ALFRED HORNUNG (Ed.)

Obama and Transnational American Studies

American Studies ★ A Monograph Series

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ALFRED HORNUNG

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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I. Transnational Family and Life Writing

AUMA OBAMA

You Are Your Future

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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