. Äußerungsakte, Äußerungsdelikte* (2010). He looks at texts like testimonial narrations and reports written by survivors of the genocide in Rwanda and reflects about the limits of literary representation and describtability of the 'unspeakable'.

Referencing the *Declaration of Human Rights* in combination with the frequently used term of 'genocide' makes Hari's narration a call to action: "[o]nce Darfur is named as the site of genocide, people recognize something they have seen elsewhere and conclude that what they know is enough to call for action" (Mamdani 2009, 3).

The publication and marketing of Hari's testimonial narration was immensely supported by the influence of famous American journalists, celebrities and religious representatives, a practice that recalls Equiano/ Vassa's hunt for subscribers. Like Olaudah Equiano, Daoud Hari has influential friends supporting his case and the promotion of his book. The journalists were working for BBC and *National Geographic* to report on the war. Ultimately, it was the abduction of one of them, which increased international attention to the war in Darfur and to Daoud Hari as survivor and potential narrator. The abduction and imprisonment of Daoud Hari, driver Ali, and journalist Paul Salopek by the Sudanese government in a clandestine garrison in El Fasher takes up almost 50 pages of the book. With the help of other journalists, Salopek's wife organised an international campaign for their release while National Geographic had three lawyers on the case. This drew the attention of the Pope and celebrity philanthropist Bono: "letters from big stars such as Bono and from famous leaders such as Jimmy Carter and Jesse Jackson were piling up on [President Bashir's] desk – copies of letters sent to President Bashir. The Vatican had even written, and the government of France" (Hari 2008, 171). The Pope's and Bono's involvement[40] highlights the agenda to inscribe the testimonial narration into the greater narrative of human rights activism – as it is supported and promoted by celebrities. Their names authenticate the narration: simultaneously vouching for the story's international relevance as well as vouching for the authenticity of the testimonial subject as truthful and credible narrator and survivor.

With the naming of these celebrities, *The Translator* evokes the 'SVS-metaphor', depicting Africa as the barbaric space in which the testimo-

40 Bono's philanthropic work has been recognised by popular media outlets like the *Vanity Fair* magazine. In 2007 Bono was a special guest editor of the issue titled "The Africa Issue: Politics & Power", cf. Vantity Fair 2007.

nial subject and his people are the victim of the ultimate crime against humanist, – genocide. The 'good angels of the West', Bono and the Pope, are the saviours who actively advertise human rights discourse. These 'angels' and 'heroes' of the narrative are not NGO workers, or journalists, but the celebrities who not only fought for the immediate release of Daoud Hari and Paul Salopek, but supported the Save Dafur organisation. In the chapter "Organizing for Darfur", Mamdani lists with great precision the famous names that were recruited for *Save Darfur*, like George Clooney, Matt Damon, Brad Pitt, but also Umberto Eco, Harold Pinter, Jürgen Habermas (cf. Mamdani 2009, 53 and 55). He writes "Save Darfur has been incredibly successful in attracting support among entertainers, the spin doctors of modern culture, and literary giants in the world of culture, almost across the political spectrum". Further he explains that their motivation was more to "bathe in the moral glow of global humanitarian cause" than to educate about the different political influences that led to the crisis (Mamdani 2009, 52). The danger that springs from their bold language and proposed actions, is that it draws a simple picture of the situation, ignoring the history and politics of Darfur to postulate that the "violence in Darfur represents the destruction of an entire civilization, presumably that of Africa" (55). Yet, *The Translator* remains very critical of the humanitarian discourse that promises to bring law and order to the uncivilised world. The book discusses ironically the discourse as colonial project, inscribed into Western culture and thought. The role of the international aid worker, journalists, government employees, and celebrities, is observed and presented with irony and detachment. In this juxtaposition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the one side and the subtle insertions of irony, when confronted with the American involvement in Darfur on the other side, *The Translator* renegotiates the image of Africa as the suffering continent and the implications of the SVS-metaphor in the light of globalisation.

"So it is said in Africa" – Discussing 'Africa' in the Light of Global Humanitarian Work

As authors, Hari and Beah promote their cases to a world-audience appropriating the structure of a personal story to give global suffering a

'human face'. However, the blurbs' description of the brutally destroyed soil as "the heart of darkness" (Hari 2008, back matter) and of a mesmerizing account of regaining humanity (cf. Beah 2007, back matter), they reproduce eurocentristic racial paradigms, labelling Africa as a wild place bare any humanity. The blurbs deliberately reference Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, projecting "the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore civilization" (Achebe 1988, 251). However, where the paratextual material uses undifferentiated rhetoric to promote stereotypical images of Africa, the main narration paints a more nuanced and critical picture. *A Long Way Gone* and *The Translator* challenge the representation of stereotypical motives as referred to by Wainaina, and in doing so, the two texts set out to question not only the reproduction of stereotypes of 'Africa' but also the production of texts that are reproducing them. The reproduction of such stereotypes, the misrepresentation of 'Africa' is the failure of international media. The media focus on covering drama in numbers, instead of giving detailed information about the circumstances that led to war: "the standard remedy for international conflicts in Africa is not to focus on issues but to get adversaries to 'reconcile'', regardless of the issues involved" (Mamdani 2009, 19). Furthermore, Mamdani describes, that especially the Darfur conflict has changed the global perspective on African wars. When crises like Angola's fourth war (1998) and the "silent death[s]" in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1996 to the present) are reported on merely in numbers, rather than socio-political and historical arguments (2009, 20f.), the Darfur crisis generated a "global publicity boom" (ibid.), appealing to common humanity. The establishment of the Save Darfur coalition has created an international brand awareness for the Darfur anti-genocide movement (23); backed up by a rapidly growing activist list, armed with email subscriptions, Save Darfur "claims to be an advocacy group, very much in the manner of the nineteenth-century Anti-Slavery League" (ibid.). Its main objective is to target American government policy through public pressure, affirming the violence in the Darfur region as genocide. Mamdani argues that the activists of the Save Darfur coalition were motivated by the case because, as Africa itself, Darfur serves a transparent canvas, a place of unknown and unreflected history, where the American public

can easily project a naive moral crusade. He contrasts the situation to the response to the war in Iraq, which has been widely acknowledged for its political complexity. Mamdani thus criticises Save Darfur for moving its focus in the conflict away from what he understands as the actual political and environmental causes, therefore falsely representing the war as a racial struggle only (cf. 2009, 19ff.). The Save Darfur campaign highlights the problem of NGOs acting on moral outrage instead of reflecting and questioning the complex historical and political conditions that shape the conflict. "The 'actual' and the 'empirical', or the 'image' and the 'spectacle', can be false, in the same way that fetishizing 'subjective violence' can be" (Kapoor 2012, 99). The reduction to the relationship between violence and ethnicity creates a simple, stereotypical image of 'Africa'. *The Translator* meets this critical view on the campaign. The book questions the positive impact of North American and European influence and involvement. Title and chapter headings serve as comments on the production of texts like itself and question the packaging and paratextual material as genre convention and successful representation of "an untrammelled cultural authenticity" (Huggan 2000, 43). In doing this, content challenges form and vice versa.

The production of knowledge and literature regarding what is understood as 'Africa' and its political and historical situation has an unfortunate effect, as John Hall reflects in *Cultures of Inquiry* (1999): it merely reinforces ideological divisions, limiting the manifold dimensions of the conflicts down to ethnicity, while other factors remain overseen. Scrutinising this limiting view of Africa and conflict, Hari explains how many different political and religious interests intersect and become nearly inseparable in the fight about Darfur –

> There are other groups in Chad, and they travel across the borders as they please. Where they get their guns and money is often a mystery, but Darfur has been filled with automatic weapons from the time when Libya attacked Chad and used Darfur as a staging area. Also, it must be understood that Sudan is aligned with radical Islamic groups and is, as a separate matter, letting China get most of its oil. Some Western interests and some surrounding countries are thought to be involved in supporting the rebel groups. (Hari 2008, 6)

The Translator stages the conflict as complicated and as especially global. In this, Darfur simultaneously serves as a specific case on the one hand, and as the *pars pro toto* for Africa on the other hand. Hari upsets the common assumption, promoted by international media, that conflict on the African continent is triggered solely by what Hall calls "a single overarching logic", namely ethnicity. The constant oscillation between the specific and the general illustrates that the identity that is at stake, is more than 'African'. It is unique and personal and is already introduced on the first page of the introduction. Hari starts his narration by referencing an 'African idiom':

> "If God must break your leg He will at least teach you to limp" – so it is said in Africa. This book is my poor limping, a modest account that cannot tell every story that deserves telling. I have seen and heard many things in Darfur that have broken my heart. I bring the stories to you because I know most people want others to have good lives, and, when they understand the situation, they will do what they can to steer the world back towards kindness. This is when human beings, I believe, are most admirable.
>
> If you know where Egypt is on the map, you can go down from there and find Sudan. The western side of Sudan is called Darfur, which is about the size of France or Texas. Darfur is mostly flat; it has a few mountains but many endless plains of little trees, scratchy bushes, and sandy streambeds. (2008, vii)

Initially, the idiom locates story and protagonist as particularly 'African'. However, Daoud Hari elaborates the account's setting: it is not an 'African' story. Because he cannot tell 'every story that deserves telling', the following story is his testimonial narration for and about the survivors of the Darfur crisis. *The Translator* does not want to represent Africa as Europe's other, it wants to challenge and problematise this assumption. However, where the main narration is more critical and deconstructive towards stereotypical images of Africa and Europe, of barbarism and civilisation, the introduction still employs naïve images to draw an expected picture. The human rights agenda, one the one side necessary to promote the narration to the readership, on the other side necessary

to raise further awareness, contrasts 'African' conflict with European 'goodwill'. The events in Darfur have broken the narrator's heart, but he finds confidence and hope in the assumption that the reader wants to be informed to help and finally 'steer the world back to kindness'. Further, he brings Darfur as the western part of Sudan into context for the reader. For a European audience Hari compares it, to the size of France, and for a North American audience, to the size of Texas. Finally, Darfur as a country of vast plains, bushes, and sand, establishing Darfur as *pars pro toto* for a stereotypical Africa. Hari gives a detailed description of Darfur and its location on the map. As the 'native informant' who builds a bridge between the 'unknown' Darfur and the readership, he introduces his people, the Zaghawa tribe, and the meaning of the name Darfur: "*Dar* means land. The *Fur* are tribespeople farther south who are mostly farmers" (Hari 2008, viii). By this, he subverts the grand narrative of Africa as the one place where "national borders, cultural specificity, and socio-political nuance are covered over by the wild and vast space of that heart of darkness" (Krishnan 2014b, 17), but also introduces Hari as the testimonial subject who functions as the cultural translator. He provides anthropological and cultural translation for the journalists but also for the reader

By pitting images of Africa against detailed description of Darfur and its history, the introduction echoes the anthropological motivation hidden in testimonial narrations. In the main narration, Hari assumes a more reflective tone. He illustrates the notion of 'Africa as the unknown' which is simultaneously a place already known. A place created and shapes by Western discourse and imagery, as promoted by human rights rhetoric. When he describes the refugee camps, the narrator reminds the reader that the Darfur tragedy is not new, not unique. It is, in fact, a repetition of what had already once happened in Rwanda[41] and Sierra Leone.

41 For an in depth analysis of the influence of globalisation on the history and perception of genocide in Africa, see Robert Stockhammer's *Afrikanische Philologie*, especially chapter 10 "Genozid und Globalisierung, in Afrika und 'der' Welt" (206, 241-254) and Mahamood Mamdani's *Saviors and Survivors* (2010). Both explain the differences between the political situation in Rwanda and Darfur in depth. While Mamdani focuses strongly on media coverage and the American reception, Stockhammer on the one hand analyses the history of genocide, and on the other hand discusses the possibilities of how to write about genocide by looking at literary representations of genocide.

> This camp had tripled in new souls during the few weeks I had been away. The thinnest shelters flapped everywhere in the wind now. Some were torn canvas remnants from Rwanda and Sierra Leone and other previous tragedies, rewoven now in to a miserable twig and rag nest for thirty thousand birds of passage." (Hari 2008, 72)

Humanitarian aid organisations pool all African tragedies together; recycle old material for new tragic events: what happens in Darfur, happened and happens all over the African continent. The 'twigs and rags' of former genocides are recycled to serve as representatives for the misery and violence identified with the African continent. The genocide in Darfur is not a new story, it is a cruel recollection of what happened in Rwanda in 1994 and Sierra Leone from 1991 till 2002, or even the slave trade of the 18th and 19th century. Hari resists the simple representation of a pre-existing landscape; his testimonial narration does not represent a collective 'African identity'. Hari has many names, and tells his journalist friend "that I was Daoud when in the Darfur regions of Sudan, but I was Suleyman in Chad". The journalist answers, "[e]veryone has lots of names around here." (11). A determination of one name, or even one specific ethnicity, becomes difficult. Even more so, Hari appeals to the ideology of cosmopolitanism, connected to people and thoughts all over the world: "I was indeed observing from this altitude. I counted among my friends the people of many tribes and many races, and this makes a difference in our hearts. I counted also among my acquaintances Jane Eyre, John Long Silver, and Oliver Twist" (32f.). The reading of Western classics enables the protagonist to practice for his job as translator of language and culture. The appropriation of literary classics as 'acquaintances' for his profession as translator recalls Kwame Anthony Appiah's formulation of cosmopolitanism, who defines this ideology as an obligation to others which is bigger than just sharing citizenship or ethnicity. It projects social and political engagement among humans across the globe, that should be powered by ethical involvement (cf. Appiah 2007). Hari escapes a "one-dimensional connection with one community" (cf. Priebe 2005, 57); his work as translator demands a familiarity with multiple communities. Even though or maybe even because he is not able to distance himself

from the political situation, he has to negotiate his own identity in the light of ethical involvement ("I, too, had chosen to risk myself, but was using my English instead of a gun" Hari 2008, 5). Equally often, Hari has to negotiate the rebels' identity throughout the testimonial narration: identities shift and remain unstable, just as the political situation: "[t]he problem in dealing with rebel groups is that it is often difficult to know who is on which side on any given day. The Arab government in Khartoum – the government of Sudan – makes false promises to make temporary peace with one rebel group and then another to keep the non-Arab people fighting one another" (Hari 2008, 12). In an area where everyone's identity is constantly renegotiated and challenged, Hari's book proposes to overcome the oversimplification of the conflict as exclusively the product of an unbridgeable ethnic difference. The main narration a well as the *Appendix 1 (A Darfur Primer)* discuss the complex historical and political situation of Darfur and the Sudan, but above all, *The Translator* explores social and ethical arrangements among the tribes and peoples involved in what might be called a 'global humanity'.[42] Achille Mbembe concludes that race is the largest identity forming group, hugging both ethnicity and nationality. In contrast, Ali emphasises the common denominator of Africans and Arabs, namely humanity.[43] *The Translator* calls to mind its humanitarian agenda by arguing that empathy and the feeling of fellowship and belonging do not derive from ethnicity alone but from believing in a global humanity. This is not only met by *Appendix 2,* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also by an emotional speech the driver Ali delivers to a group of child soldiers. He starts by explaining the colonial heritage of the war, the division of Sudan and Chad by the British and the French. He goes on to contrast allegiances and equates rebel groups and the Janjaweed. Ali concludes his speech by emphasising that belonging is not a question of ethnicity but of humanity: "In the way that they

42 This meaning both, humanity as the global community of all people as well as the action of being human.

43 Mamdani explores the colonial and pre-colonial history of Arab identity and settlement in the Sudan, he analyses in depth the history of Sudan as a history of migration but especially emphasis the influence of the issues concerning the propaganda of history writing that promotes the problematic idea of one uniform Arab identity.

are human beings and that is also your family" (Hari 2008, 139). The text breaks the reiteration of ideas about the "the mighty Arab catching the weak African to pursue genocide, or at least 'ethnic cleansing'" (cf. Abusharaf 2010, 68). Therefore, when *The Translator* suggests overcoming the idea of race, ethnicity, and nationality as the three determining factors shaping 'identity', it promotes the idea of a 'global humanity' in the name of human rights activism.[44]

While Daoud Hari's testimonial narration fights the rhetorical figure of a terminological universalisation and the structuralistic division of the world, Beah's *A Long Way Gone* actively challenges a specific metaphor. Namely the topos of the child soldier as a representation of Africa as a continent that can be saved just like a child. The book caters to the current "demand for stories of violence, displacement, and lost childhood", which is driven both "ethically and marketbased" (Mackey 2013, 100). Ethically, because Ishmael Beah's testimonial narration calls on the reader, creating awareness for the situation that is being narrated. In doing this, the text is unmistakably linked to human rights rhetoric. Additionally, the book's investment in the politics of humanitarian consumption plays into its international popularity. One crucial aspect of the immense global interest and demand for text like Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, derives from the fact that the child represents the future of humanity, a construct of purity and innocence that needs to be saved in order to save the entire human race. The human rights discourse is mobilised to stand and fight against practices of globalisation and economic forces that deny a universal personhood, and instead, promote the instrumentalisation of human beings into commodities

44 In this same humanitarian scheme, the idea of a 'global humanity' is confronted with the concept 'genocide'. The text introduces itself as a story about genocide, it "is (…) an on-the-ground account of one of the biggest stories of our time: the brutal genocide under way in Darfur" (Hari 2008, back matter). *The Translator* promotes the idea that all human beings are part of one family. In doing this, it highlights genocide as the crime that threatens not simply one ethnic group, but all of humanity. Genocide affects all people, as it is *the ultimate* crime against humanity. By establishing the war crimes of Darfur as genocide, *The Translator* (and Save Darfur) addresses a 'global' audience. Of course, this rather uncritical use of the term 'genocide' universalises different crimes and reduces their political and economic backgrounds to ethnic violence. This again promotes the uniform images of Africa on which the universalising human rights discourse is based.

(cf. Moynagh 2011, 40 and 48). In this tale of global oppression and displacement, the 'child soldier' epitomises the child as the ultimate victim; it stands for everything that is powerless, helpless, and innocent. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) are introduced as the saviour from North America and Europe. This rhetoric elucidates the figure of the child soldier as the "thoroughly contingent status of the child as a 'righted' subject" (Hesford 2016, 69). In this, 'Africa' serves as the prototype for all other cases, and the human rights discourse is mobilised as defence against dehumanising political and economic forces. Yet, this appropriation of the human rights discourse runs the risk to reinforce the very inequalities it strives to overcome.

> The recent proliferation of African child-soldier narratives in the form of memoirs and memoir-style novels speaks to these tensions in a productive way to the extent that we can read the child soldier as instrumentalized human being who narrates or enacts the process of overcoming that status and elicits (or challenges) global solidarities in the process. (Moynagh 2011, 40)

The child soldier memoir must be recognised as testimonial narration due to its essential organising principles and limit points. The rhetoric applied here, stages the 'African child' as the ultimate human victim falling prey to dehumanising forces of what is presented as an unspecific, ongoing conflict in any African country. The image of the 'child turned into beast' does not need to be located specifically, an ill-defined image of 'Africa' is sufficient. This image lets the audience project their assumptions, which are eagerly answered by humanitarian aspirations. In this 'conversation' between readership and humanitarian rights agenda, the notion of the brutal existence of children as soldiers dovetails the understanding of Africa as the 'Dark Continent'. A continent that, like the child, can be saved by humanitarian involvement. This 'rescue-mission' imbedded in testimonial narration, asserts the 'authentic representation of Africa and the child soldier'. Thus, the

narration emphasises the humanity of the testimonial subject, the journey from 'beast to human'.[45]

However, configuring child soldiers solely as victims oversimplifies the multifaceted struggle of the majority of child soldiers in wartime (cf. Hesford 2016, 73). Sierra Leone's call for justice objected the human rights agenda of the UN. The culpability of children and youth participating in the war became the subject of intense lobbying and negotiation between the state of Sierra Leone, the United Nations, and other international humanitarian groups. (cf. Rosen 2007, 302) The universal discourse of the UDHR simply ignored the local call for justice. It shows how problematic the universal claim of the Western institution of human rights can be: by ignoring local demands, the discourse dominated by hegemonic power is invoked and serves to constitutionalise the normative sources of empire[46] (cf. McClennen and Schultheis Moore 2016, 3). Furthermore, the interplay of universal humanitarian ideology and the image of the former child soldier stages the 'Dark Continent' as the cradle for a new global humanity, threatened by wars and military actions as immediate consequences of globalisation.

45 The title of a fictional child soldier narration plays with this exact terminology: *Beast of No Nation* (2005) by Nigerian author Uzodinma Iweala. The novel depicts a childhood brutally shattered by war, not shying away from representing the child soldier as highly problematic figure, not at all innocent and pure. The protagonist's fascination with the mechanics of war is as much depicted as explicit descriptions of brutal killings, giving a complex and difficult picture of the protagonist.

46 With the notion of 'empire' McClemmen and Schultheiss Moore refer to the world power of the 'Western world' (cf. 3); they state Costas Douzinas' *Human Rights and Empire* (2007), who aims to retrieve the emancipatory power of human rights discourse by unveiling the mechanics through which it comes into existence and how it reinforces relations of domination and exploitation. However, he not only criticises but also seeks to establish that "human rights can reclaim their redemptive role in the hands and imagination of those who return them to the tradition of resistance and struggle against the advice of the preachers of moralism, suffering humanity and humanitarian philanthropy" (293). Like Douzinas, McClemmen and Schultheiss Moore argue that human rights discourse codifies and constitualises the normative sources of empire. Empire, though not further elaborated in those two texts, thus is a placeholder term for the hegemonic power of both Northern America and Europe.

> Let's take Africa as an example. Here, the political economy of statehood dramatically changed over the last quarter of the twentieth century. Many African states can no longer claim a monopoly on violence and on the mean of coercion within their territory. Nor can they claim a monopoly on territorial boundaries. Coercion itself has become a market commodity. Military manpower is bought and sold on a market in which the identity of suppliers and purchasers means almost nothing. Urban militias, private armies, armies of regional lords, private security firms, and state armies all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill. Neighboring states or rebel movements lease armies to poor states. Nonstate deployers of violence supply two critical coercive resources: labor and minerals. Increasingly, the vast majority of armies are composed of citizen soldiers, child soldiers, mercaries, and privateers. (Mbembe 2003, 34)

This desolate state is allegedly best illustrated by representing victimhood as the child soldier who is used for any military purpose, to kill and be killed. In this, the 'collateral damage' is humanity. *A Long Way Gone* portrays the child solider as compromised by the power of war. A war that systematically degrades the children into 'beasts' who in this new state of brutality finally wield power themselves. As active participants of the war, they are able to take control of their own lives, by taking the lives of others. Thus, killing becomes the necessity to embrace their new function as human weapons. This toxic dynamic is what Achille Mbembe termed 'necropower'. He writes "that the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die." (2003, 11). Necropolitics is the politics of death; in the present neoliberal era of terror, insecurity, and death, necropower is the technology of control in which life is strategically subjugated to death. This is a new form of 'biopolitical governmentality', referring to 'biopower'.[47] It is the enactment of sovereignty that instrumentalises human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and entire populations. This

47 In "Il faut défendre la sociétén" Foucault refers to 'biopower' as the technology of power for managing the masses and for the control of entire populations. Further, it refers to the control of human bodies through state discipline (cf. Foucault 1997, 213–34).

central project of power, both as heritage and as a means of advancement of colonial systems of power and control, leads to totalising forms of domination over human lives within a given but endlessly shifting space (cf. 23). Drawing on Delleuze and Guattari's *Mille plateaux* published in 1980, Mebembe offers an analysis of the African child soldier's integration in international linkages, the 'war machine' or necropolitical formations, where non-state actors engage in complex relationships with state forms forging connections with transnational networks (cf. Moynagh 2011, 42 and Mbembe 2013) and producing power, while profiting from brutal conflict. In this understanding, war follows the same movement as capitalism. In the same way as capital constantly grows, war also becomes a material war; the human becomes an element of 'machinic enslavement'. Created by and entangled in this system, the child soldier is both commodity and agent. Because the child soldier must be understood as commodity and victim but also as active agent of this 'war machine', *A Long Way Gone* explores the child soldier as an ambivalent figure, exploited and sentenced to death on the one hand, and active participant of the war machine and its necropolitical strategies on the other hand.

Testimonial narrations run the risk to perpetuate global inequities stereotypes because the reality depicted is always already "so exotic, so radically unlike (or so we imagine) the situation of "our" own children?" (Mackay 2013, 100.). Beah's narration starts by narrating how he first realised that war "was actually taking place in our country" (Beah 2008, 5) and the news of it interrupted a perfectly normal day in the life of a young boy:

> The first time I was touched by war I was twelve. It was in January of 1993. I left home with Junior, my older brother, and our friend Talloi, both a year older than I, to go to the town of Mattru Jong, to participate in our friends' talent show. (…) The four of us started a rap and dance group when I was eight. (Beah 2008, 6)

This picture of an unspectacular afternoon, teenage boys excited about rap music and dance is in fact not that different from a day in the life of an American or European child. This idyllic scene of a joyful childhood

is blatantly interrupted by the outbreak of war. What is stereotypical is not the life Beah knew before the war started, but the fact, that an 'African' childhood cannot continue like this. Instead, in the parameters of testimonial narration, the experience of war and violence is anticipated. Contradicting, the 12-year-old protagonist describes war as a grand narrative, "stories told" of happenings in "faraway and different land[s]"; war, in *A Long Way Gone,* is not per se typically 'African'. Beah explains: "[a]t times I thought that some of the stories the passerby told were exaggerated. The only wars I knew of were those that I had read about in books or seen in movies such as Rambo: First Blood" (ibid.). These first lines of Beah's tale confront the reader to reconsider general assumptions about African history and its global representation. References to famous North American pop culture, like the *Rambo* films, disrupt the stereotypical imagery of war struck African countries as much as they counter the idea of America as the saviour and bearer of peace. Ironically, war is only known to the protagonist through the narratives of war movies about an American Vietnam veteran who returns home unable to separate the traumatic war memories from his post-war reality in America. Later on, the *Rambo* series as well as the film *Commando* are used to keep the boy soldiers entertained, further blurring the lines between what is a fictional depiction of war and heroism, and the soldiers' every day routine of killing. The screening of the films as well as the re-enactment of scenes serve to desensitise the children for their tasks in battle, making them believe that armed conflict is as much part of their daily life as mealtimes and sleeping. Furthermore, it encourages the child soldiers to glorify and stylise violence, disconnecting them from the reality of their actions. The young soldiers, motivated by the films, cannot wait to implement the techniques of their 'war heroes' – "'Sometimes I am going to take on a whole village by myself, just like Rambo,' Alhaji told me, smiling at the new goal he had set for himself. 'I'd like to have bazookas of my own, like the ones in Commando. That would be beautiful,' I said, and we laughed" (Beah 2008, 122). Throughout the book, the children imagine themselves as Rambo, experiencing not the 'realities' of war in Sierra Leone, but war a fictionalised product of the North American film industry which contributes immensely to the development of their violent psyche. Michael

G. Wessells notes in his study *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* (2006) that armed groups, especially in Sierra Leone and Liberia, used the Rambo films to "pump up young recruits for combat and to illustrate basic jungle warfare tactics" (69). Because, as the RUF argues, the government failed to provide basic education, the child soldiers look for meaning in the film's messages and are brainwashed with images of righteous indignation over social exclusion and violence as a means of correcting an unjust social order. This unjust order is corrected by the child soldiers' attacks on the rebels: "Alhaji tapped me on my soldier shoulder. He whispered that he wanted to practice his Rambo-moves before we started firing (…) Somewhere, somehow, someone's going to pay" (Beah 2008, 143). This scene echoes a particular quote from the movie *Commando*. It describes the mind-set of the young soldiers as set on revenge. Trained to see the rebels as their immediate enemy, they believe themselves and their actions to be as heroic and noble as the protagonists of the American films. Thus, the child soldier is caught in the logic of 'victim vs. savage'. A dilemma that can only be resolved by the saviour.

The immense influence of these films serves to highlight the different, yet paradoxically unifying perceptions of war across the globe. The films construct a fictionalised image of war as universally heroic, courageous, and noble, erasing the implications of the real experience and the complexities of causality that, for instance, *The Translator* attempts to unfold. The book compares the image of a boy carrying a Kalashnikov as typical cover image for 'African' testimonial narration to the marketability of the film posters featuring Sylvester Stallone posing as war hero Rambo for the promotion of the film. This serves as a metafictional comment that indicates war not only as a 'particularly African problem' but as a globally appealing construct shaping the lives and selves of young boys. The children are not only brainwashed and entertained by films, but are also lured in with products of world-known American brands. While some of the boys "got Adidas and others Nikes. I got a black Reebok Pump and was happier about my new crapes than anything else that was going on" (Beah 2008, 110). The image of American sneakers consumed by the child soldiers in Sierra Leone stands in opposition to narrations of war and child soldiers, which are sold as 'African products to a

'non-African' market mainly because they confirm depictions of Africa as the dark continent, born of hell and misery (cf. Mackay 2013, 100 and Mengetsu 2007). These stories become products making the consumption of 'Africa' possible; all the while 'African children' consume famous American brands. The indirect narrative strategy of *A Long Way Gone* places stereotypical images of 'Africa' next to stereotypical images of American consumer culture, like sneakers and other products which are used to fuel and enable the recruitment of child soldiers. *A Long Way Gone* places 'Africa' in the middle of a global media network, on the one hand by highlighting its stereotypical representations as products of Western ideology and on the other hand by emphasising the general influence of Western (mainly Northern American) hegemony. Beah's narration exhibits meta-reflexive awareness for its own position as a product of a "transatlantic consumer culture" (Mackay 2013, 119) which sells simplified and fictionalised representations of war as successfully as it sells sneakers. This media network does not only spread and market images of war, but of cultural life via music. The representation of this global entanglement through the circulation of cultural and other goods does not stop with Beah's escape of the war; when he arrives in New York, he immediately compares everything he sees with the impressions he gathered from listening to rap music.

> My conception of New York City came from rap music. I envisioned it as a place where people shot each other on the street and got away with it; no one walked on the streets, rather people drove in their sports cars looking for nightclubs and for violence. I really wasn't looking forward to being somewhere this crazy. I had had enough of that back home. (Beah 2007, 193)

Having escaped immense violence, he ironically fears arriving in a place where violence seems to happen out of boredom, rather than war ambition and political motivation, which he perceives as „crazy" in contrast to the specific forms of violence he knows. This rap-music-informed view[48] of the city as a battlefield lets Beah expect a city and a culture

48 Rap music takes on an important role throughout the book. For an analysis of the connection between rap music and storytelling as well as the negotiation of rehabilitation.

fallen prey to uncontrolled violence. Gangster rap of the 80ies and 90ies was frequently criticised for its celebration of negative images such as gun violence, rape, and gang battles, as representations of revolt against state institutions like the police.[49] By implying that rap music shapes the protagonist's perception of America, and by contrasting these highly stylised images to the brutal reality of Beah's life as a soldier, *A Long Way Gone* comments on the problematic concepts of authentic representation and the distribution of stereotypical images of Africa, as well as America.

Most of his time in New York City he spends in the buildings of the UN, where he meets 56 other children from 23 different countries, all of them invited here to speak before the United Nations. Oppression and violence are represented as a media event, as a story that is told by Beah and told by rap music, both equally influencing the representation and perception of violence in the form of narration. Narrated violence and the idea of 'real' violence are played against each other, but *A Long Way Gone* does not offer a comparison: it points at the unavoidable loop in which experiences of violence are represented by the media and how this again produces images of violence, referring to its own mediated quality. In this, African war and violence on American streets are presented as similar. The question then remains: why must Africa be saved – if also America falls prey to violence against the state and is equally entangled in a logic of savages vs. victims, albeit the saviours' identity might be less obvious in the context of America. This can be read as a juxtaposition of illegitimate violence as disorder on the one hand and the violence as answer to threats against the state as sanctioned violence on the other hand. Even though sanctioned violence, as interference of governmental instruments, is represented within the opposition of RUF soldiers fighting against rebel groups, it does not achieve the same tribute as sanctioned violence by Western states. Both groups of soldiers have committed war crimes. On the one side, state violence is sanctioned, while on the other side, it is dismissed as crime committed by savages against humanity. This again conforms the binary structure

49 American rap music of the 1980s and 1990s, especially the music of artists such as Snoop Doggy Dog, Tupac Shakur, N.W.A, and Ice-T, features the graphic depiction of acts of violence, discrimination, and sex (cf. Krohm and Suago 1995).

of saviours against savages. America, and with that also the UN, act as the self-appointed saviour of Africa. Therefore, when *A Long Way Gone* stresses the humanitarian and therefore important global agenda of the UN, it does so with a great hint of irony.

> Every morning we would quickly walk through the snow to a conference room down the street. There we would cast our sufferings aside and intelligently discuss solutions to the problems facing children in our various countries. At the end of those long discussions, our faces and eyes glittered with hope and the promise of happiness. It seemed we were transforming our sufferings as we talked about ways to solve their cause and let them be known to the world." (Beah 2007, 198)

Since the book is written in hindsight, Beah's enthusiasm and hopes for a better and happier future are reduced and turned into an ironic comment about the children's naiveté and the rather unsuccessful interventions of the United Nations. All of the children coming together to talk "briefly about their country and experiences" (199), they come from various places all around the earth, transcending political or geographical borders. The conference is the start for Beah's human rights activism. However, it is also presented as a nearly utopian setting, where the children speak up to a global audience, and are engaged in "song, laughter and dance" but at the end "were not returning to peaceful places" (200.).

A Long Way Gone does not completely negate Western humanitarian ideology, but the image of Africa as the protagonist of catastrophic rhetoric dependent on the West is not maintained unquestioned. Beah's narration negotiates and dissolves "visions of Africa as a place of exotic fascination and unspeakable suffering" (Krishnan 2014b 8f.) by constructing an analogy between African and American narratives of violence and war as equally fictional narratives. In doing this, Beah's testimonial narration problematises the contemporary contexts in which Africa is defined against the West as much as it reveals its own participation in the humanitarian consumer culture. These negotiations and confrontations are only offered on the textual level: paradoxically, the packaging and marketing of *A Long Way Gone* continue to respond to the demand for stories of violence and war based in 'Africa' and there-

fore support the politics of publishing such texts (cf. Mackay 2013, 100). The genre's form and conventions are not dismantled on the paratextual and extratextual level; but as a literary text, the narration itself has means to introduce doubts about its own implication in a global consumption of these types of narratives.

3.1 Daoud Hari – Narrating and Translating the Crisis by Proxy

Doaud Hari's differentiated and critical assessment of *The Translator* as testimonial narration is made possible by his bird's eye perspective. His role as testimonial subject can be more reflective and critical because he is not simply the subaltern but 'the translator' employed by Western journalists and investigators. The paratext promotes Hari as 'native' testimonial subject. It promises the unfiltered representation of 'raw and human' experiences. Introduced as the mediator of the experience of radical Otherness, he represents the 'voices' of the victims as much as he represents the 'voices' of the perpetrators. As reference to Hari's actual job description, the title reveals Hari's role as cosmopolitical mediator and narrator rather than subaltern. While the act of translating is always an attempt to render into a hegemonic language, it is also a way of storytelling. Thus, analysing Hari's role as author, first person narrator, and as translator, reveals the text as a mouthpiece for human rights. The book's paratext stresses the author's humanitarian involvement, and presents the narration as a story that provides detailed information about human rights violations. In doing this, the text emphasises its claim for justice. Daoud Hari's narration is a narrative testament to a violent and oppressive event in the history of global warfare. However, not only due to its content is Hari's *The Translator* entangled in human rights activism. This chapter looks specifically at the oscillation of collective story and personal testimony, of the rhetorical interrelations of what is often understood as the two separate domains of politics and literature, as well as the institutional involvement in the narratability of testimonial narration as human rights activism.

As a genre that is devoted to the representation of oppressed voices, to the representation of socio-political iniquities, testimonial narra-

tion's aesthetical aspects are often ignored. Testimonial narration is politically charged writing, but as a multidimensional literary product, it merges and links not only the political and the ethical, but certainly has an aesthetical and rhetorical agenda through which it achieves its political goals. Representation, in the sense of the representation of a fictional universe, as well as in the sense of the representation of a group through an individual's voice, has aesthetical and rhetorical implications. As a product that circulates on the global market, made to reach a broad audience, it is at the crossroads of the ideologies and agendas of many different agents. Testimonial narration reaches a global audience, circulating widely and most of the time, primarily outside the country of the author's origin. Ultimately, the production of these texts is enabled by unequal conditions. These uneven power relations that are so often the themes of these texts are at the same time shaping unequal production conditions for theses texts, uneven power relations – prompting the question "Who tells the story and who is represented as author?" (cf. Schaffer and Smith 2004, 5). The title page announces right underneath the author's name "As told to Dennis Michael Burke and Megan M. McKenna". This more or less collaborative writing of the testimonial narration is the interconnection of literacy and orality. As a translator Hari does not have to prove his alphabetisation, instead he confirms the collaboration between him and the non-African editors as necessity to write a 'book':

> This book is in your hands because editors Jonathan Jao and Jennifer Hershey of Random House saw something about my story in a *New York Times* column by Nicholas Kristof. So if you know these people, you should thank them now. I did not know how to write a book, but my friends said, "Don't worry, Daoud; we will help you," and they did. (Hari 2008, 181)

Hari does not confirm the myth of the illiterate Africa, nor does he have to prove that 'Africa can write' (cf. Stockhammer 2016, 242). However, he acknowledges that he was an unexperienced writer with no knowledge of the rule of the book market, dependent on the help of experienced editors. Even though the involvement of the editorial team is not

further elaborated, presenting Hari as the sole author of *The Translator*, the relationship between testimonial subject and influential editor(s) is pointed at. When Hari writes that the two Random House editors approached him because they saw potential for a story on the basis of his experiences, the dependence of the testimonial subject on the terms of editors and general market structures as the constituent part of testimonial narration is made apparent. By placing the text with Random House, Hari gains access to well-established circulation networks.[50] Furthermore, Hari's success as author dependes on the names of famous journalists: Hari's editors knew of him and his story through articles about the abduction journalist Paul Salopek. So, Hari's name as author and activist as much as the authenticity of his story are vouched for by the publicly acknowledged name of Paul Salopek and the well accomplished journalist and film maker Philip Cox. Hari himself at the end of his narration acknowledges this influential friendship. He writes about his life and the role his name plays outside Africa "I would work now in other ways to help get the story out and help return the people to Darfur and their homes in peace. What can one person do? You make friends, of course, and do what you can." (179). Hari understands that he must publish and promote the story outside of Africa, drawing on his influential friends to establish himself as an authoritative and trustworthy author persona and with that as a representative of the Darfur conflict for an international audience. The empirical conditions that enabled the production of the book, like the relationship between testimonial subject and editors, are linked to global circuits of exchange, not only affecting the import of stories but also the form of the text.

The *Acknowledgments* discuss the production of the narration as book, introducing the editors as professional help not to write, but to market it as a consumer product (cf. "the book is in your hands" ibid.). Hari's authorship is not highlighted. Instead, the narration serves as reference to his survival, emphasising his function as both, *testis* and *superstes*. Articles covering the book launch, or reviews mentioning the collaborative efforts, are scarce; Hari's success as *author* is not men-

50 Since July 2013, Penguin Random House is known to be the largest and most influential trade publisher on a global scale.

tioned in any way in articles featuring *The Translator* or himself. Instead, he appears mostly as political spokesperson and human rights activist, stressing his role as survivor over his role as writer. With the publication of *The Translator* in 2008, the name 'Daoud Hari' becomes representative for the Darfur conflict and humanitarian work in the Darfur region. Most interviews focus mainly on Hari's personal experiences, but never ask about the process of writing the story. Interestingly though, the protagonist is not called Daoud Hari. While the Sudanese name Daoud Hari appears as on the cover as well as the title page, it is his 'second identity', Suleyman Abakar Moussa, who works and serves as translator for the genocide investigators send by the American government, Cox, and Salopek. The first-person narrator explains, because his Zaghawa name 'Daoud Ibarahaem Hari' exposes his Sudanese identity and marks him as survivor; he rather uses a false identity to avoid being send to a refugee camp and to avoid the death penalty from Sudan, where he is wanted. In this double bind as *testis*, whose statements can have legal effects, and as *superstes*, the survivor whose statements represent those who have not survived, he is pressed to take on a different identity, which will ensure his actual survival and his function as testimonial subject/author. (cf. Hari 2008, 8): "Philip asked me if my name was Daoud or Suleyman. I told him that I was Daoud when in the Darfur regions of Sudan, but I was Suleyman in Chad. I explained my situation." (11). The British journalist and replies that "[e]veryone has lots of names around here" (ibid.). The necessity for this double identity stresses the narration's pressing 'urgency and authenticity'. The author is the immediate witness of the ongoing conflict, as the first person narrator he must protect those he represents: "I have not described these men carefully because, if I do, they might be killed for what I am about to say, although some are probably dead now anyway" (67). Hari explains again, why he "used two names in the two countries" (143), "[e]verything is complicated like that in Africa. Nothing is simple. No one is simple. Poverty generously provides every man a colourful past." (144). When poverty provides colourful pasts, colourful pasts make for good stories. As *superstes*/author, Hari testifies his personal involvement and experiences but also those of the people who 'are probably dead now'. By pointing towards his double identity of Suleyman and

Daoud, of *testis* and *superstes*, he stresses the political dimension of his writing. While he was a wanted man, while travelling the boarders, being Suleyman and working as translator, interpreting for international journalists, film makers, and NGO workers, risking his life and that of his crew in order to *tell the story*:

> [h]e was glad to meet this Suleyman Abakar Mooussa from Chad who spoke Zaghawa, Arabic, and English. After his many questions, he asked if I would be one of their translators for this investigation into possible crimes of genocide. Yes, I would do that, I had found my fate. (Hari 2008, 70)

Suleyman Abakar Moussa is Daoud Hari's translator pseudonym; this name enables him to work within Africa as 'mediator', translating stories and experiences of the victims. The name serves to balance the intensely political exercise of mediation between two or more parties, often of unequal size and power (cf. Huggan 2000, 43). The pseudonym 'Moussa' serves later to assume the author identity 'Daoud Hari'. Because the book is testimonial narration, its relation to real events in the merging of intimate narration and representation of collective memory stresses the significance of the complicated relationship between *testis* and *superstes*. The shifting of names as identities serves as a marker for the narration's pressing content, its possible influence on current affairs.

This double bind of *testis* and *superstes* illustrates narrating as political act, which the narrator can only pursue in answering to different names and thus in assuming different identities – separating the translator as protagonist from the translator as author-persona. To speak up against the crimes of the 'savage state', the name that served Hari as a translator now is not sufficient. The name Daoud Hari references him as author and human rights activist, touring through America, reading his book and informing his readers about the situation in Darfur. The production of the book and the political agenda both are inextricably linked, as it becomes apparent in his appeal before the Judiciary Subcommittee. In the hearing titled *From Nuremberg to Darfur: Accountability for Crimes Against Humanity Before the Senate Judiciary*

Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, Hari presents a talk to convince the subcommittee, and with that the American government, to help and to take full accountability for the crimes against humanity in Darfur. This testimony is structured in four parts. In the first part, he gives a personal as well as emotionally charged description of his rural upbringing: "[a]nd when the moon offered us enough light to see, the children of my village would play games together long into the night. While it may seem simple to you, ours was a happy life. I am sorry to say I have never found such happiness anywhere else in all my travels" (2008). In this appeal, Hari describes his family as part of a simple, yet happy community that loses this idyllic life and the security that comes with it because of "rape, murder and murder exerted by the hands of Sudan – the Janjawees" (ibid.). The dramatic rhetoric does not exceed the rhetoric used in the main narration *The Translator*, rather, it reads like a summary of the testimonial narration. Instead of appealing to a global readership, Hari here speaks before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, a subcommittee of the standing committee of the United States Senate and the United State Congress. This committee has a jurisdiction of matters relating immigration law and human rights. Hari asks to fully "support the United Nations-African peacekeeping force (UNAMID) and fund the UN World Food Programme's efforts in and around Eastern Chad" as well as to "[c]ontinue to press Sudan, China and the rebel groups for a political solution" (7). Both the testimony and the narration, use the interplay of personal story and geopolitical explanations to stress the severe implications of war. Charged with human rights rhetoric and supported by the ideologies of involved agents, such as editors and journalists, these specific narrative strategies advance the book's political agenda. His role as political spokesperson for a collective gives Hari the credibility and authority he reportedly lacks as 'unprofessional' author. As survivor, he stages himself as authoritative voice of the text. After all, *The Translator* is a *testimonial* narration, testifying to the events of the Darfur crisis as much as to the surviving of the author. As both *testis* and *superstes*, Hari writes for and about the collective of survivors as well as the dead. While his role as *testis* ties him to the dangerous representation of the living (cf. Hari 2008, 67), as *superstes* he becomes the narrator of 'ghost stories':

> The people of Darfur need to go home now. I write this for them, and for the day, and for a particular woman and her three children in heaven, and for a particular man and his daughter in heaven, and for my own father and my brothers in heaven, and for those still living who might yet have beautiful lives on earth. I write this also for the women and girls on Darfur. (Hari 2008, ix)

Hari is always invested in the notion of 'representation as story writing'. He 'translates' his people's fate, as told to him, into his story. Hari translates and represents *Two and a Half Million Stories,* as the title of the eleventh chapter states. Hari represents the 'voices' of those who have not survived; he serves as proxy for those who otherwise might disappear in history. Hence, the chapter title refers to the two and a half million displaced people who escaped the registries in the camps and are unable to tell their own story. Handpicked by the sheikh, seven people sit down with Hari to "tell their stories", a "few wanted the world to know the terrible things they had suffered and demanded that we tell their stories personally to the UN" (Hari 2008, 80). Representation, thus, is not simply a question of a political dimension; it is also an ethical responsibility: "I would say that these ways to die and suffer are unspeakable and yet they were spoken: we interviewed 1,134 human beings over the next weeks; their stories swirled through near-sleepless nights" (ibid.). *The Translator* stages representational writing as a political and ethical act: as a much needed intervention, even though the aesthetical and artistic means of translation and representation can falsify or at least reproduce stereotypes, it must happen anyway. The testimonial narration refers to the difficult agenda to 'speak for' a people; nevertheless, the book stresses that these voices must be given a platform to destabilise hegemonic views and to fight for international justice. The unrepresentable must still be represented.

Referring to the dilemma of representational writing as a common problem of African literature, Madhu Krishnan argues that representation is always problematically linked to the question of authenticity (cf. 2014b, 22). She writes that by "ascribing a representative function to a particular piece of work, in other words, its re-presentational aspects become reified into icons of 'authentic' or 'true' experience which, iron-

ically, often serve only to undergird our pre-existing assumptions about the already-known" (27). However, while Krishnan argues with Graham Huggan that this leads to an "ethnographic and anthropological valuation of authenticity and primitivism" (ibid. and Huggan 2000, 42ff.), *The Translator* confirms its 'authenticity' only by its entrenchment in verifiable historic events. Hari remarks in the *Introduction* that the following story is "based on my memories of a time of great difficulty and confusion. I have done my best to capture the details of my experiences and to set them down here accurately and to the utmost of my recollection" (Hari 2008, x). Testimonial narration, as much as it is connected to real time events, is after all *literature.* Even if presented accurately, it cannot escape the mode of representation that depends on rhetorical and narrative strategies. When Hari begins his narration with the following four words "Here is that story" (13), he already highlights the literary, the narrated quality of the text. Still, the narrator reflects upon the text's association with human rights narratives which operate through certain images and rhetoric.

> You have seen pictures of children who are dying of hunger and thirst, their little bones showing and their heads so big against their withered bodies. You will think this takes a long time to happen to a child, but it takes only a few days. It breaks your heart to see, just as it breaks a mother's heart to see. (65)

The narrator provokes a re-evaluation of human rights stories and their images to promote international campaigns, as much as he provokes a re-evaluation of the reader's knowledge and involvement by correcting his or her assumptions. Ultimately Hari emphasises the power of the text to possibly go further than to reinforce marketable icons and images and their production, elaborating on the actual implications these images have when they are not simply reproduced images but personal tragedies, experienced by many. Through the complexity of his double bind as testis and superstes and the meta-reflection about the possible fallacies of his own narration, Hari allows the reader to see through the stereotypes to the individual stories.

"The good America was in the room" – Narrative Strategies: Irony and Broken Allegories

The Translator is as much invested in humanitarian activism as it follows a political rhetoric, which subtly criticises the American government and the common perception of the war in Darfur. Both rhetoric investments are confronted with each other by the narrator Daoud Hari to problematise the common understanding of the violence in Darfur as a solely racially – and thus nationally – motivated crisis, which is based on the unreflected dualism of evil Arabs fighting and eliminating black Africans and ignores the multiple tensions that underlie the conflict.[51] As testimonial narration, its most prominent goal is to create awareness, and to internationally promote its imperative to act: its intention is performative rather than constative. However, its literary techniques serve to complicate the 'black and white' picture that has been consistently promoted by the media. Mamdani's book is not the only one warning against the simplifying images produced by the human rights rhetoric of 'savages against victims and saviours', of the binary structure of savage 'Arabs' fighting the innocent 'Africans'. Hamid Dabashi's *Brown Skin White Masks* (2011), influenced by Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, problematises the ideological construction of Islam as the essential indicator of a people, only justifying the expansion of the American empire with oppression and war. This ideology, Dabashi argues, is supported by what he calls 'native informants' and 'comprador intellectuals', principle witnesses that serves to authorise the human rights agenda as 'authentic and veritable' while simultaneously sanctifying Western ideology by means of vilifying any Muslim countries. According to Dabashi, the 'native informant' is no longer telling his or her imperialist employers what they need to know. The informant delivers what they want to believe in order to "convince the public that invading and bombing and occupying homelands of others is a good and moral thing" (2011, 200), or in short, supporting legalised violence through

51 In fact, Mahood Mamdani writes "[t]here is no doubt that several tensions underlie the spiraling conflict in Darfur. Together, they spread out like rippels: from the local to the national to the regional to the global. Local tensions arise from the colonial system and the nationalist failure to reform it; regional and global tensions arise from the Cold War and the 'war on terror' (cf. 12).

the humanitarian ideologies that derive from the juridical document that is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While *The Translator's* first person narrator and author appeals to the United Nations and asks to globally acknowledge and obey the "rights so beautifully described by Eleanor Roosevelt and others in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" in *Appendix I,* he does so critically. He negotiates the humanitarian rhetoric as simplifying the relationship between Africans, Arabs and Americans. In doing this, it does not follow the "recent spate of memories and novels that – under the veneer of human rights and feminist discourse – tends to demonise Muslims and legitimizes American imperial designs on the Islamic world" (Dabashi 2011, 17). I would like to argue that in fact, the narrator Daoud Hari is not an 'informant' who, in Dabashi's understanding, writes with an accent "to his speech, prose, and politics" (ibid.) to authenticate the narrative. On the contrary, as translator, Hari is well-versed in many different varieties of Arabic (cf. Hari 2008, 5; 66; 191), and gained his knowledge of English from reading "about philosophy and history and some politics – and the great novels, of course, which I love and which are read everywhere" (22). By this he refers to canonical, and remarkably only British, texts such as *Jane Eyre*, *Treasure Island* and *Oliver Twist* (cf. 31). Hari learns from the imperial canon of English literature, but unlike Equiano and Douglass, he does not do so to inscribe himself completely into Western speech, prose, and politics, but to complicate and differentiate his role as 'native' mediator and key witness, challenging American supremacy and its foreign politics concerning the genocide in Darfur.

The Translator's rhetoric combines the factual and the humorous into a specific kind of irony. Irony is used to create detachment and to highlight the protagonist's critical perspective. A frequently used technique to create detachment and to give a more critical perspective is irony: as a rhetorical device, irony is the opposition/tension between what appears on the surface and what is actually meant.[52] This internal tension of

52 Wayne C. Booth identifies 'irony' as rhetoric construct in *The Rhetoric of Irony (*1974). He distinguishes 'stable irony' from what he considers as 'unstable irony'. While 'stable irony' is irony with a clear rhetorical intent, 'unstable irony' occurs when ironies have not been clearly interpreted or understood since the romantic period. Booth's book covers the different rhetorical varieties of humour, such as puns, allegories, fables, metaphors, satires and parodies.

language serves to shed a critical light on certain events and experiences in the book. As a rhetorical device it really connects the narrator and the reader, forms an intimacy through which meaning can be reconstructed. The reader is given information of which the characters in the story are unaware, creating a level of mutual understanding and conspiracy between narrator and reader. Irony brings substance to the narration and helps to exhibit the 'sub plot' that criticises the humanitarian rhetoric. An example for this is a scene right at the beginning of the narrative. Hari describes a precarious situation, in which he and his journalist friend Philip stand at gunpoint, expecting to be executed by the rebels. Hari writes that his friend "looked the way the British look when they are troubled by some unnecessary inconvenience" (Hari 2008, 7). This is not simply a depiction of Hari's own very dry wit, where the narrator mocks the British filmmaker in a friendly manner. Primarily, it establishes the difference between the protagonist's personal experience and that of the journalist. The experience of the personally involved narrator, who understands his job as 'fate and as a chance to write for and about his people', is contrasted with the Western perspective of an outsider, the observing journalist. In this scene, the war and the interaction with the rebels is experienced by the reporter like an unnecessary plot twist and complication, which already happens seven pages into the story. Before the narrative begins with an immediate attack by guns and rebels, the *Introduction* has explained he political landscape of Sudan and Darfur, its history, and has introduced the victims of the violence. This explanatory frame is brought to a hold by the first chapter, where a rebel commander who accuses the protagonist for being a spy stops the travelling group. Suddenly, the reader is not being 'told' about violent consequences of political disturbances as an abstract manner, violence becomes part of the actual plot of the story, it becomes tangible. As testimonial narration, *The Translator* aims to capture and represent actual experiences. At the same time, it aims to be more than a documentary. The book does not simply observe, it promises to share first hand experiences and 'authentic' emotions, striving for "an easy balance between informing his Western readers about the causes and human costs of the Darfur conflict and keeping the narrative personal"

(Hari 2008, front matter). Nevertheless, the meta-reflexions within the main narration point at the discrepancy between experiencing war and modes of representation. When Cox's experience of threatening violence is described as 'unnecessary inconvenience', different modes of experiencing the same encounter are illustrated. For the British journalist the disruption of a smooth journey and job, both of which are meant to enable the group to observe but not to participate, is simply not acceptable, "[h]e was not going to stand by and lose a perfectly good translator" (ibid.). The inconvenience of standing at gun point is not a risk for Philip Cox. It is the translator who must fear the situation. For Hari the horrors of the event are all too apparent, when all is over he exclaims: "[a]mazing. I was not shot." (10) Hari's assessment of the situation is immediately countered by the journalist's answer: "[a]mazing, yes. Actually, I've been trying to get through to him for weeks" (ibid). The ironic tone does not ridicule or distance the experience described. On the contrary, emphasising the journalist's indifference in the face of death makes the seriousness of the threat all the more real by creating the characteristic ironic gap between the tone and the object of narration. Ignoring Hari's relief of having survived, Cox praises that this encounter gave him the opportunity to speak to the "top man" of the rebel commander: while for Cox the situation is described as business that must be dealt with, Hari and the driver pray for their lives. The unequal modes of experiencing, one white and hegemonic, not worried about his life even amidst M-14 rifles and rebels, the other already thinking about his family and how soon he might be reunited with his dead brothers (cf. 8), mirror the discrepancy between reader and protagonist. While for the protagonist the violence is 'real' and actually affecting his life, the journalist, like the reader, experiences it as a plot twist but not as an actual threat. This discrepancy elucidates the genre's aspiration to represent 'bare life' on the one hand and the agenda of metafictional comments, which reveal the testimony as narration, questioning 'authenticity' and 'representation'. The reader experiences the events through Hari's first person narration. Creating an empathetic identification between the narrator and his audiences is consistent with the literary and political agenda of testimonial narration, (cf. Schaffer and Smith 2004, 45). Nevertheless, Hari encourages awareness for the

different modes of experiencing for the narrator, other agents involved in the representation of the genocide, and the reader. With this, *The Translator* problematises the notion that aesthetic representation can capture the 'authentic essence' of events, the illusion that the reader can, with the help of the narrator, experience the same reality (cf. Krishnan 2014b, 37). The book promotes representation as a tool to create verisimilitude in language but constantly stressing the unequal/asymmetrical position of author/narrator and reader. Hari addresses the reader, confronts him or her, not to achieve identification but rather to stress the barrier between narrator and reader.

> Imagine if all the systems and rules that held your country together fell apart suddenly and your family members were all – every one of them – in a dangerous situation. It was like that. You cannot be thinking of yourself at such a time; you are making calculations of where your friends and family members might be, and where they might go. You are recalculating this constantly, deciding what you might do to help them. (Hari 2008, 37)

The narrator challenges the reader to 'imagine' the situation. Hari proceeds to explain the situation in detail to the reader, since it seems rather unlikely that thebreader was ever exposed to a similar event. This passage highlights 'authentic representation' as the problematic agenda of testimonial narration and links with the text's already discussed negotiation of the untranslatability and unnarratability of events and experiences.

As translator, Daoud Hari provides information on two levels. First, he provides information through the translation of language: Hari translates his own culture and language to the journalists and the reader, while he also translates the English of the journalists to the people like the driver. Second, as testimonial subject and *superstes*, he controls the narrative by drawing on humanitarian sentiment to appeal to reason but above all, feeling (cf. Whitlock 2015, 197). Hari translates Philip's happiness about the lucky outcome of the precarious situation to the driver as following: "I told him that he said *God is good*, which indeed, is what I believe he was saying" (Hari 2008, 37.). Where the journalist lacks to exhibit emotion, Hari translates and supplements Cox' statement. Hari's role as translator and narrator gives him the ability to trans-

late and with that to shape the narration. Consequently, the stories of the victims are not simply retold. Hari explains that he has to translate stories by survivors that are deprived of drama and plot-twists, because they are told by exhausted victims. These stories came

> pouring out, and often they were set before us slowly and quietly like tea. These stories were told with understatement that made my eyes and voice fill as I translate, for when people seem to have no emotion remaining for such stories, your own heart must supply it (80).

The translator is a mediator and creator of empathy; this empathy is not created through the apparent 'authenticity'. On the contrary, it is created and shaped through Hari's role as testimonial subject, as mediator between survivors and reader. It is highlighted as a narrative strategy. *The Translator* represents the act of collecting the stories, circumventing the difficulties of representational writing. On the one hand, it serves to advertise and speak in favour of the genre of testimonial narration, obligated to the human rights rhetoric. On the other hand, it serves as meta-comment to the genre's humanitarian agenda and the representational writing. Even when the narration stresses the necessity to make these stories heard, it comments on the problematic double bind of representation by exhibiting the different agendas and ideologies that come together in the making of testimonial narration through literary and aesthetical strategies that could not be applied in the same way by non-literary texts. The narration takes on a specifically critical tone in the chapter *Connections*. Hari turns again to the reader, praising the international involvement and interest in the case of Darfur. However, simultaneously, he accuses the American government of its unproductive interventions.

> Genocide is not always easy to prove so the many interviews were necessary. The United States and others used this investigation to determine that, yes, the government of Sudan was conducting a genocide The U.S. government did not do too much else, but the American people, as they always do, helped a lot, as did the people of Europe and many other places. The proof of democracy is surely whether or not a government represents the hearts of its people. (Hari 2008, 86)

Hari juxtaposes the investigations of the American government with the involvement of the American and European people when he indirectly refers to, among other things, campaigns led by the public. The genocide in Darfur is a unique case, in that it is referred to as genocide already while it occurs. Darfur activism has ensured that it stays in public dialogue through the international involvement of political figures, celebrities, institutions, and organisations such as Save Darfur, all of which drew attention to the crisis by openly calling it 'genocide'. However, even after gaining immense public interest, the genocide has not been stopped, making the most ground-breaking achievement of the USA in the case of Darfur, a terminological one: calling 'genocide' genocide (cf. internationaljusticeproject.com). Here, *The Translator* openly criticises the American government for its failed foreign policy.

This direct criticism is followed by a comparison of the role of the NGO workers with the behaviour of the eager and fearless journalists. Hari writes that the reporters were different from the NGO workers, because they disregarded legalities, exclusively following their agenda to "write stories that would help people. Also, they drank a lot" (87). The journalists' tool to help is the pen. Hari punctuates this difference by using two very specific and portentous allegories: "[i]f the genocide investigators were like angels from heaven, these reporters were like cowboys and cowgirls coming to clean up the land" (ibid.). At first glance, these two allegories seem very fitting, the good work of the investigators described as angelic, while the journalists are portrayed as wild cowboys, seeking adventure and authenticity. An equalisation of the UN and the Christian figure of the angel is, however, not as evident as here implied. Although the angel has been frequently used as a symbol for the 'bringer of peace', the relationship between this particular symbol and the UN is not at all self-evident. Even though the UN has not been untouched by religious sensitivities or spiritual motivations – Kofi Anan to name but one, is known to have been extending his religious values to the UN structures, – and still, aside from very few articles (cf. Chaulia 2003), the image of the angel for the UN is not a typical one. Hari addresses the showmanship of the UN investigators and aid workers, understanding and promoting themselves and their work as peace bringers who carry their believes into the world through the UDHR. This

sanctimonious self-representation is unmasked by the confrontation with the image of the cowboy-journalist. When the angel is the bearer and upholder of peace through the upholding of universal human rights, the cowboy is the allegory of the individualistic drive for expansion and exploration, the untamed. As Hari writes, the reporters were different from the aid workers because they "didn't care about paperwork or the legalities of borders", they "just wanted to write" (Hari 2008, 87). Compared to the journalist, the aid workers appear as bureaucrats who lack effective strategies to establish peace and freedom. The cowboy is the adventurer and explorer at the margins of civilisation, but he is also the incorporation of the American dream. As America's most cherished myth, the figure of the cowboy combines ideas of American exceptionalism and individualism. The cowboy is not defined by borders or fences, always pushing civilisation further: on the one hand negating it by living in untamed land, on the other hand defending the great project of Western civilisation, bringing democracy to the world (cf. Jones and Wills 2009, 107). Interestingly though, in Hari's narration, this civilisational phantasm of the West represented by the journalist does not champion the law of the gun, but the law of the pen. He does not fight, but observes the fight to support the call for action, to support the rhetoric of the Save Darfur campaign – and by that, seems more efficient than the 'politically' involved NGO's and their HR rhetoric. Journalism seems close to testimonial narration in the performative impact it can have on the world. Nevertheless, the image of the journalist as cowboy personifies fundamental archetypical characteristics: the figure still stands for a set of portentous oppositions such as good vs. evil and wild vs. civilised (cf. Izod 2001, 38f.), possibly illustrating the journalist as the bringer of civilisation. However, the allegory of cowboys and angels unravels in irony: both angel and cowboy are inscribed in the same ideology of peace and freedom as the values of Western civilisation, which must be passed on to Africa. Both Christianity and democracy are unmasked as ideologies that use the hollow shell of international peacekeeping to support their own agenda and to stage themselves as saviours. In this, Americans and Europeans are united around a moral cause, which only serves to reinforce their own image as saviours. Fittingly, Hari describes the moment of his release from prison as the hour of the American hero –

> Depending on your situation in the world, U.S. soldiers may not always be what you want to see, but for the first moment in all this time, I thought that I would probably not die today. (…) Certainly not today – not with those guys in the back of the room smiling and winking at us. The good American was in the room. (Hari 2008, 167)

Acknowledging power of the United States of America to negotiate, Hari nevertheless ironically comments on the self-image of America as the saviour who ends all wars.[53] 'The good American' becomes an allegory in itself, an image with no need of drawing on other symbols of Western culture. On the other hand, the laconic quality of that phrase exposes even more that the American presence can impossibly be the solution. By the use of rhetorical devices such as irony and broken allegories, *The Translator* does not support the binary structure of saviour and victim, of the 'good state' America that helps 'Africa' by controlling its demonic proclivities, cleansing it through the universal claim to an all-inherent humanity and equal rights. *The Translator* does not support the popular narrative of 'black Africans vs. Arabs'. Instead, the text illustrates the conflict as more complicated and American humanitarian involvement is criticised. Still, the narrative stages Darfur as the 'world's capital of human suffering' (cf. 57). In doing so, it appeals to the United Nations and the UDHR, urging them to uphold their promise to end human suffering. Thereby, the text justifies interventions of imperial power regimes over Africa, running the risk to legitimise the 'Western gaze'. However, this is deconstructed through the implications of Hari's job as translator: he not only translates Africa for the West but also reflects upon the limits of representational narrating.

53 This self-concept of America as the saviour of the world echoes the talk president Woodrow Wilson gave to an audience in Portland, Oregon in 1919, celebrating America's role in the establishment of the League of Nations after the end of World War I.

3.2 Ishmael Beah – Testifying 'Authentic' Authorship

When in 2014 the world still reported on thousands of children recruited by the notorious Sudanese White Army, boys and girls as young as eight years, who serve both willingly and unwillingly in government forces and armed rebel groups, a new force of international humanitarian interest erupted. Since child soldiers are regarded as the most pressing humanitarian and above all human crisis (cf. Rosen 2007, 296), their memoirs or testimonial narrations are widely sold and read. As a best-selling genre it echoes what G.C. Spivak defines as the 'genre of the subaltern', it testifies to oppression and violence to the Western reader (cf. Mackay 2013, 101 and Spivak 1985). In this, Africa still serve as stereotype. Even though child soldiers have been found serving all over the world, in Columbia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Iraq, it is the figure of the African child soldier that most prominently figures in documentaries, films, and media campaigns. Indisputably, it holds its place in the Western imagination as a subject of violence and of human right interventions and rehabilitation; this mimics a colonial infantilising of Africans as needing the protection of European powers (cf. Moynagh 2011, 41). A more complex way to read the figure of the child soldier embedded in global structures rather than reinforcing the binary structure of centre and periphery, is offered by Mbembe. The necropolitical formation of what he calls the 'war machine' is a type of mobile warfare in which non state actors join complex links with state forms and forge connections with transnational networks (ibid., and Mbembe 2003, 11). For Mbembe this system produces power by profiting from violent conflicts and producing exploitable 'infrahumanity', the refugee, the child soldier, the sex slave to name but a few. Even though Mbembe stresses this condition as a global one, Africa' still takes the position of the prototype for the place of origin for those, whose rights need to be restored. Mbembe calls this the *conditio nigra* (cf. 2015, 18).

Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* is a testimonial narration that questions the art of storytelling as the main provider of the fundamental vocabulary and form of human rights work (cf. McClennen and Schultheis Moore 2016, 10). It negotiates the mo-

ments away from the gun and towards the assumingly healing power of the pen (cf. Mackay 2013, 102). It operates "uneasily within the logic of fact and experience" (103) to expose the burden of memoir as a genre that caters to a great international audience. The demand for stories about overcoming individual trauma as a representation of the Western belief in uniqueness is paired with the global hunger for stories about the inhumanity of the global processes of necropolitics. This serves to promote the idea of a global human community, which includes the Western reader as much as the African author. Published in 2007, the same time when the war crimes court for Sierra Leone handed down the first convictions by an UN-backed tribunal for the crime of recruiting and using child soldiers in the 11 year conflict that started in 1991 and ended in 2002, Ishmael Beah's testimonial narration draws the focus on the 'war zone Africa' and himself as the ultimate victim of it.[54] The strong emphasis on the author's humanity, especially apparent in the paratext, combines the tradition of testimonial narrations speaking up against crimes against humanity and the problematic need to insist on the author's humanity. The cover features a determining testimonial by *The Washington Post*: "[h]e learned to forgive himself and to regain his humanity". This phrase is crucial for the presentation of Ishmael Beah as author: as human being, not as a wild beast that is "capable of truly terrible acts". The child soldier tends to be portrayed as a repository of adult influence, recruited and conscribed to destroy and kill, representing acts of terror as the maximal inhumane. In this, the child soldier narrative serves to depict the child soldier as an instrumentalised human being "who narrates or enacts the process of overcoming the status" (Moynagh 2011, 40) to highlight the political and economic forces that threaten the idea of a universal personhood. The idea to save the child from the soldier favours a plot of innocence that is corrupted but finally restored; all of which is proven by the achievements as author. This recalls the "first international human rights movement, the movement for the abolition of slavery" (45). However, the modes

54 The Special Court for Sierra Leone handed down verdicts against accused men from the rebel Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), which Human Rights Watch understands as an important and ground breaking step towards ending impunity for commanders who exploited children as soldiers in conflicts worldwide (cf. Hrw.org 2007).

of production are different for Beah. When former slaves like Douglass and Prince produced their text in a "division of literary labor" (ibid.), Beah does not need to rely on an *amanuensis* but on the advanced martking material that surrounds the publication. His success as author and his authenticity as witness and survivor (*testis* and *superstes*) is not only vouched for by the editor. It is also guaranteed by paratexts like newspaper testimonials, the genre description itself ("Memoirs of a Boy Soldier"), a printed map, and his the dedication to New York philanthropist Walter (Wally) Scheuer who taught Beah "the etiquette of being a gentleman" (Beah 2007, front matter). All this speaks for Beah's authenticity and (regained) humanity.

Because *A Long Way Gone* stages Beah as witness for a political cause, as spokesperson for all child soldiers worldwide, he takes on the role of am human rights activist. This position however, the righter of wrongs through the act of narrating, is the one of *testis* rather than of the *superstes*. Nevertheless, Beah's narrative statements are handled as testimony in court, and thus, pressure the narrator to represent himself "within contexts of extreme duress and unequal power relationships" (Mackay 2013, 101). Because for the public Beah is most of all witness and activist, a spokesperson, it is demanded of him to write and represent the 'truth', because the 'truth matters' (cf. Sherman 2008). Testimonial narrations like *A Long Way Gone*, intrinsically linked to an actual person, insist on 'authenticity' and 'credibility'. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson examine the possibilities and implication of narrative testifying and its internal and external metrics of authenticity (cf. Smith and Watson 2016, 244). They argue that the narrating 'I' must "promote an identity whose authenticity is sufficiently persuasive, compelling, and transformative to make its truth claims manifest and credible to readers" (ibid.). The reliability of the narrator is usually linked to whether his or her factual claims are documentable and whether the narrator's identity can be verified as what is termed 'authentic' (cf. ibid.). Smith and Watson define authenticity as a narrative and rhetorical concept, consisting of a sense of immediacy that communicates the urgency to the reader. This is achieved through the introduction of the first-person narrator as witness. Another crucial element to establish the narrative as authentic, is the editor or advocate who references the 'violated iden-

tity' on the narrator's behalf. The "narrator names powerful adversaries, or in the discourse of rights, positions such people or institutions as 'perpetrators' (245) and, thus, assures his or her experience as comprehensible and his role as witness as unproblematic. Beah's narration has been accused of fraud and lies. Critics argue that he extends the actual duration of his participation in the war from two months to two years. According to those critics, Beah also filled his story with over exaggerated accounts of violence, all this to capitalise on his limited experience of the war in order to sell copies of his book, marketing it as 'fact' and not as 'fiction'. However, what really is at stake here, is Beah's authority as author; when the Western journalists accuse him to testify falsely, the really challenge Beah's authority as author. As an answer to the critics, the editor Sarah Crichton refused to print a disclaimer in the paperback edition, arguing that a disclaimer serves to establish a book as fiction, recognising names, characters, place, and events as the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. For Beah the resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is precisely not coincidental. However, the debate circulating around the authenticity of the narration not simply stresses the reader's problematic demand for the 'real actual truth', whatever this means. It actually refers to the limits of the generic conventions of autobiography (cf. Mackay 2013, 102). The paratexts, especially the newspaper testimonials and praises on the first three pages, stage the narration as factual autobiography or memoir.

> This absorbing account … goes beyond the best journalistic efforts in revealing the life and mind of a child abducted into the horrors of warfare … Told in clear, accessible language by a young writer with a gifted literary voice, this memoir seems destined to become a classic firsthand account of war and the ongoing plight of child soldiers in conflicts worldwide. – Publishers Weekly (Beah 2008, front matter)

Unlike the critics, the *Publishers Weekly* realises Beah's narrative talent, which goes "beyond the best journalistic efforts", in fact, by predicting its success as a "classic account of war" and acknowledging Beah's "gifted literary voice", it refers to the author's expertise in creating a text of literary quality. The clash of autobiography and fiction is not new, and

perhaps obsolete. Nevertheless, going back to Goethe's *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811-1833) will help to understand how fictional narration and autobiographical authorship are related. Goethe remarks in a fictional letter to King Ludwig of Bavaria that to narrate one's own life, one cannot do without reminiscence and imagination. This quote postulates that every autobiography is fictional and presents the author as the artist who feigns and fictualises; this is established by Serge Doubrovsky as *Autofiktion* (cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf 2013, 8f.). Doubrovsky reflects on different blends between fiction and autobiography; it is the arrangement of the facts and the rhetorical edition that calls for fiction (cf. Doubrovsky 2008, 131). *A Long Way Gone* reflects on its own construction, consciously oscillating between historical/autobiographical and fictional possibilities of reading. Testimonial narration, after all, is a matter of storytelling and with that, it not only has political but also poetical and aesthetical claims. The influence of poetic language is introduced early on in the narration: Beah describes his love for rap music and how he enjoys learning the lyrics "because they were poetic" (Beah 2008, 6) and improve his vocabulary. When rap music influences Beah's rhetoric, and the *Rambo* fiction steers his reality, his passion for story-telling is encouraged and supported by Laura Simms. The self-acclaimed storyteller, writer, and humanitarian (cf. laurasimms.com) not only teaches Beah to create his story but to engage with his listeners; Beah turns from narrating 'I' to author. This journey is highlighted in meta-comments about the composition of the testimonial narration; they subvert the idea of authenticity and unmask it as a rhetorical concept. It becomes difficult to entangle fictional elements of the combat films, which the boys re-enact, from their actual experience. Fiction and reality merge, and start to depend on each other (cf. 5 and 121). This culminates in a scene where Beah writes that the act of remembering dissolves the boundary between fiction, dream, and reality.

> Sometimes I closed my eyes hard to avoid thinking, but the eye of my mind refused to be closed and continued to plague me with images. My body twitched with fear, and I became dizzy. I could see the leaves on the trees swaying, but I couldn't fell the wind. (Beah 2008, 49)

Memories, because they move on the edge of fact and fiction, make the reading of testimonial narrations vulnerable (cf. Smith and Watson) but also stress the creative work of the narrator as author. In this, fictional constructions and the reality of life are inseparable. *A Long Way Gone* not only testifies the survival of human rights violence, but also narrates the birth of the storyteller as author. His literary devices contravene and destabilise authenticity of the bodily experience (cf. Cubilié 2005, 222), highlighting the blurred line between mediated version of reality (*Rambo* films, rap music) and memories of real events which merge together in a poetically charged narration. While Beah's testimonial narration functions both as a source of truth and witnessing struggle as well as a challenge against the Western overemphasis on history as a claim to authenticity, it must be understood as part of a genre that navigates and opens the binary opposition between fact and fiction.

I have been rehabilitated now, so don't be afraid of me" – Rehabilitation and Approval through Story Telling

As testimonial narration, *A Long Way Gone* acknowledges the connection between witnessing, truth telling, and the literary and exposes human rights activism as a matter of storytelling that easily can fall prey to the confirmation of stereotypical representations about Africa as a savage country, an inhumane landscape inhabited by victims. The 'glamour of misery' finds its bestselling form in the child soldier narrative which depicts "the worst forms of child abuse, including physical labour, sexual slavery, and the forced used of drugs, not to mention being victims to outright murder" (Rosen 2007, 298). Ishmael Beah's narration does not represent the child soldier as the personification of innocence and purity. Instead, it gives a differentiated account of his recovery from soldier to witness and activist. When the global narration of the child as 'the human' favours a plot of innocence corrupted and later restored, Beah's testimonial has the power to highlight the different agencies and their ideologies, invested in the representation of child soldiers as an instrumentalised human being.

The human rights buzz phrase 'to save the child from the soldier' focuses on a plot of innocence. However, the figure of the child soldier pushes Western concepts of childhood to its limits and negates them

as a valid concept for apprehending these events (cf. Bhabha 2006). *A Long Way Gone's* first person narrator is an ambiguous figure. Neither a child, nor an adult, the testimonial protagonist is not simply confronted with violence but also practices violent acts. Thus, the narrator holds a morally compromised status. This problematic status must be overcome in order to uphold the claim of validity and authority of the narration and the ethical agenda of the narrator as author. Because of that, Ishmael Beah quotes a speech he holds in front of the UN Economic and Social Council chamber about his country and experiences.

> I joined the army really because of the loss of my family and starvation. I wanted to avenge the deaths of my family. I also had to get some food to survive, and the only way to do that was to be part of the army. It was not easy being a soldier, but we just had to do it. I have been rehabilitated now, so don't be afraid of me. I am not a soldier anymore; I am a child. (Beah 2007, 199)

This passage mirrors Frederick Douglass addressing his readership: "[y]ou have seen now a man was made a slave, you shall see how a slave was made a man" (Douglass [1845], 361). With this repetition, Beah emphasises his authorial role as spokesperson *and* author, righting wrongs by the power of writing (cf. Moynagh 2011, 48). Furthermore, this speech displays his difficult journey from soldier to child. When Beah claims that he is a child again, he seems to support the idea of a global humanity by staging the child as he universal symbol for those rescued from evil ("I was a little glad that he had called us boys and refrained from the word 'devil'" Beah 2008, 66). He does so by arguing that the child soldier can be rehabilitated: he writes that his "war memories had formed a barrier that I had to break in order to rethink about any moment in my life before the war" (149). When Beah tries to think of his childhood, the memories are blocked by his war experiences. He emphasises, that those memories of happier times, his childhood and his family, were not gone, only overshadowed. It is important to emphasise that the core of his humanity is not lost, only buried and it can be retrieved.

The negotiation of child soldiers is known to be an issue of age that shapes the concept of childhood for international law. The politics of law is central to the competing agendas of humanitarian groups, sovereign states and UN, all of which are actively engaged in debates that shape and shake the definition of who can be considered as a child soldier. The *Paris Principles of 2007* of the UN determine that

> any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys, and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities (*Paris Principles* 2007, 7)

is a child soldier. In the case of Sierra Leone, David N. Rosen describes the criminal culpability of children as the subject of "intense lobbying and negotiation between the United Nations, Sierra Leone, and international humanitarian groups" (2007, 302). He understands the issue as an opposition of local against universal claims of politics and justice. Rosen reports that humanitarian groups lobbied hard against the prosecution of anyone who participated in the war, below the age of eighteen at the time they committed a war crime, while victims of the war demand a condemnatory sentence for all offenders (cf. ibid.).[55] Humanitarian law and discourse argue on moral and on political grounds, demanding a single, universal solution to the issue. But in this approach "local perspectives as in the case of Sierra Leone, appear to be continually undermined" (ibid.) by the application of one international, or, one universal law, like the UDHR, the UN Charter, or the Genocide Convention. Just like the slave trade of the 19th century, the instrumentalisation of children as soldiers becomes a concern to all humankind, it is not only a matter between a people and their sovereign. This must be understood as the

55 A middle ground was negotiated, namely barring the prosecution of children below the age of fifteen to seventeen, treating them as 'juvenile offenders' and the jurisdiction of younger children was banned (cf. Rosen 2007, 302).

> key conceptual step that separates the contemporary world of international human rights law from the ideas of natural and universal rights that arose during the Enlightenment and took national legal from in documents like the Declaration of the Rights of Man (Martinez, 2012 149).

To end these crimes against humanity, all humans must unite. In order to liberate humankind from these evils, testimonial narration not only speaks *for* a community, it speaks *to* the universal reader, who is, just as the represented subject, part of the global humanity. In contrast to the individual, testimonial narrator, who represents his or her community as the ultimate victim, the child soldier narrative takes the representational structure to another level: it inscribes the testimonial narration into the discourse of a shared humanity.

A Long Way Gone avoids an oversimplified representation of victimhood and later of rehabilitation. The narration confronts the reader with Beah's consensus to join the army, his sense of alienation in the rehabilitation centre, and by addressing the child as a marketable commodity for either side. Beah strikes a more critical tone towards the discourse of intervention as a bulwark against dehumanising forces. Even when his UN speech emphasises his mental and physical journey from soldier back to child, and he points to himself as an example ("I would always tell people that I believe children have the resilience to outlive their sufferings, if given a chance" Beah 2008, 169), he nevertheless is very determined to represent the child soldier as ambivalent figure by questioning the methods of rehabilitation, and the interventions of the UN. When Beah arrives at the rehabilitation camp, the staff tries to pacify the young soldiers by persuading them, that what they had done was not their fault, because those things were "wrong and not childlike" (2008, 145), continually insisting on their innocence and some kind of moral essence qua being children. Beah implicates that this attitude is, if anything, naïve and uninformed. Emphasising this, he reports a fight in the camp between former rebels on the one, and government trained child soldiers on the other hand, as the result of boredom and frustration (cf. 136). He remarks that the rehabilitation centre did not anticipate the enormity of the war, which shaped the consciousness of the young boys.

> It hadn't crossed their minds that a change of environment wouldn't immediately make us normal boys; we were dangerous and brainwashed to kill. They had just started this process of rehabilitation, so this was one of the first lessons they had to learn (Beah 2008, 135).

The endeavour of rehabilitating the young soldiers is portrayed as naïve and badly organised, also risky. Beah stresses that the rescued boys were trained killers, anything but innocent children. The narrator highlights his own conception of his former self as a killer; he describes the killing of his victims as unemotional, merely irritating act (cf. 159). In another scene, he describes how his emotional response to a screaming victim is laughter and more violence: "[s]ome of them screamed, and we laughed and kicked them to shut them up" (151). The brutality of Beah's everyday life is narrated as his normality and routine. As a sort of stability that protects him, gives structure and order to his life, not leaving much space for a critical evaluation of the situation.

> My squad was my family, my gun was my provider and protector, and my rule was to kill or to be killed. The extent of my thoughts didn't go much beyond that. We had been fighting for over two years, and killing had become a daily activity. I felt no pity for anyone. My childhood had gone without my knowing, and it seemed as if my heart had frozen. (Beah 2008, 126)

An evaluation is not possible because Beah, after two years in the trenches, does not recognise any outside of this world. The army becomes his family who looks after him and gives his life and struggle a purpose. Only in hindsight, as narrator of his own story, he can understand, that his childhood was overwritten by the powerful ideology of the war. Due to the descriptions of himself as an unemotional and cold blooded soldier, the naiveté of the preposition 'it is not your fault' is heightened. Ishmael Beah illustrates the problematic position of child soldiers within humanitarian rhetoric by contrasting the alleged equality of childhood and innocence to their criminal actions. The child soldier is inextricably simultaneously perpetrator and victim, guilty of the same crimes that were committed against him. Because most chil-

dren are thrown involuntarily into the situation, abducted and forced to become part of the country's armed forces or a non-governmental rebel group, their status is further complicated, stuck within the duality of perpetrator on the one hand, and victim on the other hand. For Beah, the road to recovery is long; he only starts to believe in the possibility of his innocence, when the nurse Esther talks to him. Esther becomes Beah's confidante at the rehabilitation centre; he is his substitute family and love interest all in one. She not only treats Beah's physical wounds, she encourages him to talk about his experiences and to process his pain. Their friendship blossoms and Beah comes to trust Esther.

> Even though I had heard that phrase from every staff member – and frankly I had always hated it – I began that day to believe it. It was the genuine tone in Esther's voice that made the phrase finally begin to sink into my mind and heart. That didn't make me immune from the guilt that I felt for what I had done. (Beah 2008, 165)

Here, the victim-perpetrator dichotomy is illustrated by Beah's feelings of guilt that stand in opposition to his understanding of his innocence. The soldiers first perceive the rehabilitation centre staff's refrain 'it is not your fault' as an insult; the children felt they were right to avenge their families. This mirrors Beah's inner conflict. His former pride of being a soldier stands in opposition to his guilt. By moving beyond the clear-cut binary distinction between victim on the one hand and perpetrator on the other hand, *A Long Way Gone* makes a negotiation of the complexity of the issue possible. Not only on the diegetic level of what is being told, but by highlighting the structural doubling of the narrator as object of his own narration and as subject who actively shapes it, with a remainder of unreliability due to the uncertain status of his memories. Beah elaborates on the difficult process of accepting and dealing with accountability, he argues for an intimate connection between the child soldier, NGOs participating in the rehabilitation process, governmental institutions, and the public. All of which must work together to let the former soldier neither be uncritically victimised, nor outcast as perpetrator, but instead to grant him agency by the means of storytelling and listening.

Beah suggests in the *Acknowledgments* that his story could never have been written without the help and encouragement of his professors at Oberlin College as well as how much he depended on the support of Laura Simms. He understands that there is an interested market out there, without the market his testimonial narration would not have been written, nor published. To reach the audience of an international market: Beah has to learn how to tell his story, how turn his experiences and memories into narrations that appeal to a readership. Esther, who helps Beah to open up and to find strategies to cope with his war experiences, starts this process. Esther is the 'ideal reader', an intradiegetic possibility to illustrate how external agents enable and shape the narration. When she discovers that Beah enjoyed rap music as a boy, she offers him cassettes and a Walkman. Beah's interest in rap music plays a leading part in the narration; the cassettes he carries with him save his life on many occasions. On their flight and before their recruitment, twice villagers who mistake them for child soldiers capture Beah and his boys. When the chiefs of these villages discover his cassettes, the boys are free to leave. The cassette in Beah's pocket is Naughty by Nature's "OPP", which he performs to the delight of the village chief, but not before likening Rap to telling parables: "'[i]t is similar to telling parables, but in the white man's language'" (Beah 2008, 38). For him rap, is a story-telling technique; having mastered it, he is able to tell his own parable of loss, flight, and the chance to start over. The rap music disappears when Ishmael becomes a boy soldier. However, as the music and his rap cassettes signify his ability to express himself and coming to terms with his experiences and guilt, rap comes back into the story when he arrives at the rehabilitation centre. Beah reveals to Esther that he grew up on Reggae and in the end, it is the music that enables him to tell his story.

> I began to look forward to Esther's arrival in the afternoon. I sang for her the parts of songs I had memorized that day. Memorizing lyrics left me little time to think about what had happened in the war. As I grew comfortable with Esther, I talked to her about Bob Marley's lyrics and Run-D.M.C.'s, too. She mostly listened. Twice a week Leslie came and went over the lyrics with me. He loved telling me the history of Rasta-

> farianism. I loved the history of Ethiopia and the story of the meeting of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. I related to the long distance they traveled and their determination to reach their chosen destination. I wish that my journey had been as meaningful and as full of merriment as theirs. (2008, 163)

Rap becomes Beah's possibility to start reappraising and to heal. With Esther's advice he starts to write his own rap song about "the redemption of a former child soldier" (169) which also performs next to a monologue from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in the centre and singles him out to be chosen to perform as the spokesperson for the centre and the cause of rehabilitation. Significantly, Beah's narration ends with the parable about a monkey trickster and a hunter. The hunter goes into the bush to kill the monkey. While the monkey sits on a tree, the hunter approaches the monkey and pulls the trigger. Neither bothered by the hunter's presence nor by the gun, the monkey explains that if the hunter shoots the monkey, the hunter's mother will die. The village elders would tell the story to the young once a year, asking them what they would do. Beah silently decides to shoot the monkey so that other hunters would not be in the same quandary. While this parable echoes Beah's life during the war and the institution of child soldiery, it also serves to emphasise the need to adopt measures against the military regime in Sierra Leone, so that children do not have to choose between life and death, between family ad military service, and with that between childhood and violence.

A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah represents the belief in a shared humanity, global ethics, and in the genre's call to action. Story telling is marked as a mechanism and technique to represent experiences and to reappraise. While Beah asks the reader to feel sentiment and solidarity, he also asks to avoid generalisations. Due to metafictional comments about the power but also about the limits of narrating, his testimonial narration challenges the very notion of America as the saviour of Africa. The narration challenges and negotiates the conformations of cultural myths and literary traditions by contrasting mediated images of 'Africa' to mediations of America, illustrating that the idea of Africa as the dark continent, the post-colonial dilemma, as the playground for

ethnic rivalries must be reversed. The image of the African continent and culture, either melodramatic and bleak, or hopeful and vibrant, has become the celebrity of a globalised world. *A Long Way Gone* challenges the perception of these images by questioning the effect and purpose of Africa's mediated centre stage position. The text indicates a genuine interest and desire to affect change but exhibits its own genre conventions as entangled and caught up in a reproductive circle. Furthermore, the text's specific negotiation of the highly charged figure of the child as a metaphor for innocence on the one hand, but also as the personification of necropolitics on the other hand, makes the child soldier narration the ideal form to reflect the rhetorical and contentual problems of testimonial narration.

3.3 Dave Eggers and Valentino Achak Deng – The Meta-Testimonial Narration

Originally published for the first time by Dave Egger's publishing house McSweeney's, *What is the What. The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* narrates the life of Valentino Achak Deng, one of the Lost Boys of Sudan during The Second Sudanese Civil War, which lasted from 1983 to 2005. At the age of six, the protagonist Deng loses his family in the turbulences of the beginning war and leaves his village to march together with thousands of young children. With many other boys and a few girls, he wanders through Sudan and Ethiopia, trying to outrun the omnipresent violence. Finally, he ends up in a Kenyan refugee camp in Kakuma where he hopes to get the chance to emigrate to the United States. Only after ten long years in the camp, the protagonist is chosen by the UNCHR to move to America, the crucial moment for the writing of his book.

What is the What introduces two men: American author Dave Eggers, and Sudanese survivor and eyewitness Valentino Achak Deng. The title categorises the book as autobiography and introduces the figure Valentino Achak Deng as autobiographic subject. This is directly contradicted by the following genre disclaimer printed underneath the title, which recommits the text as the work of author Dave Eggers. Another element of the paratext resourcefully used is the preface, in

which the witness Valentino Achak Deng introduces himself to the reader. He stresses the narration as the "soulful account of [his] life" (ibid.) to establish himself as the protagonist and with that indirectly points at the part of the title that reads The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng. In the preface Deng explains how the project of the book started and why he "wanted the world to know the whole truth about [his] existence" (Eggers, xiii). Within the preface it is the first-person narrator Valentino Achak Deng who interestingly introduces the author of his own narration as Dave Eggers. He states that he and Eggers

> collaborated to tell my [Deng's] story by way of tape recording, by electronic mailings and visitations. We even went to Sudan together in December 2003, and I was able to revisit the town I left when I was seven years old. I told Dave what I knew and what I could not remember, and from that material he created this work of art. (Eggers 2008, xiv)

Deng appeals to the reader by not only introducing the teamwork between Sudanese survivor and American author, but by also addressing the very different participants in the production of the text. While *What is the What* is the story of Deng's life, it is written not by himself, as the title supplement *The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* suggests, but by Dave Eggers, who created out of Deng's stories and additional material "a work of art". Labelling the narration as autobiography and simultaneously announcing it as a work of art introduces the discrepancy between professional author Eggers and Deng as survivor and protagonist early on. To untangle and grasp the role of this particular staging of the unbalanced relationship between Eggers and Deng, this chapter focuses on David Eggers' role as writer and established author and Deng's role as survivor and protagonist within the production process and for the narration itself. Dave Eggers became famous for the successful publication of his debut novel *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* in 2000. Though based on the life of the author, it nevertheless admits to more or less fictional elements. Furthermore, the autobiographic novel includes a lengthy preface and acknowledgments, as well as a guide to its symbols and metaphors. Later editions include an addendum titled *Mistakes We Know We Were Making,* detail-

ing some of the deliberate omissions and fictionalised elements that made the book more sellable. In *What is the What* the author applies a similar strategy: several scenes break the narrative with metafictional comments, in which the protagonist acknowledges the author's work and his existence within the book. Furthermore, the book's genre category and the relationship between author Eggers and the eyewitness Deng are openly negotiated, constructed and deconstructed in front of the reader's eyes. A seemingly discrepancy between factual eyewitness report and the product 'novel' is constantly problematised. Eggers writes a book about the Sudanese refugee, representing him and his life, but he is not Deng's ghostwriter. Rather, Eggers' role is to be compared to an *amanuensis*, enabling Deng to tell his story and to sell it internationally. However, to weaken the asymmetrical hierarchical relationship between amanuensis and eyewitness is staged as collaboration, asserting a sense of agency: while Eggers 'lends his voice to Deng', Deng gives him the story. Eggers uses his cultural capital to promote a "human tragedy" to a war victim who is presented as lacking the experience to compose a long narrative on his own (cf. Rosendahl Thomsen 2016, 133). However, Deng benefits greatly from this collaboration: in the front matter of the novel, Eggers claims that all "of the author's proceeds from this book will go to the Valentino Achak Deng Foundation" (Eggers 2008, viii), a foundation that funds Sudanese refugees in America and helps to rebuild southern Sudan. Nevertheless, all public attention goes solely to Dave Eggers. Evidently, it is his name on the cover that sells the books and raises awareness for Deng's case as much as for the war in Sudan.

While the preface introduces Eggers as the creative mind behind the novel but still acknowledges Deng's role as survivor and eyewitness, the cover and copyright page refer to Eggers as the sole author. Precisely because Eggers' name appears prominently on the cover, it is easy to miss Valentino Achak Deng's name altogether. Even though the full title states his name, this has not the same status as Eggers' legal authorship. Looking at the cover of the 2008 Penguin edition and the first edition from 2006 published by McSweeney's, both display the short title and a painted profile of the protagonist. What both covers do not give, is the name of the survivor and protagonist. Instead, they

state the name of the author 'Dave Eggers', in bold black letters in the 2008 edition and in white letters incorporated inside the collar of the black figure. Even though the prominent position of Eggers' name on the cover seems like a plausible marketing decision, it downplays the importance of Deng as witness in the creation of the story. As the author, Eggers enables Deng to assume power by granting him the space to narrate his story. This constellation of enabling author and eyewitness has been characterised in the Introduction: Burgos-Debray uses the preface to *Me llamo* to explain her apparent collaboration with Rigoberta Menchú. Burgos-Debray explains how she reached the decision to give the manuscript the form of a monologue, deleting all her questions and "allowing" Menchù to speak, referring to herself as Menchù's listener and instrument by allowing her to make the transition from the spoken word to the written word. However, unlike Burgos-Debray, Eggers does not appeal to the reader himself, to explain the modes of production. His vocal absence from the preface stands in opposition to the emphasis of his authorship. He is introduced strategically as an experienced American writer who converts interviews and additional data into the form of a sellable book, thus making *What is the What* a display of his personal expertise as well as an exhibition of his political involvement and benevolence. Another consequence of Eggers' seeming absence is the distance between writer and witness, albeit in a less open way than in the case of Burgos-Debray. Yet, the asymmetry between author and testimonial subject is still present in the narration of Deng's life. Eggers' involvement in the creation of Deng's story has been criticised in an elaborate online review: "[t]he eerie, slightly sickening quality about *What is the What* is that Deng's personhood has been displaced by someone else's style and sensibility – by someone else's story." (Siegel 2007) Deng may benefit from the publication, but he does not own it, the story of his life is now "Copyright © Dave Eggers" (Eggers 2008, x) which clearly evokes colonial mechanism of domination all over again. However, Eggers' publication is more reflective than Lee Siegel gives credit for. Siegel notes "Eggers could just as well have transcribed Deng's extraordinary story without fictionalizing it. The unadorned story, the true story humbly recorded and presented, would not have been lacking in force" (Siegel 2007). Nevertheless, Siegel leaves the unique agenda of

the interplay of narrative techniques and strategies of the book market displayed in *What is the What* unobserved.

In *What is the What* strategically placed metafictional comments question testimonial narration's agenda to speak up for an oppressed collective. The emphasis of Deng's identity as one of the 'Lost Boys' of Sudan is used on the one hand as an emotional sales argument for the book. On the other hand, it serves as possibility to negotiate the problems of representation and the construction of identities, both of which are inherent to testimonial narration. Deng's reflections on the relationship between assuming an identity and writing concern the notions of individual and collective experiences. However strong Deng's statements about his individual identity are stressed, his represented identity is always embedded in the public narrative of the Lost Boys. His testimony is grounded in their existence. The story of the Lost Boys turns into the frame that upholds "an apprehension of self, of individual identity" (Gupta 2007, 13). Drawing on the group's historical memory makes Valentino Achak Deng's individual experiences comprehensible and legible as a political statement. Deng's personal identity markers can only be perceived and understood in the "continuum of collective social existence" (Gupta 2007, 13). Again, the public discourse about the collective creates a personal identity which appears as undistinguishable from the collective identity of the Lost Boys. *What is the What's* negotiations of collective and individual identity reveal often ignored problems of political and representational literature.

"Because I was not a writer" – The Narrative Construction of Valentino Achak Deng's 'Voice'

In contrast to texts such as Burgos-Debray's *Me llamo,* Douglass' *Narrative* and Prince's *History*, *What is the What*'s preface is not presented as written by the editor Dave Eggers, but it is introduced as written by the Valentino Achak Deng himself. With this twist, the book does not simply join the ranks of the slave narratives but comments on their structure and production. The unusual authorship of the preface does not simply replicate the relationship between author/editor and witness; rather it contradicts its unbalanced nature. It is the testimonial subject Deng, who addresses his readership, explaining the mode of

production and narration. He is introduced as the first-person protagonist who tells his own story. With that, Deng is also established as the authorial 'voice' of the narration. Deng does this by marking nearly every sentence with the testimonial "I" and its variants "me" or "my". In total, the whole preface counts 56 first-person pronouns on only two and half pages (cf. Eggers 2008, xiiiff.). The excessive usage of the first-person pronoun continues in the main narrative and establishes Deng not only as the narrative 'voice' of his preface but of the whole narration. Within this preface and the main narration, Eggers steps aside and lets Deng appear as what I name the 'voice of the narration'. 'Voice' is a rhetorical tactic used to maintain the appeal of an immediate testimony. With this the narration pretends it has been written by Deng himself; seamlessly merging implied and empirical author. By making the transition between preface and main narrative hardly noticeable, Deng introduces himself as the 'actual' and 'immediate' narrator and vouches for the truthfulness of the story. In doing this, he emphasises an immediate identity between the 'real life person' Valentino Achak Deng, who addresses the reader in the preface, and the first-person narrator 'Valentino'. Valentino's voice as rhetorical device is used to establish a relationship of trust between narrator and reader. The reader is the immediate recipient of Deng's appeal: "[s]ince you and I exist, together we can make a difference! Thank you for reading What is the What and I wish you a blessed day" (Eggers 2008, xv). Rooting the narration in verifiable events, emphasised by dates and figures introduces the first-person narrator as part of the same, 'real' world as the reader.

> For example, between May 16, 1983 and January 9, 2005 over two and a half million people died of war and war-related causes in Sudan, over four million people were internally displaced in southern Sudan and nearly two million southern Sudanese took refuge in foreign countries (Eggers 2008, xiv)

Once more emphasising the book's claim that "all of the major events in the book are true" (Eggers 2008, xiv), the narration reminds the reader of the responsibility to act and urges to make a difference.

A *Daily Mail* testimonial praises *What is the What* as a team effort of two men: "[r]emarkable … bears witness to the courage of two men: the one who survived to tell the tale, and the other who gives it such a powerful voice" (Eggers 2008, front matter). Presenting both author Eggers and survivor Deng as equally courageous, comparing the act of writing with the act of surviving tremendous horrors, reveals an ignorant and eurocentristic view point. The review states American author Eggers as the agent who gives the Sudanese Lost Boy's story 'a powerful voice'. The possibility of translating orality into textual form is a well-discussed anthropological debate. Anthropological and ethnological reports of 'indigenous' life-stories can suffer manipulative interpretation which may (though not invariably) recast the native idiom in order to extract its meaning for the modern reader (cf. Havelock 1986, 44). The necessarily manipulative interpretation by the anthropologist/ethnologist is similar to the role of the editor for the genre of testimonial narration and the *amanuensis* in the production of slave narratives. The aim is to create a written document with a strong oral appeal, conveying the immediacy of the preceding interviews while at the same time making it legible for the (logocentric) framework of the Western mind. In Lejeune's understanding of autobiographic writing, the position of narrator and of author is one unit. In *What is the What* author and testimonial subject are depending on each other, one creating the other. Eggers applies Deng's words and memories to write the story, in which the first-person narrator Valentino appears as the historical Valentino Achak Deng. To further elaborate and understand this problematic relationship of 'voice and writing', it is crucial to analyse the structure of the book which alternately brings 'narrating voice' and 'writing' together only to separate them again. Eggers and Deng's collaboration exhibits the difficulties of conveying an oral voice into written words. Valentino Achak Deng needs to be perceived as a reliable and authentic survivor to engage with the reader. The following main narration becomes an urgent and direct appeal to the reader, building on the preface's caution that "We live in a time where even the most horrific events in this book could occur, and in most cases, did occur" (xiv). The preface is charged with effect and affect; it targets the reader as if 'speaking' to him or her directly. For the reader, this creates a strong identification with the

historical survivor and blurs the lines between the preface, seemingly written by historical Valentino Achak Deng, and the narrator Valentino. This strategy serves to hide Eggers as author and creator of the narrative figure Valentino. The genre description 'novel' appears to be overwritten by the books historical claims.

The testimonial protagonist Valentino introduces himself as a natural narrator. Narrating stories is his stimulus and motive.The protagonist Valentino has to follow his need to tell 'silent stories' to the people he meets but also often just to himself.

> When I first came to this country, I would tell silent stories. I would tell them to people who had wronged me. If someone cut in front of me in line, ignored me, bumped me or pushed me, I would glare at them, staring, silently hissing a story to them. (…) When I was finished talking to that person I would continue my stories, talking to the air, the sky, to all the people of the world and whoever might be listening in heaven. It is wrong to say that I used to tell these stories. I still do. And not only to those who have wronged me. The stories emanate from me all the time I am awake and breathing, and I want everyone to hear them. Written words are rare in small villages like mine, and it is my right and obligation to send my stories into the world, even if silently, even if utterly powerless. (Eggers 2008, 29)

The protagonist's need to tell 'silent stories' connects the main story with the appeal of the preface, emphasising the urgency of what is being narrated. However, on a metafictional level, this passage also comments on the role of Eggers as professional writer. The testimonial need to tell stories is being positioned against the necessity of written words. The stories Valentino narrates are silent, until he meets Eggers. Only the author Eggers enables Valentino to tell his story to an audience – by turning it into a written narration. When Valentino explains that written words are rare in small villages, he refers to a whole set of power relations entangled in postcolonial assumptions about Africa and the West. He not simply makes stereotypical implications about Africa's oral tradition, he critically comments on the assumption that the postcolonial agenda of representational writing seemingly enables peripheral

voices to be read and thus heard. He is aware of his position in the field of literary production; he feels powerless. If he wants his 'silent stories' to be heard, respectively read by a broad audience, he is aware that he is in need of a significant author to help him publish his story and (re)-present his voice. The narrator Valentino is highlighted as a marginalised 'voice' who has been "excluded from authorized representation when it was a question of speaking and writing [my own emphasis] for themselves" (Beverley 1996, 25). Valentino Achak Deng tells his life story to famous American author Dave Eggers, decidedly, because he did not feel able to write the story on his own. Eggers is introduced as the helping hand, who creates a space for Deng's 'voice' and story. In the already quoted interview, Eggers explains not only his decision to write the book in the style of Deng's voice, he especially stresses the withdrawal of his own narrative 'voice'. The main reason given is that Valentino's voice is so distinct and unforgettable that any other authorial voice would be pale by comparison.

> Very early on, when the book was in a more straightforward authorial voice, I missed the voice I was hearing on the tapes. So writing in Val's voice solved both problems: I could disappear completely, and the reader would have the benefit of his very distinct voice. (VAD Foundation.com).

Here, Dave Eggers, similar to the strategy visible in the preface, openly stresses the powerfulness of Deng's voice and assures his self-effacement. This again echoes the introduction to *Me llamo.* Burgos-Debray explains her involvement in the production of the testimonio as necessary but of no significance for the authentic representation of Menchú's unique 'voice'. She compares her role as interlocutor with that of a benevolent midwife who creates the literary platform for the marginalised eye-witness. Similarly, *What is the What* introduces Deng's 'voice' as reliable, truthful and authoritative and Egger's involvement as minor. However, the preface does much more than to establish Deng as the reliable 'voice' of the narration. Besides all the markers of orality, such as the abundant usage of the singular nominative case personal pronoun 'I', the addressing of the production process, the preface nonetheless highlights itself and the main narration as a written artefact: the openly dis-

cussed and displayed production of *What is the What* is incorporated into the story. When discussing the construction of his narrative 'voice', the book claims that it can only produce an *appearance* of speaking, and with that of a 'truthful and reliable voice'. *What is the What* decodes its own narrative strategies; the representation of a marginalised 'voice' is highlighted as the rhetorical figure *prosopopoiia*.[56] Accordingly, Deng ponders the meaning of 'true' words and the possibilities and limits of representational writing. This echoes the debate on the (im)possibilities of unmasking the 'actual' voice of a text, alluding to the idea, that every such voice is always already a creation of the text itself.

> I worked on it for weeks more, thinking of everything I had seen, every path and tree and pair of yellow eyes, every body I buried. When I finished, it was nine pages long. When I turned it in, the UN took a passport picture of me to attach to my file. (…) I stared at this photo for hours and held the folder close for days, debating with myself whether or not this picture, these words, were truly me." (Eggers 2008, 485f)

The protagonist's concern about his own words being capable of a true representation of himself and his life is a comment on the representational capabilities of literature. Precisely because *What is the What* is not the actual autobiography written by Valentino Achak Deng, but a novel written by Dave Eggers based on the witness' life, it questions of representation and authorship decode the text as *prosopopoiia*. Even though, the collaboration between Eggers as author and Deng as narrator and protagonist is discussed openly, the power hierarchy is not as transparent as presented: "at issue is not only the subject behind the text, but the subject of the text" (Barbiero 1994, 101). This paradox is incorporated into the level of the diegesis.

56 The rhetorical figure of the *propopoiia* derives from the Greek 'prosopon', meaning mask or voice.

"It is very close to the truth…" – The Claim of Authenticity and Authorship

The protagonist has to retell his story on several occasions in the novel: to his neighbour, to the young burglar, in the refugee camp, to Eggers, and finally also to the reader. On some of these occasions, it is a silent story. In the most prominent scene discussing autobiographic writing, Valentino is asked to write down his life in a detailed chronological order. This autobiographical writing process is initiated by the "UNHCR and the United States" (Eggers 2008, 485), both wanting to know what the Lost Boys had "endured" (ibid.). The children are instructed how to write their autobiographies, they are what must be included in the narration: "[w]e were asked to write about the civil war, about losing our families, about our lives in the camps. Why do you want to leave Kakuma? […] Are you afraid to return to Sudan, even if there is peace?" (ibid.). The questions asked give a specific structure, a frame for the boys' personal memories, forming them into a coherent narrative with a specific political aim: "[w]hich ever strategy we applied, we know that our stories had to be well told, that we needed to remember all that we had seen and done; no deprivation was insignificant" (ibid.). Valentino understands what is at stake; he has to write his autobiography in a specific style and chronological order, embedding well-chosen images of misery and suffering. He had to search his memories for weeks, trying to remember every detail of his month long journey, only to press it into the form of nine short pages. The camp scene as much as the silent stories, comment on the constructability of an autobiographic narration. *What is the What* highlights its deliberate play with narrative techniques and rhetoric devices such as the appeal of orality and immediacy only to deconstruct this appeal again. These specific techniques uncover the dependency between the text and the demands of the readership: *What is the What* is written for an audience that prescribes format and content.

> At the height of our journey from southern Sudan to Ethiopia, there were perhaps twenty thousand of us, and our routes were very different. Some arrived with their parents. Others with rebel soldiers. A few thousand travelled alone. But now, sponsors and newspaper reporters and the like expect the stories to have certain elements, and the Lost Boys have been

> consistent with their willingness to oblige. Survivors tell the stories the sympathetic want, and that means making them as shocking as possible. My own story includes enough small embellishments that I cannot criticize the accounts of others. (Eggers 2008, 21)

Moreover, these meta-reflections reveal the writing process behind narratives like these: Eggers as the legal author, the actual writer of *What is the What* creates a novel in which the protagonist is given a 'strong and unique voice' to create the feeling of immediacy, of autobiography. Nevertheless, at the same time, this 'voice' is revealed as a textual construct and with that, Valentino is decoded as *fictio personae*, the fictional first-person narrator. Even though the narration presents the relationship between author Eggers and witness Deng as seemingly harmonious, the power lies with the author Dave Eggers. Eggers' authoritative role is prominently marked in the paratext, the book cover as well as the preface, and in interviews, Valentino's remarks about autobiographic writing equally highlight Eggers' influential role as writer and author. Because of this, *What is the What* negotiates the dependency between testimonial subject and professional author and rattles the idea that literature can succeed in representing the 'authentic' testimony and its subject. However, a debate pitting 'fact' against 'fiction', 'autobiography' against 'novel', does not prove to be very productive because of the books deliberate play of constructing and simultaneously deconstructing genre categories. In the tradition of the *testimonio, What is the What* introduces two agents, the testimonial subject who becomes the narrator, and the professional writer, who is the author.

> I could not, for example, recount some conversations that took place seventeen years ago. However it should be noted that all of the major events in the book are true. The book is historically accurate, and the world I have known is not different from the one depicted within these pages. We live in a time where even the most horrific events in this book could occur, and in most cases, did occur. (Eggers 2008, xiv)

The testimonial subject Valentino Achak Deng openly addresses the narrative challenges of creating 'authentic' representations out of mem-

ories. *What is the What* uncovers what *testimonio* conceals. Deng states that parts of the events in his life had to be fictionalised due to the unreliability of memories. Nevertheless, he assures the narration to be truthful. When the first-person narrator Valentino states that parts of the events in his life had to be fictionalised due to the unreliability of memories, he introduced and establishes Eggers as the author responsible for the narration. The disguise of Valentino Achak Deng as potential author persona is exhausted, Eggers is highlighted one more time as the writer lending a voice to Valentino. As author, Dave Eggers takes the narrative responsibility of Valentino's voice. *Prosopopoiia* always covers what she simultaneously highlights, namely the lack, or absence of an actual figure that speaks. In this ambivalence of knowing and forgetting, of unmasking and masking, she stages the protagonist as a survivor of historical events. In its reception testimonial narration often generates a discussion about the possibility of differentiating between fictional literature and nonfiction, negotiating the representation of an actual self, coming to the conclusion that "there could be no representation of self in language, but only an illusion of 'self' generated by a purely textual subject" (Löschnigg 2006, 2f.). This illusionary effect of the autobiographic self is something that troubles the *fictio personae* Valentino, he asks himself in the UN camps whether "these words, were truly me" (Eggers 2008, 486). These observations about representational writing and constructions of the self for autobiographical writing are not revolutionary, as they were negotiated mostly in the 1970s and early 1980s. Yet, *What is the What* returns to this debate, revealing itself part of a genre coined by personal interests, stylistic speech patterns and specific structures as any other literary text. Due to the many meta-reflections and comments on the mode of its production, referring to its construction, *What is the What* emphasises its own literary mode and thus highlights the interplay of authenticity, subjectivity, and representation as narrative techniques. While the peculiar emphasis on the truthfulness of the events and the historical accuracy stands next to the admission of fictional elements, *What is the What* is a comment on the slave narrative and *testimonio*; a literary account of the literary past of representational writing, settling a score with the challenging relationship between witness and professional writer.

"Didn't we all walk across the desert?" – Collectivity and Subjectivity within Testimonial Narration

In the opening sentences of the preface Deng asserts *What is the What* to be the "soulful account" about his life and his "beloved people of Sudan" (Eggers 2008, xiii). Thus, the text is introduced as a narration of personal but above all, of collective experiences. While this 'opening formula' indicates the text's literary quality, it also refers to the most prominent genre marker of the *testimonio* and the slave narrative (cf. Brookes 2005, 198f.). Following the agenda to narrate a politically motivated tale, *What is the What* merges personal with collective experiences. Valentino speaks on behalf of a collective, one voice speaking for an absent chorus. This is *What is the What's* second layer of *prosopopoiia*. The fictional Valentino gives his voice to the collective of the Lost Boys of Sudan. In testimonial narration, the first-person narrator is introduced as a member of the collective that is being spoken for. Shared experiences are narrated in the light of political activism. But, while Valentino Achak Deng gives his voice to the collective, the text indicates how the collective also forms the voice and its narrator. The narration is traversed by passages where the protagonist ponders over the representation of himself and the influence of an audience. In the camp the 'Lost Boys' are asked to write down their life story:

> We knew that if we admitted affiliation with the SPLA, we would remain in Kakuma. So those of us who needed to lie, lied. The SPLA had been part of our lives from early on, and over half of the young men who call themselves Lost Boys were child soldiers to some degree or another. But this is a part of our history that we have been told not to talk about. (17)

Concealing their possible affiliation with the Sudanese People Liberation Army, a southern Sudanese rebel group operating from 1993 to 2011, is market oriented as much as it is a necessary strategy of survival (if these two can be separated at all).[57]

57 Even if the recruitment of children does not find an explicit mentioning in the book as such, it sure is hovering over the story. The war has killed an estimated number of over 200,000 people and displaced at least 2 million since 2003. Among these were thousands of young children like Valentino Achak Deng, marching across unknown land,

Writing a work of "deep psychological trauma and impossible, marvellous triumph" (Eggers 2008, front matter) serves the "public narrative" (Somers and Gibson 1994, 62) of the 'oppressed and suffering African' who flees his country to find safety in the seemingly comforting arms of America. Narratives like this are no optional mode of experiencing the world; instead of representing reality, they constitute it. Further, these narratives are not bound to texts, they are discursively elaborated and float freely in the social sphere, forming a repertoire of available representations and stories; their influence depends in large part on the "distribution of power" (73). What the reader perceives as Valentino Achak Deng's identity, is in fact a narrative construct that consist of the stories told by him and about him. *What is the What* constantly reminds the reader that it is constructed – and influenced by various authorial agents, like Dave Eggers himself, the book market, and the readership. The repertoire of representations and stories generalised as 'public narratives' plays a dominant part in the creation of the protagonist. Like all stories, these narratives have drama, plot, explanation, and selective appropriation and are facilitated to tailor an identity/reality that fits the story.

> Didn't we all walk across the desert? they ask. Didn't' we all eat the hides of hyenas and goats to keep our bellies full? Didn't we all drink our own urine? This last part, of course, apocryphal, absolutely not true for the vast majority of us, but it impressed people. Along our walk from southern Sudan to Ethiopia, there were a handful of boys who drank their own urine, a few more who ate mud to keep their throats wet, our experiences

exposed to sufferings and hardships and the constant threat of war. The children are placed between the Sudanese military and the 'mirahaleen' or 'janjaweed', Arab fighters working for the Sudanese government, who captivated roaming boys to sell them into slavery. The story mentions the confrontation by an array of rebel groups like the SPLA, trying to persuade the boys to follow their army as soldiers. The connection between the boys and the SPLA is especially implied, in an incident where Valentino's group meets SPLA soldiers who give them cover and food for a few nights. Fascinated by the soldier's guns the boys ask why they cannot have guns also. The soldier exclaims, "[t]hese boys are ready! They want to fight now!" (Eggers 2008, 155). *What is the What* shows how easily the boys were manipulated with food, weapons and "thoughts of vengeance" (ibid.) to join the army: "[w]e were the Red Army and needed to eat" (ibid.).

> were very different, depending on when we crossed Sudan. (…) Even so, the tales of the Lost Boys have become remarkably similar over the years. Everyone's account includes attacks by lions, hyenas, crocodiles. (…) But we did not all see the same things. (…) But now, sponsors and newspaper reporters and the like expect the stories to have certain elements, and the Lost Boys have been consistent in their willingness to oblige. Survivors tell the stories the sympathetic want, and that means making them as shocking as possible. My own story includes enough small embellishments that I cannot criticize the accounts of the others. (Eggers 2008, 21)

The public narrative of the suffering African child, exposed to the wild, suffering from hunger and thirst, markets the book of the 'Sudanese Lost Boys'. Furthermore, it identifies the protagonist as the Lost Boy. In the above quote, Valentino explains how the identity of a collective is shaped by assumptions and stereotypical images. As much as the identity of a 'Lost Boy' is not just asserted by the public, it is a (self)-image deliberately forged and used to achieve certain (narrative) goals. The protagonist cannot distance himself from it because he is an integral part of the collective. He explains that even he had to include "small embellishments" to his story. This comment refers to the already discussed collaboration between Deng and Eggers and the negotiation of fictional embellishments within a seemingly non fictional testimony. It points out that the collective identity of the Lost Boys is created out of the personal urgency to process what had happened. Also out of the need to have a more forceful, publicly recognisable image appealing to the audience: "[s]urvivors tell the stories the sympathetic want, and that means making them as shocking as possible" (ibid.). Thus, the collective identity of the Lost Boys is unmasked as a delicate amalgam used for an international and political campaign. The boys tell an already anticipated story, tapping into the lucrative business of selling pain and suffering.

However, Valentino's description of the encouragement of their listeners to adapt the circulating narratives shows how hard it has been for the Lost Boys to extract themselves from the group identity into which they were involuntarily thrust. The personal truly becomes the identity of the political collective. Identity-based political positions are

often determined by group identities as superseding considerations of individual identity. Collective identity is formed by over-determining individual identity markers like the history of location and memories: Valentino reflects on the elusiveness of personal identities, he notices how quickly they dissolve in a politically acknowledged identity-collective.

> The Lost Boys is not a nickname appreciated by many among our ranks, but it is apt enough. We fled or were sent from our homes, many of us orphaned, and thousands of us wandered through deserts and forests for what seemed like years. In many ways we were alone [my own emphasis] and in most cases we are unsure of where exactly we're going. (Eggers 2008, 16)

Valentino confirms the collective identity as fitting yet problematic. The protagonist agonises about the difficult separation of personal and collective identity and notices that the idea of 'personal identity' or subjectivity quickly dissolves in the large picture of the collective identity. Despite, the fact that he stresses the problematic nature of a collective identity like the 'Lost Boys', Valentino sees collective identity as unavoidable, even as utilitarian. While the boys all made individual experiences, the collective identity 'Lost Boys' ensures a sense of security. He understands himself as part of this group of lonely individuals, marking this affiliation and belonging with a repeatedly used "we". This reduction of the individual identity to a sole aspect of the collective is used to represent Deng as a member of the identity-based collective that come to be known as 'The Lost Boys of Sudan' (cf. Gupta 2007, 12). Even though portrayed through the image of a 'collective identity', *What is the What* equips the protagonist with the identity of a decidedly unique survivor. The emphasis on Deng's unique personality is immense; he is depicted as unusually polite (cf. Eggers 2008, 153 and 221) as well as very eager to learn and to lead (413). These virtues distance him from the 'Lost Boys' and finally enable him to take on his role as spokesperson and representative of the collective: to represent a collective, the narrator's voice has to be unique, it has to stand out from the collective. However, as testimonial narrator, he is linked to the collective, which gives him the purpose and the authority to narrate in the first place.

A specific marker for the narrator's fluent identity are the different names used for him. In the sociological field, a name signifies important aspects of the name-holder's history and heritage. Names can define heritage, social location, as well as group affiliation. In *What is the What* they are used to highlight Valentino Achak Deng's different stations on his way from Sudan to America: "What are you staring at, Achak? She asks, laughing at me using my given name, the name I used until it was overtaken by nicknames in Ethiopia and Kakuma, so many names." (35) The name 'Achak Deng' is rooted in the Dinka culture; the protagonist explains that Achak is his first name, a name which he carried as long as he lived with his family. The other names the protagonist receives, give insights about his shifting identities:

> But I have many other names, too, Julian. Those who knew me in Marial Bai called me Achak or Marialdit. In Pinyudo I was often Gone Far, and later, in Kakuma, I was Valentino, and sometimes Achak again. Here in America I was Dominic Arou for three years, until last year, when I changed my name, legally and after much effort, to a combination of my given and appropriated names: Valentino Achak Deng. (…) Each of us has a half-dozen identities: there are the nicknames, there are the catechism names, the names we adopted to survive or leave Kakuma. (Eggers 2008, 260)

While 'Valentino' is his baptismal name, given to him by a Catholic father, 'Dominic' is the name he and most other boys were given by a teacher in the refugee camp. The nickname 'Gone Far' refers to his long trek out of Sudan. The protagonist openly adverts to the connection between changing names and shifting identities. The names associated with the protagonist illustrate his connection to certain places and to certain roles that he had to play: his first name 'Achak' and the last name Deng both are traditional Dinka names; they serve as a link between him and his early childhood in Dinkaland. The other names given to the protagonist resemble different important assimilation strategies, they comment on shifts in the protagonist's identity by illustrating the oscillation between personal and collective identity: the name Dominic, given to him by his drama club instructor Miss Glays, func-

tions more like a label rather than an actual name. She decides to call all of the refugee boys in her class "Dominic", at first a mistake but after a while, the boys stop correcting her, Deng concludes: "[a]nd so we all became Dominic" (415). Dominic becomes a label for the boys, since all their names "were very similar" – it becomes a label just like the name or title 'Lost Boys'. This 'baptism' is an act of power. Institutions like charity aids and influential agents like Miss Gladys form and label the individuals, pool them into one comprising collective identity – like that of the Lost Boys of Sudan. Names like 'Dominic' and 'Lost Boy' show the protagonist as part of the collective he aims to represent. However, the protagonist has to rise above the collective to represent it. This authoritarian and representative position is expressed by the name 'Valentino'. A priest explains that Valentino Achak Deng "will have the power to make people see" (287), he will, someday, bring light to the people he cares for, just as Saint Valentino brought eyesight back to a blind girl. In the broader context of *What is the What*, this passage serves as a metafictional comment, establishing the protagonist as narrator of his testimonial narration, sending his story "into the world" (29) and making people see. Ironically, the name on the candidates list for the immigration to the US is not Valentino, or Achak Deng: "I had almost forgotten that I had used the name Dominic on my application" (493). It is neither a Dinka boy Achak Deng nor the testimonial narrator Valentino who immigrates to the United States. But, it is Dominic, one of the many 'Lost Boys' of Sudan, confirming the specifications of the public narrative, creating and keeping alive the collective identity of the Lost Boys of Sudan.

Testimonial storytelling depends on identity images; whenever the protagonist comments on the problems of (re)presenting identity within testimonial narration, whenever the book backs on claims of authenticity and truthfulness, it is staged as a metafictional play with the boundaries of the genre. Determined by influential agents and (public) narratives, writing a self, claiming an identity, is depicted as a blurry and decidedly problematic process. At large, Valentino questions the possibilities of representation within a narration; he asks how texts like *What is the What* can generally represent somebody's 'true' identity: "I stared at this photo for hours and the folder close for days,

debating with myself whether or not his picture, these words, were truly me." (Eggers 2008, 486). The belief that each person has a unique biographical situation and a unique set of experiences, an individual stock of knowledge and personality, all of which forms what is understood as identity, unconnected to any form of group (cf. Gupta 2007, 12) is questioned by the narration. Instead, identity is portrayed as constantly changeable and transformative, always connected to a collective and always formed by an audience. Which narratives create and shape identity depends "in large part on the distribution power" (Somers and Gibson 1994, 73). Deng realises that the public and other controlling institutions like the publishing industry and the readership, as well as the author/editor, all are interested in a story dominated by images of suffering. However, appropriating the identity as one of the war orphans from the conflict in Sudan does not only mean to surrender to the power of the public narrative; it is a strategic move to exploit the international demand for humanitarian appropriations of 'African stories' (cf. Whitlock 2016, 196). The book's particular images of 'the suffering African protagonist' caters to a well-calculated audience to sell the book *and* its cause. Speaking in the name of others' as a representative mode is the central part of human rights violation tales such as slave narrative and *testimonio*. As testimonial narration, *What is the What* decodes 'speaking in the name/voice of' the collective of the 'Lost Boys' as a strategic move to achieve international awareness. Valentino uses a form of 'strategic essentialism' (cf. Spivak 1988) as his pragmatic approach to the seemingly inevitability of adopting identity categories to promote a specific political claim for the collective and marks his ethnic identity by referring to the biogenetically unique appearance of the Sudanese: "[w]e Sudanese are recognizable; we look like no one else in Earth. We do not even look like anyone else from East Africa. The isolation of many parts of southern Sudan has ensured that our bloodline has remained largely unaltered" (Eggers 2008, 17). Valentino's reference 'we Sudanese' remains vague, though he explains that the region he talks about is 'southern Sudan'. He argues that the appearance of the Sudanese is recognisable because they have been living in isolation. When Valentino refers to his people living in isolation, he means the Dinka who inhabit the region known as Dinkaland, which lies in a

province of Bahr al-Ghazal and extends in the East into the savannah and swamplands around Lake No and the Upper Nile region, around 500 miles south of Khartoum, the capital if Sudan. This part of South Sudan is surrounded in the North by Arab pastoralists, by the Nuer to the East and Fertit to the West. However, traces of influences from each of these groups can be found e.g. in the language, economic activity, and culture of the Dinka people.

What is the What describes Deng's ethnic identity as otherness and alterity that evolves out of a complex interplay between ascription and self-definition and is linked to modes of marketing and production. The complex history of the different people inhabiting Sudan stays ignored when the protagonist claims that the Sudanese are recognisable because of their specific looks.

> What makes a writer 'ethnic'? Is it the writer's identity as given by circumstances or by labelling? Or is it the writer's self-identification? Then why not study the claims of ethnicity through the pseudonymous works that represent the ethnic writer as part of their fictions, especially when these claims resonate with the stereotypical perceptions of at least part of the audience? Is ethnicity therefore primarily a quality of the reader, actual or implied? Or is ethnicity a quality of marketing or the mode of production? (Gilman 1998, 12-13)

The book introduces something like a 'Sudanese identity' to direct the interest of the reader towards Sudan and its political situation. As the protagonist states, Sudan is not well known to the international audience: "I have been called Nigerian before – it must be the most familiar of African countries" (Eggers 2008, 9). The testimonial narrator is also frequently referred to as "Africa" (cf. 4f., 23).When examining the meaning of the term 'Sudan' the importance of the mentioned specific, recognisable appearance of the Sudanese needs to be questioned. Interestingly, the appearance of the (south) Sudanese as different form the Arab-Muslims conveys in the word 'Sudan'. Sudan is the Arabic term for 'of the blacks' and is the composition of the words '*sūd*' and '*ān*'. '*Sūd*' is the plural form of '*aswad*', meaning 'black', whereas the postposition '*ān*' means 'of the'. It was used as an indication to the skin colour of the

inhabitants living in the region; it is often argued that Arab travellers, geographers, and historians who first wrote down the history of the region mainly used the term. The colour describes a visual opposition between Arabs and the *Other*, namely the tribal Sudanese inhabitants. If now the protagonist describes his and his fellows' visual appearance as specifically 'Sudanese', he does not simply follows an ascription postulated by Arabs, but deliberately ignores the complicated historical itemisation of the creation of a specific ethnic identity. This simplified notion of a 'Sudanese identity' shows how ethnicity is used to give the first-person narrator credibility as survivor and represent of the collective of victims in a war between 'Arab savages' and 'marginalised Africans'.

Valentino's rootedness in Dinka culture is referred to by the title, a reference to the Dinka creation myth: the Dinka culture is rooted in its connection to the land and their tradition as herders of cattle, God's special gift to the Dinka, according to the creation myth that gives the book its title *What is the What*. The Dinka folklore tells of the day where God asked the Dinka to choose between what was already given to them, the cattle, and the 'What'. The Dinka, devout and modest, were not interested in the unknown, they decided for God's most perfect creation, the cattle (cf. Eggers 2008, 62). In this myth the Dinka are presented as superior to the Arabs, because they took what was in front of them instead longing for the unknown. However, Valentino stumbles across Sudan and Ethiopia looking to find the 'What', therefore distancing himself not only geographically from his Dinka home, but also culturally. The very instability of the term 'what' as a signifier shows how difficult it is to define the signified. 'What' can literally be and refer to anything – any identity, any name. Valentino's identification with the collective of the 'Lost Boys of Sudan' follows the same agenda: here, *What is the What* discusses this usage of an essential identity by outlining the homogeneity of the collective as a decidedly strategic construction, thus challenging essentialist identity positions depicted in testimonial narration. While the preface itself only vaguely gives clues about Deng's connection to the Lost Boys of Sudan, the emotionally loaded back cover announces –

> This is the story of a man who, as a boy, was separated from his family in Sudan's brutal civil war; who trekked across Africa's punishing wilderness with thousands of other children; who survived aerial bombardment and attacks by militias and wild animals, who ate whatever he could find or nothing at all; who, as a boy, considered ending his life to end is suffering (Eggers 2008, back cover)

Introduced as one of the famous Lost Boys of Sudan, a group of over 20000 Dinka children, Deng is set into the larger framework of well-known political and intercultural issues, namely the framework of the "Western discourse of human rights" (Geertsma 2012, 136). The public narrative of the Sudanese Lost Boys defines the structure of Deng's autobiography: *What is the What* introduces Valentino Achak Deng as an 'authentic Sudanese Lost Boy'. This can be traced from the paperback's cover (the stereotypical image of a black man's profile) over to the page that introduces a map of Sudan and Ethiopia, to the already mentioned blurb on the back cover. This creates a complex and complicated presentation of Valentino Achak Deng's literary self/identity as a Sudanese – his specific Dinka identity only flickers through in certain moments of the book.

What is the What negotiates the (im)possibilities of an essentialist discourse that affirms the idea of a 'correct-as-authentic' representation. The play with form and narrative strategy achieves to reveal a differentiated discussion of ethnic and representative literatures like testimonial narration. Egger's novel critiques and devalues the testimonial narrations that have come before it, establishing itself as a critical comment, as a place where especially the oppressive hierarchies within writing, narrating, and publishing can be displayed excellently. The book engages in these ambiguities, contradictions, and questions of representational writing as well as identity concepts; it concedes its own limitations. *What is the What* ends as it began, appealing to the reader:

> Whatever I do, however I find a way to live, I will tell these stories. (…) To do anything else would be something less than human. I speak to these people, I speak to you because I cannot help it. It gives me strength, a most unbelievable strength, to know that you are there. I covet your

> eyes, your ears, the collapsible space between us. How blessed are we to have each other? I am alive and you are alive so we must fill the air with our words. (…)All the while I will know that you are there. How can I pretend that you do not exist? It would be almost as impossible as you pretending that I do not exist. (Eggers 2008, 535)

In this last metafictional comment, the narrative space between preface and main text, between reader, first-person narrator, and author collapses. One last time, the text highlights the testimonial narrator as the creation of a cross-cultural assemblage of identity constructions, positioned in between the as oppositional presented tropes of 'voice' and 'writing', between narrator and professional author. Here, *What is the What* points at the complicated interplay of collaboration and appropriation of representational writing. It is the unmasking of rhetorical and narrative strategies by commenting on the absence and simultaneous presence of the author trough the trope 'voice'. The author becomes the subject of this own writing – and the testimonial subject/narrator remains a *fictio personae*.

4 Conclusion – The Margins of Testimonial Narration

As a genre, testimonial narration asserts to break the hegemonial relationship of dominance and unbalanced power apart. The genre proclaims the unfiltered, 'authentic' representation of 'marginalised voices' due to the "erasure of the authorial presence" (Beverley 2004, 35). However, the analysis of several paratexts has shown that the dominant position of the editor, sometimes even as legal author, stands in contrast with the genre's agenda. The intention to represent 'the unheard' within testimonial narration is prone to fail due to its use of rhetoric and imagery affirming hegemony. Yet, a reading of both main text and paratext proved to be fruitful in revealing the texts' negotiations of the limitations of rhetoric and literary conventions. On the one hand, the procedure of editing, translating, and transcribing oral interviews and conversations into written and commercial text, undermines the testimonial subject's authority, and thus a textual censorship occurs. On the other hand, the main text, the narration, reveals strategies subverting the paratextual messages. Either most testimonial narrations address their construction openly, or they imply the involvement of a professional writer. By using the term 'testimonial narration' instead of '*testimonio*', the literary construction of these texts is highlighted. As narrative constructs, sellable narrations, the texts emphasise the process through which they convey or withhold their information. They reflect the genre's mediated quality, its dramatic structure, and the excessive editorial work.

This genre is based on an unbalanced authorship situation, a loss of authority. The focus on the troubled relationship between the two different and clashing authorial positions within the production and marketing of the genre shows that these texts open the re-discussion of the literary representation of the seemingly *Other* (cf. Young 2012). The testimonial narrations discussed provide a space for critical reflection about the representability of the testimonial subject, the collective as well as socio-political events. This becomes especially distinct when analysing metafictional comments within the main narration about

authorship and 'representative writing' within Western discourse and publishing. Here, the texts display a high awareness of the construction of author-images and the genre's different 'authentication strategies'. The testimonial subject narrates as survivor the injustices felt and endured by a whole community it represents. In doing so, testimonial narration gives space and audience to the 'unheard voices' in the 'court of world opinion' (cf. Warren 2001, 199). Thus, it is not only a genre addressing human rights violations from all around the globe, but also an internationally produced genre, which appeals to a 'global audience' (cf. Damrosch 2003, 259). This international, often enthusiastically called 'global' appeal is excited by the genre's political ambition on the one hand, and by its affirmation of highly problematic stereotypes on the other hand. The concurrence of these two seemingly opposing strategies makes testimonial narration a powerful tool in the campaigns for social justice. It demands recognition, advocacy, responsibility, and accountability, and yet it is at the same time a 'soft weapon', easily used in propaganda, readily commodified as the 'postcolonial exotic', a target for literary hoax, historically connected to benevolence in colonialism's cultures. (Whitlock 2015, 203). By insisting on a colonial past, the genre's humanitarian agenda of social justice draws on sentiment to appeal to the audience's feelings as much as "to reason, to policy, and to principle" (ibid). The books discussed demonstrate this interplay of affect and effect, revealing the structure and dynamics of testimonial narration. Topics such as slavery, genocide, and child soldiery are ethically and aesthetically rehashed, and mark the humanitarian appropriation of testimonial narration particularly an 'African legacy'. The image of the African continent as depicted within these testimonial narrations is marketed as exotic, as toxic, as idyllic, as dangerous, promoting the many humanitarian campaigns by pitching a 'single story' as representative for a collective. However, the value of this 'single story' is called into question by the main texts themselves, challenging the sympathetic pity of the audience (cf. 191).

This interaction of the market demand and the testimonial subject's need to speak up against endured injustices gives birth to the 'representational gesture' of testimonial narration. However, narrative strategies such as the meta-reflexive comments defuse this gesture. Because

testimonial narration announces the end of the subaltern, it must not recreate it by means of representational politics and exotisation. Only by the use of meta-reflections on the genre's strategies and techniques as much as on the relationship between author, testimonial subject, and audience can testimonial narration support the authorisation and empowerment of the (subaltern) narrator, finally eliminating the subaltern as a marketable category. The representational gesture of testimonial narration raises questions of 'giving voice' and 'withholding voice' as humanitarian action and intervention. Form and content both reflect the international market expansion of the publishing industry, combining the personal story with the political interest of a collective. Texts like *What is the What*, *The Translator*, *A Long Way Gone*, and even the earlier narrations by Equiano/Vassa, Douglass, and Prince reflect upon the opportunities and limits of representation, giving voice, and authenticity as narrative strategies that cater to market demands. Thus, these texts provoke, but with that also always anticipate, the question of verifiable 'truth', meaning the audience's disbelieve in the truthful reproduction, the successful representation, of real historical events and actual lives.

4.1 Yvette Christiansë – The (Im)Possibility of Fictional Testimonial Narration

Unconfessed is a fiction of a testimonial narration that, even more so than *What is the What*, negotiates the possibilities of representation and the apparent discrepancy between non-fictional testimonial narration and fictional approaches to the genre. As a novel, it questions the difference in meaning and impact of representation, exhibiting the deliberate rhetoric of human rights intervention tales explicitly. Furthermore, it raises questions of political agency, methods of liberation, and authority. It breaks down the different meanings of representation (re-presenting as *darstellen* and representing as in *vertreten*, cf. Spivak 2001, 33), only to express that they depend on each other. Yvette Christiansë published the (fictional) testimonial narration *Unconfessed* in

2007[58]; narratives of the Cape Slavery were to that date rather underrepresented, at least in publication. While the genre of the slave narrative flourished on the other side of the Atlantic in the 18th and 19th century,[59] of course heavily supported by the abolitionist movement, only a very small number of published documents or even narratives testify to the life and sufferings of the Cape slaves in an autobiographic form. It seems as if today, their lives can only be traced by archival documents of trials, listings of possessions, and by the population census. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Christiansë's debut text was greeted with great praise and laudation. *Unconfessed*'s ambition is to find a way to give suppressed bodies of colonial times the possibility to point at the archival gap, meaning the underrepresentation and partial negation of the slave within administration of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Because in spite of the vast amount of written material the Cape administration left behind, only very few documents sketch the life of a Cape slave (cf. Worden and Groenewald 2005). David Johnson argues in *Representing Cape Slavery* that "[s]ince 1994 there have been more literary texts on Cape slavery than ever before, with many drawing upon old legal sources in the Cape archives and the new historiography" (2010, 510). One of these texts is *Unconfessed.* It explores the conflict of archival documentation of history and the possibilities of representational writing. Christiansë consulted the archives to uncover unrecorded voices, then devoting the text to the representation of the unheard colonial subject. David Johnson concludes that unlike Atlantic

58 As a neo-slave narrative, a genre successfully introduced by writers like Toni Morrison, it constitutes a counter-discourse which sets out to subvert the dominant colonial hierarchy of slave and master by re-narrating history from a slave's point of view. This form of 'writing back' relies entirely on a professional writer or academic consulting historical documents to capture the life of someone who either is a purely fictional character, or the subject's life can only be retraced by historical court documents filed in the archives. Most of the neo-slave narratives depict American or Caribbean slavery and were published in the late 1970s and 1980s. However, since then the genre has developed immensely and has become more experimental and meta-reflexive. While Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) might be one of the more experimental narratives, more traditional writers and their works, such as Ishmael Reed and his *Flight to Canada* (1976), Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* (1990), Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982) as well as *Middle Passage* (1990) certainly popularise the genre.

59 Roughly sixty-five to seventy slave narrative were published in America and England between 1760 and 1860.

slavery, Cape slavery has only very few first-person accounts of slave experience. Whereas Atlantic slavery is described in the spiritual autobiographies and polemics of ex-slaves (he mentions Olaudah Equiano/Vassa, Quobna Ottabah Cugoano, and Mary Prince), Cape slavery is only rarely described in the words of the slaves themselves.

Conducting her research of court records, author and academic Christiansë came across archival snippets of a slave woman who had been imprisoned for child murder. The author felt compelled to write about Cape slavery in form of a novel instead of a scientific paper, allowing the reader to 'experience' the unspeakable horrors of enslavement produced in South Africa. Slavery and the slave trade have received considerable interest in the public sphere, internationally and in South Africa. This surge of interest is especially evident in recent historiography, public culture, and literature, and can be tied to a "globally emerging interest in historic formations of slavery packaged in popular culture, and the current increase in human rights politics dealing with re-emerging and new forms of slavery" (cf. Cloete 2017,1). The text's strong focus on 'voice' rather than body shifts the representation of the (female) slave from the body as a sight where physical violence is enacted towards an understanding of the interplay of body and 'voice' as a site on which specifically discursive violence is enacted (cf. Murray 2010, 445). Because especially slave women's voices appear to be silenced in historical records, the reading of such gaps within the records can draw a resourceful picture of the lives experienced. The book aims to tell the unwritten life of a suffering and marginalised subject, and with that the author lends her well-trained authoritative literary voice to the slave woman Sila. Due to her status as woman *and* slave, Sila is presented as doubly marginalised and thus invisible within the colonial discourse.[60] *Unconfessed* reflects the problems and difficulties of publishing stories from the colonial – or postcolonial archive – and what role the archive as well as the medium book play for writing and publishing within the field of postcolonial literature and thought.

60 The double marginalisation is played out in different ways – one of the novel's major themes is the abuse and exploitation of personal space, sexuality, motherhood, and the female body in general.

"But nothing stops the warden's book" – The (Post)Colonial Archive

Most of South African texts about slavery are fictional narratives. Fiona Vernal argues that the discoursive networks of the Cape region cannot be easily compared to those of the well-studied American slave society (cf. 2011). American slaves and their narratives could be developed out of an accessible discourse network relying on large plantations, slave quarters, and the rich tradition of Protestantism that played such a definitive role in the spiritual live of American slaves (cf. Worden 1985, 4 and 97). Further, "the presence of pressure groups such as abolitionists" (Vernal 2011, 5) propelled a written documentation of slavery at that time. Cape slaves, however, were scattered across the land, which made it difficult to stay in touch with each other.[61] The lack of such a widespread and established discoursive network leaves historical documents compiled in archives as South Africa's main source of information regarding slaves and their lives in the Cape region. In this respect, it is important to note that slaves were considered possessions and were listed in the same records used to catalogue cattle and farm goods. This not only denies the equality with non-slaves, but also denies their ability to produce historicity in terms of narration and self-development. Sila, the protagonist, rebels against this form of literary oppression. The coloniser's catalogue as a written artefact is her emotive issue; she expresses her concern and her contempt against 'writing' as an oppressive tool: "I knew those books. He put us in there with his horses and cows, the carriage and horseshoes" (c.f. Christiansë 2006, 245).

As a textual 'test tube', the novel offers the space to negotiate possibilities of representational writing and an accounting for the past. Instead of analysing the factual underrepresentation of slaves' 'voices and bodies' within the colonial discourse, the fictional narration fills a gap in the archive by imagining the life of the oppressed and silenced slave women. Within the narration, the slave is portrayed with agency and 'voice'. *Unconfessed* thus trouble the conventional amnesia or minimisation of

61 Another factor for the isolation of slaves in the Cape region was the banning of public gatherings due to the fear of rebellion. Furthermore, the establishment and maintenance of a discoursive network was complicated due to the "diverse ethnic backgrounds of the Cape slaves and the relatively small number of slaves in the typical household" (Worden 1985, 6).

the impact slavery had on South Africa's history, while they simultaneously allows to consider the difficulties and problems of a re-appropriation of the archive of slavery. "[M]arked by a sophisticated narrative structure, the novel directs our attention to the limits and ethical dangers of giving an account of Sila's life and the impossibility of recovering her voice from the existing documents" (Nehl 2016, 111). When considering archives as sources for understanding and gaining insights into historical events, it is important to unravel the power dynamics behind the accumulation of manuscripts and documents that constitute it:

> Even as we express gratitude for the historical accident or deliberate act that preserved the fragments, and value the preservatory effort, we recognize that 'sources' have long histories of making before they are trapped in the archive; and then they are further fashioned, in the archives, as archivists are also shaped by the ways in which users and readers, through their publications and other practices, reframe the record. In the wake of these kinds of engagements, we can no longer think of the archive as a point of origin, or the contents of archives as embalmed. (Hamilton 2011, 121)

Colonial power structures determine what is conserved in and what is hidden from the archive and with that, what is lost to memory. *Unconfessed* points at this gap, making visible what the archive, especially the colonial archive, *does not* and *cannot* document. The text creates the appeal of an oral confession that comments on the practice of archiving as an abuse of colonial power. Hamilton assertion follows an argument that is developed by Jacques Derrida in *Mal d'archive: Une impression freudienne* (1995). Derrida asserts that the archive grants access to documents that hide their own history, that hide their way into the archive. The archive is not only an assortment, a random collection of information, it r is a tool to write a specific history and with that a specific discourse.[62] When writing is exhibited as the dominant tool of oppres-

62 Derrida writes about the 'archons' as the guardians of all the documents; they ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate and thus make the archive a place where power and writing stand in direct relation to another (cf. Derrida 1955 and Manoff 2004, 13ff). Derrida shares this view with Michel Foucault, whereas the latter stresses

sion, the accuracy and objectivity of the archive is called into question, especially when looking at the colonial archive.

> Similarly, the new field of postcolonial studies is highly suspicious of the colonial record and could be defined, in part, as an attempt to locate the voices of the silenced native within the literature produced by colonial powers. In both fields, scholars focus on the absences and the distortions of the archive, as well as new contributions by contemporary women and postcolonial writers (Manoff 2004, 15)

The idea of the 'colonial archive' is motivated by a return to Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?". The essay refers to the literal archive of the East India Company, discussing the correspondence among the police stations and the courts (cf. Spivak 2010). Spivak, of course, follows Derrida's notion of the archive as an actual place as well as a juridical concept, where and through which authority is exercised, order given, in short, the law is institutionalised. For Spivak the imperial archive of the East India Company is exemplary for this power enforcing institution. The Empire was built on the accumulation of information about people and places under colonial rule, cataloguing and quantifying both as property to ensure the colonial dominion. Therefore, the colonial archive is the place where the colonial or imperial subject is not simply registered, but actually comes into existence as the *Other*. When language, and with that 'writing', is the dominant part of the power/oppression nexus, it places the imperial administrator at the centre. Documenting, surveying, and after all writing the colonial subject is the exercise of what Derrida calls 'archival violence' (cf. 1995, 30).

By reinterpreting and re-contextualising the archived material, *Unconfessed* illustrates and discusses the colonial practices of archiving. With that, the text not merely calls into question the colonial version

literature's role in the aesthetic rendering of historical events. Foucault's archive must be understood as the sum of discoursive practices, it thus builds the foundation for all what can be said and written about a specific time. However, Foucault's archive does not consist of documented texts, which constitute stories, it rather is an order giving starting point, which dominates the possibilities and impossibility of every proposition in any kind of discourse and thus obliges certain rules.

of historical events; it illustrates the strategies of domination practiced under colonial rule. When postcolonial scholars like Spivak demonstrate how the colonial archive is shaped by the aims of its creators and how any interpretation of the archive always depends on the perspective of its interpreters, *Unconfessed* negotiates these issues emphatically. However, transforming archival data into a creative narration is also a subjective, controlling act, since the writing of history always requires interpretation and intervention (Manoff 2000, 14). Because the archive itself is never *ab initio* nor objective, postcolonial authors and scholars like Christiansë focus on the gaps in the archive and places the colonial subject at the centre to expose the oppressive structures of the archive. *Unconfessed* explores the slave subject as part of a dialectic relationship with archival documents and repositories of information that have suppressed it. The book openly explores the act of unmasking archival dominance as problematic, always simultaneously risking falling prey to the practices it sets out to expose.

"I could not make a sound he or the others would understand" – The Silenced 'Voice'

Unconfessed negotiates 'writing' not only as creative act prompted by hints from the records and documents, but also as representative gesture, oscillating between oppression and liberation. The archive only records what the colonial power regime thought worthy to keep or to suppress. Whereas slaves are not playing a major role in the overall recordings of the VOC archive, criminal and civil judicial records provide detail (cf. Wordon 2014, 24ff). The protagonist's name is taken from criminal records: 'Sila' is a name on paper, controlled and silenced by the language of the colonial power structure.

> There was nothing new. She had heard that language of the court before. The 'whereas a female slave named Sila' was not new. (…) Her life was being summed up in that same language that said how she was: "At a Court of Justice holden in and for our Colony of the Cape of Good Hope and its Dependencies on Wednesday the 30th Day of April 1823 tried and Convicted of Murder, and had Sentence of Death passed upon her for the same… (Christiansë 2006, 16).

The language of the court is the language of the coloniser, it describes and defines the slave. It expresses the system that organises and runs the Cape colony, by the means of a national language, but especially by means of a certain political system, which relies on the written documentation and categorisation of people as objects. Sila's life is documented, categorised, and summed up by the language of the court: sentenced to death in April 1823 after being convicted of killing her young son Baro, Sila realises that her "body has no say in what happens to it" (Christianë 2006, 75). She is not more than a name in the colonial archive. She is only ever spoken about, as the documents reveal, Sila herself did not (could not) speak for herself. She remains silent. Her realisation highlights the vulnerability and ultimate oppression of slave women exposed to gendered pressure and violence within the institution of slavery. *Unconfessed* confronts the slave Sila with the power of history itself. As the ultimate, unheard subaltern, she is not simply 'voiceless', but with no substantial historical records. Sila is the reconstruction of non-reconstructable history, a character within a narration: "A text such as *Unconfessed* is located in the space where history and literature as well as fact and fiction intersect, and it thus straddles boundaries and challenges genre classifications" (Murray 2010, 14). Within this narration, the writing of history, namely historiography, is depicted as the dominating and life-constructing authority on the level of the plot. As this, it is specifically introduced on the level of the overall structure of the novel: the book starts and ends with one chapter each that is narrated in third person perspective. The autodiegetic main narrative appears as an inner monologue of the testimonial subject Sila. Both, the two framing chapters and the main narration as Sila's inner monologue contest for the role of the narrator and with thus for authority over the narration. This interaction between fictional protagonist Sila on the one hand, and author/*amanuensis* on the other hand, highlights the text's experimental approach to the representational dynamics of the fictional testimonial narration.

Sila's struggle for authority is described as a struggle *against* writing. Sila is sceptical about the power of written words, especially about their power to control her:

> When we were there, she asked, Sila, do you understand about writing? I made my eyes dull. What did she think? I am not a stupid woman. I knew. But I was not prepared for what she told me. She made my name come out of that book like a crazy thing lost in a big wind when everything is thrown up in the air and spins around. There we all were, the cows and you and me and Carolina and Camies and Pieter, But I was quick. I asked her where her name was. She laughed and smacked that book shut. (Christiansë 2006, 247)

Books and any other kind of written document are perceived as controlling forces. The artefact 'book' is described as a metaphorical whirlwind that takes hold of Sila and lets her *appear* alive, yet it leaves her powerless. Throughout *Unconfessed*, any form of archiving is emphasised as tool of the dominant colonial power regime, which deliberately works against Sila and negates her freedom. Furthermore, this metafictional passage comments on the function of the archive and the role of the archivist: Christiansë's research and writing, the publishing, and finally the reading of the book give life to the protagonist. Through the interconnections of narrative techniques, Sila is enabled to 'come out of that book' and thus appears as an active voice. The slave women is no longer the 'imagined *Other*' but a representative for herself and the collective of slave women by giving voice to the dead. However, Sila is a textual construction, and precisely not more than a name in an archive, her narration always refers back to the Christiansë as the author. This antagonism of text on the one hand and 'voice' on the other hand is not only explained with the often mentioned 'representational gesture' of testimonial narration. Presented as authentic and/because political, the imaginative character of representation is often hidden by the paratextual material like testimonials, cover designs, and titles. As the defining feature of testimonial narration, it is critically brought to the reader's attention within the main narration by means of metafictional commentaries. As a rhetorical device, 'voice' in texts is always a construct, and due to the genre's socio-political ambition often highly charged. Nevertheless, it is accentuated as reference to the imagination of the text, and with that, it points to the writer.

> Es handelt sich um die Stimme, die *gegeben* wird. Rhetorisch ist dies die Propopoiia, die Figur, durch die Toten und Abwesenden im Text in deren fiktiver Rede eine Stimme und ein sprechendes Gesicht verliehen wird. Durch Prosopopiia lässt ein Text konkrete Dine und abstrakte Kollektivia, in der Fiktion ihrer Rede ein Gesicht, die Maske (prospon-poiein)[63], durch die sie gesprochen haben sollen. Eine-Stimme-geben ist die rhetorische Figur, die ein Subjekt der Rede (erst) voraussetzt und einsetzt, das nachträglich als sprechendes schon immer gegeben zu sein scheint. (Menke 2000, 7)

Prosopopoiia is the rhetorical figure for the fictive representation of those who are absent or dead, a person or a collective. While the idea of *prosopopoiia* or 'giving voice' is used to disguise the rhetorical construction of the text and to foster the political assertions as authentic, *Unconfessed* distinctly illustrates this with the ghostly 'voice' of the hallucinating protagonist Sila. The idiosyncratic voice is thus presented as speaking for a whole group, the oppressed, or the single subaltern while it always refers to the author. *Unconfessed* illustrates how written artefacts are orchestrated to highlight the dominance of the colonial power: the book is opened and shut close not by Sila but by her owners – she will always be subordinate to the written word. So, even when Sila is finally given the chance to reappear in a novel that is dedicated to her and her 'unique voice', she is being re-presented (*darstellen*), as a fictional character, she cannot truly speak for herself precisely because she is not more than a name in an archive and a character in a testimonial narration. The fear of the dominant, all engulfing colonial power resembled by books and the act of writing is expressed vividly when missionaries take Sila's daughter away from her:

63 Menke's notion of *prosopopeoiia* as etymological composition of 'prosopon' and 'poien' refers to Paul de Man's 'Autobiography as De-Facement' and to 'Hyprogram and Inscription" (2000, 7).

> What will she read? My daughter will fall into that black book and when she looks back at me she will have the look of black leather and thin, white paper words in her eyes. And when she speaks to me it will be the sound of fingers turning thin white paper (Christiansë 2006, 228).

The description of Meeise evokes the image of a demon-like being with letter-filled eyes, with a voice of fingers turning crisp pages; it depicts her as the ultimate product of the colonial archive, a victim of the act of writing. The issue *Unconfessed* points at here is the fear of the overpowerful, discourse-forming and history-creating archive, overpowering and swallowing the individual.

Sila's life and thoughts are presented as a fragmented inner monologue, which breaks with the rigid form of a chronological narration trying to recreate historical events as authentically as possible. Instead, Sila's monologue stays silent; it is only a mental conversation between her and the spirit of her dead son Baro. With this, *Unconfessed* issues its awareness of the limits and problems of representational writing. Sila confesses to Baro's spirit: "But I could not make a sound he or the others would understand" (Christiansë 2006, 231). Silence in contrast to 'voice' becomes all the more important. In this particular silence Sila tries to find liberation:

> It was…Well. This is not easy. But. It was like this. They asked me to speak for myself, me who was so offensive to them. They wanted to come inside my heart. It was not an entry I could permit. I searched for words, but what came was a new knowledge. For one moment I thought, I, Sila van den Kaap, slave, as they called me, I could keep them from coming inside my heart if I could find words that would make them stop. (Christiansë 2006, 230)

Unconfessed debates difficulties of *re-creating* oppressed voices in a (post)colonial setting and circulating them in the form of a testimonial narration on the global book market. The novel aims to break a silence that has been caused by colonial domination and the archiving of what is commonly understood as historical facts. With these critical negotiations the fictional testimonial narration ranks with New Historicisms

key assumptions that no discourse, archival or imaginative, gives access to unchanging truths and that representation is always also oppression. Eventually, as the protagonist of *Unconfessed – A Novel* Sila can never outrun the domination of powerful agencies – precisely because she is a protagonist in a book which ultimately is a product on a market, created to not just problematise postcolonial discourse but foremost, to cater to a buying readership. Mbembe notes in "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits" that those brought 'back to life' from the depth of the archive are spectres which need a historian or writer to speak for them, thus, eternally remaining silent (cf. 2002, 25f.). In *Unconfessed* 'Writing back' is unmasked as simultaneously impossible, yet as maybe the only means to review history and display its gaps. The problematic undertaking of creating literary products like testimonial narration against the grain of archived material follows the same power-relations as the construction and compilation of the archive itself. Pieces of information are chosen above others, and the gaps of the archive, of the 'registered reality' are filled vice versa by the literary text, which follows its own political agenda. Thus, the text in its relation to archive itself becomes an archive. *Unconfessed* cannot escape what it sets out to criticise.

4.2 Coda – Saving Testimonial Narration?

The represented testimonial subject can never gain authority, because both forms of representation, 'representation' (*vertreten*) as well as 're-presentation' (*darstellen*) reinforce oppressive structures: while 'representation' as in pleading in the case for someone is political, re-presentation as in describing someone occurs in economic contexts (Spivak 2001, 32f. and 246). Representation thus always happens on the political as well as on the economic level, because the testimonial subject is simultaneously 're-presented *and* represented', and illustrates the overpowering structures of representational writing. The duality of representation, proxy and embodiment, always silences the subaltern. Because the practice of 'speaking for' and the act of 'speaking about' become indistinct, the testimonial subject can gain neither subjectivity nor authority. This is the neo-colonial construction of the subaltern; it echoes colonial domination and oppressive dependencies. It gives

the illusion of a speaking subject when in fact he or she is only ever 'spoken for'. The seemingly 'authentic voice' of the subaltern is not more than a narrative strategy that tries to mask the unbalanced distribution of power and the authority of the actual writer, the author (cf. Menke 2000, 8).

While the texts considered in this book aim to 'authentically' depict human lives and historical events changed through human rights violations, they all illustrate a strong awareness for their status as literary texts on an internationally operating book market, catering to editors, critics, and readers. Unlike Beverley and Gugelberger's suggestion that the genre of *testimonio* is more than literature, that it outranks fictional writing due to its 'authenticity' and unfiltered access to what is called 'truth', the texts openly question the possibility of truthfully testifying, of representation and the concept of authenticity. When Beverley and Gugelberger describe the genre as driven exclusively by a political ambition, they chose to ignore the politics and workings of the production. Therefore, the here presented term testimonial narration highlights and carves out the rhetorical techniques and narrative strategies that reveal the texts' construction and literality. Smith and Watson refer to these techniques and strategies as 'metrics of authentication'

> These metrics are produced *internally* at the intersection of the witness's singular history and the shared communal discourse and narrative rhetorics through which that experiential history unfolds, and *externally* through the production, marketing, and circulation of witness narratives for transnational publics. (2016, 244)

In these texts 'authenticity' serves as the link between the testimonial subject/first person narrator and the reader. The testimonial subject as narrator must be presented as a sufficiently authentic 'I' that makes persuasive, compelling, and transformative truth claims, mirroring a court hearing. Smith and Watson analyse five different metrics that establish a strong sense of authenticity necessary for the texts and narrators' appeal to the audience: immediacy, invocation of rights discourse, representation of a collective, victim identity, and ethno-documentation of cultural specificity. These intratextual affirmations of authenticity are

accompanied by paratextual and paratextual conditions such as marketing campaigns, interviews, book tours all of which create and shape the testimonial subject and his or her narration as 'authentic' (cf. Whitlock 2007, 61f.). Authenticity as the unchanging essence to the self, as taking full responsibility for one's own life, as choosing the nature of one's own existence, is debunked as a concept that is formed within writing, dependent on genre specifications and market structures. Describing 'authenticity' as a sellable asset, as a marketing strategy, seems a rather cynical outlook for testimonial narration: a genre that is committed to the depiction of human right violations and the postcolonial ambition 'to give voice to the unheard'. Nevertheless, accepting its claims of authenticity, not scrutinising it as a narrative construct and rhetorical device, is not an option. The issues concerning authenticity and representational writing present themselves in the detailed consideration of both paratextual material and main narration. While at first glance all texts give the affirmative answer to the question whether the subaltern can speak, the main narration often displays more critical reflections of the construction of the 'subaltern voice'. This almost always refers back to the author and editor as the source of the utterance or at least as the authority behind the production of text and 'voice'. The author, editor, or *amanuensis* as the originator of the story are hereby highlighted as Western superiority and authority, representing, and with that also creating the 'unheard voices'. While the exhibition of authenticity as a marketing strategy varies in the testimonial narrations discussed, they all question and renegotiate political agency, methods of liberations within literature, economic authority as well as the creation of authorship. This awareness for the problems of representational writing means a constant negotiation of the possibilities of depicting historically verifiable events and the power relations inherent to the writing process. Many of the narrative features used are common to postmodern literature. Edmund J. Smyth argues in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction* (1992) that postmodern literature blurs the lines between 'reality' and 'fiction' by including metafictional elements to highlight the textual production as 'creative and literary' endeavour:

> Fragmentation, discontinuity, indeterminacy, plurality, metafictionality, heterogeneity, intertextuality, decentring, dislocation, ludism: these are common features [..] the term 'postmodern' has to come to be regarded as synonymous with the contemporary literary 'period as a whole, in addition to being used as a synonym for avant-guard and experimental writing (1992, 9).

Especially Eggers' *What is the What*, Christiansë's *Unconfessed*, but also Hari's *The Translator* and *A Long Way Gone* by Beah are motivated by the desire to explore alternative histories from the perspective of those who have been oppressed and marginalised in historical accounts sponsored and written by the hegemonial power regime. They do so by means of fragmentation, metafictional commentaries, they draw on plural voices to de-centre the manner of representation. These features are not only used in 'postmodern literature'; most of these narrative strategies are already applied in slave narratives. The early testimonial narrations negotiate the importance of subjective narrations representing collective experience. In doing this, metafictional commentaries highlight the role of the author and its dependence on the market. They reveal the author's apparent authenticity as a construct appealing to market demands. Thus, what Smyth calls 'postmodern features' are better described as rhetorical features, which exhibit the conventional relationship between the *amanuensis*/editor and the testimonial witness/narrator as problematic and as *not* emancipating.

The genre's wish to challenge silences and to give voice to the unheard is admirable and noble but simultaneously problematic; the apparent authenticity is dissected and exposed. Instead actively resisting to be literature (cf. Beverley 2004, 49), its aesthetic effect, linguistically elaborated or not, becomes apparent when reading the main narration in relation to its paratexts: testimonial narration highlights its status as a literary construct. Thereby, it does not matter whether the text is a purely fictional testimonial narration like *Unconfessed*, written by an accomplished author, or the partly fictional and collaborative effort of writer and superstes like *What is the What.* Or, in fact, whether the narration is actually written by the testimonial subject him- or herself as in the case of Equiano/Vassa and Douglass. The assembly of a testi-

mony committed to verifiable historical events and people on the one hand, and narrative strategies on the other hand always exhibit writer and testimonial subject as controlled and created by the conditions of the book market. It becomes obvious that while texts like these are written to emancipate the testimonial subject, they of course are written for profit. Both ambitions are linked, and the exhibition of this link can open opportunities for a reformulation of the conventional and problematic relationship between author, testimonial subject, and book market. While the gaps cannot be filled, and anti-colonial resistance as representation always replicates the oppressive structures it actually means to escape, it is the important task of testimonial narration to discuss these structures and to expose them.

> Let me be strong now. Sila, whoever Sila is, wherever she has come from, I am telling you, be strong. This might be all there is, of necessity, but all there is could be less still. (Christiansë 2006, 340)

Whether it is the depiction of slavery, child soldiery or even genocide, testimonial narration is always literary representation motivated by market demands. However, as problematic and questionable it is to 'sell activism', the recreation of 'voices' lost in history, diminished, overwritten, or brutally slaughtered, testimonial narration has the possibilities to re-negotiate its own structures and dependencies. By analysing the intricate interplay of narrative strategies and humanitarian rhetoric, the troubled relationship between paratextual material and the main narration, testimonial narration can raise awareness for human rights violations and point to the highly difficult mystification of 'authentic representation' as the postcolonial utopia of emancipation and liberation of marginalised voices and bodies through text.

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The Birth of the (Non)European Author draws attention to the power relations between subaltern authors and the field of publishing, especially focusing on the ownership of author rights and the representation of authorship. By particularly concentrating on the creation and marketing of "indigenous authorship" and "marginality" as goods on the global book market, the relationship between "subaltern/marginalised" authors and agents of the book market, such as editors and publishers is highlighted as unbalanced and precarious.

This book traces the genre testimonial narration, from slave narratives to African-American child soldier memoirs, analysing the relationship of Western publishing modes and what is being sold as "African authorship". Combining explorations of theories of representation and authorship with close readings of testimonial narrations and the analysis of the relationship between professional writer and witness, this book contributes to the field of postcolonial theory, globalization studies and book history.

Anna-Katharina Krüger studied Comparative Literature at the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich and Book History at the Oxford Brookes University. As a scholar of the DFG research training group „Globalization and Literature – Representations, Transformations, Interventions" she finished and defendend her dissertation in 2017. Her research focus lies on postcolonial literature, authorship and representation theory as well as testimonial narration.

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