# 2. Life Writing Theory: Constructing Life, Claiming Authenticity

"Science is built up of facts, as a house is built of stones; but an accumulation of facts is no more a science than a heap of stones is a house." This is how the French philosopher of science Henry Poincaré expressed his ideas on *Science and Hypothesis* in the 19th century (73). Now, imagine a beautiful house built on solid ground with firm texture and a beautiful facade. Everything is in harmony, for decades nothing changes. Then, slowly, the ground underneath the house begins to shift. A crack starts widening. Then, completely unexpectedly, an earthquake hits. The entire house falls apart, though, the different parts are still recognizable.

This fictional scenario reflects what happened to the theory of life writing in the past two decades. For a long time, there existed two neatly separated worlds – the world of fiction and the world of autobiography. One was built on imagination and one on truth. At first gradually and then at excelled speed, social constructivists took away the solid base of the house by arguing that truth is just a fable. Consequently, neither autobiography can be built on truth, nor can the two worlds be as neatly divided as before. But that was not the last earthquake in the evolution of autobiographical theory. Meanwhile, a media revolution has altered practically all fields of society and scholarship, including the field of Literary Studies. The discursive surroundings of literature have been altered considerably. Culture has turned away from reading to blogging, twittering, and skyping. Two things have not changed, however: 1) there are again two separate worlds, this time constituted by the literary and the media sphere; 2) the question of truth remains one of the major dividers between both spheres.

## 2.1 RECONSTRUCTING THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL THEORY TODAY

### Positioning the Self in the Genealogy of a Field

There are many things in life which at first seem very simple but then turn out to be quite complicated. Above all, literature belongs to the former kind, since it requires excessive imagination, creativity, and work to bundle one's words and thoughts to put them on paper. The genre of life writing thereby traditionally counted as one of the more facile tasks among literarians. What could be easier than writing about oneself as opposed to inventing the world of others? As it turns out, however, writing the *self* does not exclude the process of invention – the invention of the *self* and the invention of the *other*. This poses considerable challenges to the the writer and to the scholar of life writing. As Gregory Orfalea summarizes, "this writing life is no easy row to hoe" (225). The genealogy of the field of autobiography theory reflects this finding. It demonstrates that the writing *about* life writing is not an easy row to how, either. The problem already starts with defining the subject matter.

Autobiography very basically defined is "the story of one's life written by himself" (Spender qtd. in Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 2). The Greek term literally means "self life writing" (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 1).[1] The French theorist Philippe Lejeune in the 1980s added a more expansive definition by declaring that autobiography is a "retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence [...]" (qtd. in Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 2). What combines most definitions formulated by autobiography researchers in recent periods is that the term serves as a genre description used for written autobiographical accounts in contradistinction to fictional genres, such as novels (de Man 919).

Autobiographical writing is a century-old phenomenon reaching back to the early records of Christianity, the diaries of famous leaders in China, and the memoirs of European philosophers. Ancient rulers and public figures wrote down their lives in order to share their insights and leave a legacy to their successors with their accounts serving as historical documents (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 10). The most famous and often-cited examples include St. Augustine's *Confessions*[2] written in 397 AD and Jean Jacques Rousseau's autobiographical

1 The term is derived from the literal translation of "autos" in Greek meaning "self," "bios" as "life" and "graphe" for "writing" (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 1).

2 The prominence of the title 'confessions' already reveals the testimonial nature of autobiography. Personal insights here are inherently related to the act of revealing one's in-

records published in 1782 under the same title (de Man 172). In the field of American Studies, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1784) and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1791) count as prime examples of New World life writing (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 53). As these examples demonstrate, traditional autobiography was mostly understood as a form of historical documentation.

With the emergence of Autobiography Studies in the 1960s and its further development, the very definition of the subject matter and the meaning of autobiography as literary category have undergone enormous transformations toward a more inclusive understanding of life writing (Moore-Gilbert 128). Autobiography today thus serves as an umbrella term for different forms of life writing, including written and non-written accounts (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 2). As an expansive term, autobiography is divided into several genres, such as memoir, diary writing, and poetry (Eakin, *How Our Lives* 99-100). In addition, autobiographical representation in different media, such as film, as well as new media formats like online diaries and blogs, are included in the term autobiography (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 73).

This study follows the definition of autobiography as inclusive category positioned under the original term of *life writing*.[3] The terms life writing and autobiographical writing will thus be used synonymously, whereby autobiography is used as an overarching category of various sub-genres, such as epistolary autobiography and memoir. In contrast to authors using autobiography and memoir interchangeably to refer to life writing, this analysis will treat both as separate forms (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 3). This understanding is in line with the definition of memoir as "a form of self-reflective writing that is personal, often controversial, and a meditation about the place of self in history" (Whitlock 20). Memoir therefore puts specific emphasis on the historical and cultural circumstances surrounding the writing of self. The accentuated status of memoir is derived from its emphasis on authenticity and immediacy (Whitlock 133). Complementary to the assumption that autobiography merely serves a "self-defining function," the given understanding of memoir also suggests that the writing of self always involves the writing of society at large (Fivush qtd. in Eakin, *How Our Lives* 111).

---

nermost thoughts about life and history. This particular function of truthful testimony would remain one of the most important characteristics of life writing up to the present.

3 Whereas life writing only comprises written accounts of self-narration, "*life narrative*," in contradistinction, includes various media formats and other forms of self-representation, e.g., performance (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 4). Sidonie Smith doubts the lasting relevance of traditional definitions of autobiography, due to the fact that newer forms of life narrative increasingly represent hybrids of these forms (Personal interview).

The aspect of self in relation to history and its surroundings already poses the first challenges to the study of life writing. Autobiography as 'self life writing' sets an explicit focus on the individual writer, thus, excluding outside circumstances. The extended definition of memoir softens these borders between self and other, between individual and collective. Traditionally this exclusive focus on the individual was the major reason why autobiography came to be known as exclusively "Western" genre (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 4). This localization is not only based on the geographic division of the world and the legacy of Western ethnocentrism in the development of scholarship but also on political grounds. The "ideology of egalitarian individualism" thus incorporates the intention to tell one's story as an extension of the "rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Eakin, "Breaking Rules" 113). This view pits "Western individualism" against "Eastern connectivity" as collective and monolythic identity markers located in a particular societal order (Joseph 263; W. Hassan, "Arab-American Autobiography" 11).[4] The category of self has therefore always implicitly been understood in contradistinction to collective social surroundings.

Meanwhile, with the further development of life writing studies and the influence of interdisciplinary autobiography research, the field has moved away from "prescribed definitions" of self- and other-writing (Arida 4). Especially with the increased importance of "*narrative identity*"[5] in the theory of identity, the self today is not seen as separated and exclusive category anymore, bound to individuallistic

4 Especially the empirical investigations by Ronalt Inglehart based on the World Value Survey have demonstrated that the strict separation between individualistic versus collective societies is not supported by empirical data since they reveal significant value correspondences between Eastern and Western societies. This especially refers to the spread of postmodern values found in *East* and *West* (Modernization 267). Values therefore largely remain a function of modernization processes (Inglehart, "Evolutionary Modernization"). Respective polls conducted by James Zogby have revealed a similar value coherence between Americans and Arab Americans (85).

5 The concept of narrative identity in sociology combines the idea of identity as social construction with the realm of identity politics (Somers 607). This notion is closely linked to the ideas expressed by Eakin in *Living Autobiographically* and former works. Here, he describes narration in the form of life writing as "identity activity" (78). Autobiography therefore does not only convey "metaphors of self "but rather, it "*is* a metaphor of self" (*Living Autobiographically* 78). Consequently, life writing does not represent a genre to Eakin but a lifelong process of identity formation" ("Breaking Rules" 114). What is most interesting about this logic of identity as narrative is that Eakin demonstrates how people who, due to brain damage or other serious illnesses, have been deprived of writing a truthful account of their lives also become "un-selved" as a consequence of their storytelling incabability ("Breaking Rules" 121).

societies (Somers 607). Rather, the concept of 'self' today is perceived in a way that the "extended self is the self of memory and anticipation," as Eakin states (*Fictions* 122). Not only does the adjective 'extended' imply the notion that self always exceeds the individual level, it also introduces a temporal dimension by referring to past and future concepts of the self. This renewed understanding of self also goes along with a redefinition of individualism and subjectivity on a societal level, as based on a "relational model of identity (Eakin, *How Our Lives* 57).[6] Whereas personal identity sets one apart from others, the personal narrative is thought to include the dimension of collective history and identity (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 83; W. Hassan, "Arab-American Autobiography" 23). In short, *self*-writing therefore always also represents a form of *other*-writing.

This reformed positioning of the self in autobiographical production and the corresponding notion that self and other complement each other on an individual and societal level necessarily brings about an extended analytical scope which is by far larger than the previous focus on the individual author. Whereas the concentration on the self as more or less autonomous narrator did not exclude but to a certain extent limited the historical and political range of investigation, the notion of the extended self brought about the need to analyze the exact relationship between self and other, between autobiography and society. In order to grasp the dynamics of this relation, autobiography theory needs to operate with concepts and terms which reach beyond the field of Literary and Cultural Studies. The philosophy of science provides this theoretical toolkit. Its theoretical indespensability, however, has mostly been neglected by autobiography scholars.

## The Real Self in the Philosophy of Science: Key Terms

> "The important thing in science is not so much to obtain new facts as to discover new ways of thinking about them" (Bragg qtd. in Rowan 205).

The location of Autobiographical Studies in the field of the humanities fosters a standard vocabulary, immanent assumptions, and tacit beliefs. This theoretical repertoire is part of a wider web of terms and concepts found in the field of Cultural Studies. Scholars, especially in Literary Studies, have developed the habit of adopting this standardized modus operandi. Partly, this is a result of professionalism and expertise. Partly, and this is the flipside of the former advantage, the practice of always building on the given while rarely questioning its usefulness within a dy-

6 Eakin in his definition of self-writing bases his insights on Antoni Damasio's evolutionary approach by not only regarding the self as extended but as an emotional state "embedded in the physiological process necessary for survival" (*Fictions* 126).

namic social world stands in the way of novel discoveries. This especially applies to inderdisciplinary research projects. The unreflected appropriation of terms from other fields here leads literary scholars into a conceptual trap. Avoiding this pitfall requires to rethink the established meaning of key terms from the perspective of the philosophy of science.

Autobiography has traditionally been seen as a historical and thus factual form of documentation. The central assumption was that it represented truth. The concept of truth is rooted in philosophical realism (Hilfer 55). Realist epistemology assumes that there exists a common truth that can be objectively[7] grasped, as if looking through an "unmediated 'window'" (Barker, *Sage Dictionary* 173). Truth, in turn, is defined as "the property (as of a statement) of being in accord with fact or reality" ("Truth," def. 3a). According to the correspondence theory of truth in the philosophy of science, "a statement is true if it corresponds to the facts" or "if it corresponds with some actual state-of-affairs in the world" (Hospers 9). The major criterion for truth therefore is "correspondence with reality" (Hospers 9). Although the critical mind at once identifies the tautological nature of this definition since truth and reality obviously presuppose each other, this view is in line with the popular notion of truth as "accurate information" (Christians 23).[8]

Despite the somewhat circular logic of the definition, truth as fact-based builds the cornerstone of realist thought which by far transcends the confines of academic investigation. The term realism is thus applied much more broadly to any view explicitly embracing the idea that truth consists in a relation to reality, i.e., that truth is a relational property involving a characteristic relation (to be specified) to some portion of reality (to be specified). In literary realism, truth is evoked through very detailed descriptions of events, sceneries,[9] or objects, as well as by means of historical references and the reflection of social and political circumstances (Padley 127; Childs and Fowler 198).[10] The overall aim is to "show things as they really are" (Lovell qtd. in Baldwin et al. 61). This also reveals the connection between literary realism and cultural materialism in the sense that "text and context" cannot be sepa-

7 In the empirical sciences, objectivity is defined as intersubjective verifiability (Kunczik and Zipfel, 283; Barker, *Cultural Studies* 490).

8 The first formulation of this definition of truth as correspondence to reality in the philosophy of science was advocated by Bertrand Russell and George Moore early in the 20th century. Both count as pioneers of analytical philosophy and opponents of idealism.

9 These very detailed descriptions are known as "mnemonic presentations" which describe modes of learning that support memory. In literary history, the works of Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf count as most prominent examples of this very detailed style of writing which aims at evoking the impression of truth in the reader (Ender 7).

10 In the Arab autobiographical tradition, historical accurateness was the major motivation and source of justification for autobiographical writing (Reynolds 68).

rated (Padley 152). Especially in the social sciences which Media Studies is part of, realism remains the crucial concept for defining the larger research purpose.

The function of realism as the foundation of particular scientific aims points to the larger context of knowledge acquisition and scholarly methods. The definition of the central concept of knowledge as such has traditionally posed the most striking challenge to the quest for knowledge pursued in philosophy. As the American philosopher of science John Hospers remarks: "We all have many *beliefs*; but how can we be sure that the beliefs are true? What we want is not merely belief but *knowledge*. We want to be able to be certain. But about what things can we be certain?" (Hospers 18). The key to the answer lies in the relation of knowledge and truth. According to realist thought, there are three requirements which cause the formation of knowledge: 1) a statement must be true, which is the objective component of knowledge as in the definition of truth (Hospers 20). 2) There must be a belief that the statement is true, which represents the subjective component of knowledge (Hospers 21).[11] 3) There must be good evidence for believing that a statement is true (Hospers 21-22). The question then remains which sources human beings have at their disposal to make this judgement. The answer provided by the philosophy of science immediately leads to the realm of autobiography.

The most important sources of knowledge for human beings are memory (Hospers 41), reason (Hospers 44), and oral testimony (Hospers 46).[12] Eventually, all three resources overlap with the definition of autobiography. This constitutes the essential link between the overarching concepts related to realism and truth provided by the philosophy of science and the credentials of autobiography research in Literary Studies. Especially the third source of knowledge, oral testimony,[13] is a central concept for the study of life writing. As Hospers remarks, it is a fundamental human reflex to believe in the truth of oral testimonies by others, unless there is sufficient reason to doubt (Hospers 46). In Literary Studies, this belief in the validity of a testimony is referred to as authenticity. The adjective authentic in its broa-

11 Hospers provides an illuminating example to underline the relationship between truth as rational criterion and the belief in truth: "[S]he realizes her husband is dead and still cannot believe it" (Hospers 21).

12 Sensual perception is another important source of knowledge (Hospers 41). In Autobiography Studies, this aspect comes into play when defining sensual perception as emotional perception.

13 This use of the term testimony in the field of the philosophy of science directly points to the genre of testimony in life writing. The etymology of the term defines it as "firsthand authentification of a fact" ("Testimony", def. 2a). In literature, testimony derives its major "source of legitimacy" from its supposed truth (Whitlock 119). Furthermore, in the realm of the larger media market, testimony also counts as a "'soft' genre of news" transported by journalists on predominantly humanitarian issues (Whitlock 73).

dest terms is defined as "worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact" ("Authenticity," def. 2a). Furthermore, authenticity in a philosophical sense also has another meaning with particular refererence to the individual. Authenticity here is understood as being "true to oneself" in the form of an ethical imperative (Taylor qtd. in Huggan 157).[14] Both defining elements, the belief in the truthfulness of an account as well as the maxim of being true to oneself are of utmost importance for the study of autobiography.

With respect to the significance of authenticity in life writing research, the close connection of the concept to the idea of authority adds another layer to the entanglement between terms derived from the philosophy of science and their significance in contemporary research. Authenticity and authority share common etymological roots. In Literary Studies, the more politically charged term of authority is mostly replaced by the concept of agency. The latter is defined as sense of ownership and the ability "to make a difference" (Barker, *Cultural Studies* 474). Agency thus counts as the major source of action for an individual and lies at the very core of the first-person narrative perspective (Burr 20; Eakin, "What Are We Reading" 127).[15] The term has therefore gained particular prominence in the context of ethnic life writing research, where agency and the lack thereof constitute major themes and motivations for writing.

When reviewing the original definitions of truth, authenticity, and agency, as derived from the philosophy of science, one notices their immanent dependency on each other. It ultimately remains a chicken-or-egg problem to determine which one is the basis for which. On the one hand, truth as the correspondence to facts becomes a necessary requirement for authenticity. On the other hand, only authentic

14 Especially in the contemporary debate on new media life writing, e.g., the writing of blogs and online diaries, the term authenticity has experienced a revival, since it constitutes one of the most praised, but also one of the most challenging disadvantages of new media. On the one hand, the instant publication of material online as well as the immediacy created by personal pictures, movies and voice recordings seems to underscore claims of authenticity which would hardly be attained by earlier forms of life narrative. In addition, possible censors or "gatekeepers" who control the flow of information in the traditional print market are absent from the self-controlled web (Whitlock 37; John Zogby 87). On the other hand, this provides many options for manipulation and privacy violations. Authenticity as objectively traceable truth can therefore not be claimed or ensured. This has given way to the notion of a "virtual public," where facts for the proof of authenticity are practicallt absent (Whitlock 42).

15 In opposition to highly political conceptions of agency, which dominate the contemporary debate in Cultural Studies, it is a revealing fact to note that more empirically-oriented literary scholars conceive of agency as a power emerging from mostly cognitive capabilities of an individual (Burr 20).

representations are perceived as true. Finally, the more authority writers either represent from the beginning or establish in their writing, the more agency they gain and the more credibility the reader infers.[16] Central to this group of interrelated concepts and their obvious entanglement with the realm of oral and written testimony studied in autobiography research is not the underlying question of causality but their relation to the overall function of knowledge transmission. Consequently, knowledge with all its definitorial preliminaries stands at the basis of life writing. To express this relation between individual insight and truthful storytelling, autobiography theory scholars in the field of life writing research often use the term "subjective truth"[17] which "signals to the reader an intended fidelity to history and memory" and "gestures of sincerity, authenticity and trust [...]" (Whitlock 12). The authentic[18] writer is thus assumed to have knowledge of certain facts which the reader cannot gain otherwise.

The crucial importance of knowledge as major aim of scholarship and knowledge transmission as function of autobiography points to a larger problem at the core of the scientific enterprise; namely the issue of normativity. Normativity can be defined as the sum of statements "specifying how a person is, or persons of particular sort are, expected to behave in given circumstances – expected, in the first instance, by the person that utters the norm" (qtd. in Opp 10714). It is this "oughtness" that constitutes the most challenging dimension to the aim of objective scientific enquiry because its definition requires a human being (Opp 10714). Hence, other crucial values of scientific investigation, such as intersubjectivity and objectivity, are in danger of being violated due to the subjective influence on normative standards. Truth thus represents the ultimate aim of supposedly value-free science, yet, exactly because it does so, truth also represents a scientific value in

16 Whitlock obviously sees authority as inherently reactionary when using the term "oppositional authority" to refer to authors of life narratives (Whitlock 31). Although the expression underlines the power of opposition in gaining authority, it obliterates the constitutional element of authority as immanent in the subject itself.

17 This is not to conceal the fact, however, that the term "subjective truth" is a tautology since truth is defined as correspondence to facts which need to be revealed based on objective methods (Hospers 13). Nevertheless, the fierce inclination of scholars to employ the concept of truth even in relation with subjectivity emphasizes the lasting importance of truth in the production and reception of autobiographical writing.

18 In life narratives, authors often try to underscore the authenticity of their accounts by integrating pictures and other visual and written material to lend their works what Bart Moore-Gilbert calls "documentary 'authority'" (120). An example is constituted by Edward Said who provides many photos in his memoir *Out of Place*. Whereas the pictures themselves exclusively depict close family members, the captions put these images into the larger political and historical context of Egypt (n. pag.).

and of itself (Thiel 10712). This dilemma ties in with the core objective of science as a "purposeful enterprise, established for the benefit of mankind" (Thiel 10711).

In the course of history, scientists under the influence of different philosophical and political currents have dealt with this dilemma of scientific investigation as inherently value-laden. The most popular and at the same time radical view was presented by Max Weber who promoted the view of a strictly "value-free social science" as opposed to normative social and political commitment (Thiel 10713). It is not the intention of this study to continue or interfere with this ideological debate. There is no doubt that the question of normativity by far exceeds the limits of autobiographical study. For the proposed theoretical and analytical aim it is nevertheless fundamental to clarify the meaning of normativity since it constitutes a major criterion impacting the way in which scholars in Literary Studies approach life writing. In contrast to conceiving of normativity mainly as the inclination to employ science for an overall-normative goal, this study defines normativity as the tendency to judge scientific method not according to its explanatory scope and power but rather according to normative, e.g. socially and politically desirable, ideals related to the respective research aim. Obviously, this view does not challenge the argument that science itself in the end is a value-laden endeavor. Of even more importance for the given study, however, is the definition of normativity when it comes to the comparison of research methodology and the criteria applied by scholars from different fields to evaluate these methods.

As these definitorial preliminaries of the theory of science suggest, key terms such as truth, objectivity, and authenticity have been constitutive for the formation of Autobiographical Studies. Most of them have their origin in philosophical realism. The original definition of the given concepts in the philosophy of science and their ultimate relationship to the function and study of autobiography, however, has not been coherently explored so far. This weakness seems to be less a result of the lack of interest by literary scholars than the result of an ideological development which replaced the real self of autobiographical production with the idea of a constructed self established in the humanities.

## The Constructed Self in Autobiography Theory

As the genealogy of autobiographical theory suggests, the initial approach to autobiography was one that regarded life writing as fact-based documentation of individual lives. The notion was that "life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences [...]" (de Man 172). This cause and effect logic, however, has not survived the history of autobiographical research. The most radical change to the perception of autobiographies as lived experience came about with the emer-

gence of constructivism. This was the theoretical earthquake that swept the formely constructed mansion of Autobiographical Studies in an unprecedented way.

Philosophical constructionism was initiated by Jacques Derrida in the 1960s and reached its climax in the 1980s (Childs and Fowler 48). Constructivism represents a "metatheory" which encompasses several different schools[19] of thought and which impacted many different fields in the academy (Spivey 34). The basic characteristic of all these approaches is an anti-essentialist approach to analysis which rejects the validity of "grand narratives" for explaining phenomena and denies the existence of stable referents of words as well as the existence of innate traits of individuals[20] (Burr 13; Barker, *Cultural Studies* 479, 485; de Zepetnek 2; Childs and Fowler 73[21]). Constructivism therefore puts "an emphasis on the generative, organizational, and selective nature of human perception, understanding, and memory [...]" (Spivey 34). This also alters the view of the individual agent and the reliance on memory. Constructivists therefore regard people as "constructive agents" in the sense that they "view the phenomenon of interest (meaning or knowledge) as built instead of passively 'received' [...]" (Spivey 34). The act of communication also becomes a means to "individual sense construction" (Donges, Leonarz, and Meier, my translation, 105).

This short overview demonstrates in how far constructivism stands in fundamental opposition to the core pillars of realism. Especially when it comes to the concepts of truth and objectivity, constructivism functions in a radical way. Since reality only represents a human construct, it cannot be objectively grasped. Consequently, truth as the foundation of knowledge and the depiction of the real world become obsolete if all knowledge is a matter of construction and subjective experience (de Zepetnek 6). On the one hand, this allows for a democratization of thought for no argument can gain hegemony on the basis of truth. It was particularly this

19 Among the best-known variants of social constructivism are radical constructivism and Russian constructivism. The latter is often referred to as forerunner of constructivism, although it has little to do with constructivism as methodological term (de Zepetnek 5).

20 This also explains the close relationship of essentialism to the concept of authenticity in Cultural Studies. Here, authenticity is also perceived as the genuine quality of a scientific category. These categories count as authentic due to an "immaculate" quality which cannot be explained (Barker, *Cultural Studies* 474).

21 With respect to the logic behind definitions of essentialism, some authors commit errors. Peter Childs and Roger Fowler, for example, explain that essentialism is "based on the belief that all individuals, or groups of individuals, possess certain fundamental, innate traits" (73). From this supposition they then conclude "essentialism treats identity as fixed, permanent and stable" (73). Although so-called essentialist representations of identity might evoke this impression, the conclusion of a static identity does not logically derive from the fact that certain innate and unexplained features rule human identity.

anti-essentialist stance which accounted for the far-ranging popularity of constructivism after the historical dominance of philosophical ideas that denied any multiplicity of ideas and approaches (Burr 13). This seeming liberation, on the other hand, also caused the major "disillusionment" of constructivism (Burr 14). The abandoning of the concept of "ultimate truth" not only did away with any material basis of discourse, it also dramatically impacted the notion of agency in a twofold and seemingly contradictory way. While the individual subject in constructivism is endowed with the unlimited agency to constantly (re-)invent identity, the individual at the same time becomes the "product" of this construction undertaken by itself and by others (Burr 14). Since there is no possibility to compare these constructions with truthful referents, a cycle of relativism emerges in which different constructions of the social world can only be evaluated in relation to each other (Burr 81).

This tendency to infinite relativism has caused major criticism in the academy which can be summarized under the label "realism/relativism debate" (Burr 100). While constructivism with its underlying logic of relativism represents a critique of realism's reliance on essentialism, radical constructivists have in turn been targeted for their essentialist defense of absolute relativism as superior concept (Burr 1998, 15) – a tautology par excellence. Inspite of this theoretical weakness, constructivism nevertheless succeeded unlike any other scientific paradigm.[22] In the humanities, realism therefore hardly plays a role in contemporary discourse. Especially in Literary Studies, realism can count as a neglected concept which is denied any theoretical value. Adherents of constructivism and poststructuralism therefore perceive of realism's essentialist and reductionist tendency as "politically conservative and authoritarian" (Barker, *Sage Dictionary* 173). Tony Hilfer in his highly critical investigation of the present status of Literary Studies entitled *The New Hegemony in Literary Studies: Contradictions in Theory* calls this hostility toward realism "Discourse Radicalism." As he states: "A curious aspect of Theory is its condemnation of *an entire mode of literature*, realism, not for what given realists say but as inherently conservative and oppressive in its *form*. Realism has become the straight white male of literary forms" (55).[23]

22 The term paradigm here is used with specific reference to Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn traces the history of science as a series of wave-like theoretical shifts, whereby a paradigm shift to Kuhn relies on its acceptance by the respective scientific community, not on logical superiority (94). A similar argument can be made for the dominance of constructivism despite some methodological flaws of the approach.

23 Hilfer does not generally denigrate the advances made by constructivist criticism in comparison to traditional realist thought. "I am not arguing that reality or realist literature is self-evident," he therefore states before adding that realism "is the straw man Theory sets in opposition to its own antirealism. Reality, like the moral truth it quests after, is

This fierce condemnation of realism in Literary and Cultural Studies also is reflected in the subfield of life writing theory. The extreme position of constructivists and postmodernists denies any notion of autobiography as truth-related. This stance is underlined by Eakin who quotes William Maxwell from *The Liars' Club* to emphasize the significant role memory distortion and cognitive creation play in self-narration. As Eakin cites; "in talking about the past we lie with every breath we draw" ("What Are We Reading" 125). The Arab American autobiography researcher Waïl Hassan follows this claim by reminding his readers that "there is no such thing as 'life as lived' to be referred to" ("Arab-American Autobiography" 8). Whitlock argues in a similar vein when summarizing the status quo of Autobiographical Studies: "It is now a given in autobiogeraphy criticism that the 'I' of autobiography and memoir has never been anything but virtual"[24] (1). All of these comments on the status of autobiography research in the contemporary period stand in the tradition of radical discourse analysis. Due to the preoccupation with constructivism in any possible field, Hilfer polemically makes the point that discourse analysis today "deconstructs" everything, "from advertisements to wrestling" (55).

The recent interdisciplinary opening of autobiography research indeed provides additional evidence for the constructivists' claim that life writing cannot count as fact-telling. Major contributions in this context were made by scholars in the fields of cognitive psychology and neurology. Both areas have undergone major advancements in the last two decades (Eakin, "What Are We Reading" 121).[25] Overall, scientists in these fields have refined the assumption that memory cannot be conceived of as "'library or a storehouse of information'" but as a "continuous activity" of reconstructing (Ender 5). Ender strikingly illustrates this point by stating that "no one can remember what I remember" (12).

While these findings seem to be in line with the constructivist claim that all memory is subjective and life writing therefore must count as invented, the inclusion of findings from Cognitive Studies brought about a more nuanced image. By shedding light on the detailed processes of remembering, scientists in these fields

elusive" (64). This urge is a forceful reminder to not exclude realism from the theoretical picture without insisting on any kind of theoretical hegemony.

24 "Virtual" here assumes the double meaning of constructed reality in traditional written autobiography as well as in the modern-day representation of self in different technology-based media.

25 The most well-known neuroscientist Antonio Damasio demonstrates this point in the following statement: "Multiple individuals confronted with the same body or brain can make the same observations of that body or brain, but no comparable direct third-person observation is possible for anyone's mind. The body and its brain are public, exposed, and unequivocally objective entities. The mind is a private, hidden, internally, unequivocally subjective entity" (qtd. in Ender 15).

operate with terms borrowed from realist and constructivist vocabulary. The initial assumption is that there are indeed "facts" about life that form the basis of life narrative (Perrett). Due to the influence of subjective memory and the limited capacity of the brain to recall life facts, the literary reproduction of life in autobiography inevidently counts as construction. Instead of regarding this as a mere constraint, cognitive scientists acknowledge the positive side of the process. Ender quotes the psychiatrist Jean Delay: "Our memory is like a diary that writes itself" (3). Ultimately, this finding transfers part of individual agency to the cognitive apparatus. Reconstructing subjective memory and turning this memory into narrative thus turns into an artistic process that accounts for the beauty of the art of memory[26] writing. Ender in this context uses the analogy of architecture in describing narratives of memory as "brilliant works of architecture born from the depths of our minds" that mark the uniqueness of the individual "rememberer" (13).

Scholars in Cultural and Literary Studies have widely adopted this more balanced view caused by the interdisciplinary opening of the field. Eakin concedes that memory itself is detailed and fact-related, yet the act of recording it is based on construction (*How Our Lives* 107). This acknowledgement of the importance of facts and of the unavoidable cognitive process of construction eases the normatively charged debate between realists and constructivists. A middle-position between both strains, namely "limited constructivism," assumes that (re-)constructing life in autobiography is not merely but also a matter of bad intention and will as it is a complex interplay of cognitive restraint and subjective agency (Hart 324).

This synopsis of autobiography research as a field highlights the significant paradigm shifts which have occurred since the 1960s. Whereas truth, objectivity, and facts used to represent the hallmarks of life writing during the dominance of realist thought, constructivism and its theoretical successors have mostly dispelled these terms from contemporary research. Although Cognitive Studies slightly contributed to the re-emergence of these concepts, life writing per se is not regarded to be an effigy of any material or historical reality (de Zepetnek 3). In summary, the *real* self as the starting point of autobiography research has come to be replaced by the *constructed* self dominating present-day scholarship. This focus on the self as active creation brings attention to the larger context in which this construction takes place. Commonly, this context is subsumed under the term discourse.

26 Edward Said also used the expression "art of memory" ("Invention, Memory" 179). To him, however, this quality of art as construction had a rather negative connotation due to the danger of distortion.

## Discourse and Its Discontents

The concept of discourse forms one of the most influential catch words in Cultural Studies and in the field of life writing research. Hardly any publication lacks terms such as discursive structures, discursive constraints, "discursive transformations" (Silberstein qtd. in Whitlock 133), "discursive intervention" (W. Hassan, "Arab-American Autobiography" 8) "discursive grid of globalization" (Whitlock 123), and "discursive strategy" (Salgado 204) [emphasis added]. Whitlock even describes discourse as the ultimate "catalyst" for autobiography (78). On the one hand, this focus on discourse again underlines the utmost importance of constructivist thought which favors discursive over materialist structures in the creation of life writing (Eakin, How Our Lives 62). On the other hand, the concept due to its inflationary usage causes severe discontents to the critical scholar working at the intersection of Literary and Media Studies, since the term mostly goes undefined. This leaves one with the impression that scholarly discourse itself forms the very discourse determining the production and reception of autobiography. The question then remains: What exactly does this discourse consist of in today's world?

The term discourse represents a cross-disiplinary category (Bortolussi and Dixon 2). The etymology of the term defines it as "a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete contexts [...]" ("Discourse," def. 5). The analysis of discourse furthermore encompasses "the study of linguistic relations and structures in discourse" ("Discourse Analysis"). In Literary and Cultural Studies, discourse theory has mostly been shaped by the philosophical ideas of Michel Foucault who advocated the idea that discourse unites language and practice (Barker, Cultural Studies 478). Discourse analysis in Cultural Studies therefore has a strong "textual orientation" that goes along with a focus on linguistic methods (Barker and Galasinski 62). In line with the constructivist notion of the social world as discursive invention, "objects of knowledge" are thus understood to be defined through linguistic means (Barker, Cultural Studies, 478; Gamson qtd. in B. Scheufele 41). Jürgen Habermas in addition stressed the idea of discourse as constant questioning of general truth claims based on logical argumentation (qtd. in B. Scheufele 41).

As to the specific objects of discourse found in the social world, the communication scholar Bertram Scheufele points out that it usually evolves around socially relevant topics, e.g., abortion, anti-semitism, racism, to name only a few dominant examples from our time (42). To figure out which issues dominate social discourse, communication scholars, as opposed to literary scholars who often employ linguistics means, rely on public opinion data. Public opinion is defined as a view held by a significant share of a society and measured by public opinion polls (McQuail

565).[27] Public opinion formation is seen as a process in which attitudes and norms are formed based on the selective acceptance or denial of certain frames of interpretation (Chong and Druckman 120). The term opinion itself not only carries normative but also cognitive meaning. As Denis McQuail emphasizes: "It is as much cognitive as evaluative" (516).

The cognitive component of discourse points to the crucial significance of "knowledge" in discourse analysis. As in the case of life writing in its original definition as truthful account, knowledge as the core pillar of discourse demonstrates the close links to the criteria of truth and authenticity. The given definitions of discourse in the fields of Cultural and Media Studies stress the exchange of logical and rational argumentation in contrast to the mere exchange of personal opinion, emotions or views. Following the chain of logical argumentation, knowledge transmission and acquisition require the existence of truth, which in turn is facilitated through the process of discourse. Since knowledge in discourse is not defined in individual but in collective terms (B. Scheufele 42), discourse analysis always requires the analysis of more than one actor. When transferred to the realm of literature, the writer thus functions as individual agent in influencing collective opinion formation while at the same time being constrained or at least affected by the discourse surrounding him (Golley, Reading 184).

The question of the role of the individual actor in discourse also correlates with the issue of power. Since discourse per definition implies the idea of conflicting arguments, discourse is based on the exchange of these arguments. As the postcolonial scholar Bill Ashcroft and his colleagues state, "discourse comes into being in a structure of counter-discursive practices" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 167). This ultimately incorporates the idea of "dominance" in the very definition of discourse. It suggests a dualism between hegemony and alterity, between public and individual.[28] The dynamics of this discourse, i.e., the mutual exchange of conflicting ideas,

27 The concept of the "public" is similarly challenged in Communication Studies as is the term "mass" in Cultural Studies. The public generally is assumed to consist of free citizens in a society or some geographically defined space. It is thus heavily embedded in the concept of democracy resting on an "informed public opinion" (Fortner 190; McQuail 565). Based on this normative stance, the term "public" often bears a negative connotation since the degree to which public opinion can be trusted is being doubted due to the influence of manipulative tools, such as the mass media (Fortner 188). This reveals the ethnocentric origin of the concept.

28 The most influential theory to explain how public opinion comes to dominate was provided by the pioneer communication scholar Elisabeth Noelle. In the 1970s, she formulated her hypothesis of the Spiral of Silence (McQuail 519; Kunczik and Zipfel 375). According to this assumption, people are endowed with a quasi-statistical sense of constantly comparing their own views with what they think is the public opinion of the majority.

thus necessarily brings about a redefining of power constellations. Although this finding sounds familiar to anybody working in the field of Postcolonial Studies, where the struggle for power constitutes the major concern of analysis, this logical investigation of knowledge as a formative element of discourse seeks to underscore a more general finding. For knowledge is the only means to impact dominant discourse and dominance can only be overthrown by power, the idea of knowledge as power is inherent in the very concept of discourse itself, despite any considerations of political and ethnic struggles for agency. Power therefore is not an end in itself but can be viewed as a constitutive and even positive force in discourse. As Foucault mentions, "it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse (Interview 62).[29]

Another crucial aspect for the analysis of discourse in its contemporary surroundings which emerges from the given definition is that participation in discourse with the goal of knowledge alternation is not an accidental event but an instrumental[30] process (Bhabha, Location 103). In other words, every actor participating in discourse is assumed to pursue a discursive strategy based on rational argumentation to achieve the ultimate goal of persuasion.[31] The term 'strategy' originated in military jargon. It is defined as "a careful plan or method" and as "the art of devising or employing plans or stratagems toward a goal" ("Strategy," defs. 2a, b). Strategy development and its application are thus never of an accidental nature. This idea of intentionality links the term to the definition of discourse and its rational

The media are the primary source for this assessment. Whenever individuals think they hold a minority view, their "fear of isolation" prevents them from expressing a diverging opinion (McQuail 568). The result is a "spiraling" effect which causes the preconceived dominant opinion to become even stronger. Although there is manifoldevidence that this assumption holds true, the Spiral of Silence still remains hypothetical because its formulation is very broad and can hardly be tested in detail (McQuail 520; Allen et al. 267). The media coverage of 9/11 and the reinforcement of anti-Muslim sentiment without counter-representations, however, can be read as incidents of this spiraling effect.

29 The logic of this definition actually stands in contrast to previous definitions by Foucault and other theoreticians who argued that power is a necessary preliminary for entering discourse. This raises the question of whether power is an effect of discourse or an inherent preliminary (Foucault, Interview 52).

30 Instrumentalization also implies the aspect of mobilization which Smith and Watson describe as one of the goals of autobiographical discourse by politicians (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* x).

31 This finding also highlights the importance of authorial intent and will. Even though these concepts have lost much of their meaning in recent literary scholarship, the question of "will" remains central, as Said also underlines. To him, intention can never be completely "domesticated by the system" (qtd. in El-Haj 548).

focus. As Homi Bhabha in his critique of Edward Said explains, discourse represents a "median category"[32] which is always linked to the categories of power and knowledge, thus, turning discourse into a "strategic response to an urgent need at a given historical moment" (Location 105).

When conceiving of life writing as discursive intervention – as contemporary scholarship in the post-constructivist era does – one can therefore not exclude questions of intentionality. Since persuasion and intentionality traditionally evoke suspicions of manipulation, the question of intentionality has become extremely unfavorable in contemporary literary scholarship (Leitch 26). The term strategy in general carries a negative connotation and evokes notions of instrumentalization, manipulation, and "indoctrination"[33] (Whitlock 152). This negative assessment of strategy especially in the literary field points to a larger problem of normativity.[34]

On the one hand, this neglect to explore authorial intentions is linked with the high degree of text-orientation prevailing in Literary Studies. Anything not explicitly written in a text, therefore, can hardly be proven by intra-textual means. On the other hand, this practice leaves the question of actual authorial strategies acting beyond the immediate linguistic level unexplored. This often leads to a somewhat self-enforced distancing of literary scholars from the political and social background of the respective authors. In the case of fictional writing, this imposed neutralization is justifiable since author and characters are distinct. In autobiographical writing, however, where the author is his/her own protagonist, the scholarly convention to purposefully disregard possible strategies to influence the public perception of autobiographical discourse leaves a considerable part of autobiographical production unexplored.

---

32 The term "median category" was actually used by Said in *Orientalism*. However, Said himself also endowed the term with a cognitive function, meaning that Orientalism helps mediate and structure information (*Orientalism* 58). This use of the term is hardly acknowledged by contemporary scholars, although it strongly supports the function of Orientalism as cognitive model beyond normative evaluations.

33 Statements like these point to an inherent weakness of Literary Studies to provide empirical evidence for axiomatic claims. Whitlock, for example, who constantly refers to the audience in her work, neither provides a close-reading analysis of the texts discussed nor does she mention figures or other data underscoring her hypothesis that "indoctrination" and other negative influences on readers actually occur (see Whitlock 152).

34 This skepticism toward framing as instrumentalization, of course, is not limited to the literary field but has also accompanied media research ever since its beginnings. The focus here primarily rests on the role of media in a democracy and its function to inform citizens to make proper decisions in deliberation processes (Chong and Druckman 120; also see Chapter 2.2).

When looking at these shortcomings in contemporary autobiographical theory and its love-affair with discourse, discourse causes discontent. This discontent to a large extent is rooted in a very exclusionary and unworldly[35] approach taken by literary theorists. Contemporary life writing theory thus suffers from a fundamental gap between theory and practice. Discourse remains the central catch word in respective publications. Its incremental elements of truth, authenticity, and objectivity, however, have been banned from the theoretical landscape due to the constructivist emphasis on anti-essentialism. This obsession with discourse under questionable theoretical prefixes has been brought to an even more paradoxical level when looking at a particular sub-genre of autobiography theory: ethnic autobiography.

## Ethnic Autobiography Lost in Counter-Discourse

Life narrative in the context of discourse analysis inherently entails the notion of power relations. These power relations are particularly important when investigating the life narratives of those who, for a long time, lacked the agency necessary to take part in global literary discourse. Ethnic Autobiography Studies seek to reveal the mechanisms through which this identity negotiation takes place. When taking a closer look at the discursive strategies employed by ethnic life narrative, however, one wonders if the field does not lose itself in a never-ending cycle of countering the very preliminaries of its existence.

The field of ethnic autobiography[36] research is a fairly new area in life writing research which only gained prominence in the 1980s and 90s (Eakin, Introduction

35 The positive variant of the term stands largely in the tradition of Said for whom worldliness was a central concept – both in his academic and activist work, and in his conception of literature (Shereen 111). To Said, the "text does not live outside the world," which corresponds to the rather pragmatic and highly political way in which he interpreted texts (Shereen 109). As he furthermore states in his work *The World, the Text and the Critic*: "The point is that texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly" (35).

36 Some authors refer to ethnic autobiographies as "auto-ethnography" (Whitlock 62). Autoethnography is defined as the "writing about the personal and its relationship to culture" (Ellis 37). As genre of life narrative, it reveals "different layers of concsciousness" (Ellis 37). The term is mostly used in the fields of anthropology, media, and performance studies (Ellis 12, 214). For postcolonial scholars, autoethnography is characterized as specifically political project (Pratt 49). Although the adoption of the concept by literary scholars signals methodological and interdisciplinary advancement, the present study will mostly neglect the theoretical differences between both concepts for autobiography is generally assumed to have ethnographic and political implications.

6). Under the influence of postcolonialism, the strongly ethnocentric viewpoint that saw autobiography as merely "Western" genre was given up (Eakin, *How Our Lives* 43). Scholars of life writing as well as researchers interested in the fields of Ethnic and Postcolonial Studies thus increasingly paid attention to the life accounts produced by those formerly excluded from the autobiographical landscape.

What distinguishes the study of ethnic life writing from the one of autobiographies produced by non-ethnic authors is the political dimension inherent in the definition of ethnic identity. Social power constellations and notions of hegemony on the collective level are thus immediately linked to the (self-)conception of individuals.[37] Since ethnic writing emerged as product of the political liberation following the overcoming of colonialism, the study of ethnic autobiography naturally transcends the realm of the literary by incorporating the political and socio-cultural circumstances of literary production (Moore-Gilbert 112; Golley, *Reading* 183). With respect to the individual subject of ethnic autobiography, the memories sketched ethnic writers thus take the form of "politics of memory" in which political facts and historical experiences, such as the experience of colonial oppression, are written and read through the lens of "ethnic interpretation" (Boelhowever 136). Autobiography therefore becomes a tool of cultural and intercultural learning which shapes "dialogues across cultures" (Whitlock 2). Whitlock states: "We encounter each other and ourselves in narrative." By referring to Seyla Benhabib, she then adds that "the notion of the constant creation and re-creation of identity and difference is useful for thinking about this as a dynamic process: 'I can become aware of the *otherness of others,* those aspects of their identity that make them concrete others to me, only through their own narratives'" (14).

In the context of social discourse theory, this characterization suggests that ethnic life writing by nature is reactive to the dominant discourse of the *Western* colonizer.[38] The term "counter-discourse" represents this overall-discursive strategy employed by ethnic authors which allows for a "discursive intervention" otherwise unattainable (Golley, *Reading* 15-16). Whitlock underlines the strategic nature of this "talking back" discourse by highlighting that "autobiographical acts [...] bring into view processes of othering[39] and self-fashioning" (Whitlock 13; Arida 4). The

37 Ian Haney-López, a specialist in the study of legal constructions of race, summarizes this aspect by explaining that "inferiority is a predicate for superiority, and vice versa" (22).

38 In the case of Palestinian life writing, counter-discourse often takes the specific form of "counter-Americanism" (Moore-Gilbert 114).

39 The constant emphasis on counter-discourse, however, logically represents a reaction to a dominant discourse. This underlines the critique applied by Homi Bhabha who insists that counter-discourse, just like colonial discourse, requires difference in order to perform "othering" (*Location* 96). The constant reinforcement of discursive opponents in counter-

postcolonial scholar Brinda Mehta, when specifically referring to Arab American life narratives, combines the arguments provided by memory research, constructivism, and discourse theory in arguing that "counternarrative" serves the function of subverting stereotypes whereby "memory provides an important point of motivation to reconstruct the past as a means of transforming the present" (4). Carol Fadda-Conrey, also writing on the role of counter-narrative in relation to Arab Americans, points to the historical significance of autobiographical (re-)construction by referring to it as a document of "counterhistory" ("Racially White" 136).[40] Autobiographical production by ethnic writers thus becomes a tool for the "politics of remembering," which is central not only for the self-definition of individuals, but for the collective identity formation of societies (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 25). The first problem related to this notion, however, is that strategy in the case of ethnic autobiography has only been limited to the notion of counter-discourse by means of producing "counterstories" (Lindemann Nelson 69).

This strong focus on ethnic life writing as counter-discursive mode evades a shortcoming found in other areas of autobiography research in which discursive strategies are often entirely neglected.[41] Counter-discourse as practically the only definitorial feature of ethnic life writing, however, also has its major downsides. This particularly becomes obvious when integrating the credentials of discourse theory – a theoretical move which scholars have so far avoided. As the definition of discourse and its relation to autobiographical writing indicate, the mutual exchange of counter-arguments is constitutive of any form of discourse. Discourse in and of itself therefore implies the idea of counter-discourse. The "discursive imperative"[42] of ethnic life-writing therefore truly is a counter-discursive imperative because all

discourse illustrates this practice. Anthony Appiah thus warns that postcolonial scholars get lost in a mere "otherness machine" (qtd. in Fritsch-El Alaoui 22).

40 W. Hassan describes the challenging of dominant discourse with the simultaneous constitution of one's own discourse as "double-operation" ("Arab American" 9). In contrast to the permanent insistence on counter-discourse as oppositional practice found in other authors, Hassan's view highlights the interdependency between discourse and counter-discourse without this confrontative element. Whitlock makes a similar claim when referring to a "double agency of life narrative" that can either facilitate or distort dialogue across cultures and underlying power relations (22).

41 The specific use of ethnic memory and cultural practice for the (re-)gaining of agency was underscored by Bhabha in his conception of "*cultures of survival*" ("Postcolonial" 190). The idea emphasizes that culture and cultural production at large have a strategic function for ethnic minorities.

42 Smith and Watson developed the term in the context of women's autobiographies and feminist theory. Here, similar trajectories with respect to identity politics and claims of agency can be found as in the case of ethnic life narrative (*De/Colonizing* xvii).

discourse is from the beginning assumed to represent a reaction to the power of existing arguments (Smith and Watson qtd. in Huggan 161).

What distinguishes ethnic counter-discourse from other discursive strategies, though, is the special authenticity devoted to the writer. Graham Huggan in his study *The Exotic Other* introduces the term "*cultural authenticity*" to refer to this preliminary of ethnic counter-discourse (157).[43] In other words, the ethnic writer is assumed to present a cultural perspective[44] that the audience is not familiar with and therefore cannot experience itself (Huggan 155). Due to the once more reactive character of this type of authenticity, Huggan refers to it as "*counter-authenticity*" (Huggan 162).[45] Claims of authenticity and agency therefore constitute the narrative power of ethnic life narrative in the public (Whitlock 113).[46] Overall, this trajectory

43 Cultural authenticity is usually seen in a political context in ethnic life writing. Especially recent Arab American autobiographies, however, focus less on politics and more on the expression of cultural customs and family tradition. An example of this shift is the food memoir which introduces a new "site of authenticity," as Bardenstein argues ("Beyond Univocal Balava" 161). Critics, however, argue that the focus on cultural representations, especially in the case of food memoirs, is essentialist due to the fact that food serves as an "ethnic marker" (Bardenstein, "Beyond Univocal Balava" 167). Bardenstein counters this critique by pointing to the "decomplexifying effects" of food memoirs. "Many people dismiss food memoirs as anecdotal, nostalgic, and apolitical," she states. In fact, however, "food is an easy vehicle" to transport more complex political and social realities to the public, she explains (Personal interview).

44 The notion of perspectivity is crucial for the entire body of exilic and diasporic literature. Writers derive their authenticity not merely from their particular cultural knowledge but also from their geographical location (Varisco 283). Alfred Hornung in his discussion of Said's memoir *Out of Place* terms this "extraterritorial" existence, a state in which people live outside their original cultural sphere and constantly face identity challenges (368). An alternative term used by Lisa Lau and Lisa Mendes to refer to the importance of location is "positionalities" (4). The theme of exile therefore constitutes one of the major theoretical underpinnings in the discussion of diaspora life narratives – both, as severe trauma and as "powerful force" to see things from a different perspective (Whitlock 182).

45 Naber in her discussion of the binary logic underlying the discourse about Arabs in America coins this authority "re-authenticity" ("Arab San Francisco" 264). In contrast to the prefix 'counter-,' Naber's formulation underlines the reactionary and less confrontative nature of authenticity in ethnic writing.

46 In light of the aforementioned theoretical explanations, this is not limited to ethnic life narrative. As Whitlock states with respect to the range of life writing, "across contemporary life narrative, the hybrid and the syncretic always coincide with identifications that pursue authentic, continuous, and homogenous self-identities [...]" (11).

underscores the well-known credo of speaking "truth to power" as the ultimate aim of postcolonial expression (Whitlock 119).[47]

This entanglement of ethnic identity and cultural authenticity raises another inherent crux which has evolved around ethnic literary production ever since its emergence. As Cultural Studies expert Caren Kaplan explains, "the burden of ethnic autobiographical writing is to participate in at least two different registers at all times [...]" (qtd. in Huggan 156). This points to the challenged status of authenticity in ethnic life writing. On the one hand, ethnic autobiography derives its right of existence from the authenticity of ethnic, i.e., cultural identity. On the other hand, authenticity is something to be granted by the readers who function as "legitimizing agents"[48] (Bourdieu qtd. in Huggan 164). If the readership does not share the same ethnic and cultural background – which is the rule per definitionem[49] – then, ethnic life narrative has to meet certain expectations and communicative rules demanded by the target audience in order to be understood and conceived of as authentic. Cultural authenticity thus assumes the meaning of "cultural legitimacy" (Whitlock 20). The two definitions of authenticity[50] as 'being true to oneself' and 'being true to others' by sticking to the facts thus collide.[51] In addition, authenticity here experiences another complication since members of one's own ethnic group also have

47 The strategy of speaking truth to power is closely linked to Said's elaborations on knowledge and power and his ideational forefather Foucault. As Said expressed with respect to the media and the Middle East conflict, this concept is always in danger of misuse (*Covering Islam* 134). As far as his own belief in the success of counter-narrative is concerned, critics share different views. On the one hand, Said due to his political activist stance saw the solution to the *East/West* conflict in counternarrative (Marrouchi "Counternarratives" 219). On the other hand, following the skepticism of Foucault concerning the success of narrative resistance, Said saw Arabs as "passive" and unlikely to be able to change their lot (Aboul-Ela, "Is there an Arab" 730).

48 Huggan discusses the role of readers as "legitimizing agents" largely with respect to the position of autobiographies as commodities in the marketplace. As he also points out, content and authenticity are not the only factors accounting for the successful promotion of a book, but also supposedly minor aspects like cover, design etc. (164).

49 If ethnic life writing is principally defined in relation to non-ethnic literature, then those defining it as ethnic consequently must be of non-ethnic origin.

50 With respect to the original definition of authenticity, defined as the transmission of knowledge, the solidarity imperative in ethnic life writing fosters a form of cultural authenticity (compare Huggan 175).

51 Orfalea in his memoir shares a striking confirmation of this importance of authenticity and authorial credibility in the context of Arab stereotypes and the marketplace. One of his novels never got published because, as he recalls, "I was of Arab background, I couldn't get it right [...]. I was, de facto, an unreliable narrator" (222).

certain prescribed notions of what truthful representation means to them which the individual writer might violate. Overall, this complex meaning of authenticity in ethnic life writing and the lack thereof poses the severest challenge to the genre at large. Graham Huggan observes this difficulty in one of his subchapters under the ironic heading "Ethnic Autobiography and the Cult of Authenticity" (155).

Recent postcolonial criticism has targeted the problematic role of authenticity in ethnic life writing based on its immanent quest for fighting essentialism (Barker, *Cultural Studies* 488). Due to the need of ethnic life writing to meet the demands of its non-ethnic audiences, authors are accused of reinforcing essentialist notions of culture and ethnic identity. Essentialism in this vein maintains its negative connotation. This only slightly changed with the introduction of the concept of "strategic essentialism," as developed by Spivak (Morton, *Gayatri Spivak* 125). According to Spivak, cultural reductionism can be turned into a political strategy if it allows a group to speak up with a unified voice strong enough to influence mainstream discourse in order to subvert ethnic identity stereotypes[52] (Barker, *Cultural Studies* 488; Naber 2002, 275).[53] Spivak defines her theory as the "strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword [...]" (qtd. in Morton, *Gayatri Spivak* 126). Elizabeth Eide in her analysis of Spivak's approach furthermore explains that strategic essentialism "entails that members of groups, while being highly differentiated internally, may engage in an essentializing and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivized way to achieve certain objectives" (76). The otherwise highly negative con-

52 Whitlock in her discussion of the commodification of ethnic life writing states that "there is an immediate and autobiographical appeal to a public that is gendered, classed and given permission to read [...]" (95). According to her, this audience mostly comprises a female middle-class audience (96). Although this underlines Whitlock's general critique of cooptation, the problem remains that Whitlock presents no data to justify her claim. This points to the fact that there are not only *Western* stereotypes about Eastern writers but also stereotypes about the *Western* audience.

53 Particularly contemporary Arab American women writers are often subjected to the critique of cultural essentialism. An author who is frequently attacked in this context is Leila Ahmed whose fictional and scholarly works are said to manifest essentialist representations of Arab identity (Vinson 86). Ahmed is thus accused of representing a prime example of "internalized colonialism" (Attar qtd. in Vinson 83). Defendants of Ahmed's writing, however, argue that stereotypes are only taken up in order to be subverted (W. Hassan, "Arab-American" 19-20). This debate underlines the general importance of cultural authenticity in ethnic life writing. Edward Said recognized this by positioning himself as an "inauthentic American" (Fadda-Conrey, "Racially White" 145).

cept of essentialism is thus turned into a positive force based on its pragmatic and political usage (Eide 76; Lau and Mendes 6).[54]

With respect to the significance of the concept for contemporary autobiographical criticism, it can be noted that strategic essentialism is hardly granted any theoretical value. The idea of using the reductionist mechanics of essentialism for strategic purposes is therefore still regarded to confirm rather than subvert the negative side effects of reductionism. Due to the wave of criticism originating inside the postcolonial field, Spivak herself meanwhile does not uphold her theory anymore (*Interview* 35).[55] For the current study, however, the role of strategic essentialism in contemporary discourse at large is less important than the theoretical potential of the concept which indeed needs to be highlighted. What has not been acknowledged so far, due to the highly normative tendency in Postcolonial Studies to argue against anything that might evoke essentialist tendencies, is the cognitive component of Spivak's use of essentialism. In regard to the media-oriented approach to the study of public discourse, it must be noted that strategic essentialism – independent of its specific political aims – functions on the basis of complexity reduction. Messages encoded strategically as unified and thus essentialized, according to the definitorial preliminaries of public discourse, indeed promise to have higher chances of impacting public opinion than heterogeneous and thus more complex arguments.

This scepticism toward any novel theoretical approach challenging the fierce rejection of essentialism in post-constructivist times highlights the larger concerns around the danger of cooptation prevailing in the analysis of ethnic life writing (Whitlock 121). Recently, this debate has been carried out with specific attention to the role of so-called "native informants" (Huddart 138). The term native informant originally derived from the study of colonial life circumstances in which some of those formerly colonized adopted the structure of oppression a way that they employed cultural insider information to support this system (Arida 2; Huddart 122). In postcolonial times, the concept has been applied to diaspora writers who supposedly use their exilic residential position outside their countries of origin to re-essentialize their homelands. This critique has particularly been applied to Arab writers living in the United States and Europe who, due to their often very privileged socio-

54 An example of strategic essentialism in the context of Arab American identity representation is the conscious emphasis on religious identity traits used to turn around stereotypes about Muslims (Eide 69).

55 Critics often forget to account for the specific circumstances under which Spivak developed the concept. Originally, she did not theorize strategic essentialism with respect to ethnicity but as part of her engagement with class-struggle and Marxism (Spivak, *In Other Worlds* 205). The underlying assumption here is that the "personal is political" in order to trigger "positivist essentialism" (Spivak, "Interview" 35; *In Other Worlds* 205).

economic and intellectual status, have been accused of denigrating the Orient from a *Western* perspective (Banerjee, "Between the Burqa" 301; Whitlock 181).[56]

Meanwhile, the critique of native informants in the context of Arab American writing and its legacy of Orientalism has led to the development of new theoretical models beyond the ones of essentialism and cooptation. The most popular one in contemporary life writing research is Lisa Lau's theorization of "Re-Orientalism" intended to serve as a critique of contemporary "postcolonial cultural production" (Lau and Mendes 3).[57] Lau defines Re-Orientalism in the following terms:

> [N]o longer an Orientalism propagated by Occidentals, but ironically enough, by Orientals, albeit by diasporic writers. This process, which is here termed Re-Orientalism, dominates and, to a significant extent, distorts the representation of the Orient [...]. The [argument] begins by analyzing and establishing the dominant positionality of diasporic [...] women writers relative to their non-diasporic counterparts in the genre. (Lau, "Re-Orientalism" 571)

Re-Orientalism consequently locates the agent of *Oriental* discourse in the *Occident*, at least geographically, but names the formerly orientalized subjects as sources of Orientalism. By acting as native informants, Arab writers thus abuse their superior position to further underline the inferior image of the *East* (Lau and Mendes 4).[58] For the purpose of discussing present-day ethnic autobiography research in the context of discourse theory, it is important to highlight the particular meaning of the prefix "re" in the model. As Lau's definition suggests, this prefix does not so much refer to a changed notion of the actual practice of Orientalism itself, which she still sees as distorted representation of the *East*. Rather, the "re"

56 The feminist and postcolonial thinker Trinh T. Minhha has largely contributed to elaborations on the concept of the native informant. Minhha sees the native informant as the person who translates foreign culture for the outsider in a way that the cultural insider still does not represent himself in his own voice (Khan 2022). This role of the native informant is also applied to the scholar who is suppodedly turned into a "third-world native informant (re-)producing the voice of alterity" while living and writing in the "West" (Khan 2023). Contemporary criticism often targets this counter-knowledge production by scholarly native informants since most ethnic writers live in the *West* (Banerjee, "Between the Burqa" 322; Fritsch-el-Alaoui 26; Whitlock 181).

57 Although the term is often used synonymously with other reconceptualizations of Orientalism, it is to be strictly separated from both "Neo-Orientalism" and "Post-Orientalism" (see Chapter 3.2).

58 This argument appears in a more negative light when considering that the demand for these so-called re-Orientalist works comes from *Western* scholars and activists who use the authenticity and insights provided by ethnic writers to pursue their own cause within the realm of the global human rights discourse (Banerjee, "Between the Burqa" 309).

assumes a temporal meaning in that it signals a re-emergence or repetition of classical Orientalism in the contemporary period. This re-formulated model still focuses on the core issue of power relations between *East* and *West*, whereby the former remains the target of oppression. Adherents of Re-Orientalism thus see a neo-colonialist practice at work which substantiates a "new hegemony" (Banerjee, "Between the Burqa" 323). The only but certainly crucial conceptual difference between this renewal of Orientalism and its older version is that it is maintained by *Orientals* themselves. In other words, Re-Orientalism thus marks the culmination of the vicious cycle of counter-discourse surrounding ethnic life narrative which now not only aims to counter original colonialist structures but also the counter-reaction to these structures in the literature of the formerly colonized.

This detailed look at the development of ethnic autobiography research demonstrates that the field continues to focus on the aspect of counter-discourse as major narrative strategy of ethnic writers. This *re*active nature has gained yet another theoretical twist with Lau's concept of Re-Orientalism. In sum, these findings confirm the nature of ethnic life-writing as an ambivalent genre. On the one hand, ethnic autobiography is conceived of as powerful tool against colonialism. On the other hand, its very strength can turn against it if former instruments of oppression become the means of cooptation. Whitlock in her comprehensive and innovative study on contemporary ethnic life writing visualizes this image in the metaphor of the "soft weapon." As she explains: "Autobiography circulates as a 'soft weapon.' It can personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard." Yet, as she furthermore explains, the power of autobiography as a 'weapon' is limited by the adjective 'soft' which accounts for the fact that "ethnic autobiography is easily co-opted into propaganda" (3).[59]

The preoccupation of ethnic autobiography with counter-discourse has several implications for the larger field of life writing studies. In general, the exploration of ethnic narrative in postcolonial criticism has considerably contributed to the theoretical expansion of autobiography research (Eakin, *How Our Lives* 9; Boelhower 138). With its emphasis on autobiography as means to gaining agency, this vein of research highlights the political function of life narrative beyond the literary sphere. This "politization of ethnicity" consequently calls attention to the study of life narrative along larger social trajectories (Kayyali 61). While this expanded research scope meets the initial intention of Cultural Studies which seek to look at literature within the context of actual social circumstances, the omnipresent debate on coun-

59 Whitlock later in the book provides an almost economic definition of the term "soft weapon" by describing it as "the carefully coordinated management of information across a variety of contemporary media" (54). She relates this to "public opinion management" (54). From a communications perspective, this definition shows close links to agenda setting theory which intersects with framing (see Chapter 5.2).

ter-discourse also causes severe limitations to the further development of autobiography research. This constraint can mostly be attributed to the fact that postcolonialism continues to perceive of (counter-)discourse along the lines of power relations. Counter-discourse as the ultimate strategy of the "subaltern" speaking back has become an axiom in postcolonial scholarship (Huddart 131). As is the nature of axiomatic knowledge, it hardly ever gets questioned and/or substantiated by textual evidence. Furthermore, new ways of thinking about autobiographical discourse are suppressed due to the ideological dominance of the counter-discourse approach.

Two major shortcomings derive from the present status of ethnic autobiography lost in counter-discourse. Firstly, since counter-discourse can only exist in reaction to discourse, the detailed analysis of discursive structures surrounding the autobiographical work inevitably needs to be included in life writing research. Secondly, if ethnic life narrative is assumed to be such a powerful tool in the intervention in discourse, there is no justifiable reason why this effect should not apply to the general body of autobiographical production. Targeting both issues requires what scholars in the humanities have successfully avoided so far – a "reflexive approach" (Kayyali175) to discourse analysis which accounts for the real-life circumstances accompanying autobiographical production *and* reception. Here, the question of truth is central to understanding why autobiography matters far beyond counter-discursive lines established by constructivists in the academy.

## The Truth Is: Truth Still Matters in Autobiography

It must have come as a huge surprise for scholars in Literary Studies when, with the publication of president Obama's memoir in the middle of the election campaign in 2007, debates around the "truth" and the "uses" and "abuses" of autobiography erupted in the public (S. Smith, "Autobiographacal Discourse" viii). This lively discourse taking place in various social realms and the media above all underlined that to the average reader, it does indeed make a difference if he/she thinks he/she is "buying truth" (Whitlock 112) but in the end gets nothing but a hoax[60] (Whitlock

60 Intensive emotional reactions by the readership usually follow the uncovering of a hoax. Whitlock describes the trajectories underlying this as "contracts" which bind readers, publishers and writers alike (110). Despite constructivist claims to the opposite, the autobiographical pact imagined by Lejeune therefore has not lost its relevance. Smith and Watson highlight this importance with respect to ethical considerations in avant-garde life narrative. As they underline, the "autobiographical pact implies that writers seek to maintain a sincere and responsible relationship to their audiences and to the ethical imperatives of that relationship" ("Rumpled Bed" 10-11). The intense response to untruth uncovered in a hoax narrative serves as striking evidence for this argument (Smith, Personal interview). The hoax, despite its negative reception, though, can also serve an intentional

127). The postmodern autobiography researcher in the ivory tower probably shakes his head over this superficial confusion. To him, it is out of the question that any autobiography is nothing but a *hoax*, since memoir, just like any other literary production, is constructed. Issues of truth and reality are out of the question – to the scholar. The audience obviously has a different approach to the matter. Truth here plays a key role in determining what counts as autobiography and what does not.

The principle differentiation of life writing from other literary genres is based on the division between fact and fiction (Ender 12). Whereby the classification into factual writing obviously entails the idea of truth telling, fictional writing evokes notions of imaginative construction. The first acclaimed theoretician to further develop this basic categorization was Philippe Lejeune. With his theory of the "autobiographical pact," he set the theoretical basis for generations of autobiography researchers. Lejeune in his theory assumes that the reader of autobiography enters into a contract-like relationship with the author, thus expressing the willingness to read the work as personal account of historical facts (Lejeune 19-20; Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 11, 207). As Eakin summarizes, the pact is defined as "a contract between author and reader in which the autobiographer explicitly commits himself or herself not to some impossible historical exactitude but rather to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to understand his or her own life" (Foreword xi).[61] Lejeune thus clearly proposes a dividing line between autobiographical writing and works of fiction as far as the relation between reader and work is concerned.[62] This conception of autobiography as a genre therefore shifts the defining agency away from the text itself toward the audience. The reader becomes the "judge" to verify the authenticity of the writer (de Man 174). He/she decides what counts as fiction and what counts as autobiography.

This differentiation between fact and fiction as defining genre criterion obviously faced a challenge with the emergence of constructivist thought and its re-

function by speaking "untruth in the interest of power" (Whitlock 122). The most prominent example in the Middle Eastern context is Norma Khouri's memoir *Honor Lost* (2003), which supposedly describes the honor killing of the author's best friend but was later revealed to be a hoax (Whitlock 109).

61 What tends to be forgotten is that Lejeune based his theory of the autobiographical pact on a linguistic study of autobiography, thus arguing that the pact between autobiographer and reader largely depends on the use of the first-person pronoun (Lejeune, Tomarken, and Tomarken 27).

62 In order to differentiate between fictional and non-fictional writing, Lejeune also introduced terms such as "phantasmal pact" (Lejeune, Tomarken, and Tomarken 29) and "novelistic pact" to refer to autobiographical novels. According to him, all these different formats caused different effects in the audience. The choice of terms underlines how much Lejeune emphasized the idea of the pact (Lejeune, Tomarken, and Tomarken 42).

jection of objective reality. The need for genre definition as such, however, remained important. While some argued in favor of upholding the dichotomy between fact and fiction, others did not see a reason why genre classification could be based on these blurred terms. An outstanding figure in this debate was Paul de Man at the end of the 1970s. De Man did not favor the discussion on autobiography as a separate genre in contrast to fictional writing. The reason for this was not so much his opposition to the idea of life writing as constructed. Rather, de Man was critical of genre classification in a more far-reaching sense. To him, any genre ascription enforces a particular historical function onto the work of literature. This universal classification, according to de Man, stands in fundamental opposition to the subjective memory of the narrator (921).[63] De Man thus concedes that any analysis might evolve into "an endless discussion between a reading of the novel as fiction and a reading of the same novel as autobiography" (921). Instead of escaping this vicious cycle, de Man arrives at a more nuanced conclusion. As he eventually infers, the differentiation between fiction and autobiography to him is not an "either/or polarity" but "undecidable" (921). At the same time, however, de Man suspects that the question of genre remains relevant. This is not so much a matter of theory to him but a "figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" (921).[64] The "autobiographical moment" according to de Man then is created by the subject reading and defining the text, as the text defines the reader (921).

As a bottom-line to both of these explorations, autobiography maintains its somewhat indefinite status caused by the notion that it cannot fully be categorized as either fact or fiction. Contemporary life writing research shares this view. As the Egyptian feminist and literary scholar Nawal al Sadaawi states: "Fiction and facts are inseparable. Personal stories resist vague and generalized abstractions. They maintain the urgency, the intensity, the richness and vividness of the concrete" (qtd. in Arida 1). The dichotomous distinction between fact and fiction has thus taken the shape of an etymological question which allows for autobiography to take multiple positions on a "continuum" (Ender 12; Culler 36).

63 This notion of the function and effect of genre definitions marks the center of genre theory. Adherents of pragmatism argue that a specific genre ascription exactly achieves the function which de Man was afraid of, namely, the dominance of genre over critical interpretation. Vincent Leitch elaborates that "[i]n its desire to gain interpretative power over individual texts, it [genre] knowingly sacrifices critical scope, narrowly constructing the scenario of criticism and explicitly putting the author, milieu, and text in positions of subordination to the will and strategy of the ambitious critic-exegete who defines in order to explicate/exploit generic discourse" (74).

64 Despite de Man's admiration for Lejeune's focus on the reader in autobiographical analysis, the former still described the autobiographical pact as "stubborn" because it represented a mere presupposition to him which lacked "evidence" (174).

In light of this seeming consensus on the indeterminability of genre ascription, it has to be highlighted that this view represents an academic and therefore theoretical consensus. The reader is mostly left out of the picture. To him/her, the constructivist view that truth does not exist is highly unlikely to be decisive. Both Lejeune and de Man hinted at this when calling attention to the fact that autobiography itself only emerges in relation to the reading experience. The importance of truth in autobiography therefore cannot merely be overthrown by the constructivist move to exclude the term from its vocabulary. Since the defining moment of autobiography depends on the reader, his/her expectation to read truth when entering the autobiographical pact is not only a detached or sentimental "desire [...] promised by the autobiographical pact" but a constitutional part of life writing (Whitlock 111).

This lasting significance of the autobiographical pact draws attention to the readership. For a pact by definition constitutes a contractual relationship between two parties, however, the author's notion of truth also needs to be considered. Again, the theoretic consensus that the distinction between fact and fiction does not matter cannot simply be claimed to be a consensus existing among authors as well. As it turns out, writers indeed care about the classification of their works as either factual or fictional. A statement by Orfalea strikingly underlines this: "As for the Truth. I confess. I seek it. I'm drawn by writers who seek it" (234). On the part of the writer, this aim to represent and find truth in literature reflects a larger trust in writing as human expression. Literary production thus becomes a means and an end in itself, similar to an experiment in the natural sciences, bringing to light new discoveries (Orfalea 231). Often, this leads to a curious blending of the awareness of artistic creation while still holding on to the ultimate goal of truthful depiction which is elevated to something beyond realism itself:

> Consider: There is no human instrument, not the fastest laptop – not even a legion of cameras – that can record life as it happens. Life itself is a tragedy because in its very enactment it is dying; each second dies to give life to the next [...]. But art and literature especially – has the ability to distill, to choose if you will, the representative moments, distancing, combining, bending the real to a greater capital-R Real which transcends time. [...] You are creating new life. You are giving life itself – and not the least, your life – a second chance. (Orfalea 235)

As this quotation suggests, writing and particularly the writing of one's life, gains a unique status in which truth and reality – despite the awareness of construction – remain key intentions of writers. Distortion and mimicry are not seen as opposites but merely contribute to the creation of an even more elevated reality that is not labeled as fiction.

Additional confirmation for this longing to define the undefinable, to read and write truth, can be found when walking through book stores or by scanning the catalogues of presses. One finds that autobiographies in many cases are found under

the category "nonfiction" (Whitlock 111). This longing of the readership to consume autobiography as non-fictional work also became obvious in the aftermath of 9/11. All of a sudden, there arose an immense demand for non-fiction works out of the need to gain authentic insights into the personal, political, and cultural circumstances accompanying the tragedy (Whitlock 111). A "memoir boom" and the publication of other non-fictional works tried to meet the need for information expressed by the audience (Whitlock 117).

This elaboration on the genre debate in post-constructivist times leads to a simple but far-reaching finding: truth still matters in autobiography. When seeking information on particular events or life circumstances, readers seek facts not fiction, and they turn to autobiographies. The autobiographical pact, long declared dead by literary theorists (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 200), therefore has not lost its relevance when taking a wholistic and less text-centered approach to the study of life writing. The criterion of truth thus continues to be the guiding principle of autobiographical production and reception. Eakin in this context infers that autobiographical writing is "rule-governed" ("Breaking Rules" 114). As he explains: "Telling the truth – this is surely the most familiar of the rules we associate with autobiographical discourse" ("Breaking Rules" 115).[65] This finding highlights the lasting importance of truth which Foucault expresses in more detailed terms:

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true [...] the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Interview 72)[66]

Truth as based on factual narrative, as these words strikingly underpin, is not merely a theoretical abstract which can easily be deconstructed out of the autobiographical picture. Instead, truth represents the overarching concept linking central theoretical elements of life writing theory to the larger social realm. The key terms of truth, discourse, and power cannot be analyzed separately from each other, nei-

65 Similar to Whitlock's thoughts on the hoax, Eakin notices that the important criterion of truthful storytelling in life writing becomes most visible when it is broken ("Breaking Rules" 113). Eakin investigates this phenomenon in a comparative analysis of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and Wilkomirski's *Fragments* ("Breaking Rules" 116). Both works have been considerably successful in the literary market place despite the fact that or even because their authors "stretched the truth" ("Breaking Rules" 113).

66 Bill Ashcroft and his colleagues in following Foucault make an even more universal claim in favor of the inseparability of truth and power: "Truth is what counts as true within the system of rules for a particular discourse; power is that which annexes, determines, and verifies truth. Truth is never outside power [...]" (165).

ther can any of them be removed from the theoretical debate shaped by an ideological battle between realists and constructivists.

This obvious gap between the importance of truth as perceived by literary theorists and the importance of the concept on the part of autobiography writers and readers has indeed become the subject of criticism, particularly among critics of social constructivism. Vivien Burr therefore calls for a more pragmatic[67] approach in the academy and urges scholars to not lose themselves in arguments about the nature of reality but rather focus on "the construction of accounts and what they achieve" (Potter qtd. in Burr 21). Obviously, this calls for a detailed study of the audience. So far, this aspect has been mostly neglected by life writing researchers.

## "Audience Matters" – But How?

In her analysis of autobiographical writings by scholars, Margaret Willard-Traub arrives at a seemingly evident but often forgotten finding: "Audience Matters" ("Scholarly Autobiography" 196). Although this insight should count as general principle for any literary scholar in the age of Cultural Studies, the gap between autobiographical practice and literary theory shows that the audience has not played a vital role in autobiographical research so far. The field is still dominated by text-centered analyses and Cultural Studies' initial promise to read 'texts in context' often steps into the background. Contemporary autobiography research thus suffers from a lack of reception research. One reason for this might be that some literary scholars show a lasting distaste for anything that counts as supposedly 'unliterary.'

In Literary Studies beyond high school level, there are two questions which count as inherently disqualifying for anybody pretending to engage in serious scholarship. The first one is: What does the author want to say in this text? The second one is: What does the reader think the author wants to say? Especially for constructivists, these questions are only important to the extent that their answers reveal the constructive nature of the readers' imagination. For audience studies, however, these questions are crucial. The first theoretical movement that focused on the audience more than on the text was reader-response criticism (Bortolussi and

67 In the highly abstract intellectual debate on constructivism and the latter's denial of the *real* world, pragmatism has almost been lost along the discursive spectrum. Pragmatism, nevertheless, is crucial for the concept of truth, since it assumes that questions of truth and action are inseparable. The approach therefore shares a somewhat anti-essentialist view of truth, yet, links it to a very practical call for social change. This differentiates pragmatism from more theoretical debates of poststructuralism (Barker and Galasinski 16). The role of theory is thus not undervalued in general, but the local adaptation of theory aims to describe the world in normative ways for the purpose of intervention based on human agency (Barker and Galasinski 17).

Dixon 2). The movement emerged in the 1960s in the course of the succeeding interdisciplinary opening of the humanities. Reader-response criticism posed a direct challenge to New Criticism which assumed that the meaning of a text only lies in the text itself (Cruz 1; Iser 134). In contrast to other methods of literary analysis, reader-response criticism does not stand for one specific approach. Rather, the term has come to serve as a label for a plethora of different approaches to study the effects of texts on readers (Powell 16). All of these approaches share the common focus on the act of reading as central to the creation of meaning (Iser 5). The impact of the text itself is thus an issue of debate. Some reader-response critics deny any importance of the text and completely focus on psychoanalytical models of meaning creation and the personality of the reader (Powell 17; Iser 45). Others conceive of reading as a dialectical process where neither the reader nor the text should be given absolute preference in exploring how meaning is created (Powell 18).[68]

Independent from the debates on different versions of reader-response criticism, the movement certainly filled a gap in the theoretical landscape by drawing attention to literary interpretations from the audience. This very benefit, however, also turned into the major point of critique of reader-reponse criticism. Whereas interpretation constitutes an essential element in a post-realist world in which the 'real' always depends on the subject defining it, the complete shifting of the regime of interpretation from the text to the audience came to be perceived of as "hermeneutical anarchy" (Powell 17). Since there is no fixed meaning according to which the reader's reception of a text can be evaluated, everything becomes a matter of interpretation. Critics thus claim that reader-response research can only collect and explore these interpretations while providing no structured means to decipher the underlying "interpretative strategies" of readers (Cruz and Lewis 6; Leitch 116).[69]

Following the emergence of reader-response criticism in the field of literature, a theoretical milestone in the development of reception theory was set by Stuart Hall at the intersection between Cultural and Media Studies. In his 1973 essay "Encoding/Decoding" Hall turned around all previous assumptions about the nature of texts and the process of media communication. Whereas former approaches saw communication as inherently linear, meaning that information travels from the media to the audience where it is passively received, Hall established the idea of communication as a multi-directional process ("Encoding/Decoding" 163; McQuail

68 Others argue that dominance on the part of the reader can never be written out of the equation of response studies since it does not mainly depend on interpretation but on market sales figures (Whitlock 97; Darznik "Veiled Bestsellers" 6).

69 Stanley Fish with his theory of "*interpretive communities*" meanwhile has altered this view. He explicates that specific collectives of readers share common reading strategies to the extent that meaning creation overlaps and can be distinguished (Powell 17; Bortolussi and Dixon 8; Cruz 6).

64; Gray 27). At the center of this approach stands the "active audience," which does not only receive media content passively but actively processes and reproduces information in public discourse (Gray 25; Davis 62). Hall's approach to look at communication from the perspective of the audience introduced a new mindset to discourse studies (Logan 54). Pertti Alasuutari in his overview of the different phases of reception research in Cultural Studies subsumes, Hall's model marked "the birth of reception studies" (2).[70] As the title of his work reveals, he paid particular attention to the elements of "encoding" and "decoding" as "*determinate* moments," as he states (164). Hall hereby refers back to an earlier model developed by Philip Elliott which introduced the idea that the audience serves both as "source" and "receiver" of a message in a discursive context (Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" 165). The sequence of encoding and decoding then follows the logic that information becomes encoded in communicative structures that become part of public discourse. The messages received in this discourse are then decoded by the audience, actively processed and again encoded to form elements of "frameworks of knowledge" in discourse (Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" 165). Hall thus also sheds light on the relation between reality and construction, between language and code:

> Discursive 'knowledge' is the product not of the transparent representation of the 'real' in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions. Thus there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code. Iconic signs are therefore coded signs too […]. Naturalism and 'realism' – the apparent fidelity of the representation to the thing or concept represented – is the result, the effect, of a certain articulation of language on the 'real.' It is the result of a discursive practice. ("Encoding/Decoding" 165)

Especially with respect to the theoretical underpinnings of discourse and their significance for present-day media discourse, it is noteworthy that Hall's model already entails the idea of interpretative power. Hall in this context mentions "*preferred meanings*" which emerge due to the fact that certain reading strategies are preferred over others ("Encoding/Decoding" 169). Similar to the debates surrounding reader-response criticism in Literary Studies, Hall distinguished three different scenarios regarding the impact of the reader on the process of encoding/decoding. One scenario sees a hegemonic dominance on the part of discourse in which the reader fully acts within the given code. The second scenario focuses on negotiation whereby the reader partly adapts to but also partly opposes existing codes. The third reading practice is characterized entirely by oppositional decoding. Here, the reader

70 Without impairing Hall's lasting impact on the field, it needs to be added that "reception studies" as a subfield had already existed in communication research in the 1940s with prominent models developed by George Gerbner, Harold Lasswell, as well as by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (Alasuutari 3).

intentionally interprets the message in a contradictory way (Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" 171-73). All three positions together account for the "politics of signification" within Hall's model of "encoding/decoding" (173).

The language used by Hall already indicates that his model not only made an immense contribution to the realm of literary reception studies. Instead of focusing on linguistic or deconstructivist terminology, Hall employed terms taken from various disciplines. The central significance of "code" underlines this practice. Due to this encompassing approach, Hall set the interdisciplinary basis for communication analysis in a broader disciplinary setting. Hall himself, nevertheless, limited the theoretical relevance of his approach. To him, "Encoding/Decoding" was not a "grand model" but an approach " which has to be worked with and developed and changed," as he once stated (Hall qtd. in Davis).

Instead of following this urge by stepping into the footsteps left by Hall and others, autobiography theory continued to neglect the readership as major source of knowledge. One of the earliest critics of this weakness was de Man. In his short essay "Autobiography as De-Facement" published in 1979, he identified the shortcoming of what was then contemporary autobiography theory. He introduces the essay by calling theories of autobiography not only "false" and "far-fetched" but also "aberrant" and "confining" because in his view, it presupposed assumptions about discourse which were "problematic," as he put it (919). Another well-known critic who argued in a similar vein almost two decades later was David Morley. He identified an increasing gap between reality and theory, between Literary Studies and society. Morley thus urged scholars to engage in "new audience research." Its purpose, however, was not to get lost in the practice of decoding and encoding but to return to methodological pragmatism and epistemological realism (122).

The target of the critique uttered by de Man and Morley was the incremental gap between the theory and practice of autobiography. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their overview of Autobiography Studies remark, audience research in life writing studies is severely underdeveloped (*Reading Autobiography* 92). Contemporary autobiographical theory therefore disregards the interdisciplinary groundwork laid by earlier theorists and mostly relies on literary approaches to reading. Since the latter continue to be dominated by the constructivist conviction that discursive reality does not exist, neither the author as initiator of discourse, nor the readers as active participants in autobiographical discourse are sufficiently accounted for. The focus remains on the text itself. This goes along with a simultaneous ignorance of many exterior factors influencing autobiographical production. When reading autobiography within the actual discursive network of the 21st century, a theoretical approach is needed that combines all three elements of life writing; namely, the author, the text, and the audience. A theory of production and reception fulfills this promise.

## Getting Practical: A Theory of Production and Reception

If there is any quote which students of the humanities and of the social sciences are highly likely to share in the course of their studies, it is one by Kurt Lewin. The famous Polish American psychologist who shaped the interdisciplinary use of psychological theory in various fields is constantly quoted for his finding that "[t]here is nothing so practical as a good theory" (qtd. in Goethals 7). As the shortcomings with respect to autobiography's tendency to lose itself in abstract discussions of the discursive while disregarding the analytical basis to actually explore discourse reveals, the field is in need of a theoretical uplift. This is particularly important since autobiography is more than just a literary object which finds itself in dialogue with itself but with the world at large. As Whitlock explains: "The 'unofficial' public sphere of literary, cultural, religious, and artistic movements are vital to political contestation and opinion formation; from this it follows that autobiographical narrative is an agent in complex global dialogues and encounters and a way of thinking through the interdependencies of conceptions of the self and other" (11). This finding expands the theoretical horizon even further and leads to a wholistic theory of "production and reception," which, however, does not disregard practical relevance (Golley, Reading 183). The starting point is to acknowledge the global market of life writing.

One of the few scholarly consenses in Cultural Studies is the finding that formerly separated cultures due to the influence of modernization and migration have moved closer together, at least in a virtual sense (Whitlock 13). This phenomenon is commonly summarized under the heading of globalization.[71] Globalization has originally been discussed as an economic phenomenon based on the assumption that the mingling of cultures is mostly the consequence of the flow of material goods (Guarnizo and Smith 3). This development has particularly influenced the book market on an international level. In this "massively globalized" world, books circulate beyond cultural and national borders (Whitlcock 5; Damrosch, *What Is* 110). Amazon and Co. make it possible to read almost any book in any language within a few days after only one mouse click. The national or even local audience

71 Globalization is highly contested in the field of Literary Studies and is denigrated as "flawed concept" (Whitlock 8; Fluck 73). Authors who draw attention to texts as cultural commodities are therefore often criticized. An example of this is Whitlock's critique of Arjun Appadurai (72). She shows a strong tendency to reduce Appadurai's argument only to the negative sides of commodification. A less ideological reading of Appadurai reveals that he in fact provides one of the most nuanced approaches to the integration of globalization in Cultural Studies. This also goes along with a very detailed analysis of the concept of the commodity (Appadurai 7).

of former times is thus replaced by a "transnational reception environment"[72] (Vinson 79). This particularly applies to ethnic autobiographies which are gaining more prominence. As Whitlock states, life narrative thus represents an "exotic[73] commodity in a world of mobile texts" (Whitlock 4).

As the vocabulary used in the context of an ever-expanding globalization of the book market indicates, autobiographies are increasingly seen as "objects" of a mass market of popular culture that is ruled by "consumer capitalism" (Naficy qtd. in Whitlock 183). Life writing therefore does not only find itself "in transit" with respect to the crossing of national borders but also regarding the very definition of the genre (Whitlock 8). The latter thus turns into a "material genre" (Willard-Traub, "Rhetorics" 512). These changed dynamics of the market of autobiographical production and the definition of autobiography as commodity has ultimately forced autobiographical scholarship to reposition itself. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in an essay entitled "The Rumpled Bed of Autobiography"[74] take up this challenge by posing the following question:

> To what extent does our theorizing itself need to be remade by contemporary practice at these 'rumpled' sites of the experimental, so that we may take account of changing autobiographer-audience relations, shifting limits of personal disclosure, and the changing technologies of self that revise how we understand the autobiographical? (13)

As these lines emphasize, the changed nature of autobiography in a globalized world also brings about a different analytical perspective based on a changed notion of literary functions and roles (Whitlock 14). Whitlock's response to this movement suggests an analytical shift toward the audience because "what readers do with texts, and how texts circulate as commodities, must become vital components of autobiography criticism," as she explains (Whitlock 13). Cultural and Literary Studies despite their obvious interdisciplinary shyness to integrate approaches from

72 The increasing importance of the transnational approach is not only limited to the study of literature and media audiences. It also reflects the dynamics of literary production in an ethnic context. As Carol Bardenstein explains, "formerly, there were mostly unidirectional immigrant narratives. Today, the demographics are changing. People are not settled in one place. The distinctions of cultural identity are not clear-cut. I therefore find the transnational approach more fruitful" (Personal interview).

73 The term exotic has a long history, both in the dissemination of Orientalist images of the *East* in historical representations and travel narratives and in the academic discussion thereof. Ethnic autobiography is thus suspected to arouse an "exotic appeal" that is targeted toward "the consumer as an enlightened, sympathetic, and politically correct individual [...]" (Whitlock 15).

74 The article explores the "Rumpled Bed" as a recurring theme in avant-garde life writing.

the sciences – not to mention economics – have finally acknowledged this economic development.[75] The market of books is increasingly seen as "culture industry" which is supported by readers as consumers in "capitalist systems of production and consumption" (Whitlock 15).

Given the fact that the audience to a large extent has been neglected in Autobiographical Studies, this inclusion of market trajectories certainly represents a welcome step toward developing the field. Despite this broad embracing of the audience, however, not much advancement can be noticed. One reason for this stagnation is of a methodological nature. Viewing the reader as consumer and thus essential part of the book market indeed emphasizes the reader's role. The problem remains, however, that Autobiography Studies lack the methodology to study consumer behavior beyond Amazon sales figures (Whitlock 16). The link between textual means of analyses and market data evaluation is missing.

The other reason for the lasting disregard of a more market-centered approach to the autobiographical audience is a normative one. The view of the reader as "market reader" is inherently linked to the highly detested notion of power and cultural decline in an era of commodification (Waring qtd. in Huggan 165). While it is not so much the traditional notion of colonial power based on cultural dominance which accounts for this normative condemnation, the economic force exerted by the consumer is still thought to maintain colonial power trajectories. The fear of "cooption" (Muecke qtd. in Huggan 160) and appropriation combined with the impossibility of autonomy is thus reawakened in a market world where the Western reader has the legitimizing power to judge cultural authenticity (Huggan 164; Bissell 194).[76] Globalization, according to post-Marxist critics arguing in this vein, therefore brings along another threat of colonialism. Whitlock identifies this phenomenon in the context of Arab American life writing post 9/11: "Narratives from Afghanistan circulate in the war on terror as commodities that become part of a debate about the politics of intervention and resistance. What does the flood of life narratives make available to the metropolitan West: spaces for dialogue and exchange, or a reemergence of the stereotypical and mythic East?" (53).

The latter critique of commodification as new form of colonialism certainly is justified given the long and often oblique means through which colonialism repre-

75 Although Whitlock does not see many positive side-effects emerge from popular culture books in the mass market, she nevertheless acknowledges that these works can make a cultural impact if new audiences are reached without cooptation. As an example, she mentions Mahmoodi's *Not Without My Daughter* (102).

76 The discussion of the market and its impact on Literary Studies has given new momentum to the debates on native informants (Banerjee, "Between the Burqa" 322; Fritsch-el-Alaoui 26; Huggan 156). Authenticity, as Huggan thus concludes, also turns into a myth in this market situation (Huggan 166).

sented economic exploitation as means of cultural oppression. What remains questionable, however, is whether this historical legacy also justifies the highly normative and less analytical move to condemn the concept of life writing as commodity. This harsh denigration of the market audience disregards the opportunities emerging from this new and rather economics-based perspective. Commodification here provides the essential basis for life narratives to reach larger audiences (Whitlock 18). The aspect of economic commodification therefore represents a requirement for autobiography to become part of public discourse in the first place, not some additional cultural burden underlining the decline of culture.

Literary scholars therefore err in reducing the meaning of memoir as commodity[77] merely to the aspect of money. This reductionism disregards the underlying potential which the market – not only in monetary but especially in conceptual terms – opens up for a more comprehensive study of life writing. Nawar Al-Hassan Golley in this context calls for a theory of "production and reception" (Reading 183). The key to establishing such an approach lies in accepting that "multinational publishing enterprises, mass media, and migrant audiences" represent the *real* environment for autobiographic discourse (Whitlock 4). If autobiographical writing is accepted as part of this globalized market environment based on its entity as cultural and material good, it also becomes clear that life writing today not only represents a literary tool but a discursive medium that competes with other media in a global market.

## Life Writing as Mediated Memory

"Can we ever distinguish between fact and fiction in autobiography, any more than we can in our media?" Waïl Hassan quotes from Ihab Hassan's *Rumors of Change* ("Arab-American Autobiography" 12-13). With this question, he points to the most pressing issues facing contemporary autobiography theory today. One is the lasting struggle over genre divisions separating fact and fiction, whereby Hassan's question already reveals an answer to this. Obviously, the genre classification based on fact or fiction becomes obsolete if the two cannot be separated (W. Hassan, "Arab-American Autobiography" 8). Most important about Hassan's argument, here, is the link he creates to the media sphere. Despite focusing on the impact of autobiography as a commodity in the market place, Hassan builds the bridge to seeing and reading life narrative in an even larger context. This context is not only one of glo-

77 Based on the etymology of the word, commodity historically stands for any natural or economic good. Its value is not merely measured in financial terms but also based on its general capacity to bring about benefits. The one-sided reduction of the term to monetary aspects is therefore misleading, especially since "exploitation" and the loss of value are only some possible effects linked to commodity trade ("Commodity," def. 5).

bal money making and advanced means of technological invention but the one of mass communication. Autobiography here comes into play as mediated memory.

When linking the keywords of media and autobiography, one wonders if there really remain any new findings to be explored. After all, autobiography research, just like Literary and Cultural Studies at large, has integrated the media age into the curriculum. Hardly any conference, book, or article centers on written literary works only anymore. Rather, videos, movies, computer games, and other media are analyzed alongside and in comparison to each other. Especially digital forms of life writing therefore comprise an expanding field of investigation. This also underlines the fact that the definition of life writing as such has undergone another expansion. It now explicitly includes online sources and digital writing (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 4). New technologies are thus seen to open up new textual forms for the transmission of life narratives (Whitlock 18). This in turn also alters the notion of the social world in which these narratives are created. Smith and Watson thus see a "time of simulated realities – on television, in everyday life, and in the virtual reality of cyberspace" ("Rumpled Bed" 10).

When scrutinizing this seemingly interdisciplinary approach to the study of life writing in the context of the media revolution, one aspect is quite remarkable but hardly ever noticed: the debate in the context of new media in literary Autobiographical Studies almost exclusively has the meaning of "new media"[78] and/or "digital media" (Whitlock 18; Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 189). Only non-traditional formats and mixed-media[79] modes of life writing are devoted increased attention, especially when it comes to their impact on different audiences (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 286). The continuing debates on the uses and abuses of social networking sites as forms of new-media life writing but also scholarly investigations of alternative life representations, e.g., in the form of "avant-garde" digital artwork, represent some examples of the expanded analytical scope brought about by the new media age (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 183). The significance of the concept of media as such therefore has undoubtedly gained prominence in the study of life writing.

The obvious excitement of literary scholars when it comes to the exploration of alternative forms of life writing should probably cause equal excitement on the part of the media scholar. If looked upon from a critical perspective, however, Literary

78 A definition in contrast to traditional media underlines the main features of new media, i.e., the facilitation of "many-to-many conversations," the simultaneity of distribution and reception of cultural objects and instant global connectivity (McQuail 138).

79 Mixed-media representations may combine old and new media formats at the same time. An example is a video (i.e., old media) posted on the personal site of a user on a social networking platform (i.e., new media) (Kunczik and Zipfel 56; Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 183).

and Cultural Studies' flirtation with (new) media is puzzling. Why does a 3-D-movie depicting the life of a famous character or an emotional blog entry of a teenager all of a sudden tempt the literary scholar to consider the larger context of mediated discourse? Are only new media real media? Have books been deleted from the list of media? Hardly so. As a closer look at the concept of media reveals that autobiography as a medium existed long before facebook and twitter triggered the media debate in Autobiography Studies.

A medium is generally defined as "a means of effecting or conveying something" ("Medium," def. 2a). More specifically, a mass medium is "a medium of communication (as newspapers, radio, or television) that is designed to reach the mass of the people" ("Mass Medium").[80] Single individuals in this collective are referred to as "recipients" (my translation, Kunczik and Zipfel 55). Today, the term mass media has mostly become used in the specific context of even more advanced technologies which make communication possible with an increasingly global audience (McQuail 55). Furthermore, the term mass media also covers institutional aspects as characterized by the following attributes: 1) the production and distribution of symbolic content, 2) operation in the "public sphere," 3) participation (either as sender or receiver) is voluntary (McQuail 58). Following these criteria, the terms *mass communication* and *mass media* are not to be equated since mass communication constitutes a process which takes place through the means of mass media as major actors shaping this process. In result, relationships between the media and their audiences emerge. In contrast to interpersonal communication where this relationship is immediate, the relationship between mass media and audience counts as "mediated" (McQuail 55; Gray 33). The activity of mediating thus refers to the process of conveying information as an intermediary agent ("Mediate," def. 2a). Mediation,[81] mostly used as a noun, however, also has a second meaning: an "intervention between conflicting parties to promote reconciliation, settlement, or com-

80 Similar to the theoretical debates on the concept of the "public" in popular culture research, the term "mass" in the field of Communication Studies remains contested. The term signifies an undefined but large number of people assumed to share certain characteristics and react to media stimuli in a similar way. This homogenization therefore does not allow for any differentiation on the individual level (McQuail 560).

81 Mediation is not equal to the term "mediatization." Whereas mediation describes the use of media to communicate information in a rather neutral sense, mediatization aims at the instrumental use of media to achieve a maximum affective impact on the audience. It often goes along with distorted representations of events to fulfill the "*media logic*," i.e., specific rules and values which are seen to constitute effective media coverage (McQuail 563; Kunczik and Zipfel 87).

promise ("Mediation").[82] In other words, while mediation refers to the process of conveying context through media use, mediation can become an intention of this mediation process with the goal of reconciliating diverging views or concepts.

Although the given definitions hardly play a role in the writings of the majority of Cultural Studies scholars working on (new) media life writing, they are nevertheless central to the interdisciplinary study of life writing in the media context. Especially the double-meaning of mediation is of immediate relevance for the following analysis. The given definitions in sum point to two simple but conceptually crucial findings. The first one is that books – no matter if fictional or non-fictional – represent print media,[83] just like other journalistic formats, such as magazines and newspapers (McQuail 25).[84] The second relevant finding connected to this is that a medium "is not just an applied technology for transmitting certain symbolic content," as McQuail points out. Instead, it represents "a set of social relations" (136).

Both of these findings are hardly ever acknowledged by literary scholars who unjustifiably draw a conceptual line between books and media, between autobiographies and new media life writing. There is no reason to assume that traditional print media are not media anymore, simply because new media have now complemented the range of media options available. In addition, the categorization into mass media does not depend on intrinsic qualities of the respective medium but on the audience it seeks to attract. Written autobiography as a means to impact dominant discourse, i.e., the discourse ruled by the mass of the people in a given society, therefore represents a medium. This medium competes with other media formats of life writing but also with other media at large.[85] This "plurality of media" accounts for the fact that every autobiography exists in a "situational relationship" with the media environment establishing public discourse (Angus 247). Hence, there is no justified reason for claiming that life writing on the one hand represents a discursive means, as scholars of autobiography have constantly claimed, while at the same time limiting their analysis either to the literary realm or to the study of new media.

---

82 McQuail points out that the concept of mediation as a form of reality intervention by the media represents a metaphor in the shape of a "window," "mirror" or "filter" (83).

83 Many decades before the media revolution, de Man already established the link between life writing and Media Studies when describing the role of the autobiographical writer as someone who employs the "resources of his medium" (172).

84 As major characteristics of the book as medium, McQuail mentions so-called "[m]edium" and "[i]nstitutional aspects" (McQuail 27). Among the medium aspects are criteria such as multiple copy distribution and individual authorship. The institutional aspects include the book as commodity, market distribution, and the freedom of publication.

85 The emergence of life narratives in various media formats has come to be subsumed under the heading "automediality" (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 168).

When conceiving of life writing as medium in social discourse, the question of mediation also becomes important. In the past, scholars in the field have experimented with the concept of "mediated memories" in the context of the "Digital Age" (van Dijck). When recalling the quality of mediation as a process, however, this single-minded understanding of autobiography does not suffice. Instead, mediation in the case of autobiography as part of media discourse actually takes place in at least five different ways: 1) Personal memory is stored under specific historical and discursive circumstances which are themselves ruled by mediated discourse (Golley, *Reading* 184). 2) The recollection and reconstruction of this memory is influenced by the discursive surroundings in the instance of memorizing (Eakin, *How Our Lives* 106). 3) The (re-)construction of these memories intentionally or unintentionally mediates, i.e., alters, the content based on complex processes of cognition. 4) The goal of this mediation can itself be mediation, i.e., the reconciliation of diverging discursive arguments. 5) Life narrative is mediated to the audience in the form of different media representations.

These logical inferences from the definition of media and media discourse altogether illustrate the nature of life writing as mediated memory. Obviously, the artificial division between old and new media life writing does not shed any light on these complex trajectories. Eventually, this also explains why life writing has not been analyzed as part of the larger social and political media discourse. Doing so not only requires a conceptual but a methodological basis. The traditional text interpretation practiced in the humanities here meets its limits.

## From Literary Interpretation to Interdisciplinary Analysis

> Moreover, as the bonds of discourse are loosened, the mind will be freed from the constraints those bonds imposed, and the person thus freed will move toward "the full development of all human faculties" [Ryan 490], leaving behind the narrowness of vision that befalls those who remain tied to the confining perspectives of the ideologically frozen divisions of intellectual labor. (Fish 101)

Interdisciplinarity remains one of the most important catch words of contemporary scholarship. In fact, it has come to represent a "movement" in and of itself, as the American anthropologist George Marcus states with respect to the expansion of Cultural Studies as a field (174).[86] Everybody therefore has to work 'interdisciplinarily' in order to be acknowledged, so it seems. This often gains the shape of being interdisciplinary "for the sake of being so" (Gibson and McHoul 25). Stanley Fish once put the matter into even more polemic terms when speaking of the "gospel of interdisciplinary study" in his essay "Being Interdisciplinary Is So Very Hard to

86 Marcus mostly discusses interdisciplinarity in the context of anthropology (175).

Do" (106).[87] The latter thesis especially gains confirmation when looking at contemporary Autobiography Studies. The field offers a particularly fruitful terrain for interdisciplinarity. As Whitlock remarks: "Life narrative is not disciplined, and in particular it is not contained by the Literary or the literary […]" (193).[88] This transcendence of the (L-/l-)iterary is facilitated by life writing's long inclination for interdisciplinary discourse analysis. The views of what discourse and interdisciplinarity here really mean, though, vary considerably, as has already been demonstrated. When taking interdisciplinarity seriously for the sake of actually expanding the analytical instrumentarium, one finds that more is needed than the losening of the definition of the literary. Rather, a methodological bridge between hermeneutics and empiricism is essential.

Interdisciplinarity is defined as "involving two or more academic, scientific, or artistic disciplines" ("Interdisciplinarity").[89] In Literary Studies in particular, this disciplinary border-crossing takes various forms. The most common practice of interdisciplinarity is the integration of terms and concepts from other fields (Paulson 49). Furthermore, interdisciplinarity is also used in the sense of intertextuality,[90] i.e., a comparative approach to different texts as sign systems (S. J. Schmidt, "Literary Studies" 4). In addition, the cross-disciplinary cooperation of designated

87 Fish based his critique on the assumption that interdisciplinarity was inspired by Marxism and deconstructionism. He essentially argues that the way in which interdisciplinarity is practiced often ends up in anti-professionalism, whereby different fields "colonize" others for selfish ends (99). Due to these lasting difficulties, even young and innovative scholars nowadaysstill criticize the lack of true interdisciplinarity. This especially refers to the link between Literary and Cultural Studies. In short, "more interaction is needed between media scholars and researchers in literary studies," Alsultany acknowledges (Personal interview).

88 Whitlock here refers to the work of Ken Gelder who introduced the differentiation between the "literary" and the "Literary." The "Literary" to him signifies an explicitly artistic orientation of popular fiction (14).

89 As Stanley Fish in his polemic and thought-provoking essay points out, the term interdisciplinarity, defined as the crossing of disciplinary borders, is a tautology because disciplinary realms are to a large extent arbitrarily "compartmentalized" (100) and the product of "political construction" (109). According to Fish, these artificial borders bring about "divisions of knowledge, in a sort of segregated disciplinary discourse" (103). Fish even goes so far as to label these divisions "disciplinary ghettos" (100).

90 Intertextuality has its roots in structuralism and is interested in the connection between different sign systems in the process of meaning creation. Texts of all kinds, including visual, virtual, and oral material, are assumed to depend on each other based on common codes (Childs and Fowler 121). Thereby, the exact border between texts as containers of other texts and as separate entities can hardly be drawn (Barker and Galasinski 68).

experts from various fields on common objects of study is also referred to as interdisciplinarity (Campbell 132).

In the realm of Autobiography Studies, interdisciplinarity is embraced by popular culture research (Kellner 140). In contrast to Cultural Studies at large, popular culture research pays particular attention to the cultural artifacts that previously counted as "trivial" (Jensen 97). This includes texts and meanings produced for and by popular audiences.[91] Popular culture research therefore combines Media and Literary Studies by approaching culture as mass-mediated phenomenon (Jensen 91). It also has a political connotation in its longing to disentangle the struggle over meaning in society and the constitution of "citizen publics" (S. Smith, "Autobiographical Discourse" xix; Barker, *Cultural Studies* 485). Whitlock defines the "popular" in autobiography research as "distinguished by the whole apparatus of production, distribution, advertising, promotion, and consumption" (94).[92]

This overview of research efforts beyond the traditional confines of literature in Autobiography Studies might evoke the impression that there is no shortage of interdisciplinarity. This view appears in a different light when looking at the specific nature of joint projects. Uniquely transdisciplinary publications are hard to find. Almost exclusively, cooperation takes place within the confines of the humanities, whereby literary scholars often work with scholars in film studies, comparative literature, history, and linguistics. A welcome exception is the recent integration of

91 Contrary to the clear delineation between writer and reader, production and reception, popular culture definitions of autobiography include the reader as producer of literature.

92 This definition of the "popular" is in line with a theory of production and reception that spans the whole life cycle of literature. The negative evaluation of commercialism, however, reveals that the field of popular culture is still highly contested in the academy. Even though institutionalized since the 1980s, proponents of the "'hard' sciences" still judge the objects of popular culture research as "trash" (Jensen 97). In order to adhere to some theoretical space of their own, researchers in popular culture are therefore hesitant to openly equate popular culture with "mass-mediated culture" in order to emphasize the authenticity of genuine culture in society (Jensen 91). In general, it is a characteristic of Cultural Studies to work against the division between high and low culture (Kellner 140; Alsultany, Personal interview). This also marked the major separation between the Marxist tradition of the Frankfurt School and the British vein of Cultural Studies, whereby the former emphasized low culture to resist high culture class pressure (Kellner 141). In addition, contemporary scholars emphasize that Cultural Studies pay tribute to the fact that various forms of cultural production must be analyzed alongside each other. As Evelyn Alsultany notes: "One goal of Cultural Studies is to make sense of texts, and media is a primary text in U.S. culture" (Personal interview).

concepts from cognitive science, neurobiology, psychonarratology,[93] and neurophilosophy (Eakin, *Living Autobiographically* 124; Bortolussi and Dixon 3-4; Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 210; Dixon 5; de Zepetnek 6).

Overall, this view of interdisciplinarity that mostly limits itself to the realm of the humanities raises the question of interdisciplinary method. In the case of interdisciplinary cooperation among Cultural Studies scholars, the methods applied are highly similar since scholars in the humanities continue to rely on the method of interpretation. In cases where the sciences are indeed considered and the inderdisciplinary border to the social sciences transgressed, as in the case of cognitive science research, interdisciplinarity mostly involves the inclusion of *findings* from these fields, not the integration and active application of *methods*. Although this practice does exceed the boundaries of one's discipline as far as the object of research is concerned, it remains questionable whether the exclusion of interdisciplinary method really counts as interdisciplinary practice. Stanley Fish raises a thought-provoking question in this resepect: "[D]oes the practice of importing into one's practice the machinery of other practices operate to relax the constraints of one's own practice" (Fish 107)? In quoting Stearn, Fish demonstrates the logic of this trajectory by using the example of historians: "What has happened is that social historians have borrowed topics, concepts and vocabulary [...] but they have then cast them in an essentially historical frame [...]" (qtd. in Fish 107). Jacques Derrida once described this type of limited interdisciplinarity as "outward," meaning that it is rooted in existing academic disciplines and practices and does not create something genuinely new (qtd. in Campbell 132). The contemporary critic Hilfer puts this neglect of true interdisciplinary theory in even harsher words: "Theory is calcifying to blindness as its discourse approaches a point of scholarly entropy where 'texts' are endlessly 'interrogated' by application of a set grid of predictable and unexamined assumptions" (xi).

Both, the practice of autobiographical research to stay close to its own methodology and the tendency to only import but not apply established concepts from the sciences, confirms this tendency toward a certain pseudo-interdisciplinarity. Literary Studies thus employ hermeneutics[94] and close reading as their major means

93 Psychonarratology is one of the most recent interdisciplinary offsprings in the study of literature. Based on cognitive science, psychonarratology almost exclusively rests on empirical methods to understand the reception process of readers. Adherents praise it as the future path to discourse analysis (Bartolussi 24).

94 Siegfried Schmidt does not neglect that today's hermeneutics differ from the methods employed before the 1960s because they are more theory-oriented and rely on "analytic philosophy" (3). Still, the belief in intuition as major source of interpretation remains the driving force in Literary Studies. This view stands in fundamental opposition to the harsh rejection of master narratives which otherwise dominates the field.

of analysis (S. J. Schmidt, "Literary Studies" 4; Childs and Fowler 103). Very often, these hermeneutically-derived interpretations take the shape of highly subjective and often purely descriptive accounts (Miall 24). Autobiography Studies as part of the humanities still center on "*Verstehen*" in the sense of "interpretative understanding" rather than on scientific procedure (Slingerland 226). The term analysis thus continues to be a synonym for interpretation. As Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasiński point out, "[a]nalysis is interpretative: the process is laden with researchers' attitudes and beliefs," which consequently brings about a high degree of "arbitrariness" (64). Steven de Zepetnek adds that this is an inherent weakness in Literary and Cultural Studies (1). Some consequently question the existence of any method in Literary Studies at all (3).

The latter critique is mostly applied by scholars who observe an inherent resistance to any type of empiricism in Cultural Studies (de Zepetnek 1).[95] The empirical method is based on observation, i.e., the collection of data under reduced terms of complexity. These data in turn are used for the testing and modification of theories and models (S. J. Schmidt, "Logic of Observation" 304). The underlying assumption is that "empirical knowledge is functional knowledge," which means that it seeks to explain the construction of this knowledge through the means of observation (S. J. Schmidt, "Logic of Observation" 309).[96] As compared to merely text-based analysis, empirically-minded scientists presuppose that meaning indeed is not inherent to the text itself, as especially structuralists argued. Not the *product* of literary creation and analysis therefore is the focal point of attention, but the *process* through which meaning is created, i.e., the process of interpretation based on a systemic and logical methodology (S. J. Schmidt, "Logic of Observation" 309). The underlying philosophical root of the empirical method can thus be found in realism whereby ideas and general concepts are judged according to "how well they explain particularities" and not by the particularities of a text or social phenomenon themselves (Hilfer 66).

The empirical procedure thus takes into account what Lejeune and de Man already hinted at in the constructivist era – the fact that autobiography and its effects

95 Slingerland attributes this resistance to empirical inquiry to "postmodern skepticism" (221). Without denying that objectivism poses many problems due to essentialist notions of truth, he still sees an urgent need for more empirical inquiry. This explanation highlights that the friction between scholars in the humanities and in the sciences partly rests on a misunderstanding. Obviously, both reject ultimate truth claims and the notion of absolute objectivity, yet, they still adhere to very different means of analysis.

96 When including the larger context of Orientalism surrounding this work, it must be pointed out that the empirical method still counts as prime example of *Western* rationalism which in turn contributes to the high "prestige of science" found in Europe and the United States (Slingerland 221).

rely on a mode of reading as activity.[97] In the academy, this strain of thought was taken up and theorized under the heading empirical Literary Studies which emerged in the 1980s as "collateral to [radical] constructivism (de Zepetnek 2). Empirical Literary Studies[98] directly challenge the omnipresence of "axiomatic" assumptions in favor of empirical enquiry (Miall 12). Based on the notion that literature is a social phenomenon, empirical Literary Studies rely on the meta-theoretical basis of analytical philosophy and Karl Popper's critical rationalism (S. J. Schmidt, "Literary Studies" 3). There are four analytical core pillars in empirical Literary Studies: 1) the production, 2) the distribution, 3) the reception, and 4) the post-processing of literary texts. Post-processing describes the process of referring to literary texts in relation to other media offers. This means that the literary text[99] is necessarily embedded in social processes operating under social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of the respective society" (S. J. Schmidt, "Literary Studies" 3).

These general principles of empirical Literary Studies strikingly highlight an earlier finding, namely that any text must be studied by taking into account its production and reception (S. J. Schmidt, "Literary Studies" 4). Instead of just calling for such a comprehensive approach, empirical Literary Studies also provide the respective methodology. By setting a primary focus on the processing of literature by the audience, empirical Literary Studies form the so far lacking link between text and audience. The essential basis is rooted in realism since processes of reading – despite the subjective construction that takes place in individual cases – are seen as "real acts" which can be investigated through empirical observation (Miall 2).[100] This methodology provides the tools for studying autobiography in a larger frame-

97 Interestingly, de Man in his critique already made a far-sighted statement on interdisciplinarity. "Empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition," he claimed (920).

98 Schmidt counts as one of the founders of Empirical Literary Studies (ELS). Although the approach fostered an analytical shift in Literary Studies because it moved away from the literary text to "the literary system" as object of investigation ("Literary Studies" 3), it must be underlined that the impact of ELS by far has not been overwhelming. Especially in the German academic landscape, traditional scholars are still "hostile" to the approach (Schmidt, "Literary Studies" 6). After the 1990s, hardly any publications or critical discussions on the topic can be found.

99 Due to the social embeddedness of literary works, empirical literary scholars have a different notion of texts. They therefore prefer the term "literary phenomenon" (S. J. Schmidt, "Literary Studies" 4).

100 Although Smith and Watson do not count as representatives of ELS, they call for the application of "case studies for advancing the auto/biographical method" (*Reading Autobiography* xxiii). This underlines an obvious longing of the field to move beyond traditional literary reading practices.

work in which the processing of literature and its effects are investigated in comparison to other media for the purpose of "Delimiting the Literary" (Miall 33) instead of further emphasizing the "literariness" of autobiography (Miall 93).

This journey through the development of life writing studies demonstrates that the construction of self has occupied scholars from various theoretical angles throughout the decades. Especially the ideological war between realists and constructivists, the connected genre debates over fact and fiction, and a certain degree of methodological insularity have so far prevented scholars from developing an innovative methodology to comprehensively explore the *constructed* self and its *real* audiences. Especially "the healing and bridging power of literature" is thus continuously claimed as major function of autobiography but never actually verified by evidence on audience effects (Fadda-Conrey, "Racially White" 173). For the one keeping "at least one eye on the larger conditions" (Fish 108), it thus becomes obvious that axiomatic thinking about the role of autobiography in society does not equal scientific analysis. In other words, if autobiography indeed stirs a "transformative dialogue," (Fadda-Conrey, "Racially White" 194) all parties involved in this dialogue have to be accounted for in the study of life writing. In a world in which discourse does not take place in the private sphere of the home anymore but in the media environment, this dialogue becomes a complex trialogue between literature, the public, and the media. The question "how can memoir claim a distinctive place among the various news media in these times?" is therefore of limited relevance (Whitlock 137). Instead, accepting that memoir, due to its unique structural features, is already part of the news media marks its distinctive place in the field of literature. The question linked to this is not "what" autobiographical discourse in general does but "how"[101] it affects public discourse (de Zepetnek 7). This requires an analysis of life writing in the context of mediated discourse. Media Studies and the theory of framing provide the analytical toolkit to carry out this "impossible necessity" (Huggan 175).

## 2.2 MEDIA FRAMING THEORY

The way we see other people depends on the window on which we look at the world, what we see through it, when, under what lights and shadows, and, especially, in what larger setting, for whatever the many varieties of individual experience, each one's outlook is perhaps most

101 De Zepetnek uses a similar logic in his interdisciplinary framework of "comparative cultural studies" as a medium path between hermeneutical and ELS. He devotes major attention to meaning creation as "process" and on the importance of methodology in literary analysis (7).

heavily influenced by the larger political, economic and cultural facts of the relationship at the given time. (Isaacs qtd. in Shaheen, *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping* 29)

It is hardly a surprise to read these lines in the work of Jack Shaheen, the man who devoted almost his entire research to exploring the stereotypical representation of Arabs in the media. The "window" that every human being looks through counts as one of the most important concepts in contemporary media research and even in scholarship as a whole. Obviously, science today is equally interested in exploring some form of objective empirical reality as well as the different subjective realities people perceive (McQuail 86). These different ways of looking at the world are often described by means of metaphor. Shaheen uses the one of the "window" to express the fact that perceived reality not only depends on a particular perspective but also on limitation. The other most common metaphor to describe this selective and somewhat bordered view of the world is the one of the frame. Nearly all realms of social life can be clustered by imagining them in frames – be it the political, economic, or cultural sphere. In contrast to the 1960s, when autobiographical research made striking contributions, these frames today all act under the command of the media world. Autobiographies and their readerships are no exception to this rule. The theory of media framing investigates this phenomenon by shedding light on the question of how frames act in the construction and perception of reality.

## Defining Frames and Framing

Framing first became prominent in the field of sociology. In his publication *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Human Experience* (1974), the Canadian sociologist Erwin Goffman developed framing as an approach[102] which explains how human behavior and interaction are structured by different frames (*Frame Analysis* 21).[103] Nowadays, framing counts as one of the most prominent theories in

102 There are debates whether framing merely represents an approach, a model, or whether it fully meets the criteria of a theory. Most scholars use the term "model" to refer to framing based on the psychological mechanism underlying the concept (Chong and Druckman 115). The present study, however, will treat framing as a theory, since additional indicators underlining the explanatory capacity of framing will be added.

103 The book can be understood as a continuation and further theorization of Goffman's seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) in which he employed the analogy of the theater in order to compare acting on stage and everyday identity performance (124). Goffman's groundbreaking finding that human experience includes performative elements can count as inspirational thought for many contemporary theoreticians who have transferred the finding of performed identity to fields such as feminism, ethnicity, and gender studies (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 43).

the fields of communication, psychology, sociology, and linguistics (Dahinden 22; Druckman 1041). Frames also constantly appear in Literary Studies where concepts such as "frame narrative," "frame story," the framing of dialogue (Whitlock 75), "frames of reference" (Butler qtd. in Whitlock 191) and "frames of individual and collective responses" (Golley, Introduction xxxi) are used in very different contexts. In addition, a frame not only constitutes a scientific term but a widespread metaphor in common parlance (Entman, "Framing" 52; Slingerland 172). Due to this "omnipresence" of frames, the communication scholar Robert Entman has come to call frames "fractures" because the definition of the concept comprises so many diverse particles (Entman, "Framing" 51). While some of the uses in different fields overlap, they differ in others. When employing framing as an interdisciplinary approach to the study of autobiography in the media context, is it thus crucial to underline how the concept is used in Communication Studies.[104]

The media researchers Dennis Chong and James Druckman introduce the basic idea of framing in the following terms: "The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives" (104). David Altheide describes a frame as "a border around a picture, that separates it from the wall [...]" ("News Media" 651). This illustrates that information is always presented in a specific context, which in turn evokes particular mechanisms of processing this information (Dahinden 67). The most commonly used definition summarizing these preliminaries is the one introduced by Entman who understands framing as "selecting aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient[105] in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, *Projections* 52). In complementation to framing as an activity, frames as the products of this activity are defined as interpretation patterns[106] that help structure and process new information efficiently (B. Scheufele 46). Framing research has predominantly centered on the analysis of news media. This, however, should not conceal the fact that framing also takes place in the case of fictional media content (McQuail 374).

As to the relevant actors of framing, the mass media are assumed to create frames by providing the public with information. The way in which this media

104 The contemporary use of the term, even within the confines of Communication Studies, highly differs from the original definition of framing by Goffman (Dahinden 3).

105 Salience is defined as "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences" (Entman, "Framing" 53). The concept is central in media effects studies and seeks to explain how the degree of coverage on a topic impacts the way in which this content is processed by the audience (Kunczik and Zipfel 355-56).

106 Scheufele differentiates between "interpretation patterns," "discourse patterns," and frames as "passepartout terms" (my translation, 40).

content is perceived by the audience accounts for specific social problem definitions dominating public opinion (Altheide, "News Media" 650). Media frames with their capacity to impact public opinion are not assumed to be the only sources of framing in public discourse, yet they have proven to be substantial ones (Norris, Kern, and Just 13). This emphasizes that frames are not only defined by what they *include*, but naturally also by what they *omit*. Issues and interpretation patterns which do not appear in the definition of social problems dominating the media coverage therefore also alter the nature and extent of the problems that do gain public importance (Entman, "Framing" 54).

The most prominent example of a frame in Communication Studies, which for decades ruled the media reporting on a global level, was the so-called "Cold War frame" (Entman, "Framing" 52). Particularly in the U.S. coverage of news but also in many other countries, this meant that events that had no direct relation to the Cold War between Russia and the capitalist countries of the *West* were nevertheless represented as taking place in the context of this ideological warfare.[107] As this example demonstrates, framing has the potential to impact political[108] and social decision-making processes on a national and even global level. This has become the major target of criticism due to the possibility of abuse (Whitney, Sumpter, and McQuail 405). Chong and Druckman summarize the logic of the argument in the following terms: "If opinions can be arbitrarily manipulated by how issues are framed, there can be no legitimate representation of public interests" (104). Despite these politically-linked concerns, framing can also be seen in more "neutral" terms when regarding the cognitive benefit of the practice as a social learning process (Chong and Druckman 120). The media thus foster "cognitive development" and encourage life-long learning (Logan 54).

As to the multiplicity and dynamics of framing, Chong and Druckman state that frames "occur when (often small) changes in the presentation of an issue or an event produce (sometimes large) changes of opinion" (104). These changes largely

107 The Cold War plays a decisive political but also theoretical role in several discplines. The literary scholar Margaret Somers calls the struggle between capitalism and communism "metanarrative" (619). Mignolo also mentions the Cold War as an era which "redrew the map of the early modern/colonial world and displaced the colonial difference from the dichotomy between Occident and Orient to North and South" (34).

108 The effect of political framing counts as a driving motivation for the development of framing research. The first to prove direct relations between framed media reports based on the use of symbolic language and their impact on political views was Shanto Iyengar in the mid-1990s (Allen et al. 267). The original interest in this sub-field of public opinion research points to the legacy of World War II and its impact on Communication Studies. A driving urge was to reveal mechanisms of "political instrumentalization" and its effect on war-sentiments and patriotism (Kern, Just, and Norris 292).

rest on the use of symbolic language or imagery (Allen et al. 267). The most prominent framing processes analyzed in Media Studies focus on visual and verbal framing. These two must be conceptually separated since they evoke different effects (Barnett and Reynolds 90; Coleman 239).[109] Frames have proven to be stable over time (D. Scheufele 104), yet they are not static. Instead, they depend on constant repetition and reinforcement. If existing frames fail to be stable, "frame-shifting" occurs (Slingerland 172) and issues are "reframed" (Allen et al. 282).[110]

The most important external factors contributing to the replacement of a media frame is the occurrence of so-called "*key events*" (McQuail 317). In contrast to pseudo events[111] as products of mediatization without much real-world importance, key events are real events which end up as big, mostly global, news. The reason for this is their immensity, their unexpectedness and their dramatic nature. Often, the coverage of key events quickly accelerates to unexpected levels. This is due to the fact that these events contribute to the creation of prototypes. Journalists are thus prone or "primed" to interpret similar events within the explanation pattern. Due to the self-reinforcing mechanisms of the global media market, this leads to a disproportionately high amount of coverage (Johnson-Cartee 287). Key events have such a large impact on the global media landscape and on public opinion that they ultimately alter or replace previous media frames (Ruigrok and van Atteveldt 74). This especially holds true for violent conflicts, wars, and natural disasters (Bennett 31). The most prominent example of a key event is 9/11. In the more recent past, the swine flu epidemic of 2009 constitutes another important example of a key event which ruled the global media coverage for weeks (McQuail 317).

The audience is thus often confronted with various competing frames at a time (Chong and Druckman 112).[112] As experimental research indicates, recipients, when faced with this challenge, usually prefer the alternative that is consistent with their

109 This definition shows common features with the concepts of paratextuality or epitextuality in Literary Studies. Whitlock defines epitexts as "the messages located outside of the book that nevertheless signal its presence: media interviews, reviews, articles, readings, and private communications such as letters and diaries" (61).

110 Media production studies differentiate between "routine phases" and "orientation phases" (Scheufele 104). While frames remain relatively stable during routine phases, orientation phases give way to new frames.

111 A pseudo or "media event" is characterized by the purpose to receive media attention without necessarily having any real-world importance. Media events are particularly ascribed to television reporting. Examples include special celebrations, state visits, and national celebrations (McQuail 563).

112 Although a certain degree of coherence can usually be found when comparing different frames, one pressing question in current framing scholarship is why certain frames become stronger than others (Norris, Kern, and Just 11; Chong and Druckman 116).

values or principles. "In short, being exposed to opposing sides of an argument increases consistency among decisions taken on specific policies and underlying principles" (Chong and Druckman 112). This demonstrates that the replacement of an existing frame depends on specific conditions, including pre-existing values and the relative strength of the opposition frame.[113] As this definition based on the notion of "perceived reality" underlines, framing shares certain credentials with the constructivist[114] school of thought (Dahinden 73; D. Scheufele 104). Reality is thus assumed to be of a subjective nature. The degree to which framing impacts the individual, however, varies according to the degree of media consumption and other personal predispositions.[115]

This relation to personal identity aspects influencing individual framing effects in the audience highlights the close entanglement of framing research with the field of psychology, with the latter providing essential contributions to the study of framing. Both disciplines commonly understand themselves as parts of the social sciences which rely on empirical research methods. Three interrelated fields of investigation in psychology are of crucial importance for communication scholars: 1) knowledge units and their networking, 2) information processing, 3) psychological framing effects (B. Scheufele 13). Based on this sub-division, scientists in Media Studies – particularly in effects studies and media psychology – investigate the framing phenomenon and its effects as a multi-faceted and quite complex process

113 In general, strong predispositions, such as special personal values towards issues, have been found to limit the impact of frames by increasing the resistance to contrasting information (Chong and Cruckman 111). The strength of the opposition frame determines how far one is pulled away from an existing frame (Chong and Druckman 114). These findings that derived from experimental research are in line with the predictions made by cognitive dissonance theory as it will be discussed in more detail with respect to the changing of stereotypes (see "Of Scripts, Sparrows, and Stereotypes" in this chapter).

114 A more detailed categorization divides framing into a critical, constructivist, and cognitive paradigm, whereby the construction of mental models counts as defining feature of the cognitive approach (Ruigrok and van Atteveldt 71).

115 With respect to its capacity to shape the reality perception of the audience, framing shows strong commonalities with cultivation theory as developed by George Gerbner. The theory holds that, depending on the degree of media consumption, media content, and other personal characteristics, recipients tend to conflate the media world with the real world (McQuail 497). This leads to the thesis that especially increased television exposure "cultivates viewers" (Tehranian 105). The most prominent studies on this phenomenon have been conducted in the context of crime statistics. Viewers who display high news media and other crime-related media consumption generally overerstimate the real occurrence of crimes (McQuail 498). This example also demonstrates a major difference to framing research with the former being much more effect-oriented.

(Chong and Druckman 110). This complexity is rooted in the fact that framing accompanies the entire communication process. As already suggested by the division of psychology into different research areas, frames can be identified in at least three locations: 1) on the part of the communicator, i.e., the journalist or the media in total, 2) the text or alternative media content, 3) the receiver of the message, i.e., the audience as reader, listener, or viewer (Entman, "Framing" 52).

When reviewing this short introduction to framing, the seemingly unlimited potential of the approach unfolds. Due to its close entanglement with the field of psychology and its relevance for very different stages of the communication process, framing provides seemingly limitless options for possible applications in a variety of fields (Barnett and Reynolds 47). Media Studies have come to occupy a specific function for the further development of framing theory due to their lasting efforts to synthesize and integrate the different theoretical and disciplinary strains (Entman, "Framing" 51). A central contribution in this respect has been the further theorization of schema theory which provides a crucial element for the interdisciplinary application of framing in Literary Studies.

## Mapping Schemata

الحمار يتعلم حتى، التكرار بواسطة. The previous line expresses an old Arabic proverb which translates into "by repetition, even the donkey learns" (Merskin 164). This focus on learning as based on mere repetition, although true, only represents one aspect of learning processes. Another crucial component of learning is categorization based on so-called schemata. These schemata are responsible for the fact that even the reader who might not be able to read Arabic still recognizes the printed letters as Arabic by means of distinction from European or other sign systems stored in his/her memory. Schema theory constitutes a crucial element of cognitive psychology, and it has also come to account for the close link to framing research in Media Studies (D. Scheufele 103). Since framing is a cognitive process, schemata are assumed to constitute the conceptual basis of the theory. What complicates this interdisciplinary synergy is the fact that both concepts, i.e., frames and schemata, appear in both disciplines and often take on different meanings.[116]

116 While the degree to which communication scholars include psychological schema theory in their frameworks varies, it is largely acknowledged that schemata lie at the core of cognitive framing. Some communication researchers therefore use the terms frames and schemata synonymously, whereby framing tends to be used more interdisciplinarily (Dahinden 35). The focus on schemata marks a more psychology- and sociology-oriented approach. This emphasized the large potential for a theoretical synthesis (Dahinden 92-93).

In cognitive psychology, frames are defined as "cognitive structures of organized prior knowledge, abstracted from experience with specific instances [...]." Their relationship to schemata is established based on the fact that "schemas guide the processing of new information and the retrieval of stored information" (Fiske and Linville qtd. in Dahinden 30). This general definition of the relationship between frames and schemata already reveals a hierarchical order, whereby schemata serve as overarching structures. An even more detailed exploration of the concept of schemata reveals the following:

> In essence, a schema is a cognitive structure. This mental image represents a commonsense model of life situations that an individual has experienced directly or vicariously. Schemata contain information about the substantive elements usually encountered in the situation and the interaction of these elements. They are used to integrate new information into established mental images and to retrieve information. (Graber qtd. in Dahinden 90)

Psychological definitions also recognize the larger cognitive environment of schemata referred to as "stimulus domain." As the cognitive psychologists Shelley Taylor and Jennifer Crocker elaborate: "The schema contains general knowledge about a domain, including a specification of the relations among its attributes, as well as specific examples or instances" (qtd. in B. Scheufele 13).

These definitions already point to a close relationship between the concept of framing and the one of metaphor used in Literary Studies. The first to recognize this link in Autobiography Studies was John Eakin. In his work *Fictions in Autobiography* he explicitly establishes the connection between scientific research on schemata and life writing in stating that "the dominant trope of autobiography is metaphor" (187). This opens up an interwoven net of interdisciplinarity ranging back to Aristotle who defined metaphor as a figure of speech "giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transferrence being either from genus to species, or from species to genus […]" (qtd. in Lakoff and Johnson 384). This logic of replacing a phenomenon by an orverarching image gave way to the modern understanding of "conceptual metaphor" whereby "Categories are Containers," as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson summarize (382). Based on these philosophical foundations, Urs Dahinden points to the most important characteristic of metaphor with respect to the use of the concept in framing theory; namely its dynamic quality. As he states, metaphors are "'nomadic,' that is taken up by interacting with various discourses over time, thereby showing their malleability both actively and passively" (79-80). From this he derives that the term "frame" itself constitutes a metaphor (Dahinden 79).[117]

117 Dahinden in his conception of metaphor stresses the significance of models and theories which travel from different scientific to "everyday discourses and vice versa" (79).

This relationship between the terms frames, schemata, and metaphors as used in different fields of the academy – despite slightly different uses in each field – points to the most important function of frames as "mental images" (Graber qtd. in Dahinden 90). As the psychological contribution of schema theory suggests, these mental images are inherent to human thinking and learning. Schemata are the most basic means for people to process and structure information (Dahinden 92). This process takes place more or less unconsciously since schemata are activiated automatically whenever new information needs to be stored (Dahinden 60; D. Scheufele 106; Dixon 3). This cognitive function in turn is related to the act of communication. McQuail highlights this characteristic by emphasizing the support function of schemata: "A schema is an aid to communication and understanding, because it provides some wider context and sense-making" (567). Despite this very general function, Bertram Scheufele identifies the following specific functions of schemata in the context of communication research: 1) the structuring of experience, 2) the support of information acquisition, 3) abstractions of object classes, 4) the facilitation of interpretation, 5) the extension of existing schemata based on new information, 6) the categorization of existing schemata as well as 7) the expectation of particular values (14-15).

Based on the finding that schemata come into play at different stages of the communication processes, these functions must be further explored with respect to the actors involved. At one end of the communication process, the senders, i.e., the media as operated by journalists, represent "schematic experts" (B. Scheufele 17). Because of their constant exposure to dominant schemata in public discourse and their distribution of information, they are able to activate and employ very elaborated and interrelated schemata. Activation thus depends on the availability of background knowledge stored in the form of schemata in long-term memory (B. Scheufele 26).[118] Schemata thus allow for the structured presentation of otherwise isolated events (McQuail 567). This demonstrates why schema-based media fra-

118 Information activation is the focus of priming research in cognitive psychology and Media Studies. Priming is often mentioned in close connection to framing. Priming, however, has a much more nuanced cognitive focus in that it explains the specific nature of different activation processes. The approach states that the more a specific scheme is enforced and reactivated, i.e., primed, the faster incoming information is categorized and interpreted according to this schema (Allen et al. 266-67; Scheufele 26; Semetko 361). Chong and Druckman even see a conceptual confusion in the simultaneous use of priming and framing. As they clarify, "priming may be thought of as a procedure that increases the accessibility of some category or construct in memory" (115). To them, an increase in the accessibility of information is not equal to a rise of salience concerning an issue. As these findings highlight, priming does contribute to the explanatory potential of framing, yet the two approaches need to be delineated.

ming is a crucial part of the modern media routine. Schema-oriented processing of information thus allows journalists to structure and order high amounts of information under time and economic pressure. Only schematizing therefore enables them to quickly adapt to very dynamic and constantly changing discourse situations (B. Scheufele 17; Whitney, Sumpter, and McQuail 406). Due to this function of journalists to administer information by reproducing and creating schema-based frames, media terminology refers to them as "gatekeepers" (Dahinden 64).[119]

At the other end of the communication process, recipients of media messages process the information delivered to them within the frames created by the media. The cognitive function of schemata here is equal to the one of journalists. Yet, the degree of influence on pre-established frames is different. If audience members are not actively involved in the communication process, as holds true for the majority of traditional media[120], they have relatively little power to shape the creation of new schemata. They are thus less autonomous[121] when compared to journalists (Entman, "Framing" 56). Schema-based information processing on the part of the audience takes place both as a bottom-up and top-down process. Bottom-up means that information is extracted from the text or respective piece of mediated information and then categorized into an existing schema. Sometimes, this can lead to the creation of a new schema in the cognitive apparatus. Top-down processing, in constrast,

119 The term gatekeeper was first established by David M. White in the 1950s. It refers to individuals in the mass media market who have the authority to decide in favor of or against the publication of units of information. Gatekeepers can be found on different hierarchical levels, whereby they accompany the entire process of news media production (Kunczik and Zipfel 242). Gatekeeper research meanwhile constitutes a subfield of media research of its own (Kunczik and Zipfel 241; Dahinden 64). From the perspective of a literary scholar, the concept of the gatekeeper obviously represents a similarly evident metaphor as the term framing.

120 Low interactivity is still the major characteristic of old media, such as television, radio, and print. What communication scholars are most interested in when it comes to the question of audience involvement is not the issue of autonomy as such but the analysis of gratifications derived by the audience. These differ from the ones of new media consumption (Kunczik and Zipfel 350).

121 The question of autonomy, however, should not be confused with the larger concept of the active audience. Audience members are always assumed to actively process information. This processing naturally takes place based on individual predispositions so that no 1:1-relationship between incoming information and information output can be assumed. The question of audience autonomy is linked to the ideological and more normatively-oriented debate on the social struggle over meaning and definitions of social reality, as they are particularly prominent in Postcolonial Studies (Gamson et al. 385).

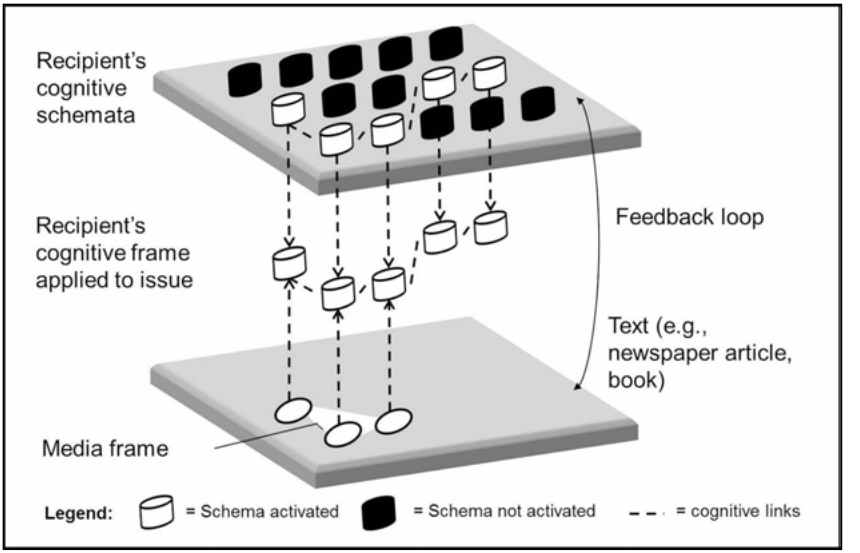
means that incoming information is already processed and at times filtered, based on pre-existing information stored in schemata (D. Scheufele 23).

This actor-specific explanation of the function of schemata clarifies the connection between schemata and frames. Whereas some authors use these terms interchangeably, this study follows the approach chosen by Dietram and Bertram Scheufele. *Cognitive frames* are thus understood to consist of different interlinked schemata (110-11). Both audience members and journalists develop these cognitive frames when being exposed to information. *Media frames*, in turn, are the result of the media's framing of events in a particular way. These media frames activate a set of schemata on the part of the audience. Since the audience receives the information provided by the media based on pre-established cognitive frames, framed media representations can either meet these mental maps or consist of "frame-discrepant information" (Scheufele and Scheufele 112). In any case, it is most likely that media frames and pre-existing audience frames concerning an issue do not overlap completely, meaning that the media only activate parts of the schemata related to a cognitive audience frame.[122] The degree to which audience frames and media frames overlap can be assumed to be rather high since some frames are more applicable to the activation of certain schemata than others.[123] Scheufele and Scheufele mention the example of the operation "Iraqi Freedom" to demonstrate this effect. The mere terminology is likely to activate an audience schema linked to freedom rather than one related to economy or others (114). The degree to which the presented media frame shapes the cognitive frame of the audience is referred to as "frame adoption" (Scheufele and Scheufele 113). The following graph gives an overview of the interrelationship of cognitive schemata, frames, and their activation by media content.

122 Besides the schemata which are immediately activated by media framing, so-called "spreading activation" causes further schemata to be triggered, which show no immediate connection with the media frame provided. Spreading activation sets in because schemata all are interconnected. This means that information stored in neighboring schema are also affected without immediate stimuli (Scheufele and Scheufele 117).

123 The logic of this correspondence is in line with Stewart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model, though, empirical Media Studies use different parameters to explain the relationship between frame creation by the media and audience adoption.

*Graph 1: Media Framing on the Basis of Cognitive Schemata*




Source: Adaptation of wood board figure developed by Scheufele and Scheufele (118). The graph shows how pre-existing cognitive frames on the part of the recipient impact the processing of new media content. Media frames usually activate a limited number of audience schemata only. The total number and structure of activated audience schemata accounts for the cognitive frame applied to a specific issue.

When looking at the separation between the media as creators of frames and the audience as recipients of frames, it needs to be highlighted that this seemingly clear-cut division is a simplification for the purpose of model building. In an interrelated and reflexive media world, audience members quickly take the place of journalists and vice versa. The same logic applies to the recognition of "*journalists as audiences*" (D. Scheufele 117). Due to their professional environment, journalists also constitute their own audience, meaning that they are exposed to the frames created by their colleagues and social discourse at large (B. Scheufele 17; Dahinden 59).[124] This notion might seem self-evident in light of today's assumption of the 'active audience.' Since framing, however, is constantly criticized due to the possibility of undermining audience autonomy based on frame manipulation, it needs to

124 This role switching between sender and receiver on the part of journalists is a major research focus of news-selection studies in the field of communication. Framing here again comes into play at different stages of the news selection process itself. The influences of journalistic media frames on the media's selection of news are commonly referred to as "reciprocal effects" (Ruigrok and Atteveldt 71; Kunczik and Zipfel 271).

be clarified that the audience as active participant in the framing of social discourse is explicitly included in the model. Media frames that become part of social discourse are thus assumed to be influenced by the audience before becoming part of media discourse. This trajectory can be imagined as a "*feedback loop*" from social discourse to journalistic framing and back (see graph 1).[125]

This overview of schema theory and its importance to media framing provides the key to understanding how individual audience members process media content and how the media and audience are involved in public discourse creation. Furthermore, the significance of framing and schema theory sheds further light on the importance of a cognitive approach to reception studies. Here, the process of media consumption for the purpose of knowledge gain remains at the center of attention. Knowledge, however, as stored in cognitive schemata, cannot be separated from affective concerns, since incoming information is always subjected to evaluation. This is where stereotypes enter the picture. Linking schema theory with scripts and sparrows reveals that stereotypes are not as bad as their image.

## Of Scripts, Sparrows, and Stereotypes

Whenever the term stereotype comes up, negative associations follow. Especially in the *West*, where individualism and one's differentiation from the rest of society are highly valued (Lakoff and Johnson 305), stereotypes are considered backward and discriminating. For researchers taking a cognitive approach to the study of stereotypes, this conclusion is premature. When exploring the function of stereotypes as part of the cognitive apparatus, stereotypes turn out to be necessary and even helpful tools. Could the negative image of stereotypes in fact be a stereotype itself?

Schemata have shown to be very abstract concepts since they already contain clusters of interrelated information stored in the brain. On the lower-level of everyday-information processing, these schemata can be broken down into categories. Categories are clearly defined cognitive patterns which contain particular attributes (Scheufele and Scheufele 127). Every category has a border to another one, based on a particular set of attributes. An object occurring in the context of newly-acquired information is attributed to a certain category if it shows all – or at least

125 Some media researchers try to emphasize the difference between framing processes and their actors by referring to "frame building," which takes place in social discourse, and "frame setting," which is done by the media (Scheufele and Scheufele 112-13). For the purpose of simplification, the present study mostly neglects this terminological difference and uses the terms frame creation, building, and frame setting interchangeably while mentioning the respective actors involved.

the majority – of the given attributes.[126] At the center of each category, one finds a so-called "prototype" representing the ideal object within the given category, while objects differing from this prototype are stored in the periphery after being compared to the attribute pattern of the prototype (B. Scheufele 18). The most prominent example of a prototype in communication literature is the one of the sparrow. It represents an object which belongs to the category of birds. This category is characterized by attributes such as "can fly, has feathers, lives in trees, eats worms (Scheufele 19). To demonstrate the function of categorization based on prototypes in the context of Arab Americans, one can imagine the keyword Arab as a category containing prototypical elements such as Muslim, violent, terrorist, veiled, etc.

This example highlights the link between prototypes and stereotypes which requires particular attention in an interdisciplinary setting. In general, stereotypes are defined as simplified representations that reduce individuals to exaggerated and mostly negative character traits. Stereotyping thus becomes a means of power exertion (Barker, *Cultural Studies* 488). Once an individual is defined as a social outsider on the basis of meeting a set of stereotypes, he finds himself in "symbolic exile," often even denied the most fundamental trait of "having humanity" (Merskin 161). From a cognitive-psychological viewpoint, stereotypes are cognitive schemata which are linked to belief systems about social groups (Dixon 3). While one schema refers to one object, the constructed reality of the individual is made up of the interplay between different objects and bundles of schemata which together account for certain expectations regarding the behavior or causal relationships of other objects or people (B. Scheufele 97). A person or an object is thus categorized into a stereotypical category the more features correspond to the respective prototype (Hewstone 338).[127] These schematic expectations toward prototypical objects account for the fact that information contrasting the information previously stored is ignored. This interplay between cognitive information processing and affective evaluation characterizes the emergence and maintenance of stereotypes (Cainkar 163).[128] The

126 Many definitions of categories require all attributes of an object to meet the respective criteria of a category. Since this is hardly the case in reality, however, such definitions must count as overly reductionist (Scheufele, *Frames* 18).

127 This process of categorization is known as the "goodness of fit principle" (Dixon 4; Hewstone 338). The goodness of fit principle reflects to which the degree expected traits or characteristics of an object or a person correspond to the actual features observed. This juxtaposition of expected versus experienced reality influences the way in which an object is categorized (Hewston 338).

128 The cognitive mechanism behind the sustainability of stereotypes is analyzed in Communication Studies by use of the media-psychological approach of cognitive dissonance. The theory goes back to the social psychologist Leon Festinger and holds that media users prefer media content that is in line with preexisting attitudes and beliefs.

most important cause giving way to the emergence of stereotypes is the lack of personal experience and knowledge regarding members of social groups and objects (Merskin 161). Prototypical information is thus used to fill these information gaps (Dahinden 20).

When adding the dimension of time to this cognitive interplay, stereotypical action sequences are established which are called scripts. A script is defined as "a coherent sequence of events expected by the individual, involving him either as a participant or as an observer" (Abelson qtd. in B. Scheufele 20). Cognitive scripts not only influence the production or reception of media content itself but also the way in which this information is processed by memory. This also applies to information about the self. Here, so-called "self-scripts" which represent "cognitive generalizations about self" impact the way in which autobiographical memory is constructed through scripts (Perrett). The best-known example of a script from everyday life is the "supermarket frame" developed by Umberto Eco. According to this example, the supermarket forms a "deterministic environment" (Lewis 23) that denotes a particular cause of events related to certain objects found in the supermarket (Eco 21). The notion of place is thus already connected to a series of activities and objects which are found in the given setting. As Eco remarks: "In this sense a frame is already an inchoative text or a condensed story […]" (21).[129] Again, when transferring this general example to the Arab American case, there could be a script[130] attached to the object of Arab causing other individuals to suspect criminal

Content that contradicts this information tends to be avoided in order to prevent cognitive dissonance. The finding suggests that individuals have an internal need to remain in a state of value and attitude coherence. According to Elbow, who employs the concept in Literary Studies, a large range of human thinking, feeling, and behavior can be explained by cognitive dissonance. As he explains, "the organism seems to want somehow to find *some* kind of harmony or unity" (54). While Communication Studies share this assumption, newer public opinion research has revealed that in ambivalent situations, individuals are found to tolerate a certain a level of dissonance (McQuail 551).

129 The example of a university lecture helps illustrate the influence of time and sequencing on scripts. When thinking of the word 'lecture,' individuals who are familiar with the concept immediately associate a certain chain of events with it, e.g., the professor enters the room, the students take out their books, the professor talks, the students ask questions at the end (Scheufele, *Frames* 20). This demonstrates the script-like character of mental schemata.

130 This psychological use of the term shares many characteristics with the understanding of scripts in popular culture. Scripts usually occur in the context of film studies. Researchers in "auteur studies" reveal how screenwriters dictate the sequences of scenes, cuts, and other essential elements of movies (Schatz and Perren 507). In cognitive studies, this directive function of the screenwriter is fulfilled by cognitive schemata.

behavior, religious fundamentalism, or the suppression of women in every-day life. These examples emphasize that scripts do not just stand for certain prototypical characteristics but for a sequence of events linked to these attributes.

This synthesis of key concepts in cognitive science sheds a very different light on the process of stereotyping than Cultural Studies usually convey. Whereas the simple term of the stereotype usually evokes immediate reflexes of opposition, framing theory demonstrates that stereotypes, by nature, are part of human cognition. Stereotypes as cognitive prototypes and related scripts are unavoidable and thus a natural part of human thinking.[131] The question *whether* stereotypes can somehow be prevented or abolished therefore obviously does not make much sense. The question of *how* existing stereotypes can be altered and new ones established, however, is one that is of equal interest to scholars in Cultural and Media Studies. Whereas the former, however, invest much energy in calling for counter-discourse to achieve this effect, framing theory provides a less ideological and more empirical explanation for the alternation of sterotypes and their possible reframing.

## Cracking the Frame: Reframing Stereotypes

When calling for the replacement of stereotypes, scholars in Cultural Studies oftentimes use terms such as the "redefinition" and "reinvention of identity" ("Arab-American Autobiography" 31). Furthermore, they link this with the idea of "new public narratives" (Somers 630). As to the cognitive processes underlying this discourse, Cultural and Literary Studies, however, have not provided sufficient analytical means to explain how stereotypes can be changed beyond the axiom of counter-discourse. Framing theory and its explanation of the origin of stereotypes in mental schemata and scripts fills this gap. It provides answers to the question of how "Cracks in the Frame" can cause alternative stereotypes (Steinberg 847). The necessary requirement for such a shift in the mental mindmap is persuasion.

Persuasion has been a key term in Communication Studies ever since public opinion research emerged in the first half of the 20th century (Cruz and Lewis 7; Chong and Druckman 103). Especially early media theories in the 1970s stood heavily under the influence of so-called propaganda[132] studies as a legacy of the

131 The activation of stereotypes not only serves the purpose of protecting mental resources because stereotypical information gets processed faster, stereotypes also serve a very literal function of protection as a result of human evolution. Based on stereotypical judgements about people and situations, individuals are able to avoid or quickly escape situations that might harm their lives.

132 Propaganda refers to the "product of deliberate attempts to influence collective behavior and opinion by the use of multiple means of communication in ways that are systematic or one-sided" (McQuail 564). Based on this definition, which suggests intentional mis-

Second World War and the media machine employed by Nazi Germany. Mass media at the time were assumed to exert almost unlimited power over the audience (McQuail 51). With the adoption of the active audience concept, these concerns about manipulative persuasion started to cease. According to the status of present-day empirical findings, persuasion still plays an important role in media effects research but the focus rests less on normative generalizations than on exploring the specific circumstances under which this effect takes place. With respect to the intentional constitution of frames and their impact on stereotypes, persuasion also remains of importance because it underlines the impact of frames on different levels of media processing. In the context of cognitive framing, persuasion is defined as a "learned predisposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way" (Allport qtd. Dahinden 95). This delineated view of framing as effects model points to two further requirements needed to achieve persuasion; namely, the affective as well as the behavioral component.

As to the affective dimension, persuasion only occurs if the emotional level is touched. Furthermore, framing causes attitudinal[133] changes toward certains objects or people. Both prerequisites need to be met in order for frames to become reflected in the audience (Dahinden 83). Scheufele summarizes this interrelation beyond the cognitive dimension by referring to framing as "two-step-model." As he explains, "media frames steer thoughts of recipients into a certain direction and thereby affect emotions and opinions" (my translation, 79). Media frames thus affect the medium- and long-term affective predispositions of the audience (Dahinden 87).[134] Examples

information, propaganda usually has a very negative connotation (McQuail 565). This view of media affects is highly normative (McQuail 15).

133 Attitude in empirical studies is calculated by using the following formula: Attitude = $\sum v_i * w_i$, where vi is the evaluation of the object on attribute i, and wi is the salience weight ($\sum w_i = 1$) associated with that attribute. The attitude toward an object thus equals the weighted sum of a series of evaluative beliefs about that object. This highlights the importance of prior information for the evaluation of new information and the possible neglect of incoming information based on established cognitive schemata.

134 This dimension also constitutes a core difference to the theory of agenda setting, which is often associated with framing (Dearing and Rogers 71). Agenda setting is defined as the capability of the media to influence the public agenda based on the salience and frequency of certain topics in the news coverage (Semetko 360). In contrast to framing, agenda setting has mostly been found to impact the affective dimension of the audience on a short-term scale (Dahinden 87). Currently, the scholarly debate focuses on so-called second-level agenda setting, which is researched in connection to "associative framing." Both approaches are based on psychological priming processes (Ruigrok and van Atteveldt 71; McCombs 87). Although these very detailed theoretical differentia-

of this persuasive effect of media framing have been found in numerous empirical studies. In the case of the Iranian Contra Affair, for example, a topic which has been widely researched, emotional representations of the issue clearly affected the attitude of the audience toward the delivery of weapons to the Middle East (B. Scheufele 78). Another prominent example is the shooting of a Korean plane by the Soviets in 1983. Comparative studies contrasted this event with the shooting of an Iranian civil plane by U.S. forces in 1988. Both incidents caused huge losses of civilian lives. The tone, vocabulary, and problem definitions used by the media, however, varied considerably. Whereas the former event was presented as a human tragedy, the Iranian case was depicted as a military accident (McQuail 379). This difference in framing caused different emotional reactions in the audience. In the case of Korea, humanitarian[135] concerns outweighted strategic or military evaluations. The opposite was true for the Iranian incident where emotional attachment was lacking (Druckman 1047; Jasperson and El-Kikhia 120).

It is at this intersection of the affective[136] and the cognitive where the logic behind *prototypes* and their ultimate role as *stereotypes* in social discourse unfolds. What is commonly referred to as *negative stereotype* therefore must be seen as a negative evaluation of a prototype which is stored and categorized in memory in such a way that associated attributes lead to a negative evaluation. Additional information provided by the media or other sources can then either change the connotation of these existing attributes or account for a different categorization of the

tions might sound confusing to the literary scholar, they point to the overall relevance of framing in the landscape of empirical discourse analysis.

135 Humanitarianism has been found to be another meta-frame in the coverage of international news events (Dahinden 187). Empirical studies on the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, reveal that a "humanitarian frame" sometimes replaces the common "terrorist frame" that still dominates the media (Scheufele and Scheufele 117). As Scheufele and Scheufele demonstrate, the representation of violent incidents in the Gaza strip with a focus on the humanitarian concerns of Palestinians leads to very different audience evaluations of the respective events than the coverage within a terrorist frame (117). Parallel to this increasing interest in the topic of humanitarianism on the part of communication research, human rights research has also gained significantly more attention in the field of Literary and Cultural Studies in recent years (Whitlock 76-77).

136 Some communication scholars refer to the specific impact of framing on the evaluation of objects as "attribute framing" (B. Scheufele 34). The dependent variable here is not connected to the actual behavior resulting from information processing (goal framing) but on the evaluation of the object itself. An example is the discussion of beef either within an economics frame or within the frame of the organic food movement (B. Scheufele 34).

prototype. What changes is the *context* in which the object is seen, not the *object* itself. In other words, when speaking of changing or replacing stereotypes, it is not the stereotype as such that can be replaced or altered. Rather, the emergence of a new prototype might eventually replace the old stereotype based on different context information.

This cognitive approach to the study of stereotypes ultimately reveals why "counter-stereotypical" representations do little to stop stereotypes from operating (Dixon 4). Empirical studies have shown that counter-representations usually lack the link to the original object stored in memory to an extent that the stereotype remains untouched. Successfully changing or replacing existing stereotypes therefore requires alternative representations linked to the stereotypical object that still show a clear relation to the original stereotype. Simply replacing an existing frame with a new one therefore does not automatically lead to the eruption of stereotypes (Chong and Druckman 114).[137] In the Arab American context, this means that in order to change the image of the Arab oil sheikh or the belly-dancing harem girl, alternative representations of Arabs cannot completely ignore former stereotypes. Instead, they have to trigger positive evaluations on the basis of new and more detailed information. This discursive process, then, is not one of *opposition* but one of *complementation*, *discursive contest*, and *multiplicity*.[138]

The media, as assumed by Jack Shaheen already (see Chapter 1), indeed are major actors to achieve this end by providing alternative information concerning popular stereotypes (Dixon 5). They trigger processes of "[d]ehabituation" (Miall 17) and "defamiliarization" (Miall 53; Boelhower[139] 134).[140] This in turn allows the

137 Dixon provides research results on racial groups. He shows that the confrontation with people who completely disconfirm the stereotype will lead to the categorization of the individual in either a different or a new category but it will not alter the stereotype of the present category. Therefore, in order to be effective, the alternative to the stereotype must still show a correlation to the existing schema (Dixon 4).

138 This is in line with the concept of "Discursive Rivalries," as developed by Gary Fine in the field of sociology. Instead of the purely dichotomous view of counter-discourse, discursive rivalries imply the plurality of discourses that stand in equal competition to each other (Cainkar 154).

139 Boelhower also acknowledges that defamiliarization plays a crucial role in the "strategy of reconstruction" in autobiography. Instead of basing this argument on a cognitive-psychological basis, Boelhower defines defamiliarization in terms of geographic and metaphorical space, whereby the growing distance between "actual self and place" achieves the effect thus described (134).

140 So far, this process of defamiliarization has been attributed to fictional writing mostly due to the artistic and stylistic devices of the writer. Novel images can thus be created that escape everyday reality (Miall 17). While framing provides the cognitive explana-

media consumer to place the objects and members of social groups "Beyond the Schema Given," as the interdisciplinary literary scholar David Miall entitles his subchapter (53). Framing can therefore either trigger a new "mental model" or it can reinforce old ones (Ruigrok and van Atteveldt 71). The reflexive nature of the process turns framing into a constant alternation between framing and being framed, between reframing and being reframed (Angus 234). This finding will later play a crucial role in demonstrating the capacity of autobiographies to (re-)frame stereotypes. Just like stereotypes function on different levels of the mind, frames also operate on several levels.

## David versus Goliath: Frame Levels and Issue Frames

*Image 1: "David with the Head of Goliath"*

Source: Reprint of Caravaggio painting from 1606 (Graham-Dixon xvii).

If there is one image which communication researchers, literary theorists, and journalists alike are equally familiar with, it is the one of David versus Goliath. The biblical story represents the struggle of the young David against the giant Goliath bringing about the ultimate fall of the giant. The fight in a larger sense depicts an "allusive metaphor" of the fight of the underdog versus the superpower with the essential tension emerging from the hope that the underdog still has a chance to win (Lennon 68).[141] As communication researchers have revealed, David versus Goliath is not just a popular metaphor but one of the most prominent media frames.

As all previous examples of media frames have demonstrated, frames appear in all possible contexts. In order to arrive at a more structured understanding of frames as opposed to mere *topics*, an additional conceptual classification between frame *levels* and *issue* frames is essential. The example of David and Goliath counts as well-researched in this respect and helps demonstrate how frames act on different

tion for this effect in a non-fiction context, this is not to deny that other formats of media representation can achieve the same effect. This highlights the universal value of the theory for several sub-fields of Cultural Studies.

141 Lennon in his study *Allusions in the Press* reveals the David versus Goliath motif to appear particularly often in the economic context of company mergers and acquisitions in German newspapers (68).

cognitive levels. As meta-studies of the use of the David and Goliath metaphor revealed, the image counts as the most popular frame used across various different media and subject areas (Dahinden 14).[142] It represents a "conflict frame" that evokes the effect of polarization on the part of the audience. Conflict frames are generally characterized by the opposition of different interests of two or more social powers whose relationships to each other can take various shapes. All conflict frames share the common feature of revolving around questions of power as central concern (Dahinden 107; D. Scheufele 113). The vocabulary accompanying the David versus Goliath frame usually centers on the terms "us" versus "them," whereby the "them," i.e., the coverage of the oppositional party, dominates. The frame is independent of thematic content. It can be used in all possible contexts, e.g., in sports, politics, or social struggles (Dahinden 186). This universal applicability of the dialectic points to the nature of the David versus Goliath frame as meta-frame which acts superordinate to different issues.

The example of the David and Goliath frame highlights that frames occur on various levels of abstraction which are categorized according to different selection criteria and cognitive hierarchies (Dahinden 186; Allen et al. 266-67). On the meta-level one finds so-called "*basis-frames*" (Goffman qtd. in Dahinden 107).[143] These basis frames represent cognitive schemata which reflect "inter-categorical hierarchies" which have cognitive priority in categorization processes (my translation, B. Scheufele 19). Besides the conflict frame, morality and ethics have also been found to function as basis frames (Dahinden 106-07). A particular incident of these higher-level frames is the so-called "personalization frame" (my translation, Dahinden 107).[144] The personalization frame represents a meta-frame that puts personal expe-

142 In addition to the metaphor of David and Goliath, researchers also often use the concept of the Manichaean dualism that goes back to the medieval adherents of the Persian religious leader Manes and the conception of the world as struggle between good and evil (Exoo 29). Calvin Exoo identifies this Manechaean binary as a historical characteristic of U.S. media coverage, which especially became visible in the post-9/11 period. This is not to deny that the origins of the Manichean binary already date back to the Puritan ideology of good versus evil in U.S. history.

143 Authors use various terms to account for the existence of different frame levels. This study adopts the rather clear-cut terminological differentiation between higher-level and lower-level frames used by Dahinden whose work is also highly interdisciplinary (107).

144 This categorization into basis frames by Dahinden only represents one example of meta-analytical frame analysis. Other studies by researchers who use a similar terminology arrive at different results and models, e.g., concerning the number of basis frames and the respective terminology. David Altheide, for example, speaks of a "problem frame" and describes it in terms similar to the "conflict frame" sketched by Dahiden ("News Media" 648).

rience to the forefront of information processing. Single, topic-related incidents operating on lower levels of abstraction are presented as more or less typical examples of the larger frame (Dahinden 108). All of these meta-frames constitute "ideological frames" in that they are related to issues of moral or political conflict, as the example of David and Goliath again illustrates (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 185).

On the lower level of abstraction, micro-frames, so-called "*issue*" or "thematic frames,"[145] operate (Allen et al. 266-267; Chong and Druckman 107). Nel Ruigrok and Wouter van Atteveldt define issue framing "as a process of selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of an issue on the basis of which the audience can evaluate the issue described or the protagonists associated with the issues" (70). Issue frames comprise smaller units of categorization by relying on a very theme-specific interpretation (B. Scheufele 72).[146] Issue frames, such as terrorism, have shown to be highly contingent between the media and the audience (D. Scheufele 112).

The distinction between higher-level ideological frames and lower-level issue-frames allows for a more differentiated understanding of the cognitive levels involved in the categorization of information on the part of the audience. As to the relation between macro- and micro-frames, it can be stated that their construction takes place interactively with more than one frame operating at a time (D. Scheufele 106). From a conceptual perspective, frames can therefore be imagined to act on a vertical axis represented by higher- or meta-level frames and lower-level issue frames. This also accounts for the differentiation between a "discursive level" and a "textual level" of framing (Scheufele and Scheufele 111). In addition, the delineation of different issue frames takes place on a horizontal[147] framing axis. This obviously poses an analytical challenge to framing research because different frame levels need to be distinguished. The question thus remains how communication research actually identifies frames?

145 Since the definition of what exactly constitutes a theme is quite challenged in Communication Studies (Dahinden 75), this study will use the term *issue frame* to emphasize the cognitive principles underlying issue categorization in contrast to the term *theme* used in Literary Studies. Issues are further differentiated in contradistinction to "events," whereby an event counts as one element of a larger issue (Dahinden 76).

146 This specific focus on an issue without including detailed context information to Justin Lewis serves as a confirmation for the thesis that news is inherently "ahistorical" (31).

147 Scheufele and Scheufele also base their framing model on a horizontal and vertical framing matrix to account for different "schema hierarchies" (117). On the horizontal level, they use the term "*arenas*" to refer to different social realms such as politics and society (111). This somewhat equals the definition of issue frames in this study.

## Identifying Frames: Media, Text, Audience

"'Taking a photograph,' the teacher says, 'is above all centering in a frame. So you have to learn framing, and that means learning how to see everything through a little square in that frame and hot to choose the best angle of attack" (Babin and Iannone 57). This episode on framing as a photographic practice that must be learned also represents the position researchers must take in order to study media frames in society. The development of respective research tools also involves a long methodological learning process. Communication departments around the world now focus on empirical research methods, particularly when it comes to framing studies (Tankard 97).[148] The identification of frames, however, is complicated by the fact that frames not only occur on different conceptual levels but also in three distinct elements of the communication process; namely, the media, the text, and the audience.

The largest amount of empirical framing research has focused on frames as audience effects (Whitney, Sumpter, and McQuail 399). This strand of research analyzes frames both as dependent and independent variables[149] (D. Scheufele 107; Whitney, Sumpter, and McQuail 399; Scheufele and Scheufele 113). This hints at the question of causality which poses a challenge to empirical framing research. Media frames can be assumed to function – rather mono-causally – as the origins of audience frames. When considering the interrelationship between the media as active and its participation in public discourse, the audience can also be seen as source of framing. This, in turn, would reverse the definition of the independent and dependent variable under scrutiny, meaning that media frames as the outcome of discursive framing are dependent variables. Since this introduces a degree of complexity which standard means of analysis can hardly master, most studies focus on the study of audience frames as effects, which has proven to be valid. This causal relationship, however, can never be simply presupposed but must be shown by correlation (Dahinden 304-05).[150] Put in simpler terms, the identification of a frame in a given text does not guarantee that this frame is also reflected in the audience

148 The communication scholar James Tankard praises the contribution of framing research to discourse analysis because, to him, framing offers an alternative to "the old 'objectivity and bias' paradigm" (95).

149 The dependant variable in Media Studies is defined as the effect of a media stimulus, whereas the stimulus itself is the independent variable. If both variables stand in a causal relationship to each other, one speaks of internal validity (Kunczik and Zipfel 23).

150 The status quo of framing research in regard to the question of causality is that media frames are necessary variables for the establishment of audience frames but not sufficient ones since other discursive frames of different origins also interact (Dahinden 305).

reading the text (Entman, "Framing" 53). Neither can a single text be considered the only cause of an audience frame.

The definition of frames as either independent or dependent variable consequently depends on the specific research objects at the basis of the investigation; namely, journalists, texts/media content, or the audience. In the case of journalists as sources of frames, interviews are used to reveal the specific motives and means behind the production of media content (B. Scheufele 49). On the other end of the communication process, audience frames are usually explored by means of questionnaires, interviews, and long-term data collection to account for frame shifts (B. Scheufele 60). From a methodological viewpoint, the most detailed research is conducted on frames found in texts or other media content (Dahinden 60). Frames here are analyzed by means of comprehensive content and cluster analyses (B. Scheufele 56). In contradistinction to text analyses in Literary Studies, where the term analysis mostly relies on interpretation, content analysis in empirical Media Studies implies a strict methodological design.[151] This usually involves the choice of sample content, the formation of analytical categories and the encoding of the text according to these categories. Frames are then identified inductively to arrive at a coding scheme (Chong and Druckman 107). The frequency at which these units occur is then counted. The result of this reveals the existence of certain media frames (B. Scheufele 55; McQuail 363). Quantitative content analysis is a very established means of frame analysis. The major advantage of this method is the fairly high degree of reliability (McQuail 363). Its biggest weakness, however, is the risk of imposing interpretation systems on the content based on a certain categorization instead of inferring frames from content only (McQuail 354).

Due to some of these methodological constraints connected to quantitative frame analyses, researchers are now trying to apply mixed methods to the study of frames (McQuail 365). The major goal here is to complement quantitative data collection with more qualitative means of interpretation in order to grasp text information which pure content analysis cannot register (Entman, "Framing" 57). This more hermeneutical focus inevitably relies more on single and rather detailed case studies than on the analysis of a large number of texts. Since this, in turn, runs counter to some of the hallmarks of empirical research, including reliability and validity, communication scholars so far have not been in favor of integrating these qualitative approaches into their designs (B. Scheufele 57-58). Man continue to

151 In more specific terms, content analysis represents a qualitative-inductive approach, since it derives its theoretical conclusions on the basis of data collection (Dahinden 203; Donges, Leonarz, and Meier 135). Deductive quantitative analysis, in contrast, proceeds from theory to data collection (Dahinden 205). Inductive-quantitative analysis, as additional variant, represents the methodological synthesis of the two generic approaches but counts as less common in the empirical practice (Dahinden 206).

denigrate hermeneutics as "myriad of contradictory theories and insights" which do not promise much potential in terms of knowledge gain (Bortolussi and Dixon 8).

It is at this methodological intersection where the weaknesses but also the strength of framing analysis fully unfold and give way to the creation of something new. Whereas autobiographical text analysis suffers from the lack of the empirical method, empirical scholars in the field of communication theory seek to integrate more qualitative tools into their methods. Robert Entman in this context makes the following claim: "We (communication researchers) should identify our mission as bringing together insights and theories that would otherwise remain scattered in other disciplines" (qtd. in Dahinden 319). The first step toward achieving this interdisciplinary goal is the realization that literary scholars and communication researchers, after all, work on the same cultural material. Above all, they analyze the impact mediated discourse has on the lives of individuals, thus turning them into mediated lives. The framing approach ultimately provides the basis for developing a mediated theory of life writing to explore these lives in more detail.

## 2.3 FRAMING LIVES: A MEDIATED THEORY OF LIFE WRITING

I assert that continued growth is essential to the rational and empirical character of scientific knowledge; that, if science ceases to grow it must lose that character. It is the way of its growth which makes science rational and empirical; the way, that is, in which scientists discriminate between available theories and choose the better one or […] the way they give reasons for rejecting all the available theories [...]. (Popper 7)

Autobiography theory with its focus on close-reading and framing theory in Media Studies are both count as sophisticated in their own fields, athough they suffer from individual shortcomings that limit their explanatory power. As is the case with many theories in the academy, both fields continue to live separate lives. Autobiography Studies have not incorporated methodologies from Media Studies so far, and Media Studies have mostly ignored cultural material other than news when testing the interdisciplinary value of framing. In order to carry out Popper's claim above, one needs to acknowledge that framing counts among the "available theories" which have the capacity to benefit the growth of knowledge in Literary *and* Media Studies. As Popper also acknowledges, it is the "empirical character of scientific knowledge" which accounts for its continuous growth. This empirical nature of knowledge contribution has so far been missing from the methodological instrumentarium of life writing studies. A new way of reading autobiographies marks the

first step to developing a (re-)mediated theory of life writing which does not reject "all the available theories" but chooses "the better one" to arrive at new insights.

## From Media Frames to Mediated Lives: Life-Reading the Journalistic Way

The comparative approach to the methodologies used in the fields of Literary and Media Studies already demonstrates the theoretical synergies which emerge for the application of framing in life writing research. So far this move has been prevented mostly by the dominant view in Autobiography Studies that life narratives are located "outside the frames sustained by the media networks [...]" (Whitlock 153). The only exception to this rule is found in the case of journalistic memoir. Here, the boundary between the media and the literary market is blurred because non-literary writers, i.e., journalists, engage in life writing. By taking a closer look at the professional roles of journalists and literary writers, however, one finds that memoir takes the shape of journalism even outside the genre of *journalistic memoir*.

Journalistic memoir constitutes a sub-genre of memoir which focuses on the narration of important events related to the life of the journalist (Winslow 34). This highlights that the definition of the genre is not only linked to the personal life of the respective writer but to his profession specifically.[152] Journalistic memoirs flourished in the 20th century during the era of realism. In the United States, so-called "muckraking" accounts by journalists helped reveal social and political ills (Hartsock 144). In the recent period, journalistic memoir has experienced another upswing in the form of war narratives, especially with respect to journalistic autobiographies reporting on the Middle East conflict. As Whitlock in her chapter "Embedded: Memoir and Correspondents" suggests, journalists have thus become "witnesses in the war on terror" (132). The war in Iraq provides the latest example of a violent conflict that caused a major wave of journalistic life narratives (Whitlock 131). Whitlock in this context refers to journalists as "authorized witnesses of the war in Iraq […]" (132).

This notion of journalists as "authorized witnesses" points to the exceptional professional status of journalists as authors of life narratives. Their accounts are commonly assumed to reveal even more "accurate" and "immediate" information than former ways of reporting (Whitlock 133). In addition to the finding that auto-

152 This definition needs to be clearly separated from life narratives by famous personalities who often use the support of journalists, e.g., by means of interviews, to write their autobiographies. Also, the adjective 'journalistic' is sometimes applied to highlight a report-like style of writing in memoir (Winslow 34). Both forms are not journalistic life narratives that are included in the given definition, since the latter requires the journalist as narrator of his/her own biography.

biography as a genre enjoys an exposed status with respect to truthful and authentic narration, this demonstrates that journalistic life writers are characterized by an even larger degree of "discursive authority" (Whitlock 149).[153] On the one hand, this authority is rooted in the ethical self-commitment to truthful reporting (Christians 22-23). On the other hand, journalists, especially in the case of war reporting, act as cultural and social outsiders in foreign countries. Due to their immediate access to foreign events, however, their status equals the one of exiles in ethnic life writing in that they act in "transnational contact zones" (Whitlock 148). Due to this elevated authorial agency, the journalist as memoirist gains additional "moral and ethical accountability" (Whitlock 156). This parallel to ethnic life writing corresponds to the market dynamics of journalistic life narrative. The works usually aim at reaching a domestic audience (Whitlock 143). [154] Here, they circulate as "traveling nonfiction" (Whitlock 148). This again underlines the blurred genre lines between life writing and news reporting, between literary and media discourse.

This practical blending of life narrative and journalism has not brought about an analytical rapprochement between the two fields of literature and media research so far. The discussion of journalistic life narratives in Literary Studies demonstrates this separation once more. Journalists are acknowledged as life writers by literary scholars. Their professional authenticity and the truth of their accounts are presupposed almost self-evidently. Discussions of the fictional nature of life writing here mostly step into the background. Most importantly, however, literary means of interpretation dominate the respective analyses, not media theories which would require interdisciplinary exchange. The British novelist Graham Greene once established a rather sarcastic explanation for this lasting disciplinary demarcation on the basis of the division between fact and fiction: "A petty reason perhaps why novelists more and more try to keep a distance from journalists is that novelists are trying to write the truth and journalists are trying to write fiction" (qtd. in Andrews 261).

153 Critics often see this trend in a negative or even cynical way by claiming that the "war on terror has created a new market for the production of celebrity journalism [...]" (Whitlock 140).

154 This obviously refers to "Western journalists" only, i.e., non-Arabs and non-Muslims narrating their experiences in the Middle East (Whitlock 134). To Whitlock, these accounts therefore still tell "an American story," no matter how close authors get to the respective events abroad (Whitlock 145). This reveals a lasting ethnocentric bias when it comes to the analysis of journalistic life writing at large. American journalists are thus tacitly imagined to be of American, i.e., non-ethnic, descent. The possibility that journalists with mixed ethnic backgrounds engage in war coverage is thus completely ruled out. In the context of the Iraq War, this has led to the critique that narratives are "gendered" and "nationalized" (Whitlcok 142).

Although this comment sheds light on the present state-of-affairs in life writing studies, it does not account for the *structural* similarities between life writing and journalistic writing as non-fiction. The example of journalistic memoirs in addition reveals further commonalities with respect to the *professional roles* of autobiographical writers in media discourse. The following overview systematizes these structural and role-relatd commonalities by connecting the respective terminologies used in the fields of Literary and Media Studies:

- **Autobiographers as journalists, journalists as authors**: *Authors* of autobiographies are producers and receivers of public discourse. As such, they have an equal capacity to establish and alter frames circulating in the public like *journalists*.
- **Autobiographies as media, media as texts**: *Autobiographies* as print *media* share many characteristics with other mass media content, specifically with news media formats. The most important one is their common classification as non-fiction despite their constructed nature as influenced by the practice of framing. Autobiographies thus *mediate* life stories and sometimes also engage in the *mediation* of political or social conflict.
- **Autobiography readers as media consumers, consumers as audience**: Readers of autobiographies buy and consume autobiographical works like they consume other non-fiction media content. Since genre-related expectations steer the cognitive processing of media information, *readers* of life writing as *media consumers* experience the same framing effects.

This systematic overview of the professional roles fulfilled by journalists and by writers of autobiographies allows one to fully uncover the potential which framing as theory of life writing presents. Such a theoretical move goes far beyond the discussion of journalistic life narrative in Literary Studies, although this genre transgression provides additional evidence why the content-based similarities between journalistic and literary writing should ultimately lead to a theoretical synthesis as well. Yet, analyzing texts produced *by journalists* as autobiographies is not the same as treating autobiographies produced by literary writers as *journalistic texts*.[155] This conceptual move allows one to fully explore and comprehend the impact of life writing on mediated discourse. The following table highlights the overlapping functions and effects of framing in life narratives and journalistic writing.

155 The terminology is chosen based on the limited scope of this study that focuses solely on written life narratives and therefore only includes equivalent print media formats.

*Table 1: Functional Comparison of Literary versus Journalistic Framing*

| Role/Object | Literary Sphere | Function | Media Sphere |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Author** | Autobiographer | Reception of surrounding media frames<br>Replication and/or alternation of frames<br>Establishment of new frames | Journalist |
| **Text** | Autobiography | Mediation of frames | Article, news piece |
| **Reader** | Media audience (fiction/non-fiction) | Reception of frames<br>Transformation of frames into public opinion<br>Replication and/or alternation of frames | Media audience (fiction/non-fiction) |

The table demonstrates in how far the role of journalists equals the one of literary writers of autobiography and vice versa when it comes to their potential to frame public discourse. This capacity not only relies on the narrative authority accredited to both groups of writers but also on the particular status their texts occupy as non-fictional works. It is this perception of literary identity narration as "public" discourse which opens up a new angle to the study of literature at large (Somerss 617).

Whitlock in her study on contemporary ethnic life writing makes the striking observation that the "transits of life narrative remain a breaking story [...]" (187). Although she uses this journalistic vocabulary as a figure of speech to emphasize the topicality of life writing research, the previous structural and functional similarities between the literary and journalistic sphere confirm the literal significance of this statement providing the essential preliminaries for reading life writing through the media lens. Yet, the fact that authors of autobiographies can frame public discourse does not mean that the possibilities of framing are limitless. Particular requirements therefore need to be met in order to (re-)frame mediated lives.

## "Who Can Frame?" The Agents of Framing

The possibilities of framing public discourse on the part of journalists are not unlimited and the same holds true for the writer of life narrative. This issue of the framing limits not only points to questions of *how* framing takes place but also to the question of *who* exactly has the means to frame. As communication scholars have revealed, there are specific characteristics which determine the effectiveness of framing on the part of the writer. The issue of "Who Can Frame?" therefore

requires a more specific actor analysis (Druckman 1041). This takes one to related aspects of technique and style which also raises the question of *what* can frame?

Empirical studies agree that framing can only be achieved by so-called "elite actors" (Chong and Druckman 117). Journalists naturally enjoy an elite status in influencing public opinion due to their function as gatekeepers of the news. Outside this journalistic environment, so-called "opinion leaders"[156] represent this elite (McQuail 476). The theory of opinion leadership assumes a two-step flow of communication in which public opinion leaders, who enjoy the trust of other audience members, function as mediators by passing on and evaluating perceived media content. Their status therefore not so much relies on monetary wealth or other material means but on the capacity to impact public opinion based on their social status. Popular examples of opinion leaders are politicians, scientists, and intellectuals (Chong and Druckman 117).

Whenever media theorists enumerate groups of opinion leaders it generally tends to be forgotten, though, that authors of literature also count as significant opinion leaders who have the same – if not a larger variety – of means at their disposal to impact public opinion through their writing.[157] This especially refers to the authors of life narrative. Whitlock emphasizes their special status among intellectuals by stating that the "memoir is traditionally the prerogative of the literate elite" (132). Although this notion of a literate and thus also literary elite itself represents an umbrella category which can include elite actors from various social realms, their status is linked to their intellectual and thus cognitive potential. This finding derived from present-day communication theory reveals a close relation to life writing research as it was put forward by early theorists such as de Man. He already regarded the intellectual contribution of life writers and their focus on fact-telling as

156 The concept of opinion leadership also suggests that audience members who do not count as "leaders" are categorized as "followers" (McQuail 473). This categorization is not static, however, because it is issue-dependent. In addition, some audience members cannot clearly be assigned to any of these two categories, which also points to the fact that the two-step flow of communication underlying the concept of opinion leadership is rather a multi-step process in which different inviduals negotiate between media content and public opinion (McQuail 472-73).

157 Said is usually granted an exceptional position with respect to opinion leadership for he made "no pretense of professional authority" (Shereen 124). As far as Said's belief in the practical value of scientific knowledge and his focus on amateurism are concerned, this finding receives evidence. However, as Said's own life narrative reveals, he was extremely aware of the influence he enjoyed as public intellectual and used this status to underscore his authorial agency (S. Schmidt, "(Re-)Framing as Political Project" 10). The critic Paul Armstrong is therefore convinced that both authority and authenticity constituted core pillars of Said's persona and nurtured his political ideals (98).

crucial for their discursive impact. According to de Man, writers of autobiography "are obsessed by the need to move from cognition to resolution and to action, from speculative to political and legal authority" (174). This summarizes a common understanding of opinion leadership in Media and Life Writing Studies, whereby cognitive capabilities and factual information provide the basis of authority on the part of the writer. This authority in turn accounts for the credibility granted by the audience and ultimately sets the stage for possible framing effects.

This criterion of opinion leadership also points to the enormous importance of the truth criterion again. As was the case for truth as a criterion for the division of different literary genres[158] into fiction and non-fiction, truth in a larger sense also severely influences media framing. Truth here is more strictly defined as the credibility devoted to the source by the audience (Druckman 1042). As experimental research shows, the degree of credibility devoted to the source, which in turn is based on the authority of the author, has an enormous impact on framing. The more credible the source in the eye of the audience, the more likely it is that the audience adopts a particular frame (Druckman 1054).[159] Credibility is specifically linked to the importance of personal experience. Again, this accounts for both realms – journalism and literature. Leila Buck highlights this connection between autobiographical storytelling and reporting: "Personal storytelling is doubly powerful because the skeptic is confronted with not just a real person, but an eyewitness – someone who can say 'not only did this really happen – it happened to me" (22). This again emphasizes the severe importance the aspects of truth and persuasion have in the fields of literature and communication research (Angus 244).

This characteristic of credibility based on personal and professional experience is closely linked to the criterion of analytical distance. This distance can either be created by geographical or cognitive separation from the object studied. The con-

158 Genre is a major criterion determining how media content is cognitively processed by the audience. Different genre expectations thus attract different frames. These frames also impact the subjective gratifications gained from media consumption (Willems qtd. in Dahinden 81; Miall 92; Bortolussi and Dixon 21).

159 In contrast to the vast majority of studies on framing that are based on content analyses in combination with audience surveys, Druckman conducted an experimental study to test the impact of source credibility. It consisted of two groups of university students who were given texts on the topic of government spending on the poor. One text framed the issue as government expenditure issue while the other focused on humanitarianism. The varying degrees of credibility of the two sources severely impacted the adoption of the respective frames on the part of the readers (1047). Experimental research designs are usually very time- and cost-intensive, yet, they have the advantage of revealing causal relationships between variables which other methods lack, since intervening variables can be controlled (Kunczik and Zipfel 23).

cept of location thus becomes linked to knowledge acquisition and distribution, underlining that "knowledge and voice are always located in time and space and social power [...]" (Barker, *Cultural Studies* 485). Location consequently functions on two fronts. With respect to an inward effect of location, inner distance to an object or subject is perceived to aid self-reflection. This inner distance is an effect of the geographic distance to the object or culture studied, whereby additional analytical perspectives emerge. Both aspects are reflected in writing since the "organization of a text in 'spatial' terms reflects a shift of location" (Moore-Gilbert 126). As the debate on native informants in the context of ethnic life writing revealed, "ethnic framing" presents a particular case for the credibility criterion based on geographic distance (Boelhower 137). Here, authority not only refers to cultural insider knowledge but also to geographic[160] location. *Where* the subaltern speaks is thus equally important as *who* the subaltern is. The "authentic insider" of ethnic life narratives therefore combines geographical, analytical, and cultural distance (Vinson 88). This in turn increases the potential of ethnic life narrative to frame.

This list of criteria sheds light on the question of who can frame. Although opinion leadership, authenticity, credibility, and analytical distance are not sufficient criteria to guarantee the impact of framing on the audience, they constitute necessary requirements to achieve this effect. This rather one-sided actor-analysis with a focus on the characteristics of authors, however, should not conceal the fact that the audience as active participant in mediated disourse already impacts the very production process of life narratives. After all, frames are always "chosen with the audience in mind" (Chong and Druckman 117). This applies to journalists in the case of news framing, and it similarly plays a role for authors of life narratives. This audience-orientation on the part of the writer directly points to the means employed to frame lives in autobiography.

## What Can Frame? Framing and Stereotypes of Strategy

[A]utobiography as a medium for revealing the self to an 'other' also transforms the genre into a means for influencing the other through a textual portrayal of the self. Such a view of

160 Said defines geography as "a socially constructed and manifested sense of place [...]" ("Invention, Memory" 180). In addition, geography according to him cannot be separated from ideas of power and domination ("Invention, Memory" 181). Interestingly, constructivist thought here enters the definition in a twofold way since geography itself counts as "constructed" while this construction then gives way to the similarly constructed idea of "place" as a subjective feeling rather than an actual location.

the transformative power of narrative is consistent with the view Hilde Lindemann Nelson[161] proposes in *Damaged Identities: Narrative Repair*. (Vinson 88)

This reflection on the potency of life writing by Pauline Vinson in her exploration of Arab women's autobiographies once more underlines the extra-literary significance of the genre in shaping society at large. Framing and its cognitive underpinnings provide a starting point for grasping the psychological mechanisms accompanying this process. The use of the term "means" in this passage, however, reveals a very specific trajectory. It implies that "influencing the other" is not an arbitrary task, nor is it accidental. Rather, influence implies the idea of intentionality which is achieved via the use of authorial strategy. This significance of strategy becomes the key factor in the transformation of framing into a theory of writing and reading life narratives. As Margaret Somers in this respect remarks, "getting heard requires new theories" (610). "Strategies of Framing" allow for this effect to ultimately (re-)frame lives and also autobiography theory (Chong and Druckman 117).

The use of framing as strategy reverts back to the idea of discourse as intentional and purpose-driven activity to produce meaning (see Chapter 2.1). With respect to framing as explicit discursive strategy in literature, however, no theory has been formulated so far. The only research area which explores framing as strategic device is found in mobilization studies. Framing here constitutes a powerful instrument of activists for mobilization purposes (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 185). It "refers to the interactive, collective ways that movement actors assign meanings to their activities in the conduct of social movement activism" (Buechler qtd. in Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 25). In sum, framing provides the "know-how" for mobilization (Steinberg 849). Frames and their resonance in public discourse thus determine the nature and extent of individual and collective action (Hackett and Zhao 297). In contrast to the notion of framing as manipulation, this strategic function of framing highlights the positive aspect of framing as a means to gain agency (Steinberg 849).[162] Analyses that focus on framing as strategy therefore mostly are found in the context of social and civil rights movements (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 21). Framing here functions in a double sense with social activist framing and media

161 The title of Hilde Lindemann Nelson's work *Damaged Identities: Narrative Repair* underlines the almost therapeutical relationship to identity theory that narration is granted in contemporary life narrative research. Nelson as a philosophy professor has made considerable contributions to the field of bioethics by exploring the construction of narrative identity and its impact on the self and society.

162 This also implies that collective action rather than individual agency is assumed to have the capacity of altering social frames through discourse (Steinberg 857).

framing overlapping.[163] This intertwinement of political mobilization and framing as media strategy can be summarized as "mediated action" (Steinberg 853).

The technique through which framing as mediated action in life narratives becomes a strategy is inherent in the text itself. Life writing simultaneously employs affective and cognitive registers. The personal and often intimate details of individual lives naturally appeal not only to the rational perception of the reader but also to the affective dimension. It is this "emotional and aesthetic value" which impacts how images of the other and images of the self become entangled in the experience of life narratives (Whitlock 200).[164] Emotional depictions evoke vital images in the mind of the reader who becomes sucked up by the strain of events and is thus even more susceptible to adopt the frame he/she is presented with (Coleman 252). Whitlock describes this composite of emotions and events in almost addictive terms: "These lives have the power to pull readers into an aporia of reading and looking: the gap between allegro and lento, when reading and seeing are halted – in a productive pause. Here the wounding implications of image and word in flesh and emotion can make the reader wince, and yet [...] we must continue to read on" (201). Similar effects are achieved by the mass media coverage on highly controversial and often ethical issues such as the death penalty, religious rights, and abortion (Tankard 96).

This potential of life writing as strategic political instrument is usually highlighted with respect to ethnic life narratives and the discourse on cultural difference. Here, the use of framing as strategy supports the function of autobiography to "thematize" (W. Hassan, "Arab-American Autobiography" 10). Other postcolonial scholars even regard this "instrumental use of autobiographical forms for concrete political objectives" as defining criterion of postcolonial writing at large (Moore-Gilbert 128). This well-established acknowledgement of ethnic life writing as strategic, however, brings to light two essential problems which severely limit the study of autobiographical strategy. The first one is a very limited and often mistaken categorization of ethnic life writing as inherently political and thus *strategic* while the bulk of autobiographical writing is treated as rather unpolitical and thus *unstrategic*. The task of exploring strategies of writing therefore is pushed into the background. Not only does this lead to a shortage of analyses on the strategic use of life narrative at large, it also denigrates non-ethnic life writing to the status of the per-

163 Bakalian and Bozorgmehr base their research findings not on literary or documentary research but on interviews conducted with activists (25).

164 Whitlock, based on her critique of autobiography as commodity, labels this emotional dimension of life narrative "politics of affect" (Whitlock 123). To her, this is the result of reiterating certain stereotypical images, such as the one of the *exotic* woman. Her choice of words in this context again underlines how much politics and emotions are intertwined in the analytical approaches of contemporary life writing research.

sonal while only the ethnic seems to be political. The second problem is linked to the definition of strategy in the context of ethnic life writing in a narrower sense. As has already been demonstrated, ethnic life writing scholarship has colonized itself to an extent that counter-discourse seems to be the only answer to postcolonial discursive means. Not only does this distort the concept of discourse, it also limits the enormous strategic potential of life narratives to only one single strategy.

Both problems have so far prevented scholars from unveiling and studying alternative strategies of life writing beyond the realm of ethnic life writing and beyond the realm of counter-discourse. Consequently, framing as based on media and cognitive theory has not been discussed as a strategy for writing and/or reading life narrative so far. Especially the explanatory power of life writing with respect to the cognitive underpinnings of stereotyping demonstrates the potential of framing as a strategy of writing and as a strategy of reading. Framing theory thus strikingly destroys the most powerful myth in postcolonial Autobiography Studies, namely the assumption that the "production of counter-polemics" provides the answer to existing stereotypes (Orfalea 189).

The assumption of counter-discourse as only powerful strategy to change stereotypes thus turns out to be one of the most powerful stereotypes in life writing theory at large. One of the harshest critics of such a narrow-mindedness on the basis of a normative understanding of stereotypes is Homi Bhabha. In *The Location of Culture* one of the chapters bears the revealing title "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism" (95). Bhabha here severely criticizes the normative bias of postcolonial scholarship in the study of stereotypes:

> My reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible (or plausible) through stereotypical discourse. To judge the stereotyped image on the basis of a prior political normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it, which is only possible by engaging with its effectivity [...]. (*Location* 95)

Bhabha in this passage demonstrates a luminous and quite uncommon standpoint by looking at the study of stereotypes beyond common (mis-)conceptualizations. He thereby acknowledges that stereotypes are the results of an ambivalent discourse which is much more complex than the dialectical and "assertive" notion postcolonial scholarship suggests (Said qtd. in Heffernan 21).[165]

165 Bhabha later in the book sketches his well-known idea of the stereotype as "fetish" (*Location* 105). He describes a fetish in similar terms as the concept of metaphor by stating that both replace the actual subjects they describe and provide access to identity (Heffernan 22).

Framing with its focus on cognitive and affective mechanisms of public discourse and stereotyping by far exceeds this simplified and normative model criticized by Bhabha. It provides both writers and analysts of autobiography with the theoretical underpinnings of modern-day public discourse and the distribution of knowledge therein (Tankard 96). Ultimately, this knowledge can help (re-)frame the public stereotype of the "bad Arab" (Orfalea 168). It only does so, however, if framing is employed not only as a strategy of writing autobiography, but also as a strategy of reading it.

## (Re-)Framing as Empirical Theory of Reading Autobiography

As the normative debate on the creation of stereotypes in Cultural Studies reflects, framing as a strategy of writing and reading autobiography requires a mind change away from normativity toward the inclusion of empirical findings from the fields of Media Studies and cognitive science. This also calls for a methodology that combines the analytical advantages of Media and Literary Studies while limiting their weaknesses. Surprisingly, scholars in the fields of Media Studies in this context complain about similar shortcomings as their colleagues in literary study departments. As Justin Lewis polemically remarks, there are only two types of media research; the first one is "literary and speculative" and the second is "political and power oriented" (19). A theory of (re-)framing allows for the literary and the political reading of life narrative while combining these readings with the analytical strengths of empirical Media Studies. This leads to a coherent analytical framework consisting of specific predefined analytical steps and a number of variables to be identified in order to test the explanatory value of the theory.

Such an empirically oriented model of analysis provides a very specific understanding of framing that differs from the conventional use of the term in Literary Studies. Many authors mention framing without ever defining it or without even providing a close-reading analysis of the texts discussed (see Whitlock 139). Gillian Whitlock in her study on Arab and Muslim life writing, for example, uses the term 'frame' throughout her entire work in very different contexts. She speaks of a "rhetorical frame" which is constituted in life narratives and the use of memoir to "alter the frame" (Whitlock 139). Furthermore, a "literary frame" (Whitlock 153) and "frames of reference" are functioning as intertexts (Whitlock 158). This omnipresence of framing vocabulary is not an exception, though. Other authors in autobiography research use the concept with similar frequency. Waïl Hassan, for example, focuses on the historical "frame" in his discussion of Leila Ahmed's memoir ("Arab-American Autobiography" 18) and concludes that the theme of connectedness "frames" her autobiography (W. Hassan, "Arab-American Autobiography"

20). Sidonie Smith[166] and Julia Watson in their study of avant-garde autobiographical art also repetitively employ the concept of the "frame" to explain the narrative set-up of the texts discussed ("Rumpled Bed" 6). In addition, scholars focusing on political functions of autobiographies also favor the term framing to describe the way in which literature can impact public discourse. This particularly applies to scholars working on feminist theory (Whitlock 89).[167]

The acknowledgement of framing as a strategy of writing based on the theoretical elements of framing in Media Studies already eliminates this vague and inflationary use of the concept. Framing as authorial strategy, however, only becomes visible if framing is embraced also as a theory of reading *and* writing. Such a move can account for what scholars in the field of autobiography have been calling for, namely, "one of strategic auto/biographism" to fully grasp "lived experience" ("Discourse in the Theatre" xx). In order to be able to speak of a theory of writing and reading, of production and reception, analysts need to be able to identify the frames interacting in mediated life writing. This requires more than the universal use of framing vocabulary or inductive inferrences without sufficient textual proof. A thorough text analysis is therefore needed that relies on a defined set of variables according to which the existence and effectivity of frames can be identified. Based on the given trajectories of necessary requirements for the existence of framing, the following variables (V) will serve this function in the literary analysis:

- *$V_1$: Claims of Truth and Authenticity* – Since the credibility of the source is a key factor for the successful implementation of frames, authors employing framing as their strategy must underline their authenticity. For authenticity can be linked to several identity traits, e.g., profession, cultural experience, or ethnic identity, all textual or visual[168] references to these characteristics can count as means to achieve credibility on the part of the reader.

166 Sidonie Smith in an interview with the author strongly underlines the rather universal application of the concept of framing in Cultural Studies at large. "Everything can frame," she highlights. According to Smith, autobiographies do not necessarily have a privileged status to achieve this effect in public discourse. The use of framing for the analysis of autobiography certainly does not deny this assumption that any cultural material has the capacity to frame. Still, the specific use of framing as rooted in media theory requires the comparability of different cultural material based on structural similarities such as non-fiction content.

167 The most-frequently cited example in the context of *Orientalist* literature is the use of a frame story told by the narrator Sheherazade in *1001 Arabian Nights* (Whitlock 89).

168 Again, when calling attention to the different cognitive effects by information provided either in visual or textual format, visual material will be recognized if it plays a very

- *$V_2$: Structure/Form* – Frames can be identified on various levels, i.e., on more abstract ideological as well as on more focused issue levels. Higher-level frames can be identified by paying particular attention to the structure and general format of a work. This can include structural elements such as title, chapter divisions, headlines, and subheadlines, as well as individual insertions which interrupt the body of the text (e.g., diary entries, pictures, etc.). All these structural devices can be assumed to create a particular reading scheme which functions as an umbrella frame encompassing several issues on the lower level.
- *$V_3$: Language* – This criterion obviously constitutes an umbrella criterion since all of the afore-mentioned variables also rely on textual evidence linked to the use of language. Language as separate variable, however, seeks to specifically identify the creation of different issue frames. The use of recurring key terms and vocabulary linked to specific issues counts as strongest indicator to prove the existence of these issue frames.[169]
- *$V_4$: Reception* – The final variable seeks to grasp textual frames as they are adopted by the audience. Audience here explicitly includes the realm of "'everyday' readers" and professional audiences, such as literary critics and journalists (Douglas 156). The analysis therefore includes reviews published in literary journals and magazines, as well as newspaper reviews and electronic reviews published on commercial book selling sites, special interest platforms, and bookclubs.[170] This analysis of audience frames also extends to the larger setting of the marketplace. Whenever available, sales data and oth-

dominant role. It nevertheless has to be pointed out that the comparability between visual and print media needs to be assured.

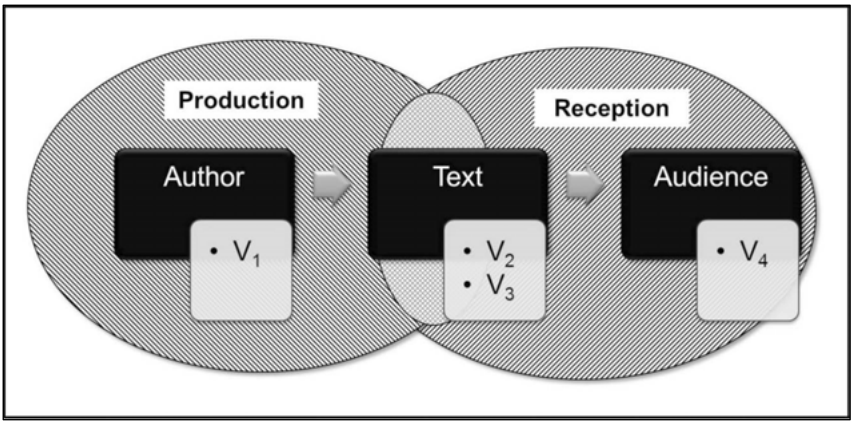
169 Since this vocabulary-based analysis does not equal quantitative content analysis which relies on coding (Scheufele and Scheufele 127), it certainly involves subjective interpretation. While this can count as an inherent weakness of the analysis, it also accounts for its strength since it values literary interpretation as complementary to content analysis in order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of framing mechanisms.

170 As Kate Douglas rightly points out, reviews play an increasingly important role for literary scholars and the publishing industry since they often serve as the only early indicators of how a book is received by the audience. Reviews today are mostly published online, not only by professional reviewers but also by the reading public. Some analysts have started to pay attention to online reviews, among them John Eakin ("Breaking Rules" 118) and Gillian Whitlock (Whitlock 14). Predominantly, however, these authors only provide tentative snapshots of these audience evaluations which therefore do not contribute to a thorough analytical approach to audience studies. So far, there are no coherent studies on online reviews in Autobiographical Studies (Douglas 156).

er commercial indicators, e.g., the marketing of the respective books with respect to particular target audiences, will be included in this variable.

As can be noted, $V_1$ explicitly targets possible gatekeeping efforts by writers to establish a frame (Production). $V_2$ and $V_3$ focus on the text-immanent instruments used to constitute frames (Text). $V_4$ seeks to grasp if and in how far the frames identified in the text are adopted by the readership (Reception). This methodology therefore does assume a causal relationship proceeding from text to audience with textual frames representing the independent variable. This reflects the original intention of this study to reveal the effects of autobiographical writing on public discourse and not the reverse. This logic does not seek to neglect, however, that these effects are "culturally resonant" and therefore likely to become part of authorial frames at a later point (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 19).[171] As the description of the given variables already indicates, certain variables might sometimes be difficult to delineate since means of textual representation often overlap. It is, however, the guideline for the analysis to adhere to this analytical methodology as strictly as possible to identify the dominant[172] frames operating in the chosen autobiographies.

*Graph 2: Reframed Theory of Production and Reception*




171 To a certain extent, these reciprocal effects are already implied in $V_1$ based on the assumption that authenticity claims by the authors are already a reaction to dominant frames circulating in the public.

172 This suggests that the aim of the analysis is not total integrity. The goal is to identify and analyze the establishment and effects of major frames found in the given works. This does not rule out the existence of additional frames functioning in the works which the present analytical model cannot capture.

Ansgar Nünning and Manfred Jahn once stated that the "main advantage of models is that they are unbeatable didactic tools" (qtd. in Schulz 7)**.** The given model of framing as a theory of writing and reading autobiography fulfills this function in several ways. By including the production process and other situational circumstances surrounding the text in the analysis, the scholar is forced to leave the narrow view of the literary sphere to engage in true "discourse studies" (Alasuutari 12). Different from the conventional use of the term, this requires an embracing of the entire "media culture" as the discursive environment of life writing (Alasutaari 9). This environment, in turn, must not be regarded merely as the place of identity politics, but as the place where knowledge is constantly produced and reproduced, framed and reframed. Ultimately, (re-)framing as theory of writing and reading life narrative becomes a "public knowledge project" (Alasutaari 17). This knowledge project must eventually start where stereotypes take their origin; namely, with the media coverage creating the framed Arab.