ALFRED HORNUNG (Ed.)

Obama and Transnational American Studies

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ALFRED HORNUNG
ANKE ORTLEPP
HEIKE PAUL

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ALFRED HORNUNG

Preface

The concept of American Studies as an interdisciplinary analysis of the culture, history, and politics of the United States of America has undergone a number of changes since the mid-twentieth century. In response to given historical constellations, American Studies scholars have critically accompanied the successive positions of the United States, represented by her presidents, as a leader of the Free World, as an indispensable nation, and as a global player on an increasingly interdependent planet earth. The emergence of Transnational American Studies (TAS) has been attributed to the aftermath of 9/11 and President Bush's ensuing unilateral politics (Rowe, Robinson, Hornung 2011). The conception and proliferation of TAS by the American Studies Association and partner associations on a global scale were part of an intellectual and academic procedure to provide an egalitarian basis of scholarly cooperation in discussing the role of U.S. culture and politics in the world (Fishkin; Hornung 2004). While critics have challenged this new turn in American Studies as part of a new form of American exceptionalism (Fluck, Pease, Rowe 2012), have envisioned American Studies after the transnational turn (Bieger, Saldívar, Voelz 2013), or directed attention to the transpacific world (Shu, Pease 2016), TAS nevertheless seems to have become an appropriate and viable form of critical engagement with America at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Hebel 2012). In the same way in which John F. Kennedy and his family embodied the idea of the U.S. as the leader of the Free World, which gave rise to Cold War American Studies, Barack Obama and his extended family seem to embody the concept and practice of Transnational American Studies.

Barack Obama's biography encapsulates the principal features of a Transnational American Studies approach. His biracial descent from a white American mother from Kansas and an African father from Kenya, his formative years in the multiethnic environment of the state of Ha-

wai'i, the school experience in the Muslim Indonesian capital of Djakarta, the education in Los Angeles and at Columbia University in New York, and the conscious decision to undertake social work for the African American community in South Side Chicago before entering Harvard Law School represent an academic background and an intercultural network which have prepared him for an unusual political career. His successful political campaigns for the state of Illinois, the U.S. Senate, and eventually for the first non-white President of the United States were run on an all-inclusive and innovative agenda in line with the transnational turn in many academic, cultural, and political areas (see Christ/Olson 2012 and Bond 2012). In his own publications, Obama has stressed the importance of his transnational connections. Thus, he begins writing his commissioned autobiography, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995; 2004), in Bali rather than in the United States, which describes vividly his transnational education and ends with his visit in his father's native Kenya, emphasizing the triangular constellation of America, Asia, and Africa. Likewise, his autobiographically based series of essays in *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006) contains a long chapter on "The World Beyond Our Borders" (271-323) in which Obama relates his own time in Indonesia to world politics and recognizes the limited role of nation-states in dealing with transnational affairs. This new transnational reach seems to be based on the reaffirmation of the value of American family life. The concluding chapter of *The Audacity of Hope* presents Obama's own family as a model for reclaiming the American Dream, which historically has always been an attraction to all people across the globe. Hence, Barack Obama's transnational role is also related to his wife, his children, and his African siblings (see Hornung 2013).

First Lady Michelle Obama's conception of her role as "Mom-in-Chief" in the White House has generated a number of nationwide and by implication transnational health programs for children and all Americans (Birte 2012). The "Let's Move" and "growing organic food" campaigns have had a tremendous impact on changing attitudes and minds both at home and abroad. A comparable public program was advanced by Obama's Kenyan sister Auma, whose education at the universities of Heidelberg and Bayreuth eventually led to her social work in England and later engagement for children in Kenya under the auspices of CARE

International, described in her autobiography *Das Leben kommt immer dazwischen* (2010), translated into *And then Life Happens* (2012). Siblings in other parts of the world, round off the president's transnational family network and provide like Mark Obama Ndesandjo in Shenzhen, China, further autobiographical insights: *An Obama's Journey: My Odyssey of Self-Discovery across Three Cultures* (2014).

The contributions in this volume address the assumption of a correlation between the extended Obama family, the Obama presidency and Transnational American Studies. The articles are revised and extended versions of papers first given at a conference in October 2014 in preparation of the founding of the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University, with Auma Obama as the keynote speaker at the opening ceremony. Hence the first section, "Transnational Family and Life Writing," opens with Dr. Auma Obama's presentation on her foundation Sauti Kuu in Kenya, which promotes self-aid programs for young people and a return to agrarian values in partnership with German companies. It is based on her intercultural experiences of education and social work in Africa, Europe, and the United States of America. Alfred Hornung and Birgit M. Bauridl analyze these triangular affiliations in Obama's German- and English-language autobiography and the biopic "The Education of Auma Obama" produced by the German *Filmkantine* in co-production with *ZDF/Das kleine Fernsehspiel* and the Kenyan director Branwen Okpako. Carmen Birkle compares the similarities and differences in the lives of Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey and the public presentation of African American womanhood. Xiuming He describes the first lady's official visit in the company of her children and her mother to the People's Republic of China and her interaction with China's First Lady Peng Liyuan. The section concludes with Greg Robinson's evaluation of Barack Obama's Asian connections in his life and politics and suggests to see him as the first Asian American rather than African American president.

The contributions in the second section focus on transnational connections in past and present as apparent in pre- or post-national formations and in legal actions related to multiethnic and multilingual societies in which members of the extended Obama family grew up. Kristina Bross and Laura M. Stevens survey the field of Early American Studies and detect many of the transnational features associated with the twenty-

first century. Likewise, Elizabeth J. West discovers transnational elements associated with Barack Obama's life in life narratives by Muslim immigrants from Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose social status saved them from the usual fate of those who were black and enslaved. Yet, they had only a passing influence on American society, which West likens to Obama's presidency. The importance of oceans for transnational connections between European colonizers and indigenous cultures figures in contemporary Canadian and Australian artistic expressions and literature that Birgit Däwes reads as trans-indigenous trajectories. The creolization of the U.S. South emerges in the life writings of migrants with Asian and Latin American backgrounds who conform to Barack Obama's 2008 race speech "A More Perfect Union" in Charles R. Wilson's assessment. For him, the South is the new center of immigration, a center of a gastronomic revolution, which prefigures the future of a transnational society. The transnational ramifications of legal issues are the subjects of Glenn T. Eskew's and Rüdiger Kunow's articles. Eskew reviews Barack Obama's biographical and political connections to the Civil Rights Movement to evaluate the achievements of the Joshua generation. Rüdiger Kunow gives a critical account of Obama Care as an exceptionalist piece of legislation in an exceptionalist nation and shows its proximity to neoliberal economies.

Barack Obama's appearance in and usage of the media has importantly determined his political life. In addition, he has also become a subject of transnational media. Contributions of the third section demonstrate the transnational reach and appeal of Obama's figure. Mita Banerjee analyzes the locations of Bollywood films in the Swiss Alps and in the United States and reveals the implications of the filmed encounter between an autistic Muslim immigrant from India and the African American president to disprove the terrorist fear and to counteract racial profiling. Paul Giles recognizes a connection between the postmodernist president Obama and the postmodernist filmmaker Quentin Tarantino and reads the narratives by these figures in an intertextual relation to the country's history of slavery and involvement in the Second World War. SunHee Kim Gertz correlates Obama's Philadelphia race speech with Sönke Wortmann's film of the German soccer championship in 1954 to point to the attempts to overcome historical positions in both countries in the twenty-first century. Carola Betzen reviews the hopes connected with Obama's presidency and the limitations Obama

encountered in office to account for the disappointment in the African American community about the return of racist actions. Kendrick Lamar's hip hop music, she argues, presents a solution to the president's impasse by countering the despair in urban ghettos with a more positive attitude and self-respect. Udo Hebel applies his concept of interpictoriality to trace the historical images of American presidents which are consciously used for framing Obama in the gallery and contexts of his predecessors. In her comparative analysis of Obama and Snowden, Gesa Mackenthun refers to the examples of Henry David Thoreau, Huck Finn and the Declaration of Independence to question the political opposition in the Obama administration to the journalist's courageous defense of American values in his Russian exile.

"Transnational Affinities" begins with an account by UCLA-based specialist in Chinese archeology Lothar von Falkenhausen of the work done in the Cultural Property Advisory Committee. Appointed by President Obama, Falkenhausen and his colleagues advise the government on preventing the pillage of archeological sites all over the world and the illegal importation of antiquities. Nina Morgan focuses on the interrelation of political autobiography and the nation-state in her Derridean reading of the affinities between the late South African President Nelson Mandela and the U.S. President. Given the racial histories in both countries she argues with Derrida for the importance of forgetting as essential for reconciliation. Gerd Hurm relates Obama to the historical situation of the 1930s via the Luxembourg-born Edward Steichen and his photography in which he shows Steichen's concern for the poor and projects his transnational idea of "The Family of Man." Nicole Waller takes up the political status of Puerto Rico for her discussion of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor's autobiography and critically comments on Barack Obama's official presentation of her life. Jutta Ernst uses the example of the American born Eugene Jolas, who oscillated between German-speaking Lorraine and the United States and in his poetry developed an original translingual connection between the two continents, to underscore the Hawaiian-born Obama's concerns for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in his agenda of "Building the American Mosaic." The section concludes with Christa Buschendorf's presentation of Shirley Graham Du Bois's life and her work to achieve a transnational alliance of people from Asia and Africa with the support of the Communist party. She also uses the artist's and activist's journal *Freedom-*

ways as a case study for a relational sociological reading of the African American we-identity and its tendency toward transnationalism.

My American Studies colleagues, Mita Banerjee, Axel Schäfer, Oliver Scheiding, and I would like to thank all contributors to this volume for their original articles in support of our efforts to establish the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz. The conference, in which they first presented their ideas, was funded by the Ministry for Education, Science, Continuing Education and Culture, the Center for Intercultural Studies, the research network Social and Cultural Studies Mainz (SoCuM), the German Research Foundation, and our publisher Universitätsverlag Winter in Heidelberg. We would like to thank all sponsors for their invaluable support, which also made this publication possible.

In the preparation of this volume for print, Stephanie Marx and Johannes Brauer corresponded with contributors and formatted the manuscripts. Timothy Walker copy-edited all papers and provided his native speaker expertise. Morgan Mooney proofread the manuscripts. The final task of setting up the camera-ready copy was expertly handled by Joy Katzmarzik with the indispensable support of Silvia Appeltrath. I am deeply indebted to all of these willing American Studies graduates for seeing the volume to print.

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I. Transnational Family and Life Writing

AUMA OBAMA

You Are Your Future

Before talking about my foundation in Kenya, I wish to say that I am honored and I want, on behalf of the Obama family, to thank you all for making our family a subject of transatlantic, transcultural, and intercultural interest. Perhaps this will enable people to discuss multiculturalism, interculturalism, and just how people manage to be with each other and live with each other across cultures, which I think is a way towards improving our world, considering all the different and terrible things that are going on at the present or at least that we hear about in the press as going on at present.

I am going to talk about my organization, Sauti Kuu, which is a global non-profit foundation that reaches out to children and young people, aiding them in developing realistic alternatives to poverty and helping them to actively participate in improving their situation—and at the same time that of their families and communities. The foundation was registered in 2010, but I started the work with a pilot project in Alego in 2008. Kenya is an equatorial country in East Africa that has enormous stretches of green, fertile land, yet over half the population lives in the capital, Nairobi, in urban poverty and slums. One of the aims of my foundation is to break the chain of poverty by which poor farmers fleeing the impoverishment of the countryside end up living in the capital as poor, unskilled, slum dwellers. I'm convinced that if we can give young people the confidence and experience to use the local resources at hand and their own potentials and strengths, they can create a better future for themselves and their families.

The name of the foundation, Sauti Kuu, means "powerful voices" in Kiswahili and the organization is called that because even I, personally, as a young girl spent a good part of my childhood and my youth fighting to have a voice. I grew up in a patriarchal family among very strong-

willed boys and as a single girl I constantly heard, “as a girl you cannot do this”, or “as a girl you have to let your brother do that”, or “as a girl you have to do this”, or “you must do this or that or the other.” I always fought against the idea that I was going to be forced to do something just because of the fact that I had been born a girl: I wanted to know why this was so and I was told one does not really ask questions.

Culturally we tend to listen to what we are told, and do as we are told, and not argue about it. But I would constantly ask questions and this questioning caused problems because, as a young person, you are supposed to be meek, and quiet, and not really have a voice. Everybody else speaks for you and that really disturbed me. What we try to give young people in my foundation comes from thinking back to my own fight in trying to get a voice and the path that I took that made me who I am.

One of the key drivers of our work is implied in the title of my talk, and this is directed towards young people: “You Are Your Future.” When I say young people are the future, people say, “Oh that’s a cliché, everybody uses that expression,” but I strongly believe that young people *are* the future. So when I tell young people, “you are your future,” I also then add quite quietly, “you are also my future,” because at the point when I am too old and too weak to make decisions and have no position anymore because I am an old-age pensioner, they will be the ones in the seat of power, making the decisions. And I want those decisions to be in my favor. If I treat youth right *now*, they might treat me okay when I get to that age. That is also how I talk to grown-ups about how they are supposed to view young people and how, whether we like it or not, we have to pass on the baton. So it is so important and not just a necessity, but actually an obligation and a responsibility, to make sure that young people develop in a way that we would like them to be later on when they take over from us.

You are your future. How do we make this a reality at Sauti Kuu and what is it that motivates us? I do not do this work because I think out of some technical reason or some academic reason it is the right thing to do. It really is what I feel and what I believe is the way one should live one’s life. One can argue about it and have the conversation with me. I am quite open for the conversation, but I warn you, I have been doing this for years and I have really good arguments as to why I believe the model we use really works.

One of the things we are trying to do is define *self*, especially when we talk about young people who are socially, financially, and culturally disadvantaged. Very often, they have a very poor sense of self. We try to make young people really discover who they are or at least become aware of who they are as individuals. Who are you? Are you important enough? Do you even see yourself? Do you even hear yourself? Do you think you are important enough to be heard? Do you think you are important enough to take a position on anything? And are you even able to take a position on anything? And do you believe this position you take is of relevance to the greater community that you live in? It is very, very important for young people to know who they are. It does not matter where they come from, whether from Kenya, from England, or from Germany. Once young people know themselves and their potential, their opportunities are unlimited.

Saying this to a young person from the slums may in the first instance not seem right when looking at pictures taken where it actually happens: the biggest dump in Nairobi. The kids and the families go there to look for bits and pieces, trinkets to sell so that they can eat. And telling that young person that they have unlimited opportunities seems in the first instance a little bit of a joke, so bear with me as I try to explain what we do in trying to redefine poverty. What is poverty? Poverty is actually relative because very often what one person thinks is poverty is not necessarily poverty because individual persons limit themselves to what they consider valuable in their own lives and surroundings. And the problem with the idea of poverty, especially when it comes to the disadvantaged, is that we who are less disadvantaged have given poverty a definition that the disadvantaged then tend to want to fit into, so they can qualify for the support that those get who are poor. Now, I am talking specifically about the developing countries in the part of the world where I come from, Kenya. We are dealing with a crisis where poverty becomes an asset because somebody might notice a disadvantaged person and their family and might put them in that program and maybe they will make it. But that somebody is someone from outside of that person's life; they represent external support that the disadvantaged individual cannot control. He or she cannot define what the external supporters are going to do. Instead, the latter tell the disadvantaged what they need to do with their lives. They define them by the fact that certain things are missing in their lives and that then

qualifies as poverty. I do not want to dismiss poverty as a problem, but we have to redefine it to make clear that the fact that someone does not have running water or electricity does not necessarily mean they are poor. They just live in a different environment, a different world, a different culture.

At Sauti Kuu, we are also trying to redefine the idea of development aid. Those who have heard me speak know how I feel about the whole idea of development aid. I always ask the question, “Yes, development aid, but development to what or from what?” How come when it comes to talking about the developing world, development is discussed without giving it a context? We have to start redefining what we mean and being more concrete. Are we talking about economic development? Are we talking about social development, or ecological development? What development *are* we talking about? Because once we know what is meant by development, then we can start doing something about it. But just to say, “I am coming to Kenya to do development aid,” means for me nothing. I always then ask, “What are you going to do? Develop what, *from* what, *to* what?”

Sauti Kuu aims to redefine development aid for two reasons. Firstly and fundamentally, based on the three terms I mentioned, self, poverty and disadvantage, we are trying to encourage the people to realize they are not victims of their situations. They are in situations where they are disadvantaged as children, and young people, and as entire families, but they cannot be defined by those situations and they can change those situations. The people need to change their mindsets around it. Because no condition is permanent: it can always be changed. That transformation is very, very important and a key part of our work. Secondly, saying “Oh, I want to get development aid” as something that comes externally steered from outside is not sustainable. It falls into the category of philanthropy.

Development aid in itself, as philanthropy, is not sustainable because if the kind of help someone gets is based on that—though it is wonderful help and we are grateful for it—it is help that somebody gives coming from their passion. It is what Germans call “guilt feeling”: I feel I *need* to help. So if I feel like helping and I have an extra twenty U.S. dollars or Euros, I will donate. It can even be two or twenty thousand that I donate, but I am doing it out of a sense that I am helping because I need to help. Because these are poor people. Which is also a position that our

foundation, which is a charity, could take and a way for us to get the money, but it is not sustainable. Because the day someone decides that they are not happy with what you are doing and how are you running your program, if you are dependent on the money that they are giving to you and they stop, then your program dies. Or the day they decide they are not interested in supporting kids who have AIDS and HIV: now they want to support girls because it's the in-thing to do. Then the program is left hanging and what organizations do next, for those who know the development world, is a huge summersault and all sorts of acrobatics to move from doing aid as their program to focusing on girls so they can continue getting the money.

Development aid is not sustainable. There is no plan to it. It is not really development because the recipients are not developing *to* anything. They are collecting this thing that is called development aid. And hopping from one program to another. We try to stop that with the work that we do because we say development has to be in the context of the underprivileged, especially the economically disadvantaged, and has to be within economic development, where the people can actually do something about it. Aid has to be put into the mainstream. The kids we work with may come from disadvantaged backgrounds, but at the end of the day what we want to do is to bring them from the point of being disadvantaged to a place where they become responsible young adults who are earning an income, participating in the running of their communities, regions, and nations in a responsible way with financial independence. At the end of the day, all that is economics.

When we achieve that, we are going to have sustainability because (and this is what we really do with these young people) we start teaching them that whatever they are doing is going to lead somewhere economically to improve their lot and the lot of their communities. They are part of the economic value chain. We tell the young people participating in Sauti Kuu and interested in becoming part of our organization: do not become a member because you think you are going to get freebies and handouts. Be a member because you know there is something in it for you. It does not work any other way, that is what life is about, that is mainstream, that is the reality and we have to move away from development aid, which is undefined, and to a space where we are actually defining the kind of interaction we are having with each other. This is when it gets dynamic and things start moving.

And this is where our work starts becoming more precise because we then work with young people to develop their personalities and their character and to enable young people to ask the question: "What's in it for me?" We work with them to realize and recognize their potential. Because if they do not have the confidence to ask that question, they cannot participate; they must be able to believe in themselves in order to be able to take responsibility for themselves. They are then forced to be active and to participate and the moment they are active and raise that voice people will hear it. And that is what Sauti Kuu is all about. Making young people use that voice. And once they use that voice then we have an approach that we call eye to eye, on the same level. It is their responsibility to participate; it is their responsibility to change their lives so that they do not use poverty as an excuse and do not see themselves as victims. The mentality we have in most cases with the disadvantaged, especially in our part of the world, makes people feel that they are victims and that the world owes them in order for their lives to get better.

We started off some many years ago saying, "Let's give these people fish." Then we said, "No, no, no, let's teach them how to fish." What I always say is, "Do not give people fish, do not teach them how to fish, ask them, whether they eat fish." That is when the conversation starts happening. And if someone does not eat fish, then they should say so and when the person asking has nothing but fish to offer then he has to retreat and say I cannot help you because all I do is trade in fish. I use the term conversation as an analogy, but it needs to happen, and it is a scary conversation because, from our part of the world in particular, everybody thinks, "Oh the West is great and we need to listen. They are the experts. We are ingenuous when we start making conditions and asking for our rights and want to have a conversation. They are going to withdraw; they are not going to give us their money." And then on the West's side? Let's face it, I worked for CARE International,[1] I was an insider, I know the situation. You get good salaries as expatriates, you get lovely homes, you get nice big cars. You can hop from one organi-

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[1] An international aid agency dedicated to ending global poverty via development and humanitarian programs, hence the term "care package." The acronym CARE now stands for Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere.

zation to the other living a wonderful life; your kids' school fees are paid and everything. Are you going to give up on that? Are you going to say I only have fish to sell and I am going to go away and leave? You are going to look for another organization that is going to want the fish that you are giving them. Right? So this is the situation. Let's be honest about it and change the dialogue that is going on because it *is* a business at the end of the day. Development aid is keeping a whole system going.

But if we really look at the core of it, the basis of development aid can be changed from within by changing the attitude, not just of the recipients, but also of those who give. We need to say that this is a dialogue that we are having around trying to improve the situation of the communities we come into. We are trying to create spaces. We are trying to create a possibility for young people and their communities to be able to improve their lot in a dialogue situation, where they get heard; they listen as well and, together, solutions are found for the problems that they have.

We ask the communities and we have conversations in order to change this very negative status quo and to get rid of the victim mentality and the dependency mentality. This is what Sauti Kuu is trying to do. Let us create platforms where we make this change possible and our focus is on children and youth again because they are our future. Let us create platforms where we enable the people we work with to use their potential to change their lives by themselves with our support and assistance. And the only time we should use the term "help" is when we have a conflict situation or catastrophes. Talk of the tsunami, of earthquakes, floods, talk of war. But every other form of development work together should be a partnership, a give and take, a conversation, a negotiation—even in the highest instance. Because, to be honest, a lot of the time international support is necessary to try to get our own governments to move and manage our systems in such a way that it is profitable and advantageous for the communities that we come from.

While creating the spaces for conversation, Sauti Kuu has created a youth center from where we started talking and working under a tree. If you go onto our website, you can see we now have a youth center where the young people can come to a safe space, participate in activities, and have conversations among themselves about what they want to do and how they want to improve themselves and their communities. They have an opportunity to discover their voices because they are made to use

their voices through different activities. Through sport as well. Very good. Nobody is louder anywhere else than on a sports pitch, and young people get to have that opportunity to use their voices to appreciate themselves and be appreciated by others, which is very, very important not just for the young, but for all of us. They also are obliged to initiate activities that make a difference in their community. But *they* initiate the activities.

When I started the work with Sauti Kuu, it was very, very frustrating because it was just me under the tree with these very naïve youth. I would get my whole family into the rural areas to cook three-course meals for these young people, meals which they were not used to. I would be searching all over, looking for vegetables and all the ingredients because, although the people have land, acres of it, they do not use it to produce the products they need to eat, let alone to sell. I would arrive, filling the taxis with all that food and feeding the young people and they would love it, and we would have a great time. Then I would say, "Okay, what are we going to do about your challenges and your issues?" and there would be silence. I would be like, "Okay, I can think of a lot of things because I am that sort of a person. I can think of thousands of things. The challenges you guys have, I see them already yet it is not for me to say. You guys have to solve your problems yourselves."

We spent two years looking at each other, drinking juice, eating biscuits, and having three-course meals for lunch. They ended up saying to me, "Auma, this is really difficult 'cause the people in the community are laughing at us. They say these are Auma's young people who sit, drink juice, and talk because they expect to get freebies." Well, which they did not get, but I honored them because they stayed on with me, even if in anticipation, "Okay this time she is going to tell us what we are going to do, she is going to tell us." Yet I could not. I said, "I cannot because it is up to you all." Only later, once we started doing a lot more work around personality development, did I realize that these young people did not use their voices; they do not believe they'll be heard and they do not have the courage to use their voice. Only when I retreated and let them take the lead did we start moving forward.

We really had an active situation though we were not doing anything for two years while I was waiting for them and they didn't believe me. Because they are used to being told what to do, one of the biggest challenges even today is for youth to finally take the lead and decide

what's going to happen with their lives. So, in a concrete way the areas that we then move on to, once the youth realize who they are, involve looking at young people's potential.

Again, thinking of so-called development aid, nobody ever really asks these people, "Okay we are coming in; we are going to do some work with you, but what can you bring to the table?" They are defined as poor and everything that comes on the table is very expensive because if the program has been set somewhere else and it comes as a package, they are importing whatever it is that they need. This process is costly because that is where our governments make a nice sum of money by charging one hundred percent customs and all the rest of it to get it into the country. So a key question has to be to ask what is already there in the community, what local resources the people can use to get what they need. Not what they *might like*, but rather what they *need* in order to improve their lives.

We have a very important saying at Sauti Kuu: "Use what you have to get what you need." We work with young people and their families in such a way that we look at the resources that they have; they cannot come with nothing to the table because everybody has something to offer. Everybody, even if it is just a brain with a lot of great ideas. So, for example, we support them in education if their brain is what they have to offer. Work hard, get good grades and get an education so you can improve your life. It is a very, very important exchange between the parties that are involved, based on respect and on the fact that this redefinition of self, poverty and potential is trying to make a difference to better the lives of the young people and their families because they are part of the value chain. They are the consumers; they are the employees. They are the employer, potentially.

We also support young people in agriculture, especially in the rural areas, because we have families that have five acres, six acres, ten acres of land and are using one acre trying to feed themselves. They do not have any food, they cannot. They import food. Like I said, me with the taxi and my cabbages and my vegetables for the lunches. Everybody is doing it, importing food into this area where they have land and can grow food. So, we tell them that they have a resource that they should appreciate and use.

The sad thing though is—because we have been taught that a person is successful only if they have a white-collar job, and our school system

works that way—that we send people to school with the anticipation that they will get white-collar jobs. Anybody who then does not get a white-collar job and ends up working in the countryside feels they are a failure. So young people working the land do it very, very reluctantly.

With our colonial background, now speaking directly about Kenya and the African countries that were colonized, it was the women who were left in the homesteads tilling the land. The men went to work on the big farms, the ranches, etc., or in the city. So, to stay behind in the countryside and work the land is seen not only as a failure, but is perceived as doing women's work, which, you can imagine, in that kind of context and in that culture is seen as something very negative.

The difficulty in getting people to work on their land is what is causing extra poverty. We work on changing the mindset and telling the people that this land that they have is an asset. It does not mean they have to all become farmers. Maybe there are five children and one might become the farmer, but the rest of the family will profit. Maybe none of them will farm, but get the land working for them first, put a manager in place and then go to the city. Part of the problem of slums and the poverty in cities is that people go to the city unequipped. They have no funds, they have no knowledge. They have nowhere to stay. They end up doing nothing in the city. Or doing the work that we see in the waste dump.

Using the resources that communities have locally and then also appreciating vocational skills, handicrafts and different vocations that do not require going to university are important aims. Our system says that the only people who are successful are the ones who manage to go to university: This is the lovely golden path, going to university, getting a professorship, whatever, big jobs, architect, doctor, you know, whatever. But on the side people are falling off, becoming plumbers, electricians, carpenters, and everybody sees it as if someone failed and did not get the grades to continue. However, this is a terrible way of looking at things because the most expensive people to get to work for you are electricians, plumbers, and masons. Do they not make the most money at the end of the day? This trend is, especially in Europe, happening more and more. Believe me, masons and masseurs are working those jobs and then still going to university and getting that degree because they can afford to pay their way through school.

Young people need to start being realistic; instead of getting a white-collar job where they are sitting in a government office bored stiff, looking for little things to do on the side to make extra money because the pay is so miserable, they could actually have a skill that they could use to make more money and still improve their situation and still actually sit in the office and have the white-collar job. Because if someone does really well, they can employ people and become the boss and then do not have to dirty their hands. There are many ways to get there.

We do not work just with the kids in rural areas in Kenya, we try and work internationally. We have just started a pilot project with kids in Germany around being responsible for your own life. You are your future, and also taking ownership of what happens in your life. And as you ask "What's in it for you? What are the resources that are available to you that you can use to improve your life?" An exchange between parties is created that is based on respect for the difference young people are trying to make. The model that we use in Kenya to try and create a platform for young people to use their potential is the same as what we are trying to do in Europe as well, starting with Germany. We aim to create a space where young people can realize their potential and also find back to the community, a joint community, where the adults are also involved because at the moment there is a lot of mistrust of adults, who do not seem to have the interests of youth at heart. At our end, in Kenya, not so much, like I said earlier, because it is also a matter of meeting the material needs and when those needs are reached and a sponsor (usually an adult) is found, the kids are happy, they trust and believe in that organization. Of course, this process brings other problems—but that is a conversation for another time.

In closing, I would like to reflect on a talk I gave the other day around mental challenges and psychological issues that people have. One of the conversations we had was a comparison of Africa and Europe. What I was trying to explain was that, in my culture, we do not look back; that is one of the cultural differences. If I have issues now, it is very hard for me to think, "Oh, it is because my mom didn't do this or that." Because my mom didn't do something, my mom beat me up, or I didn't get enough cuddles, or whatever. I cannot even think of going there to explain why I am miserable now. In the West, people look back and talk about the past, which is good in itself and is a way to do the therapy around it, but the problem is you cannot change the past; you

can only change your present and your future. So having a situation where you think “Oh well, I am in this situation because that and that happened before and now they owe me” is going to put you in the bog. You get stuck. You cannot move forward because that is not going to change. And despite the strategies developed to deal with the past, it is still up to you at the end of the day. You have to look forward because it is your life, in your hands. You are your future. For us older ones, it is the same. What I have said and addressed mainly to the young people applies to all of us. It is never too late; we still can take our lives into our own hands and make sure that our future is how we want it to be and how we want to form it. Working in collaboration with each other across continents, across nationalities, and across cultures in order to improve this space that we live in has a lot of challenges, especially now in the twenty-first century.

ALFRED HORNUNG

Auma Obama's Intercultural Life Writing

In 2010 *Das Leben kommt immer dazwischen: Stationen einer Reise* appeared from the German publisher Bastei Lübbe. It turned out to be an autobiography by Auma Obama, the African sister of the first African American president of the United States, Barack Obama. It is also this family relation which serves as a basis for the sister's autobiography. It begins with a letter from the new Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, with whom Auma had shared a table at the inauguration of Barack Obama's presidency in Washington, DC, in which Hillary gratefully remembers their conversation. A year later, in 2011, the Second Channel of the public German television, ZDF, broadcast a documentary film or biopic called *Die Geschichte der Auma Obama*. The film was part of the Channel's series "Das kleine Fernsehspiel" written by the Nigerian-born director Branwen Okpako. It is available in a bilingual DVD *The Education of Auma Obama*. Another year later, in September 2012, an English version of the German autobiography appeared from St. Martins Press in New York, translated by Ross Benjamin. It is easy to see that these autobiographical activities in print and audiovisual media are connected to the limelight of the African American president which is cast on his extended African family as well. His sister uses it for her own activities in international social work and to affirm, by way of three versions of her autobiography, her own self against the public scrutiny of the male world. In this examination of Auma Obama's autobiographical portrayals of herself, I would like to focus on this network of relations which is situated between three continents: Africa, Europe and the United States of America.

It is no surprise that Auma begins her life narrative with reference to her position as a girl in the family. The patriarchal rule in her family even extends to her two-year older brother Abongo who can order her around. When her mother is pregnant with her, her father left Kenya to

study in the United States, first at the University of Hawai'i in Mānoa, then at Harvard University where he earned an MA in economics. During his years in the United States from 1959 to 1964 Barack Obama, Sr., started two marriages: First he married Stanley Ann Dunham in Hawai'i with whom he had a son, Barack, the later president. He divorced Ann in 1963 for Ruth Beatrice Baker who went with him back to Nairobi where they married and had two sons. Since the Luo tradition allows polygamy, the Kenyan wife, Auma's mother, had to accept this situation. When he had settled down in Nairobi with his new family, Auma was forced to leave her mother and live with the new family in Nairobi. This was the start of her life-long struggle for independence from patriarchal roles: "My family belongs to the Luo people, in which the man occupies the undisputed role of patriarch" (*Life* 9)[1]. In my analysis of Auma's education and emancipation I will show that she actually achieves her independence by way of the German language and literature.

In her Nairobi high school, she happened to have a teacher of German from the German Democratic Republic who generated her interest in Germany and eventually helped her to gain a DAAD scholarship to study there. At the age of twenty, she left Kenya to spend a total of sixteen years from 1980 to 1996 in Germany where she studied German literature, linguistics and sociology first in Saarbrücken near the French border, then in Heidelberg where she received an M.A. Then she followed her dissertation advisor Alois Wierlacher to the University of Bayreuth, which specializes in African cultures. There she wrote a thesis on "Arbeitsauffassungen in Deutschland und ihre literarische Kritik in ausgewählten Texten der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur zwischen 1953 und 1983: ein Beitrag zum Kulturvergleich Deutschland – Kenia" (1996)[2]. Her road to emancipation began with the change of her first name from the Anglicized Rita to her Luo name Auma. It also included her acquisition of a foreign language, which adds to the linguistic hori-

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1 Parenthetical quotations are from the English language autobiography *And Then Life Happens* unless indicated otherwise.

2 English translation: "The Concepts of Labor in Germany and Their Literary Criticism in Exemplary Texts of Contemporary German Literature between 1953 and 1983: A Contribution to a Comparison of Cultures of Germany and Kenya."

zon of her local Luo language and colonial English, and eventually extended to the interpretation of German literature from a sociological point of view and the new discipline of intercultural German Studies. This new horizon of linguistic and literary knowledge allowed her to meet her father on a new level of understanding. She had left Kenya without informing her patriarchal father of her study abroad, but now she was ready to receive him in Heidelberg and to communicate with him on an equal level. When he died in 1982 in a car accident under mysterious circumstances, perhaps connected to his critical attitude toward the corrupt Kenyan government, she pitied him and recognized his loneliness in the last years of his life. For her, he is now "the most important human being in her life" and in this spirit she dedicates her autobiography to him: "In loving memory of my father, Barack Hussein Obama, I dedicate this book to my family" (*Life* Epigraph). Her concept of family also takes on a new intercultural level of comprehensiveness and understanding when her mother comes to visit her in Heidelberg in 1984, and when she receives the first letter from her American brother that same year.

From the perspective of the new field of intercultural German Studies, Auma Obama learned to read contemporary German literature and evaluate its critical representation of labor based on her own experience of labor in Germany and Kenya. Reading classic novels of the postwar years such as Siegfried Lenz' *Deutschstunde*, Heinrich Böll's *Ansichten eines Clowns* or Peter Schneider's *Lenz*, she recognized the drive of the individualistic pursuit of professional goals in Germany and by implication of the Western industrial nations. In Kenya, on the other hand, she saw labor directed toward human interrelations and the common weal. This intercultural approach gradually translated into Auma Obama's public life in Germany. It enabled her to counteract the persistence of Western stereotypes about Africa, which is seen as a continent rather than as the collection of different countries and ethnicities. Increasingly, she participated in public discussions on German radio and TV programs and actually started to give a series of courses on Germany's image of Africa for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, associated with the Social Democratic Party. Rightly, she argues that the official programs of support and development for African countries often camouflage the existing stereotypes. Rather than staying put in the small and pedestrian city of Bayreuth in Northern Bavaria, she started traveling in

Germany, including doing work for the media in Berlin, where she meets her future husband, Marvin, an Englishman. They got married and had a daughter in 1997. The new reality of her family life found its equivalents in the media, the completion of her film in the studios of Babelsberg "All that Glitters is not Gold" (1997) which autobiographically thematizes the difficult times of an African woman in Germany. Taken together with the screenplay, which she wrote later in Zimbabwe for a film about the youth of her parents, she has completely rearranged the former family relations in the patriarchal society of Kenya to form a caring network of equal family members within her own extended family.

Similar forms of rearrangement pertain to her experience in social care services. In England, she volunteered to work for senior people in a home for the aged and realized the perfunctory and basically emotionless treatment of these people by the service personnel. Again, she compares the cool and aloof distance toward the aged who are put away from their relatives in private or public homes with the care given to adult people in her own Kenyan society. The many emotional scenes and commitments to her grandmother and other senior people emphasize the inclusion of elderly people in family life where they are nurtured and cared for by their relatives. Likewise, she also registers a similar cultural difference in looking after children in Kindergarten. In England, children are supervised by caretakers who try to comply with the professional rules of the trade rather than showing emotional commitment to the children and their needs. Abstract distance rather than lived emotion seemed to be the rule in her Western environment.

Eventually, this emotionless behavior also prevails in her own married life, and Auma decided to get a divorce and return with her daughter Akinyi to her native Kenya in 2007 to live in the caring environment of a family setting, however, this time without patriarchal prerogatives. Her long stay in Germany and her years of married life in England have provided her with a basis of emancipation not available in her own African country. The return to the native land becomes the accomplishment of an intercultural learning which went through several stages ranging from language acquisition and the familiarization with a new approach to reading literature to the practical application of theoretical patterns to her transformed life of a mother with a family. From this new position, there seemed to be only a small step for her to take

over the offer of the American welfare organization CARE to be the coordinator of the East African Sport for Social Change Initiative (*Life* 301). To a certain extent, she has now found an activity comparable to her brother Barack Obama's social work in Chicago in the 1980s which allows her to work for change in her own society from the perspective of intercultural competence.

In the same way in which the experiences in Germany and England had helped her to gain this new status of an independent and caring woman oriented toward the values of an African family life, her connections to the United States have added a new dialogical dimension to this Euro-African background. A letter from her brother in America actually establishes this dialogical relation in 1984, two years after she had reconciled with her father and received her mother's visit in Heidelberg. In the following excerpt Auma describes the reception of that letter and the remarkable similarity between her father and his first American son:

> One day I got a letter in the mail with my name and my Heidelberg address written on it in very neat handwriting. The handwriting was startlingly similar to that of my father. And when I turned over the envelope, the name Barack Obama jumped out at me. I will never forget the shock that seized me at that moment. That handwriting, that name—at that point, my father had already been dead for some time. Slowly, I opened the envelope and pulled out a piece of paper covered with writing. The similarity to my father's handwriting was even more striking in those lines. . . . I wondered, that the two of them had such similar handwriting, although they had lived together only for a very brief time, when Barack Jr. was just an infant? Later, when I got to know my brother better, I discovered a number of other similarities, which never ceased to amaze me. (*Life* 153-54)

This letter is the beginning of a correspondence between the brother and the sister based on the shared paternal heritage visible in the handwriting. The trace of the father actually leads to a first visit from Auma to Chicago where she finds an amiable and absolutely charming brother as a social worker in the black community who even knows how to cook—as opposed to her own inefficiency displayed when she once was supposed to cook for her father in Nairobi. In his autobiography, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995; 2004), Barack Obama notes that his sister's visit was an important moment for himself to discover and establish a link to his Kenyan heritage. It was

during his first visit to Kenya in 1988 in the company of Auma, prior to starting Law School at Harvard, that his sister not only became his guide and introduced him to the African part of his family and to Luo traditions, but she also conveyed to him the positive feeling toward their common father which she had gained by way of her intercultural learning. It is now Barack who underwent a new stage of his own intercultural connections—after his life in Hawaii and in Indonesia—as he visited the gravesite of his father and grandfather on their homestead in Alego:

> I felt the circle finally close. I realized that who I was, what I cared about, was no longer just a matter of intellect or obligation, no longer a construct of words. I saw that my life in America—the black life, the white life, the sense of abandonment I'd felt as a boy, the frustration and hope I'd witnessed in Chicago—all of it was connected with this small plot of earth an ocean away, connected by more than the accident of a name or the color of my skin. The pain I felt was my father's pain. My questions were my brother's questions. Their struggle, my birthright. (*Dreams* 429-30)

This identification with his African background completes his American identity and serves as the dialogical line of communication between his siblings across the Atlantic Ocean. Several visits from Auma with her daughter in the United States such as on the occasion of Barack's wedding to Michelle and other family events, in which Auma also met the American part of the family, carried on until Barack starts his political career. It is Obama's candidacy for the presidential office which gradually changed the nature of their relationship. Although Auma participated in the election campaign and fervently hoped for the brother's success like all of the Kenyan family and the whole country, she began to have reservations about her own status as an independent and emancipated Obama woman. Without doubt, the good relations did continue after Barack Obama won the presidential election and moved to the White House as the first African American president; nevertheless, she seemed to be uncomfortable about her brother's glory that loomed like a specter over her own life.

It is interesting that the documentary film *The Education of Auma Obama* is framed chronologically by the different times of the election day in November 2008 in the United States. Each of the chapters of the

film are headed successively by moments of the election, eventually culminating in Barack Obama's acceptance speech in Chicago and the exuberant celebrations of the Kenyan public who shout, "We are going to the White House!" Over and above the temporal coordination of Auma's stages of life with the moments of the election, Barack Obama is present in Kenya as a life-size cardboard cutout figure which forms the backdrop of some of the scenes or is even carried around during festive celebrations. It must have been at that moment that Auma Obama decided to launch her own autobiographical performances for which she captures the momentum of her brother's success to reestablish and reconfirm her own independence arrived at interculturally.

The dual nature of the proximity to and distance from her brother's example shows in the writing of her autobiography. On the one hand, she seems to imitate the tripartite structure of Barack's autobiography *Dreams from My Father*, which begins with a description of his Origins in Hawaii, Indonesia, Los Angeles and New York, moves to his experience as a social community worker in Chicago and ends up with his visit in Kenya. A short epilogue captures the time after his first African visit. Auma Obama's *Das Leben kommt immer dazwischen: Stationen einer Reise* (2010) starts in Kenya, moves to Germany, then to England and back to Kenya. Instead of the linear structure of her brother's autobiography culminating in the visit to his father's home in Africa, her autobiography has a circular structure which leads back to her origins. Although the itinerary along the places of identification is similar in both life narratives, the languages used are different. Auma's use of the German language in *Das Leben kommt immer dazwischen* before the English language translation marks an important point of difference between the brother's and the sister's autobiography. When the English language translation appears two years later, Auma comments on the use of German in an "Author's Note":

> This book was originally written in German. Some may wonder why, when English is actually a language I grew up with, next to my native tongue, Luo. But the fact that I studied and worked in Germany made it seem natural to tell my story in the language in which I had spent my formative adult years. The writing came more easily to me, and in many ways my main audience was a German one. (*Life* ix)

When Auma Obama receives an offer for an English version she realizes "that the way I think and express myself in German differs from the way I think and express myself in English. Moving between the two cultures, I had always transitioned smoothly from one to the other, and so I had never noticed this difference until I dealt with telling the same story in both languages" (*Life* ix). Hence she chooses a professional translator of German literature, Ross Benjamin, in New York to do the job. In this sense, the English-language version practically becomes a distant scholarly enterprise in which she also adds an Epilogue—like her brother—and provides a comprehensive Index of names and biographical data.

The film *The Education of Auma Obama* was produced and broadcast between the publication of the two versions of the German and English autobiography in 2011 and seems to be a biopic hybrid. On the one hand, Auma's life is framed by the instances of her brother's emergence as the president of the U.S. on election day, on the other hand the film is almost a polyglot enterprise. Not only does the DVD offer two languages German and English for viewing, but there are four languages spoken by the characters in the film: German, English, Luo, and Swahili. Against the monolingual presentations of Barack Obama's autobiographical productions—the print media and the audiobook version of *Dreams from My Father* or the filmed campaign biography "A Mother's Promise: Barack Obama Bio Film," directed by David Guggenheim in 2008 (cf. Hornung 2013), Auma's multilingual competence also reflects her intercultural experiences which she demonstrates by narrating her life partially in English and German, with occasional Luo words. In spite of all similarities, the difference between the two stories is clearly affirmed and maintained. To what extent the title of the biopic *The Education of Auma Obama* is a conscious analogy to the classic American autobiography *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918) in which the grandson of the sixth president of the United States constructed his life against the political model of success as a man of letters and cultural historian, remains subject of analysis. In any case it represents an effective performance of life writing in the media placed between the written versions of her German and English autobiography.

An additional aspect of the performance of life writing in the media is the author's public appearance as a powerful speaker. We were fortunate to have Auma Obama give the keynote address for the opening of the conference in October 2014 when the contributions to this volume

Obama and Transnational American Studies were given as papers. Although it has always been our intention to refer to all members of the extended Obama family as indicated by using only the surname in our title, we still had to battle the specter of the president and her brother. Quite clearly, Auma Obama wants to be treated as the independent woman who proudly treasures the name of her father Obama and insists on her own status gained by her own achievements and intercultural experiences in Germany. She came to Mainz a day after she had received the Prix Courage as "The Woman of the Year 2013" from the second channel of the German ZDF in Munich for her new social program Sauti Kuu—Swahili for "powerful voices of our future generation," which she also presented at the conference in her keynote address "You Are Your Future" published in this volume. Sauti Kuu—is a Foundation started and directed by Auma Obama in cooperation with German companies which seeks to help poor and disadvantaged children to work toward a future. Rather than continuing to work within the structures and frames of the American CARE program, she has now achieved another level of independence in the creation of her own foundation which seeks to help young people find their own ways of making it in life, to provide structures which will allow the young to gain their independence in psychological, social, and financial terms. The intercultural training and intercontinental autobiographical work seems to have come to fruition. Auma Obama's life and work moves between three continents: Africa, Europe, and America, more specifically between Kenya, Germany, England, and the United States. Like her father, Auma Obama becomes a mediator between cultures who relates Kenyan traditions to Germany, England and the United States. Her life writing as well as her many activities are in the service of intercultural understanding and of educating ourselves.

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BIRGIT M. BAURIDL

Auma Obama Transangular: Performing Presidency between Africa, Europe, and America

"We are going, we are going to the White House"—a small, enthusiastic, and flag-waving crowd chants during a 2008 election party. The flag is an American flag. The crowd surrounds and celebrates a life-size cutout figure of Barack Obama *Junior*. Yet the election party in focus takes place against the backdrop of the rural Kenyan setting of Barack Obama *Senior's* hometown.

The scene reflects Barack Obama Junior's individual family history, his family's complex multi-cultural set-up, and, more precisely, his links to Kenya. Yet beyond the individual connection, as a condensed symbolic celebratory performance, the scene also epitomizes the often quoted transnational, transcultural, and even transcontinental participation in the United States presidential elections. Taking the cardboard Obama into their midst, the crowd communalizes *their* Obama not only as *their* son, but it enacts and at the same time mirrors the collectivization of the success of the first *black* president of the United States. Taking possession of Obama and staging reciprocal belonging, the crowd both appropriates and rearticulates a transnational—or even transcultural pertaining to either the inside, outside, or the beyond of the US—image of Obama as anything from-to or intersectingly American, African, African American, black, or global president.[1]

The fleeting moment of the election party has been archived and made available for circulation as part of a 2011 documentary, which

[1] For a discussion about Obama's presidency and its potential "for both expanding and reducing the meanings of Blackness in relation to transnational America," see Parameswaran.

featured the languages English, German, Luo, and Swahili and was produced by the German *Filmkantine* in co-production with *ZDF/Das kleine Fernsehspiel* and *Branwen Okpako*. The documentary itself enhances the transnational character of the scene and the transcultural construction of Barack Obama Junior.[2] Yet the documentary is not entitled *Die Geschichte des Barack Obama* or *The Education of Barack Obama*. The 79-minute documentary is to portray *Die Geschichte der Auma Obama* or *The Education of Auma Obama*.

Auma Obama, President Obama's older half sister, was born in 1960 in Nairobi, Kenya, as daughter to Barack Obama Senior and Kezia Obama. During her studies, Auma Obama, who holds a PhD in German Studies (1996) from the University of Bayreuth, spent several years in Germany; in recent years, several TV appearances and multiple newspaper articles have turned her into a public persona in Germany. After her studies, Obama's family life and her career focusing mainly on charity work have brought her to England and back to Kenya. She did not meet her brother Barack before 1984, when she visited him in Chicago and introduced him to her version of their father and their family's Kenya, a place and "home" (Obama, *Dreams* 222) they would travel together later on. In *Dreams from My Father*, Barack Obama Junior reflects on Auma's arrival in Chicago and describes her as "an African woman emerging from behind the customs gate, moving with

[2] For a discussion of the concept of the 'transcultural,' see Lenz. Especially: "[…] a new processual and performative understanding of 'culture' […] critically engages the boundaries of the nation-state without simply dismissing it, distinguishing between the political and juridical workings of the nation-sate and the dynamics of the culture(s) of/in a nation-state that always transcend its borders" (390). And: "[…] 'transcultural' also addresses the inter- and cross-cultural dynamics of cultures as cultures of difference, not in the traditional sense of interrelating or comparing separate cultures or focusing on 'influence' of separate cultures on one another, including respective perspectives of cultural imperialism, neocolonialism, 'Americanization,' and the like in their unidirectional version. Instead, 'transcultural' […] registers the inherent hybridity, creolization, interculturality, of every 'culture' and explores the decentered networks and field of power relations of cultures as being continuously and discontinuously in flux. 'Transcultural' processes construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct cultural differences in a transnational, globalizing world […]" (390).

easy, graceful steps, her bright, searching eyes now fixed on my own, her dark, round, sculpted face blossoming like a wood rose as she smiled" (207). As early as 1995, *Dreams from My Father* establishes Auma Obama—who would become a member of the 2008 campaign team—as instrumental to Barack's assessment of his relationship to his father, Kenya, and, ultimately, to his construction of his own identity as a Kenyan's son: "I remained awake, propped up in a chair with the desklight on, looking at the stillness of her face, listening to the rhythm of her breathing, trying to make some sense out of all that she'd said. I felt as if my world had been turned to its head; as if I had woken up to find a blue sun in the yellow sky, or heard animals speaking like men" (219-20).

Given the center-stage position Barack Obama awards Auma in his own coming-of-age and in his own coming-to-terms with the transnational family setup, the titles of Auma Obama's documentary, *Die Geschichte der Auma Obama* or *The Education of Auma Obama*, not only raise expectations of an autobiography-as-representation plot featuring community-oriented, change-bound, educational episodes. But the viewer also expects an attempt to counter any presidential and political appropriations of the half sister's identity and envisions the presentation of a personal quest for and emphasis on self-definition and independent individuality which, for the half sister, creates an identity outside the presumed shadow of the first black President of the United States of America—be it in an intertextual tradition of Henry Adams's *Education* (1918) or Lauryn Hill's *Miseducation* (1998). After all, the key stages of both Auma Obama's major life narratives—the autobiography *And Then Life Happens* (2012), originally published in German as *Das Leben kommt immer dazwischen: Stationen einer Reise* (2010); and the documentary, i.e. the audio-visual life narrative, *Die Geschichte der Auma Obama / The Education of Auma Obama* (2011)—are located far away from the domestic grounds of the *United States of America*: both are set in *Europe* and in *Africa*.

Yet Auma Obama's life narratives are as much as and more than creations of Auma's independent identity and lessons about Kenyan cultures in the plural: By inevitably reflecting her relationship to her brother Barack Obama, this essay argues, Auma Obama's written and audio-visual life narratives as effective and consequential enactments triangulate not only her individual discussion of cultural, political,

social, and racial contexts in Africa, Europe, *and* America and stage not only her own self as a presumably global identity meandering between individual and political persona. But they also co-construct the President's political and American identity and, moreover, situate America in the tricontinental and transnational expanse between Africa, Europe, *and* America.

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Auma Obama's documentary and autobiography play with a meta-discourse on scholarly characterizations of life narratives. More precisely, her work does not hesitate to admit and toy with the notion that life narratives—in their individual, collective, representative, and even political layers—are never representations of existing phenomena but constructions of human identities. Scholarship on autobiography and life writing draws on concepts of identity as a discursive, relational, and performative construct shaped and generated by the "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler, *Bodies* 2). It agrees that not only actual behavior but also narrations of the self—be they textual or audio-visual—are reiterations of a self that comes into being through the performative act of that reiteration. Auma Obama admits to, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson term it, "self-representation as a performative act" (9) and to the "agency" (4) which can be inherent in the process of "self-construction" (Eakin, *Living Autobiographically* 2) when she notes at the beginning of her book: "The dialogue in this book has been *re*constructed to the best of my *re*collection" (author's disclaimer; my emphasis). The double reference to a present recreation of the past points to the utilization, appropriation, and accordingly retrospective interpretation and design of the past for present purposes.

Moreover, Auma Obama playfully reveals, recognizes, and accepts life writing as the culturally specific construction—Smith and Watson define life writing as a "cultural *practice*" (8, my emphasis)—of not only life narratives but lives. She discusses the impact of cultural perspectives on the process of viewing and writing one's self in the "Author's Note" and, in quasi poststructural acceptance of multiple cultural truths and even versions of the self, she does not hesitate to

acknowledge, "This book was originally written in *German*. Some may wonder why, when *English* is actually a language I grew up with. [...] I realized that the way I think and express myself in German differs from the way I think and express myself in English" (n.p.; my emphasis). While scrutinizing the expressive side of identity construction(s) and emphasizing the opportunity for agency and choice within this process, Obama's reflection on culture-specific versions of identity nevertheless triggers notions of similarly culture-specific receptions and outside interpretations of identity as a relational construct. Auma Obama thus does not claim to present one unified and singularly valid version of her—or her family's—story or self, but plays with a relational and reciprocal notion of double, multiple, or even transnational consciousness and being.

Clearly, the question of language goes beyond linguistic implycations. It creates diverse cultural stages for Auma Obama's life narrative that extend beyond narrow scopes of national places, occasional travels, or migratory paths. Linked to physical locations which nevertheless defy territorial limitations via the construction of material or notional boundaries, the stages of Auma Obama's life constitute landscapes of negotiations between multiple nations and cultures—from Germany to England to Kenya to the origins of Auma's American stepmother. These transnational sites—just like Anna Birch and Joanne Tompkins, Erika Fischer-Lichte, or Shannon Jackson argue for on- and/or off-stage performances in general—become socially, culturally, and politically semantic pillars of Auma's *life* performance and, as active agents, contribute to the consequentiality of her textual and audiovisual narration, i.e. they contribute to the enactment of 'Auma Obama.'

Auma Obama's play with the fusion of spatial and cultural imaginaries echoes Shelley Fisher Fishkin's call addressed to American Studies scholars to "increase[] [our] attention to the historical roots of multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and goods and the social, political, linguistic, cultural, and economic crossroads generated in the process" (22) or Jane Desmond's observation that the "production of knowledge"—here: the production of knowledge of the persona and image 'Auma Obama' and all representative, collective, or political extensions and interpretations this may entail—"is always situated in a social and political context where it has a specific use or value, broadly conceived, in relation to other modes of knowledge, political structures,

and public discourses" (6). Obama's insistence on her own movement between not only languages, but cultures, nations, and continents spotlights the intersections of her life writing with transnational or transcultural realities and their mutual constitutive influence. In other words: Auma Obama makes it a consequence, if not superfluous, to stress the indispensability of studying the location of her life narrative within transnational systems.

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"Auma spent sixteen years studying and living in Germany, moved to England for love, and gave birth to a daughter there. The tension between her original and chosen worlds and cultures was a constant challenge, and eventually Auma returned to their African roots," the cover of her autobiography reads and establishes Auma Obama as a global citizen who traverses multiple cultural and national spaces: Luo/Kenyan, British, German—*Europe* and *Africa*. Yet she encounters them not as homogeneous, but as heterogeneous 'contact zones,' which Mary Louise Pratt in her 1991 "The Arts of the Contact Zone" describes as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (34). Auma Obama not only witnesses the negotiations determining these contact zones, but by being located in their midst, she voluntarily or involuntarily participates. Moreover, she not only *comes* to contact zones, her own physical and cultural mobility contributes to their creation, and she *be*comes them. Auma Obama herself embodies the "liminal" state John Carlos Rowe in 2002 ascribes to the contact zone ("Future" 12). He views "the 'contact zone' as the liminal region or 'borderzone' in which different cultures meet and negotiate—violently or otherwise—their 'neighborhood'" ("Future" 12). Auma Obama reveals that the idea of 'neighborhood' moves away from a notion of being situated next to each other into a meandering state of simultaneous difference, interaction, and fusion. It comes as no surprise then that the cultural, contemporary spaces and sites of collective memory in which her self-narration is set become inseparable from her identity and the enactment of her identity in her book and documentary. As sites of simultaneous individual and collective cultural negotiation,

both Africa and Europe function similarly simultaneously as sites of attachment, appropriation, and critical investigation.

Auma Obama's discussion of Kenya is clearly defined by an educational agenda and thus an endeavor to participate in collective cultural knowledge production. However, this debate is also characterized by the very flexible character Pratt ascribes to the contact zone. Thus, on the one hand, Obama uses the African cultural and, in the documentary, physical space to discuss cultural contact—be it produced by her presence or by cultural influences triggered by human or cultural mobility—and to evaluate the ensuing processes, for example when she explicitly points to the aftermaths of colonialism in school and utters "the feeling that they were trying to educate [them] to be little British girls" (15). On the other hand, and moreover, she also inspects the cultural, ideological, and political site of these negotiations. In her autobiography, she in many instances correlates the portrayal of her own estrangement from African culture with a reflection on issues of gender. "For us," she writes establishing Luo and Kenyan cultural and communal belonging, "a warm meal typically consists of vegetables, meat with sauce, and the traditional *ugali*, a cooked maize flour paste" (65). Yet, what at first sight may appear to be an example of an educational agenda is turned into an observation of gender roles when Obama illustrates her father's expectations toward her as a Luo girl: "The vegetables and meat sauce needed only to be warmed up, but I was supposed to prepare the *ugali*. My father was not aware that I didn't know how to do it. And I didn't dare to confess this to him" (65). Cultural realities and gender requirements are portrayed as intersecting; feeling alienated by the gendered chore intersects with food-cultural alienation. Thus, Obama insists on the constructed nature of gender and hesitates to reiterate the performance required by her as a girl: "As an eight-year-old girl […] I, too, was expected to submit unquestioningly to the old values. Unfortunately, no one took the time to explain contexts and backgrounds to me, the inquisitive girl" (12).

In her autobiography, Obama stresses her ability to participate in transnational mobility as the decisive moment that allowed her to consciously enact her own participation in the creation of her identity as both individual and community member. Her "journey to Germany," which she initially interprets as "an escape" in order "to avoid at all costs a fate as a submissive wife," finally turns into an opportunity to

interrupt the reiteration of a gendered and cultured identity and gives her the chance to perform the utmost symbolic action of taking possession of her own cultural and female emancipated self: she changes her name:

> When I arrived in Saarbrücken, my name was Rita Auma Obama. […] In Germany, everyone thought I had a German first name and asked me why I didn't have an African one. That sounded to me as if they were calling my whole identity into question. As if they wanted to know who I really was, because they could not *reconcile* me, the African, with that name. In a way, I understood this dissonance. I, too, felt a bit as if the name Rita gave me a false identity. So I decided pretty soon after my arrival to use my Luo name, Auma […]. (102)

It becomes clear: Germany, as the contact zone that she herself creates by her presence, serves as the site she appropriates to turn her physical journey into a spiritual one and to, once again, negotiate cultural belonging. She takes on the perspective of the doubly conscious and views herself through the eyes of the German beholder. Yet, contrary to the Du Boisian 'unreconciled strivings,' a trope she plays with in the English version of her biography, Obama subverts the perceived difference and enacts her own reconciliation with her roots by complicating space-culture-identity relations. Having reached Germany, which becomes one symbolic destination in her journey itinerary away from gendered hetero-definitions and toward auto-identification, she utilizes the German onlooker's gaze and the experience of spatial agency—she decides where she is—to also decide who she is and begins to claim her Luo cultural heritage as hers. She rejects a consciousness, an identity that is either or, here or there, and transnationally blurs the German space, the journey from Africa to Europe, the onlooker's gaze and the African heritage into her very own complex version of consciousness.

This does not mean that Europe remains undiscussed and a foil for positive appropriation. Germany—just like Britain later on—and German behavior within a contact zone becomes the object of her own negotiations of cultural contact. The German gaze upon her African body with the non-African name, as the quote above illustrates, is a gaze desiring categorization from a perspective which sets its own cultural knowledge and expectations into the center of a quickly established, dichotomy-based evaluation. In a visual meta-comment on its own production, Obama's documentary reflects the image of the gaze. In a

scene shot in Heidelberg, a crowd which the viewer is tempted to identify as a group of daytripping (white) German retirees crosses between the camera and Auma Obama. This scene illustrates Auma Obama's position between the camera's passive object and the active construction of her identity by filming the documentary—or, rather, agreeing to have documentary filmed in its particular way. Moreover, the collectively astounded look on the group members' faces portrays the group as being caught in and at the same time intruding and blocking the space between the documentary's agency and Auma's black body, which is pushed into the background. Their relentlessly staring gazes not only draw the viewers' attention to exactly that, the gaze and all that it entails, but also within the film mirror the audience's gaze upon the film and their own attempts at categorization.

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While Auma Obama's geographical journey indeed takes her to the United States and while her brother is the President of the United States, America never becomes a major stage or geographical site of belonging in her life narratives. This discrepancy may be interpreted as such—as a conscious insistence of the sister's identity as independent from the brother's (fame)—or as only natural and no discrepancy at all. Anyway: the discrepancy is only one in terms of geographical setting. As a cultural and political space, the US interacts with and impacts both major settings of the documentary and memoir; or: it interacts with and impacts both major sites of identification which Auma Obama negotiates.

The American cultural impact—or, the flip side of the coin, the appropriation of American cultural elements—shapes the meta-level of the life narratives. Both the memoir and the documentary display some of the essential ingredients of American life narratives. "The history of the American continent […] has been accompanied by multiform patterns created for the representation of American lives," Alfred Hornung (ix) insists on the fundamental role discursive creations of individuals as representatives have played and continue to play for the negotiation of collective American memories and cultural, social, and ideological self-definitions. Thus, "[t]hese forms of representation,"

writes Hornung, "range from the cave paintings and rock art of indigenous people or their traditions of storytelling via the written narratives of explorers and settlers about their encounter with the New World to the transcultural accounts of immigrants in search for a new American life" and reach into "the twenty-first century" (ix). The narrations of Auma Obama's life—of the US President's sister's life—embrace diverse facets of these multiple forms of American life narratives. The question whether these elements are American only or the products of transcultural exchange within traditions of self- fashioning and life writing as well as the question whether Obama and/or the producer of her documentary consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously employ these elements remain secondary since they do not quench the opportunities contained in Auma Obama's life narratives to read them as (partly) American.

Her life narratives stage Auma Obama as mastering American cultural forms and allow the audience to read and in the viewing process construct Barack Obama's African sister's individual identity and cultural and ideological belonging as American (enough). The autobiography of the first black president's sister toys with the rhetoric of the prototypical African American slave narrative when it spotlights Auma's multiple childhood experiences of separation from close or substitute family members:

> I was five or six years old at the time, and I wouldn't see my mother again until I was thirteen. Except one time—at a brief encounter in her new home—I didn't see my stepmother again, either, until many years after her departure. By then I was already an adult. (23)

Similarly, the documentary establishes visual links between Kenyan and African American history. When elaborating upon the Kenyan history of colonization, the documentary uses historical photographs of African railroad workers, which, in their repertoire, resemble and may be interpictorially linked to culturally productive, i.e. widely circulated and drawn-upon, 19th-century images depicting African American railroad workers in the United States.[3]

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[3] See Hebel's definition of interpictoriality: "Similar to concepts of literary intertextuality, the concept of interpictoriality goes beyond the mere docu-

The autobiography's illustration of influential ideological forces in Auma Obama's childhood even stands in accordance with the intertextually highly productive image of Benjamin Franklin as the American prototype and icon of industry, frugality, education, and the self-made man. In the light of a reading of Obama's textual and audio-visual life narrative as a performative enactment of her identity, the latter even lends itself to an interpretation as—meaningful, however, in contrast to Gatsby's hollow one—self-construction. Although allusive of colonial power and imperial politics, Auma Obama's life in Mary Hill Primary school follows a clear-cut schedule that is reminiscent of Franklin's: "There was a Saturday uniform and another for going to church on Sunday. […]. In retrospect, I have the impression that everything at Mary Hill Primary School was organized according to strict rules. […] The strictly regimented life of the boarding school […]" (18-19).

The most prominent image offering ample opportunity for an American interpretive appropriation is that of the journey. The employment of journey images such as a long road leading into the sunlit distance in the documentary or the circular journey structure of the autobiography from Kenya via Europe back to Kenya can be juxtaposed with journey structures in major American narrative patterns ranging from Puritan landings to the circular paths of captivity narratives to the Middle Passage to the South-North quest of the slave narrative to the symbolic return home of the immigrant. And after all: Barack's journey to Kenya in Auma Obama's work becomes a topos for his own coming-to-terms with his African familial and cultural roots.

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mentation and description of relations, influence, and sources; it rather emphasizes the semantic and semiotic implications of the frame(s) of reference and act(s) of signification added to the respective image by means of its interpictorial rhetoric. The interpictorial reading of a specific visual representation underscores the functionality of the semantic surplus produced by the participation in and, particularly significant, possible transformation and resignification of conventions, repertoires and traditions. […] Interpictorially charged visuals […] complicate assumptions about the immediate accessibility and comprehension of pictures and expose the possibly manipulative structures and strategies of their own uses" ("'American' Pictures and (Trans)National Iconographies" 414).

The memoir's circular construction patterned along a Kenya-Europe-Kenya route—even the chapters are structured into "Kenya" (1ff.), "Germany" (91ff.), "England and Kenya" (229ff.), followed by an "Epilogue" (323 ff.)—enhances its readability as an American narrative although America does not appear as a setting. Nevertheless, the memoir embeds Auma Obama's life into a frame which not only juxtaposes the geographical location of the narrative in Europe and in Africa with the political realm of the US, but which *confuses* any notions of all these spaces as independently interacting agents and *fuses* the geographical, cultural, and political realities of these spaces as sites of individual or collective identity performances into an intricate web of mutual dependencies and interpretations. The very first sentence of the very first chapter, entitled "Kenya," reads "OH, MY GOD! Oh, my God! I can't believe it!" (3). Before the memoir reveals that the excitement is triggered by a letter from Hillary Clinton and thus that the very first sentence is dedicated to an American political figure, Obama highlights: "my brother Barack had, against all odds, become the first African-American president of the United States" (3). On the following pages she continues: "How on earth was I to go about answering a letter from Hillary Rodham Clinton?" (4); and: "On the occasion of the inaugural luncheon, I had been seated with Hillary and Bill Clinton and other dignitaries of American politics" (6). And the "Epilogue" begins with a reflection: "Several years have passed since my brother became the forty-fourth president of the United States" (323).

Inevitably, Auma's circular journey from Kenya to Europe and back to Kenya becomes a journey that is connected to the United States. In other words: inevitably, Auma Obama becomes the American President's sister and her story becomes that of her brother which inevitably is that of the American President is that of America. It comes as no surprise then that the documentary's central plot is located in Kenya (while she 'travels' to Europe, especially to Germany, only in subchapters) and structured along the days surrounding the 2008 presidential elections. The documentary's 'chapters' are all announced with 'chapter headings,' i.e. captions such as "November 4, 2008—U.S. Election Day" that clearly emphasize a time slot and construct a temporal reference for Auma's story that is inseparably linked to the political space of the United States. In other words, the documentary fuses American time references with African sites. It merges the US

presidential elections, a US political event, with the geographical location that links Auma's and Barack's heritage via the character of the father. Zooming in into the most intimate part of their shared heritage, the father's village, the father's home, the documentary center-stages the Kenyan village during the US elections, thus emphasizing the African village's American relations; at the same time it turns the US elections into a presumably transnational event.

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Barack Obama Senior is a key figure in this 'Americanization' of the Kenyan heritage and the 'transnationalization' of the US. The father physically brings America to Kenya: Ruth, his American wife and Auma's stepmother, migrates to Kenya and turns Auma into a product of the contact zone that Ruth and the father create. "The word was that I was the girl with the strange way of expressing herself (at the time, influenced by my stepmother, I used many American terms)" (21), Auma Obama writes and thus highlights her identity, i.e. the identity of the American President's sister, as Americanized.

Moreover, the father himself becomes the embodiment of a transatlantic, America-directed movement. Auma Obama stages his journey to the United States as a student as an experience of a mobility that is designed by what can either be defined as US generous outreach or US cultural imperialism and politics:

> There were events that occurred several months before I was born that had an enormous impact on my life. When my mother found out that she was pregnant for a second time, it was already planned that my father would go to study in the United States. At that time, Kenyan students were being sent to the United States to be educated at universities there. […] The program was funded by private sponsors—later by John F. Kennedy, among others. This exodus of students to the United States, which took place between 1959 and 1962, has been dubbed the "airlift." (29)

Following the parameters of American values and ideologies, the father focuses on education, is endowed with the notion of exceptional achievements when he is "offered the opportunity to pursue a doctorate

at Harvard University" (37), and thus not only follows the traces of an American quasi-immigration story which to him promises the fulfillment of an (American) dream of self-improvement via education. What is more, the three-dimensional temporal and spatial extension of his movement between Africa and America into the history and space of the airlift strengthens his narrative function as a symbol of participation and trust in American ideologies and intensifies the portrayal of the American status as exceptional and generous city upon the hill and benevolent world police. The audio-visual discourse of the documentary underlines the narrative of the model migrant—or, in a more daring reading, of the model black student prone for success similar to the soon-to-follow-in-his-footsteps exceptional achievement of his son in becoming the first black president of the United States—when it displays a photograph of Obama Senior and his fellow (international) students in which his skin color stands out, or when it shows an image of the recently-landed airplane spilling enthusiastic students onto American ground and thus evokes comparisons with settler or immigrant landing scenes.

To both Auma and Barack Junior, Barack Senior is the American father with Kenyan roots. To Barack Junior, he is not only the controversial figure in both political opponents' public perception and in the Kenyan family history and simultaneously much-celebrated piece in the puzzle of the global president, but also the much-needed American heritage. The latter, moreover, provides opportunities for enactments of Barack's presidential identity as becomes visible in the Kennedy reference above or in the performance of an interpictorial grave scene in the documentary. Barack Junior's visit to the Kenyan burial site of his father and grandfather, on the one hand, previews his and Michelle's later pose at Kennedy's grave; on the other hand, the contrast between rural Kenyan setting, his rolled-up sleeves, his jeans at the African grave and his white collar and black coat in the American scene create an image of the president as responsible and at the same time down-to-earth and humble. He is also portrayed as a family man who honors family as an ideological value and his political predecessors as his American idols and peers and who is able to transcend borders in his own simultaneously transnational and American persona.

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