POST-POSTMODERN AUTHENTICITY,

ENGAGEMENT AND

RECONSTRUCTION OF VALUES

A COMPARATIVE READING OF DAVE EGGER’S’S A HEARTBREAKING WORK OF STAGGERING GENIUS, ZEITOUN, WHAT IS THE WHAT AND THE CIRCLE

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction......................................................................................................................9

2. Theoretical Framework: Postmodernism and post-postmodernism ................................12
   2.1. Postmodernism...........................................................................................................13
   2.2. Post-postmodernism ..............................................................................................16
       2.2.1 The End of Postmodernism .................................................................................16
       2.2.2 Reconstruction ..................................................................................................21
       2.2.3 Pragmatism .........................................................................................................22
       2.2.4 Renewalism .........................................................................................................24
   2.3. Conclusion ...............................................................................................................26

3. A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius ..................................................................28
   3.1. Introduction ...............................................................................................................28
   3.2. Self-referentiality in the preface ...............................................................................29
   3.3. Self-referentiality in the text ....................................................................................31
   3.4. ‘Pretend it’s fiction’: Post-postmodern fictionality ..................................................33
   3.5. Conclusion ...............................................................................................................34

4. Zeitoun ............................................................................................................................36
   4.1. Introduction ...............................................................................................................36
   4.2. Background: the events of Hurricane Katrina .......................................................37
   4.3. Reality claims ..........................................................................................................38
   4.4. Literary nonfiction ...................................................................................................40
1. Introduction

‘Whatever you do, though, don’t accept any cynicism.’ says Dave Eggers as a part of his argument to encourage young students to be socially engaged. He addressed these students in his interview at Ghent University on the 17\textsuperscript{th} of March, in 2015, when Eggers was awarded the Amnesty International Chair (Bex 17). This chair is awarded every year to someone who has made exceptional contributions to human rights. He received this honour not only for his critical novels but also for his socially engaged projects, especially “Voice of Witness” (Bex 18). This award demonstrates that his engagement as an author is highly valued.

It is remarkable that a writer could receive an award for his contributions to the human rights movement. It demonstrates a contemporary shift in which there is a renewed appreciation for socially engaged authors. Whereas, in postmodernism, many authors emphasized their withdrawal from social and political life. In my research question I assume that Eggers is part of this shift. To understand why Eggers moves beyond postmodernism I will explain the criticism on postmodernism as well as the shift to post-postmodernism in the theoretical framework of the dissertation. Furthermore, in the analyses of the novels of Eggers I will attempt to prove my argument that Eggers tries to move beyond postmodernism. The post-postmodern development was theorized by David Foster Wallace, the influential author of \textit{Infinite Jest}, in his essay ‘\textit{E Unibus Pluram}: Television and US Fiction’ in which he discusses the concept of ‘post-postmodernism’ to address the new trend in literature. Although this terminology already existed it became more prevailing because of Wallace’s essay. The cynicism Eggers addresses in his interview is also criticized by Wallace. He associates cynicism with postmodernism. Contrary to its use in postmodernism however, cynicism has become institutionalized and less critical according to Wallace. Cynicism has become mainstream and even dominates television shows (Wallace 183). Wallace critiques this institutionalization because it interferes with the critical role of cynicism in postmodernism (Wallace 183). Here, ‘postmodern irony’ is more appropriate however because ‘cynicism’ has a negative connotation. Wallace sees post-postmodernism as the new literature that has to acknowledge the postmodern ideas but which has to move beyond them ‘to represent the world constructively, to connect with others’ (McLaughlin 215). Despite the fact that I will problematize some of these statements in the following chapter, the theoretical framework, this article was very influential and
it serves as a useful example of some of the core ideas of post-postmodernism, including its view on its predecessor postmodernism.

‘E Unibus Pluram’ was written in the nineties and was followed by many other critics theorizing the post-postmodern. The changing discourse can be seen in the interview of Eggers and the essay of Wallace but also in many theoretical texts. The scholars I will be examining include Nealon, who wrote ‘Post-postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism’ as a sequel to Jameson’s ‘Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’. Another scholar who is important to Post-postmodernism is Toth because he introduced his concept ‘Renewalism’ in his book ‘The Passing of Postmodernism’. Mary K. Holland focuses more on humanism and uses the term ‘metamodernism’ instead of post-postmodernism. There is no consensus yet on the name nor the exact characteristics of ‘post-postmodernist’ literature. In the theoretical framework I will give a comparison of different terminology such as: late postmodernism, metamodernism and ‘new sincerity’ as well as a more in-depth examination of the shift from postmodernism to post-postmodernism. For now however, I will be using a tentative definition of post-postmodernism. Post-postmodernism is at first an intimidating, academic term. A definition of the word has not yet been included in The Oxford English Dictionary. McLaughlin however, gives an introduction to the concept in ‘The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature’ (212-223). Firstly, I can define post-postmodernism as a movement which began in the late 1980s in the United States (McLaughlin 212). McLaughlin presents Post-postmodernism as a reaction against postmodernism which was deemed inaccessible (212). Sincerity had become impossible in postmodernism and ‘irony’s gone from liberating to enslaving’, McLaughlin quotes Wallace (214). Post-postmodernism however, as the name suggests, does not signify a complete break from postmodernism: it doesn’t reject postmodernism as a whole. Postmodern irony, its self-aware language and the critical deconstructivism are impossible to ignore. The post-postmodern mission is not to reject postmodernism but to move beyond it to explore the possibility of representation again (McLaughlin 215). Huber confirms McLaughlin’s statement when he describes post-postmodernism as: ‘a return to the real’ which ‘looks beyond postmodernism’s constant endeavours to disrupt, to alienate and to subvert’ (6). Other characteristics are realism, sincerity, authenticity and accessibility (Huber 6). This development in contemporary literature is what I will examine in the theoretical framework.

Previously, I concluded that many scholars have published works that theorize the post-postmodern and assert the change in recent literature. Some of the authors I have discussed above,
have been examining literary works as well, for example Huber. In this dissertation, I will be focusing on the literary works of Dave Eggers, an influential, renowned, and engaged American writer and public figure. I will discuss four novels by Eggers: firstly, I will study his autobiography: ‘A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius’. Secondly, I will analyse his two biographies: ‘Zeitoun’ and ‘What is the What’ and lastly his fiction novel The Circle will be examined, a novel that has received much attention for its prescient criticism on social media. Eggers has become an influential author: not only his literature itself is well received but also his various projects like Voice of Witness and his influential magazine McSweeney’s. Post-postmodernism is still a developing subject which makes it interesting to explore the genre. Furthermore, a lot has been written on the books of Eggers but those analyses mostly focus on only one or two works of Eggers. This analysis which combines four books will offer an interesting view on the oeuvre of Eggers. The diversity of his oeuvre makes a post-postmodern reading of his novel especially interesting. In my analysis of these four novels I will focus firstly, on how Eggers moves beyond postmodernism and enables representation in each novel. Secondly, I will argue that a post-postmodern reading of the novels contributes to the understanding of the novels. Post-postmodernism does not only provide a better understanding of each individual novel, it also provides a better understanding of the oeuvre of Eggers as a whole. I will argue that a post-postmodern reading reveals the underlying purpose that each novel has in common: to restore communication and to reconstruct values. To demonstrate my argument I will firstly analyse Eggers’s autobiographical novel: his debut A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius. Secondly I will analyse the biography Zeitoun. Thirdly, I will examine Eggers’s biography What is the What about Deng’s experiences in the Second Sudanese Civil War. Lastly, I will analyse Eggers’s fictional novel The Circle. Before I begin the analysis of the reading material, I must first elaborate on post-postmodernism in the theoretical framework.
2. Theoretical Framework: Postmodernism and post-postmodernism

The novels by Eggers selected for this dissertation share some characteristics with post-postmodernism. It is important to have knowledge of post-postmodernism because it can help understand Eggers’s perspective and purpose in his novels. Postmodernism, as a genre, is very diverse and consequently, difficult to define. One approach to this is, for example, using the plural ‘postmodernisms’ to indicate the different variations (Krijnen 156). Postmodernism is difficult to define because postmodernism by definition deconstructs boundaries, including the boundaries of its own genre. It is postmodernism’s transgression, its tendency to break down all boundaries, that also makes it difficult to argue an end of postmodernism and to move beyond it. That is why many propositions have been made on what follows postmodernism. As it is impossible to look at the entirety of postmodernism and post-postmodernism, I will focus on the most influential characteristics of postmodernism and I will focus on the ways in which post-postmodernism moves beyond postmodernism and the ensuing impasse. Specifically, why postmodern and post-postmodern theorists criticise postmodernism and which alternatives to postmodernism they propose. This will shape the theoretical framework for this analysis of the four novels of Eggers. Central to the framework are firstly the points of criticism so that, when I analyse the novels, I can examine specifically what techniques Eggers uses to solve some of these problems. Secondly, the alternatives offered by other theorists are interesting to examine how Eggers’s writing can be understood as post-postmodernist. The novels engage with this theory and they also offer their own solutions.
2.1. Postmodernism

Postmodernism can be defined as a development that ‘thrives on challenging and deconstructing traditional certainties’ (Krijnen 149). Certainties as truth, reality, identity, history and gender are deconstructed in postmodernism (Krijnen 149). Postmodernism argues that these concepts are not part of absolute truth. Instead they are constructed by language (Krijnen 149). This means that postmodernism argues that language does not represent reality but that it constructs reality (Krijnen 149). In accordance with this view on language, postmodernism argues that Absolute Truth, objective knowledge and representation are constructions (Krijnen 149). As a result of postmodernism’s intent of deconstructing ideas, which were previously certainties, postmodernism has much critical potential (Krijnen 149). This critical potential however, can be driven too far: what if there are no certainties, values or truth left? This would risk an ‘anything goes’ attitude (Krijnen 149). Consequently, postmodernism combines an opportunity for freedom and emancipation with a (moral) vacuum and the feeling of paralysis (Krijnen 150). Post-postmodernism is the reaction that concerns itself with postmodernism’s relativist shift.

When looking at the terminology itself, it is noticeable that ‘postmodernism’ contains the prefix ‘post’ and therefore is derived from modernism. The question remains however, what this ‘post’ implies: a break or continuation with its predecessor? This is a question that also needs answering in context of post-postmodernism. The beginning of postmodernism has been associated with the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust (Krijnen 149). The new technology which made possible the horrors of the Holocaust was celebrated in modernism (Krijnen 149). Modernism’s belief in progress, technology and reason therefore lost its meaning and became problematic after the Holocaust (Krijnen 149). Consequently, postmodernism started in the 1950s as a reaction to and criticism on modernism (Krijnen 152). The philosopher Lyotard argued that the ‘legitimizing master narratives’ are losing their credibility after the Second World War (Butler 13). The nationalist narratives, the idea of race and other myths were problematic after seeing the results of such narratives in the Holocaust and horrors of war. The task of the postmodernist writer becomes resistance against those narratives (Butler 15). Hutcheon emphasizes however that while this beginning of postmodernism is very critical, it criticizes from within and does not yet mark a radical change or break (Poetics of Postmodernism xiii). From its beginning, postmodernism problematized progressive narratives of technology as well as grand narratives of nationalism and religion which
had formed a basis for the start of the Second World War. The dominant techniques to not only criticize these narratives but also to subvert them arose later.

Central to postmodernism’s subversive power is deconstruction. Deconstruction claimed this important role in postmodernism under influence of poststructuralism. Poststructuralism introduced deconstruction as a key characteristic of postmodernism first in the context of language. It is only in the 1970s that postmodernism became associated with poststructuralism (Krijnen 154). Philosophers like Derrida, Barthes and Foucault influenced postmodernism (Krijnen 154). Poststructuralist Derrida asserts that language ‘does not mirror but constitute reality’ (Krijnen 154). The relation between language and its referent, which was considered ‘natural’ before, was revealed as arbitrary in poststructuralism. Language does not refer to an entity in reality but is a system of signs which refer to other signs. This means language itself could carry ideological subtext and therefore language too is problematized by postmodernism (Hutcheon, Poetics of Postmodernism xiii). The problematic nature of language itself also has influence on literature which consists of texts and language. Texts thus also construct reality. As a result in postmodernism literature itself must contest these processes of constructing reality within the texts (McGowan 18). Hence, the important role of deconstruction in postmodern literature.

Deconstruction in postmodernism expands beyond its role in poststructuralism to deconstruct language. Postmodernism deconstructs the grand narratives, the notion of absolute truth, the individual self and history (Hutcheon, Poetics of Postmodernism xiii). Hutcheon presents history, for example, not as an objective study of the past but as a constructed narrative. The study of history changes from an objective study of the past to the study how history is narrativised (Hutcheon, Poetics of Postmodernism xiii). This example portrays how the reflexivity of language is applied to all narratives. Reflexivity can be expressed in the concept of the ‘simulacrum’, formulated by Baudrillard. A simulacrum is ‘a set of signs dedicated exclusively to their recurrence as signs, and no longer their ‘real goal’ at all’ (qtd. in McGowan 18). As a described in above, in language this means that signifiers do not refer to an entity in reality but that a signifier exists in relation and contrast to the other signifiers. The signs in this worldview are generated by capitalism (Butler 114). Baudrillard thus problematizes the presence of capitalism in culture and argues that this presence must be contested on the same cultural platforms (McGowan 18). Postmodern literature therefore has the purpose to unveil these simulacra: the facts which are considered natural are actually only constructions. McGowan (18) indicates how different this vision is from traditional
views on engagement. It is important to note however, that even though postmodernist engagement is different it certainly exists, contrary to accusations of relativism in post-postmodernism.

Lastly, the influence of deconstruction on postmodern literature is important because post-postmodernism will respond with reconstruction. Krijnen defines deconstruction as an attempt ‘to lay bare a text’s inner contradictions in order to show how meanings are contingent textual or linguistic constructions, rather than objective truths’ (Krijnen 154). Postmodernism is aware that language constructs reality. These constructions are underlying ideologies which cannot be avoided in society nor in art (Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* xiii). Hutcheon defines postmodernism as revealing and problematizing these unnoticed ideological ‘subtexts’, which are present in the narratives of history, the individual and especially of language itself (*Poetics of Postmodernism* xiii). Postmodernism deconstructs ‘by leaving overt the contradictions between its self-reflexivity and its historical grounding.’ (Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* xiii). Because of this focus on construction, in postmodern literature, writers reflect on their medium and its mediation of reality. The self-reflexivity is demonstrated by metacommentary: postmodern writing comments on its own mediation and highlights the text’s construction. Instead of trying to represent reality, postmodernism focuses on writing and representation itself: it highlights the text mediation and its differences with reality. Post-postmodernism reacts to this deconstruction with reconstruction: instead of deconstructing values, post-postmodernism will attempt to reconstruct them. Next, I will examine how postmodernism evolved from a critical, subversive genre to be seen as relativism. The two main arguments for this are the institutionalisation of postmodernism and the dominant use of postmodern irony.
2.2. Post-postmodernism

Post-postmodernism is difficult to define because it is still developing. The development can be asserted not only in literature and philosophy but also on a broader level, for example in rising ecological awareness and feminist movements (Krijnen 151). There is no consensus yet on what comes after postmodernism, even the terminology differs from theorist to theorist. The terminology is constructed by scholars to indicate and define different developments. I will be using ‘post-postmodernism’ consistently throughout this dissertation firstly because it remains, despite its cumbersome phrasing, one of the most neutral terms, in contrast to ‘metamodernism’ or ‘new sincerity’. Secondly, the term expresses the intricate relation with its previous developments: similarly to ‘postmodernism’, the prefix ‘post’ implies a change as well as a continuity. This terminology however, makes the two seem clearly defined concepts while, in reality, they are not clearly cut. Rudrum and Stravis for example, agree that ‘post-postmodernism’ as well as ‘late postmodernism’ express to go ‘beyond’ postmodernism but they are also problematic because they imply a chronology (xiv). Studying the relation with postmodernism can be useful however because an outline of post-postmodernism can be sketched when studying its stance on postmodernism.

2.2.1 The End of Postmodernism

Since the late 1980s the death of postmodernism has been announced. Many writers and scholars have been declaring the end of postmodernism. In 1993 for example, David Foster Wallace published his essay ‘E Unibus Pluram’ in which he declared the arrival of post-postmodernism and the end of postmodernism. Secondly, Hutcheon addresses John Frow’s question ‘What was postmodernism?’ in 1990 as an early proclamation of the passing of postmodernism (“Epilogue” 5). These early writers form the beginning of the post-postmodern framework in which Eggers writes. This trend of announcing the end of postmodernism is reflected in academic writing when scholars also began to report the waning of postmodernism. This includes Hassan who stated: ‘we hardly know what postmodernism was’ (Hassan 15). Hassan addresses postmodernism in the past tense to indicate its ending. Hutcheon is another scholar who places postmodernism explicitly in the past by writing that postmodernism ‘may well be a twentieth-century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past.’ (“Epilogue” 5). This proclaimed passing of postmodernism created a void and demand for something new. Post-postmodernism can be seen as an attempt to move beyond this impasse.
On the other hand, post-postmodernism can also be seen as a continuation of postmodernism. The previous scholars portrayed post-postmodernism as the end of postmodernism but there are other critics who see post-postmodernism as a continuation of postmodernism. These scholars argue that postmodernism still lives. To give a voice to this argument Hutcheon refers to Altieri as an example. He published his book ‘Postmodernisms Now’ in which he identifies literary innovations as affiliations of postmodernism (“Epilogue” 10). By constantly evolving postmodernism lives on, argues Altieri (Hutcheon, “Epilogue” 10). This view on post-postmodernism solves the problem of the difficulty to prove the end of postmodernism. As I will discuss later in this chapter, postmodernism has been so radical in deconstructing all boundaries that it is nearly impossible to argue the end, and boundary, of postmodernism. This second view on post-postmodernism as a continuation of postmodernism can be useful to understand The Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius of Eggers because the novel uses some postmodern techniques while the view on post-postmodernism as a new trend will correspond better with his other novels because they divert from postmodern characteristics.

Ultimately, both interpretations are constructions by its writers and categories as ‘post-postmodernism’ or ‘postmodernisms’ are used to give shape to literary innovations. This ‘narrative’ of the death of postmodernism is criticized by Hoberek because it constructs a chronological and hierarchal view on literature while there is no clear division between postmodernism and post-postmodernism (233). Huber also criticizes rigid classification and argues for viewing these developments as a continuum (4). He argues that the narrative of the death of postmodernism and consequently the view of a divide between postmodernism and post-postmodernism, reduces the concept of postmodernism to scepticism, nihilism and its institutionalized form (5). Therefore, Huber argues for a continuity between postmodernism and post-postmodernism (5). Despite this criticism, the announcement of the end of postmodernism dominates the field of study. When analysing the work of Dave Eggers these interpretations of post-postmodernism can offer a framework in which to understand the presence or absence of postmodern characteristics. The presence of postmodern characteristics does not mean Eggers is striving to write a postmodern novel although this facilitates a view of continuity between postmodernism and post-postmodernism. In my analysis of A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius I will argue that Eggers uses some postmodern techniques to move beyond postmodernism, rather than continuing writing postmodernism. To understand why Eggers moves beyond postmodernism I will explain some of
the criticism on postmodernism. These assessments will also offer a background to understand the choices Eggers makes in how he moves beyond postmodernism.

The end of postmodernism and the beginning of post-postmodernism is often linked with historical events. Postmodernism claimed to be the ‘end of history’ because postmodernism seemed to be the end of the line (Timmer 15). Postmodernism had become the norm and deconstruction the dominant mode (Timmer 15). Historical events like the terrorist attacks of 9/11 or the iron curtain brought an end to this idea of ‘the end of history’ (Timmer 15). The beginning of post-postmodernism is sometimes linked to the events of 9/11 because of the traumatic experience (Timmer 15). Postmodern cynicism found no place in these feelings of trauma and loss. Timmer however, argues that these events were not necessary for the end of postmodernism: interpretations of the world were already changing (15). Rudrum and Stravis also point out the danger of simplifying these developments when they are associated with historical events (xix). Authors of the generation of Wallace and Eggers, who were born when postmodernism was already dominant, were already formulating their own ideas, which is why their ideas should not be interpreted in the same, original postmodern framework (Timmer 15). Timmer gives the example of Dave Eggers, who opposed being categorized as postmodern (15). Although Timmer argues that the events of 9/11 were not indispensable to the emergence of post-postmodernism, she acknowledges the importance of the events and its influence on the interpretation of identity and the world (15). Interestingly, Eggers seems influenced by the events of 9/11 as well. His novels Zeitoun and What is the What, for example, both take place after 9/11 and their stories are influenced by the events. The novels examine and critique the response and effects of the attack.

There are two main arguments for the end of postmodernism in this narrative of the death of postmodernism: the first is the institutionalization of postmodernism and the second reason is relativism. The first argument deals with the loss of the subversive force of the genre when postmodernism became institutionalized instead of a marginal genre. The second addresses the development of postmodern irony which was first an important characteristic to facilitate deconstruction but which has become exaggerated and applied to often. Postmodernism is far more critical however, than these points of criticism portray postmodernism to be, as the description of postmodernism in the previous chapter indicates. These arguments against postmodernism therefore criticize the new developments in postmodernism, what it has ‘become’, and not the original ideas and subversive nature of postmodernism (Timmer 13). Post-postmodernism reacts to what
postmodernism has become and not to the original postmodern ideas (Timmer 13). Writers develop their own writing style within post-postmodernism to move beyond postmodernism and the problems identified here. It will be interesting to examine how Eggers deals with these points of criticism on postmodernism and which alternatives he offers.

**Institutionalization of postmodernism**

Firstly, postmodernism is criticized because it has evolved from a subversive genre that sought to deconstruct the dominant ideas and discourse, to become a dominant genre itself (Huber 3). As a result postmodernism contradicts itself: the counterdiscourse has become a discourse or doxa (Hutcheon, “Epilogue” 10). Postmodernism has become institutionalized and its irony and self-reflexivity have become pervasive in popular culture (Huber 4). Postmodernist deconstruction of meaning can have a critical function but it has become dominant (Krijnen 163). Deconstruction has become so pervasive that it has lost its critical function (Krijnen 164). The institutionalization makes postmodernism into what it tried to avoid and what it criticized. Wallace proved this standardization by examining television in the United States: Wallace argued that postmodern ‘irony and rebellion have been absorbed, emptied and redeployed by the televisual establishment they had originally set themselves athwart’ (184). Postmodern rebellion has become a pop-cultural institution (Wallace 184). In other words, postmodernism ended because it lost its critical, subversive power when its characteristic irony and self-reflexivity became the new doxa and lost its critical purpose because it became so pervasive. Postmodernism replaced former discourses and became dominant itself.

**Relativism of postmodernism**

Secondly, postmodernism is criticized because of the relativism that originated because of the generalization of postmodern irony, which I discussed briefly above. The first to criticize postmodernism’s form of criticism were feminists in the 1980s (Hutcheon, “Epilogue” 10). They agreed with the postmodern deconstruction of cultural ideas about the difference between men and women but to them postmodernist deconstruction had reached too far. The concern arose that postmodernism only deconstructed and never constructed or reconstructed anything meaningful (Hutcheon, “Epilogue” 10). As an activist group, they were fighting for their values which postmodernist deconstruction was starting to restrict. Because postmodernism undermines values it
has been criticized because, despite its critical capacity, postmodernism has the danger of becoming nihilistic (Krijnen 165). This nihilism has been criticized by scholars, for example by Ihab Hassan in his work Beyond Postmodernism Hassan addresses the deconstruction of the idea of there being one Truth. To counter this postmodern influence, Hassan argues that there is still truth based on trust instead of transcendence and he condemns the relativism of postmodernism (Hassan 21). Hassan’s main concern with postmodernism is that postmodernism undermines the human tendency to interpret the world meaningfully; postmodernism ignores the human tendency to try to make sense of the world (21). These two essential observations of what postmodernism has the danger of becoming, introduce post-postmodernism and its reaction to postmodernism. Conscious of these faults of postmodernism, post-postmodernism aims to concern itself with truth as well as the emphasis on human emotion of trust and the human tendency to give meaning. Post-postmodernism thus reacts to the accusations of relativism on postmodernism and will attempt to evolve and concern itself with values again.

On the other hand, the end of postmodernism is also contested. Other scholars argue instead that a break with postmodernism is impossible because of its radical insights and lasting influence. Post-postmodern writers like David Foster Wallace draw a clear line between postmodernism and post-postmodernism to identify and characterize the new development while, realistically, the situation is more nuanced. Though useful to characterize post-postmodernism, in reality it is not easy to prove the end of postmodernism because it has lasting influence (Rudrum and Stravis xiv). Postmodernism has made it impossible to move beyond it. Firstly, because postmodernism deconstructs all boundaries, including those of genres, and secondly, because postmodernism’s diversity allows for constant evolution (Huber 4). Instead of presenting the evolution between postmodernism and post-postmodernism as a break, Toth suggests looking at the development as ‘reconfigurations’ of postmodernism (The Passing of Postmodernism 5). He argues that the idea of a break is based on a chronological view which is a construction. When studying the genres there is no clear division. The view of ‘reconfigurations’ allows a more nuanced perspective because it identifies the changes as different to and at the same time as an extension of postmodernism (The Passing of Postmodernism 5). This is a useful view on the evolution between postmodernism and post-postmodernism because it allows for more nuance. The differences between the books of Eggers can all be studied in this framework. It allows for both his more postmodern debut A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius to be studied in the same framework as his biographical
novels like *Zeitoun*. Both present different evolutions of post-postmodernism. Postmodernism thus has continuity in post-postmodernism but key elements are revised.

2.2.2 Reconstruction

A central revision is reconstruction: as opposed to postmodernist deconstruction, post-postmodernism will reconstruct. There is a renewed interest in values, truth and communication (Huber 24). Post-postmodernism acknowledges deconstruction and its claims but aside from exposing values and truth as constructions, post-postmodernism prefers to reconstruct values and strives to find common ground again (Huber 24). The previously established continuing influence of postmodernism expresses itself in the awareness of post-postmodernism of the ‘inaccessibility of the real’ and ‘the impossibility of truth’ (Huber 6). Even though post-postmodernism acknowledges these postmodern insights, it moves beyond them (Huber 6). As stated above, postmodern irony, the subversive power of postmodernism and deconstruction have been blamed to be relativist. A post-postmodern effort emerges in response to this relativism to reconstruct sincerity and values (Huber 24). Wallace announces this new generation of writers in ‘E Unibus Pluram’:

> The next real literary "rebels" in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of "anti-rebels," born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-entendre values. Who treat old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and fatigue. (192 – 193)

Wallace calls for change and a new generation of writers in his essay. He imagines these innovators as ‘anti-rebels’ because they explore values and emotions again. He presents the change between postmodernism and post-postmodernism as the evolution of irony and self-reflexivity to focusing on values and human emotions. Even though Wallace draws too much of a line between postmodernism and post-postmodernism, he offers a clear look on the renewed focus on the reconstruction of values. Even though post-postmodernism is aware of the constructed nature of values and truth, which postmodernism deconstructed, post-postmodernism decides to move beyond it and reconstruct those values as resistance to the possible relativism.
2.2.3 Pragmatism

This combination of respecting postmodern ideas while at the same time trying to move beyond them to focus on values, poses a contradiction. Postmodernism’s deconstruction of values and representation cannot be ignored. Post-postmodernism acknowledges that there is no foundation for truth or values and yet one of post-postmodernism’s missions is to reconstruct those values. How can post-postmodernism reconstruct those values, which were proven to be constructions in postmodernism, without regressing to literary styles from before postmodernism? This can be made possible through pragmatism. Firstly, pragmatism offers an alternative view on language because it focuses on the role of communication. Pragmatism, like postmodernism, denies the possibility of representation of reality in language and literature (Krijnen 147). Postmodernism consequently sees language as the thing that constructs reality and responds with deconstruction and self-reflexivity (Krijnen 147). Pragmatism is different from postmodernism because it sees language as a tool instead: language serves communication, not representation (Krijnen 147). Krijnen defines this communication as ‘the process of constructing and exchanging the meaningful relations through which humans are able to manage the world around them to their own benefit’ (147 – 148). This view on language and communication focuses on the human tendency to make sense of the world which was neglected in postmodernism. The fact that values are a human construction does not indicate that they are meaningless. This interpretation of language is useful to move beyond postmodernism because it does not return to a representational view on language and because it avoids postmodernism’s self-reflexivity (Krijnen 148). Pragmatism therefore enables the reader to understand why post-postmodern authors focus on communication and empathy in their novels. In the analyses of the novels, I will focus on the role of communication and how Eggers enables this communication and empathy.

Secondly, pragmatism presents a different view on values. The pragmatist vision on language extends to its views on morality: morality can be used as a tool (Krijnen 176). Pragmatism acknowledges that morals are constructed but believes in their continuing use as a tool to form connections between people (Krijnen 176). Morals in pragmatism are made possible again and serve as practical guidelines that can be reformulated (Krijnen 176). Pragmatism does not pretend that morals are fixed principles and thus continues postmodernism’s influence on the deconstruction of values while at the same time enabling the reconstruction of values by considering them as a tool for communication. Values are not fixed but are subject to change: values are something humans
develop and adjust according to different situations, cultures and times (Krijnen 176). Morality may not be a universal framework but morality is useful and crucial to communicate with each other. The values that are expressed in language may be constructed but that does not mean that they are meaningless. This effort to renew values and to focus on communication is a crucial characteristic of post-postmodernism. This post-postmodernism concerns itself again with the human tendency to try to make sense of the world. The renewal of values and communication will be expressed in literature as well. In the analysis of the novels of Eggers, I will examine what techniques Eggers uses to communicate with his readers and how he focuses on values and communication within his novels. The reconstruction of values will be an important focus in my analyses of the books.

This new post-postmodern focus on values and communication is expressed in the new genres that become dominant in literature. One of those genres is realism. Post-postmodernism has been described to return to realism (Huber 28). This “return” to realism however, implies a return to modernism or nineteenth century realism which it is not. Similar to nineteenth century realism, there is a renewed endeavour to attempt mimesis but the underlying reason is different. There is a return to realist aesthetics but this does not constitute a renewed belief in representation but rather a belief in the power of communication (Huber 28). In response to postmodern techniques of fragmentation, stream of consciousness and self-reflexivity, which made reading the text more difficult, post-postmodernism focuses on communicating with reader. This focus on communication is part of post-postmodern reaction to postmodern disillusionment (Huber 28). Postmodernism remains influential and makes a return to past traditions impossible. Timmer relates this lasting influence of postmodernism to the generation of post-postmodern writers (11). Post-postmodern writers, like David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers, grew up during the institutionalization of postmodernism (Timmer 12). Postmodernism thus influenced them and as a result they write with a postmodern background (Timmer 11). The writers want to move beyond postmodernism because of its institutionalization which made postmodernism a dominant genre (Timmer 11). Instead, they focus on what it means to be human (Timmer 11). Timmer characterizes the texts of these writers as an ‘empathic expression of feelings and sentiments’ and as having ‘a drive towards intersubjective connection and communication’ (11). This empathy will facilitate communication in novels. Empathy and communication are key elements of the post-postmodernism of Eggers and they serve as an important approach to move beyond postmodernism. Post-postmodern realism is thus not a return to previous realism which believed in representation: it acknowledges
postmodernism’s assertion that true representation is impossible. Instead, this new realism focuses on communication and communicating values.

2.2.4 Renewalism
Toth offers a second framework on post-postmodernism. His view on this return of realist aesthetics is ‘renewalism’, a term he coined (“Introduction” 216). This new realist aesthetic includes a renewed faith in what postmodernism deemed impossible: a belief in truth and representation and thus mimesis (Toth, “Introduction” 216). Toth named this neo-realism ‘renewalism’ because neo-realism implies an association with nineteenth century realism (“Introduction” 216). He avoids this association because he argues that a return to modernism or nineteenth century realism is impossible because of the assertions of postmodernism which claimed that representation and truth are constructions (“Introduction” 216). At the same time, these assertions also make it impossible to move beyond postmodernism because of its lasting influence. This poses a paradox for post-postmodernism: on the one hand it is impossible to move beyond postmodernism while on the other hand a return to previous traditions is also impossible. This contradiction is made possible because of the renewed faith of renewalism: ‘faith in the promise (of mimesis, of communication, etc.) and the impossible possibility of that it will be fulfilled.’ (Toth, *The Passing of Postmodernism* 119).

Renewalism accepts and simultaneously moves beyond postmodernism’s argument that truth is impossible and truth claims are constructions (Toth, *The Passing of Postmodernism* 119). This view illustrates the advantage of considering post-postmodernism as reconfigurations of postmodernism instead of as a rupture with postmodernism, as previously discussed. Renewalism moves beyond postmodernism by embracing ‘the need for such claims while simultaneously demonstrating an awareness of their illusory status.’ (Toth, *The Passing of Postmodernism* 119). Toth describes renewalism as a period of “faith without faith” and of “mimesis without mimesis” (“Introduction” 216). In other words, renewalism is aware of the impossibility of representation and values because of their constructed nature. Even though renewalism is aware of this, it chooses to strive to these ideals anyway. Renewalism strives to reconstruct these ideals because renewalism is aware of the possibility of realism to facilitate communication (Toth, *The Passing of Postmodernism* 77). Realism serves communication instead of true representation: ‘accuracy or “realism” is a vehicle for shared understanding, the best and perhaps only mode of accurate communication.’ (Toth, *The
Passing of Postmodernism 77). Toth interprets this return of realist aesthetics not as a renewed blind faith but as faith in the possibility of communication that realism offers.
2.3. Conclusion

This chapter on postmodernism and post-postmodernism introduced some key elements relevant to this dissertation. Despite the difficulty to define post-postmodernism, it was possible to discern some key characteristics. Firstly, post-postmodernism is aware of the postmodern realisation that there is no foundation for one truth or set of values. However, while respecting those claims, post-postmodernism tries to reconstruct those values. It reconstructs values as truth, faith, morality, solidarity and the possibility of communication. Secondly, this also includes a restored belief or at least effort for mimesis. There is a ‘return to the real’ (Huber 6). This effort for mimesis is expressed in the renewed popularity of realism in fiction but also in non-fiction writing. Huber defines the mimetic texts as texts which lay claim on authenticity and which strive to represent extratextual reality as much as possible (8). Such literature includes non-fiction, new journalism and autobiographies (Huber 8). This non-fiction writing also becomes more popular during post-postmodernism.

Both renewalism and pragmatism offer an understanding of how post-postmodernism can move beyond postmodernism: how post-postmodernism can focus on authenticity and values again without ignoring postmodernism’s problematization of representation and mediation. Even though Huber and Toth differ slightly in their views, they both focus on the importance of communication in post-postmodernism. Both believe, as in postmodernism, that representation is impossible but they call for post-postmodernism to try anyway. Post-postmodernism however, focuses on communication instead of representation. What post-postmodernism communicates are values. Aware of the constructed nature of values, post-postmodernism tries to reconstruct values by discussing them. Both are concerned not with the possibility of representation but with expressing values that make us human. In accordance with this evolution to focus on reconstruction, post-postmodernism reconstructs narratives by focusing on subjective truths. Whereas postmodernism deconstructed grand narratives of history, post-postmodernism returns to representing historical events. Post-postmodernism will narrativize events again but subjectively, not as an objective representation of reality. Post-postmodernism does not return to narrating grand narratives from before postmodernism, instead post-postmodernism tells only subjective truths and narrates individual experiences and perspectives.

Literature plays an essential role in this process of reconstructing values. Whereas the role of postmodern literature was to subvert and challenge the narratives it produces, the role of literature
in post-postmodernism is to reconstruct values. Literature serves as a medium to communicate and reconstruct values. Because of this focus on communication, post-postmodern literature does not return to a literature that tries to represent reality. Post-postmodernism is aware that representation is impossible, even though there is a return to realist aesthetics. Literary fiction is of interest to post-postmodernism because it enables authors to contemplate values again which were deconstructed in postmodernism. Its distance to reality creates freedom for the writer to explore such ideals (Krijnen 187). Fiction is also valuable to this new aim of post-postmodernism to communicate because fiction facilitates empathy (Krijnen 183). Through imagination the ability arises to see the other as complexly as we see ourselves. Even though this is a fictional connection to the other, it has an indispensable moral function (Krijnen 183). In this dissertation I will determine how Egger’s work interacts with these theoretical developments. I will also examine if there is a shift in his oeuvre over time.
3. A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius

3.1. Introduction

The first book which I will discuss is A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius, an autobiography. The cover of the novel reads ‘A memoir based on a true story’. By adding this subtitle, Eggers emphasizes the book’s authenticity and claims to represent his life accurately. Such reality claims stand in contrast with his preface in which Eggers asserts the differences between the book and reality. The story itself deals with the death of the parents of Dave Eggers. The book describes the disease and eventual death of Eggers’s mother and the death of his father. Within a month, Dave Eggers and his siblings are suddenly orphans. Dave receives the responsibility of caring for his younger brother Toph while his older sister Beth continues studying law and his older brother Bill works in Los Angeles. Together, Dave and Toph make a road trip to the West Coast. The descriptions of their drives along the Big Sur and Highway 101 are disrupted with flashbacks which show the hardships faced by Dave and Toph, including their financial difficulties and the judgement from outsiders. The book furthermore describes Dave’s attempt to be featured on MTV’s The Real World and his creation of a magazine Might. Dave and his friends experience some success with the magazine but the book ends with the eventual downfall of the magazine. Furthermore, the suicide attempt of John is described. In the end, Dave leaves San Francisco with his brother Toph to go to New York. Throughout this book, Eggers interrupts his narrative with comments in which he addresses the differences or similarities between the novel and reality. The preface, especially, consists of such commentary.

In my analysis of A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius, I will focus on the self-referentiality of the book. This self-referentiality draws attention to Eggers’s mediation of reality in writing his autobiography. The attention for mediation is characteristic of postmodernism’s problematization of representing reality and the inevitable mediation which makes complete representation impossible. A post-postmodern reading however, reveals the effect of authenticity which is the real purpose of Eggers’s self-referentiality. Eggers’s openness about the changes he has made in his story evokes authenticity and enables him to express his deepest emotions in the novel. Therefore, I will argue that a post-postmodern reading of the self-referentiality in A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius offers a deeper understanding of the novel than a solely postmodern
reading. The post-postmodern reading reveals how self-referentiality is used to move beyond postmodernism by enabling Eggers to represent his life and express his emotions authentically. To demonstrate my argument, I will first focus on the preface which illustrates the self-referentiality of the book. Secondly, I will examine how this self-referentiality is present in the story itself. Lastly, I will demonstrate how Eggers expresses his emotions in the text, focusing specifically on the motif of the car crash scene.

3.2. Self-referentiality in the preface

Eggers uses self-referentiality to reflect on the genre of autobiography. This self-referentiality to his autobiography is present from the first page of the book. Even before the preface begins he adds commentary within his copyright information. For example, he adds a description of himself which is ironic because it is excessively detailed. He describes himself as ‘Height 5’11”; Weight: 170; Eyes: blue; Hair: brown; Hands: chubbier than one would expect; Allergies: only to dander; Place on the sexual-orientation scale, with 1 being perfectly straight, and 10 being perfectly gay:’ (A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius np). To complete this description Eggers adds a scale from 1 to 10 on which he has circled number three. Eggers reflects on the genre of autobiography and the possibility of representation in these statements. Here, he deals with the genre ironically by exaggerating his description of himself and overstating the need to be correct. Eggers furthermore already comments on the mediation in the autobiography by adding a note: ‘this is a work of fiction, only in that in many cases, the author could not remember the exact words said by certain people, and exact descriptions of certain things, so had to fill in gaps as best as he could. Otherwise, all characters and incidents and dialogue are real, are not products of the author's imagination' (A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius np). In this quote, Eggers simultaneously states that the book is a work of fiction while arguing at the same time that it presents reality closely. Presenting the novel as fiction enables Eggers to represent reality creatively without receiving criticism for deviating from reality. Secondly, pointing out the book’s differences and similarities to reality allows for the feeling of authenticity. Therefore, Eggers will use this style with the post-postmodern purpose of moving beyond postmodernism and enabling authentic representation. These notes in the copyright information serve as an introduction to the style of the book. Next, I will develop this argument by examining the preface.
The preface consists of self-referential comments on Eggers’s mediation of reality in his writing. Eggers lists the changes he has made to reality to accommodate his story. For example, he mentions the characters whose names he has changed: ‘The author, though he was loath to do it, had to change a few names, and further disguise these name-changed characters. The primary example is the character named John’ (A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius ix). In this comment Eggers acknowledges the changes he has made. While normally, drawing attention to mediation has the effect of revealing the fictionality of the text, the honesty and openness of these comments also give a sense of authenticity to the text. Eggers avoids problematic expressions like ‘based on a true story’ and instead emphasizes the differences of his story to reality. Smith and Watson explain the authentic effect of Eggers’s self-referential comments on the mediation of his story: ‘By highlighting its rearrangements and masking of experiential history, the narrator asserts the “truth” of his tale.’ (7). Eggers furthermore adds a reality claim to emphasize that, despite this change of names, his story resembles the truth: ‘It should be noted, though, that Meredith’s main scene, in Chapter V, contains no fabrications. You can ask her. She lives in Southern California.’ (A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius x). Despite his reality claim the quote does not succeed in conveying the authenticity of the story because Eggers exaggerates his claim by inviting the reader to contact Meredith. This quote is a good example of the way Eggers plays with the genre of autobiography and the authenticity of the book. Smith and Watson argue similarly that ‘Eggers reproduces and violates its conventions of sincerity.’ by ‘gaming with the self-referentiality of the memoir’ (7). This example thus illustrates two key elements of Eggers’s writing: firstly, Eggers’s self-referential comments on mediation have an effect of authenticity and secondly, the self-referential comments play with the conventions of representation and the genre of autobiography. Eggers’s self-referentiality thus cannot be interpreted solely as a postmodern problematization of representation but rather, in a post-postmodern reading, as a way to enable authenticity.

Subsequently, I will focus on the post-postmodern authenticity and Eggers’s expression of his emotions. As argued above, a post-postmodern reading which focuses on authenticity rather than deconstruction of representation offers a deeper insight in the novel. Eggers himself announces the objective of his self-referential style in the preface:

The gimmickry is simply a device, a defense, to obscure the black, blinding, murderous rage and sorrow at the core of the whole story, which is both too black and blinding to look at – avert…your…eyes! – but nevertheless useful, at least to the author, even in caricatured or
condensed form, because telling as many people as possible about it helps, he thinks, to dilute the pain and bitterness. (Eggers, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius np)

In this quote Eggers makes clear the emotional heart of the story. The book’s self-referentiality serves as a defense mechanism which allows Eggers to express his emotions. The self-referential comments make light of Eggers’s ‘rage and sorrow’ while the reader can read between the lines and feel the authenticity of the words and underlying feelings. His emotions are so extreme that he can only express them in this ‘caricatured or condensed form’: including self-referentiality. The book however also retains authenticity due to Eggers’s openness in his self-referential comments on mediation. As Altes also argues: Eggers’s work ‘rejects postmodern irony in favour of emotionality, sharing and truthful commitment.’ (107). This post-postmodern reading thus reveals the role of self-referentiality as a way to move beyond postmodernism, to represent reality and to express Eggers’s emotions authentically. I will examine how these emotions are expressed with an example of the motif of the car crash but first I will analyse the presence of self-referentiality in the story itself.

3.3. Self-referentiality in the text

Similarly, to the book’s self-referentiality in the preface, the self-referentiality within the story enables authenticity and expression of emotions. The narrator addresses the reader and notes the differences between reality and the story. Firstly, this awareness of mediation allows Eggers to represent reality authentically. For example, the narrator notes, in a list of meals Dave made for his brother, that he did not name the meals: ‘We didn't actually name any of these meals. Would we seem cooler, or somehow less cool, had we done so? I am thinking less cool.’ (Eggers, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius 87). A second example is the graph that the narrator includes in the text when describing Dave and Toph’s new apartment: ‘the best is the back-deck-to-stairway run (fig. 1), which allows, with only a modest running start, one to glide easily thirty feet’ (Eggers, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius 62). In another humorous comment the narrator asserts that he has not changed the name of his landlord: ‘The rest of the floor consists, with occasional musical chairings, of a desk for our landlord, Randy Stickrod (real name), who is a magazine consultant’ (Eggers, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius 169). These comments make the reader aware of the narrator’s mediation of reality. The comments however, also succeed in creating a connection between the narrator and the reader which evokes the authenticity of the
story. The narrator’s self-referentiality when claiming to represent reality actually makes the reader more aware that they are reading a mediated text. Despite this awareness, the connection formed between the narrator and the reader ensures a feeling of authenticity for the reader. The awareness of mediation furthermore makes it possible to claim to represent reality because without it, the book would ignore postmodernism’s realization that unmediated representation is impossible. This style thus can be best understood as a post-postmodern attempt of moving beyond postmodernism.

Secondly, the narrator furthermore uses these disruptions in the narrative as a way to conceal and, at the same time, express his emotions. An example of this occurs at the end of the novel when the narrator finally returns to the death of his mother. The beaches on which he frisbees with Toph remind him of his mother: ‘Even a beach like Black Sands brings her back, how in her last half-year, she would watch from the car. At Toph’s flag football games, Beth and I would sit on the sidelines, cheering, making unkind remarks about the coach.’ (Eggers, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius 429). The scenes complement each other because his mother’s death is paralleled with a positive memory in which she watches her children play on the beach. That memory however, foreshadows her death when Dave realizes she was not waving but asleep in the car: ‘we walked back up, knowing our mother had seen everything, was so proud of us all, watching from above. But when we climbed the dune and were closer to the car it almost looked like she was asleep. She was asleep. Her hands in her lap. She had not waved.’ (Eggers, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius 429 – 430). The memory of her death is so emotional that the narrator disrupts the scene with descriptions of playing on the beach: ‘She was not ready, not even close, was not resolved, resigned, was not ready – And while we’re throwing there’s a naked man walking, I first see him as he walks right past me, between me and the water.’ (Eggers, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius 432). These disruptions create an emotional tension and portray the difficulty Eggers has to write about his mother’s death. When the emotions from her death become too much the narrator explicitly shifts the narrative back to the beach scene: ‘maybe a camera lens, that we haven’t been able to match with its mother and - Oh fuck I was going to say: so Toph’s got this other trick where he catches it normally’ (Eggers, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius 435). The narrator comments explicitly on the text and speaks to the reader when he exclaims ‘Oh fuck I was going to say’. These disruptions illustrate the narrator’s self-referentiality which enables awareness of mediation and at the same time authenticity. This combination allows Eggers to move beyond postmodernism and focus on post-postmodern authenticity and emotions instead.
3.4. ‘Pretend it’s fiction’: Post-postmodern fictionality

Eggers uses fictionality as a way to move beyond postmodernism and its criticism on attempting to represent reality. Eggers combines fictional scenes with reality claims to enable him to write his autobiography. In self-referential comments he asserts both that his novel is fiction and that it closely resembles reality. Eggers writes in the preface for example: ‘For all the author's bluster elsewhere, this is not, actually, a work of pure nonfiction. Many parts have been fictionalized in varying degrees, for various purposes.’ (A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius ix). This quote is furthermore emphasized in the acknowledgements, where Eggers encourages the reader to ‘pretend it’s fiction’ (A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius np). Although a postmodern reading might focus on Eggers’s play with representation and the genre of autobiography, a post-postmodern focus reveals the underlying emotions which Eggers expresses. Eggers’s self-referentiality and fictional scenes allow him to move beyond postmodern relativism to a post-postmodern expression of emotions and sincerity.

A scene which illustrates this argument is Eggers’s imagined car crash. The moment is completely fictionalized and imagined but it offers a symbolic way for Eggers to express his anxieties. From the beginning of the novel the narrator describes Dave and Toph’s drive on highway 1. Instead of describing his mother’s death, the narrator imagines an escape from the moment: ‘He gets up and comes to me as I am sitting in the chair and I take his hand and we go through the window and fly up and over the quickly sketched trees and then to California.’ (A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius 45). Eggers’s imagination offers an escape from describing his mother’s death. This avoidance however, already expresses the depth of his pain. Although their drive along the Big Sur seems realistic, Eggers continues his fictional passage with an imagined car crash. The narrator describes how he imagines the car driving of the cliff and crashing into the sea: ‘we could be driven off the cliff and down into the ocean. But fuck we’d make it, Toph and I , given our cunning, our agility, our presence of mind. Yes, yes. If we collided with a car at sixty miles per hour on Highway 1, we could jump out in time. Yes, Toph and I could do that.’ We’re quick- thinking, this is known, yes, yes.’ (Eggers, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius 55). This scene can be read as symbolizing the death of Eggers’s parents which resulted in a lack of financial and emotional security. The narrator’s imagined survival represents his wish to provide for Toph and himself. In this fragment, Eggers’s self-referentiality and imagination allows him to express
underlying anxieties. This vision returns when he faces emotional difficulties. For example, at the end of the novel, when Dave decides he and Toph will leave San Francisco, he has the same vision while driving along Highway 1: ‘it looks for about twenty yards like we’re going to go straight over, it really does for a few seconds there – and if we did we would be ready, of course, would do the thing where we get out of the car at the same time, one door each, then the timed perfect dives’ (*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* 412 – 413). The fragment expresses Dave’s uncertainty and anxieties for the future while, in the narrative, he pretends to be invincible. This fictionality and self-reflexivity enables Eggers to represent reality unproblematically but, more importantly, allows for his emotional expression which is more important in post-postmodernism.

3.5. Conclusion

In my analysis I focused on self-referentiality in both the preface and the story. I concluded that this self-referentiality has two main purposes: firstly, this attention to the mediation of the novel can be interpreted as postmodern awareness of the impossibility to represent reality objectively. Secondly, a post-postmodern focus reveals the effect of authenticity. This combination allows Eggers to move beyond postmodern relativism to a post-postmodern expression of emotions and sincerity. *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* combines postmodern problematization of representation with a post-postmodern focus on authenticity and emotionality. In a post-postmodern reading, this book illustrates the pragmatist attitude which I described in the theoretical framework: it portrays an awareness of postmodernism’s problematization of representation but decides to move beyond postmodernism’s relativism. Pragmatism is aware of the constructed and arbitrary nature of values. Despite this realization however, pragmatism recognizes the value of authenticity, sincerity and other values. A quote of the book that demonstrates this reading is the narrator’s perspective on the value of hope: ‘Winter begets spring, night ushers in the dawn, and loss sows the seeds of renewal. It is, of course, easy to say these things, just as it is easy to, say, watch a lot of television. But, easy or not, we rely on such sentiment. To do otherwise would be to jump without hope into a black and endless abyss’ (Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* 417). Faced with the death of his mother, Eggers writes this defense of hope. The quote demonstrates the core of the book: a defense of values like love and hope despite the underlying awareness that they are constructed values. I can conclude that a post-postmodern reading of *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* offers a new focus on authenticity and emotions in the novel. This reading revealed the
underlying tensions and emotions which the author expresses as well as tries to conceal. The book’s self-referentiality served as a postmodern awareness of the mediation of reality in writing. However, more importantly, the self-referentiality created authenticity. An analysis of *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* thus benefits from a post-postmodern reading.
4. Zeitoun

4.1. Introduction
The second book The first biography which I will analyse is the biography Zeitoun. Sold as nonfiction, Zeitoun is a story based on real events and the real experiences of Abdulrahman Zeitoun who stayed in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. The novel immediately states it is based on real events and the true story of Kathy and Abdulrahman. Abdulrahman was born in Syria and is an immigrant in the United States. The family lives in New Orleans and owns a house-painting business. When the hurricane is close to making landfall at the end of August, in 2005, Kathy evacuates with their four children and Zeitoun stays behind. Trapped on the roof of his house because of the flood, Zeitoun explores the city in his canoe instead. The novel continues, telling of Zeitoun’s heroic deeds to help others who stayed behind until Zeitoun is captured and accused of looting. Zeitoun experiences the abominable conditions in a make-shift prison at the Greyhound bus station. Here, the disaster of Hurricane Katrina is connected to the consequences of 9/11 and the War on Terror: Zeitoun’s appearance and Syrian background give him a disadvantage. He is called a terrorist and enclosed in a small cell with three others. Zeitoun compares the conditions to Guantanamo: he cannot sleep, there are punishments with teargas and beatings, he can barely eat because he is not allowed to eat pork because of his religion and he is refused contact with the outside world. He succeeds in smuggling a message to Kathy through a priest and she hires a lawyer to free Zeitoun. Even the legal system however, is unhinged because of the panic following the hurricane. After a difficult process Abdulrahman is released. The family is left with the trauma of what happened.

Eggers’s claim of representing reality could be problematic after postmodernism’s problematization of representation and the realization that even language itself constructs narrative and mediates reality. I argue that a post-postmodern reading of Zeitoun, reveals a better understanding of Eggers’s effort to move beyond postmodernism and to represent reality. I will argue that Eggers succeeds in representing reality by presenting it as a subjective reality, experience and truth. By doing this he avoids what postmodernism deemed impossible and problematic: believing in objective representation. From this subjective perspective, Eggers criticizes government responses to Hurricane Katrina and institutional racism which is presented as a remaining effect of
the terrorist attack of 9/11. Underlying his criticism is a reconstruction of values. Because literature lends itself to present subjective perspectives, it is ideally suited to reconstruct values. To demonstrate my argument I will first provide the background of the events of Hurricane Katrina. Subsequently, I discuss the reality claims of the book, including its label of nonfiction. Thirdly, I will examine how this is combined with a subjective perspective and why this is a productive combination. I will interpret this by using the framework of literary nonfiction. This is followed by an analysis of how this combination between subjectivity and reality claims contributes to Eggers’s social engagement and criticism and consequently, the reconstruction of values.

4.2. Background: the events of Hurricane Katrina

After the events of Hurricane Katrina many ‘lesson-learned’ reports were published (Davis and Rough xii). These intend to improve the nation’s response to catastrophes, especially terrorist attacks, because the response was inadequate and unable to deal with the speed at which the catastrophe spread (Davis and Rough xi). The fact that this natural disaster is immediately studied in terms of possible terrorist attacks, exemplifies the dominant position of terrorism in the minds of the United States and its writers. This is reflected in Zeitoun as well.

The United States has often encountered hurricanes but they seldom had the impact of Hurricane Katrina: it was one of the most catastrophic natural disasters on domestic land (Davis and Rough 1). Two extremities caused Hurricane Katrina to be exceptionally damaging. Firstly, the hurricane was such a large storm with tropical storm force reaching 230 miles far. Secondly, the hurricane caused a deluge: New Orleans flooded when the levees failed (Davis and Rough 2). As a result, Hurricane Katrina was one of the most destructive and fatal hurricanes to ever hit the United States: an estimated 1,330 people were killed, 770,000 people were evacuated and around 300,000 homes were destroyed (Davis and Rough 2). In a publication of 2015, those numbers have risen: Siepmann reports 1,800 deaths and the damaging of 800,000 houses (Siepmann 131). New Orleans was most affected (Davis and Rough 2).

The hurricane was first announced on August 23, 2005 by the National Hurricane Center when it was noticed around the Bahamas (Davis and Rough 16). A state of emergency was announced on August 26 when the hurricane turned towards New Orleans (Davis and Rough 16). This resulted in evacuations, the deployment of FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) teams and a call for federal aid (Davis and Rough 16). Hurricane Katrina first made landfall on
August 29. This coincided with the breach of the levees which caused a flash flood warning (Davis and Rough 17). In the days after, the National Guard forces arrived, the Superdome and convention centre were evacuated and military forces were sent in (Davis and Rough 17). By September 10, the reconstruction could begin (Davis and Rough 17). All these facts are correctly presented in Zeitoun, asserting the book’s accuracy and referentiality.

The National Guard, aided by military forces, were in charge of evacuating, rescue missions, security, distributing water and food, medical care, reconstruction and law-enforcement support (Davis and Rough 25). In Zeitoun, these tasks are portrayed as well as the shortcomings of their performances. Especially the law-enforcement support is problematized. The government, military and National Guard have been criticized for their inadequate response and their misconduct. As a criticism on the government response, Neil Smith wrote ‘there is no such thing as a natural disaster’: a controversial statement in light of Hurricane Katrina but it succeeds in drawing attention to the fact that lower-class population was affected more than the middle and upper class (Siepmann 131). Siepmann states it also ‘revealed the deep-rooted racial disparities in the southeastern United States’ (131). Zeitoun offers a personal account to present such criticism.

4.3. Reality claims
Firstly, I will focus on Eggers’s claims to represent reality and how Eggers moves beyond postmodernism’s problematization of representation. I will argue that Eggers emphasizes Zeitoun’s subjective perspective and presents the story as a subjective truth instead of an objective representation. Eggers has done research on the events of hurricane Katrina so that he could offer an accurate background to Zeitoun’s narrative. The exact dates in the narrative all correspond with the official dates which are mentioned above. The book’s descriptions of the amount of damage and the hurricane’s casualties are portrayed correctly. Eggers asserts explicitly that the information presented in the book is based on official sources. Eggers provides a list of sources which he consulted to write this book: he writes ‘the following books and reports were crucial to the writing of Zeitoun’ (Zeitoun 329). Eggers, for example lists the source ‘The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast by Douglas Brinkley’ (Zeitoun 329). He expresses the book’s historical accuracy as well as the authenticity of Zeitoun’s narrative in different ways. I will examine these different methods below.
Firstly, Eggers claims to represent reality by emphasizing that his book is a work of nonfiction in his introductory ‘notes about this book’: ‘This is a work of nonfiction, based primarily on the accounts of Abdulrahman and Kathy Zeitoun (pronounced “Zay-toun”).’ (Zeitoun xiii). This quote demonstrates Eggers’s claim that the book is a nonfiction book. However, the quote also demonstrates that this presented reality is mostly based on Abdulrahman and Kathy’s personal experiences. Eggers states this explicitly in his introduction to the book: ‘This book does not attempt to be an all-encompassing book about New Orleans or Hurricane Katrina. It is only an account of one family’s experiences before and after the storm. It was written with the full participation of the Zeitoun family, and reflects their view of the events.’ (Zeitoun xiii). Eggers’s focus on their personal experiences enables him to represent reality and to move beyond postmodernism. Eggers does not pretend to represent reality objectively, which would be problematic after postmodernism’s realisations, but rather subjectively. A post-postmodern reading helps understand that this emphasis on subjectivity and the authenticity of Zeitoun’s experiences can be understood as a way to move beyond postmodernism. Within this subjective narrative however, Eggers attempts to be historically accurate. He explicitly states this in his ‘notes about this book’: ‘Dates, times, locations, and other facts have been confirmed by independent sources and the historical record. Conversations have been recounted as best as can be remembered by the participants. Some names have been changed.’ (Eggers, Zeitoun xiii). As we can see in this quote, Eggers combines his reality claim with an emphasis on the subjective perspective of Zeitoun. He will tell Zeitoun’s personal truth. He combines the advantages of telling a personal story with the authority of nonfiction. This will enable him to also offer criticism on the real government response and on the racism Zeitoun has faced.

Secondly, Eggers claims to represent reality in his text by referencing real events, dates, photographs and sources. Eggers presents the story as a diary almost by dividing his text by dates. He provides an hour by hour detailed account of Zeitoun’s experience witnessing the hurricane. Eggers also added photographs to further illustrate Zeitoun’s story. The photographs additionally serve as evidence of the accuracy and truthfulness of Eggers’s writing. Some photographs are personal, for example the pictures which depict Zeitoun’s childhood in Syria with his brothers and sisters (Eggers, Zeitoun 91). Other photographs depict Zeitoun’s travels around the world and Zeitoun himself in company of his children (Eggers, Zeitoun 140-141, 143, 197). Each photograph relates to the narrative. For example, when Zeitoun stood at a street corner with his children so his brother Ahmed could see them on a webcam, the text included a picture of the webcam (Eggers,
Zeitoun 150). The photograph proves the accuracy of the narrative. Eggers furthermore included historical photographs such as the photographs depicting the swimming competition in honour of the project of the United Arab Republic (Eggers, Zeitoun 112, 115). These photographs however are also linked explicitly to Zeitoun’s personal life and depict Zeitoun’s brother Mohammed’s swimming career. The book even includes a satellite picture of Zeitoun’s flooded street and home (Eggers, Zeitoun 189). These reality claims, especially the photographs, have two main effects on the reader: firstly, they aim to convince the reader of the book’s accuracy and secondly the photographs encourage the reader to empathise with Zeitoun. An interesting framework for Zeitoun’s combination of a personal narration and a real, historical background is literary nonfiction.

4.4. Literary nonfiction

The genre of literary nonfiction offers a good framework to understand the combination of these reality claims and the label of nonfiction. Two characteristics of literary nonfiction, subjectivity and exemplarity, demonstrate the post-postmodern method of Eggers to move beyond postmodernism. As established in the theoretical framework, representation of reality becomes difficult after postmodernism’s arguments that objective representation is impossible because of mediation and construction of language and writing. These postmodern insights make it impossible to return to earlier forms of realism, like the 19th century realism. Post-postmodernism’s approach to realism, or more broadly to mimesis, is unable to claim to objectively represent reality. A solution to this problem is focusing on subjective truth instead. The genre that Eggers uses for this subjectivity is literary nonfiction. Siepmann argues that Zeitoun is literary nonfiction because the novel combines nonfictional and fictional writing: ‘narrative techniques of fiction can be used to reconstruct the events in New Orleans as they were experienced by eyewitnesses’ (Siepmann 132). According to Siepmann, Eggers uses the techniques of fiction to tell the story of a real event from the perspective of a witness (132). Literary nonfiction is useful for this post-postmodern reading because of its focus on subjectivity and exemplarity, which I will discuss below. Firstly, as discussed above, the book’s subjectivity allows Eggers to attempt to represent reality. Literary nonfiction is both derived from an effort for mimesis and influenced by postmodernism: it holds postmodernism’s rejection of objective representation into account and instead focuses on subjectivity (Siepmann 136). Secondly, exemplarity enables the narrative’s critical engagement. Siepmann argues for example, that Eggers presents Zeitoun’s story and his unfair treatment as influenced by 9/11 and the following War on
Terror and thereby criticizes the government responses and treatment of immigrants: ‘Eggers’s novel uses his case as an example of how the civil rights of Muslim Americans were restricted in the U.S. after the terror attacks if September 11, 2001, and of how their precarious situation increased their vulnerability to crisis and disaster.’ (Siepmann 140). Zeitoun remembers the reaction to 9/11 when he is first arrested, for example: ‘After 9/11, he and Kathy knew that many imaginations had run amok, that the introduction of the idea of “sleeper cells” – groups of would-be terrorists living in the U.S. and waiting, for years or decades, to strike – meant that everyone at their mosque, or the entire mosque itself, might be waiting for instructions from their presumed leaders in the hills of Afghanistan or Pakistan.’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 212 – 213). This criticism will be explained more fully below. Literary nonfiction’s focus on subjectivity and exemplarity will thus offer a better understanding of the novel’s post-postmodern authenticity and engagement.

4.4.1 Subjectivity
This first, crucial element in literary nonfiction is subjectivity, theorized by Peter Bruck (Siepmann 136). Subjectivity ensures that the genre does not return to the 19th century belief in objective representation (Siepmann 136). It also makes a different kind of literary authority possible. In contrast to realism’s authority originating from its argument that it represents reality objectively, literary nonfiction has authority because it represents a subjective truth. Even though literary nonfiction is more subjective, it claims authenticity. Firstly, Zeitoun can claim authenticity because Eggers did background research on the subject of the novel, hurricane Katrina. Secondly, the recounted information can be seen as the authentic experience of the witness Zeitoun: this is a subjective truth of the person who experienced the events (Siepmann 136). A fundamental method of Eggers that enables him to move beyond postmodernism, is thus writing Zeitoun from this subjective perspective.

This subjectivity in Zeitoun is best expressed in the narration. Although the narrator is omniscient, the focalizers are almost constantly either Abdulrahman or Kathy. This focalization enables the reader to identify with the main characters. There is no distancing between the characters and the reader, as there would be in postmodernism. Instead of emphasizing the constructed nature of the text, Zeitoun draws the reader in as close as possible to Zeitoun’s and Kathy’s experience of the events. The portrayal of Zeitoun’s experiences seems unmediated because of the internal focalisation. Moreover, Eggers has been emphasizing the accuracy of this representation since his
introduction to the book. What furthermore makes this narrative about hurricane Katrina more subjective are the flashbacks to Zeitoun’s past. For example, when the narrator describes Zeitoun’s experience in the Camp Greyhound prison when the guards started spraying prisoners with pepperspray, Zeitoun had a flashback to the time when he witnessed elephants in a Lebanese circus as a boy:

Their trainers used large steel hooks to pull the beasts one way or the other, to prod or punish them. (…) Zeitoun thought of the trainers now, how these guards too had been trained to deal with a certain kind of animal. (Eggers “Zeitoun” 234 – 235)

Zeitoun compares the treatment of the elephants by the trainers with the treatment of the prisoners by the guards. He thereby also equates the prisoners to animals. This comparison critiques the unfair and appalling treatment of the prisoners. It critiques how the people in that prison, often there for a minor crime or innocent, are dehumanized and reduced to animals. This comparison and criticism however is only possible as a result of the focalisation of Zeitoun and thus the subjective perspective of the book. This portrays the role of subjectivity in enabling criticism.

4.4.2 Exemplarity

Secondly, literary nonfiction’s exemplarity offers a framework to understand how the novel enables engagement. Exemplarity makes it possible to examine Zeitoun’s traumatic experience and give larger criticism on government responses to hurricane Katrina but also to 9/11. As literary nonfiction, the text looks beyond the event to its effects and ‘cultural representativeness’: it tries to understand (American) culture better through its reactions to a traumatic event (Siepmann 136). Exemplarity can enable the text to move beyond its personal narrative. This means Eggers can critique society, government response and the accompanying racism through his subjective rendering of the events of hurricane Katrina. Information is known about racism in handling prisoners and ‘looters’ during the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. However, while these instances remain only numbers in such researches, in Zeitoun Eggers brings such an instance to life. Zeitoun’s internal focalization helps the reader empathise with him. For example, after his arrest, Zeitoun reproaches himself for underestimating the prejudice against him: ‘How could he not have known that staying in New Orleans, a city under something like martial law, would endanger him?’ (…) ‘He had lost perspective. He had expected too much. He had hoped too much.’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 262). These thoughts offer an insight to the situation that an objective document could not offer.
Not only does exemplarity enable Eggers to give broader criticism despite the subjective narrative, that criticism also depends on Zeitoun’s perspective. It is through the experiences of Zeitoun that Eggers succeeds in criticising problems as racism and government response not only to hurricane Katrina but also 9/11. Such criticism reaches more people precisely because of the subjective narration which allows readers to identify with Zeitoun and put their prejudice aside. What Eggers criticizes specifically and how he does it will be discussed next.

4.5. Social engagement
Throughout the novel the Zeitouns are faced with racism and islamophobia. From the beginning of the novel there are instances of racism. Kathy’s hijab, for example is almost yanked off by a girl and the adolescents curse at her instead (Eggers, Zeitoun 46). These isolated occurrences turn out to be emergences of an underlying institutional racism and islamophobia that becomes more explicit in the chaos and aftermath of the hurricane. Kathy already noted a surge in incidents after the events of 9/11: ‘the frequency of incidents seemed tied, to some extent, to current events, to the general media profile of Muslims that week or month. Certainly after 9/11 it was more fraught than before’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 45). Racism can be defined here as having a disadvantage because of your skin colour or origin: Siepmann describes a text like Zeitoun as a case study of how ‘race and class rendered some people more vulnerable to disaster’ (Siepmann 132). The hurricane Katrina was more disastrous to minorities: ‘Zeitoun emphasizes how certain sociocultural factors made the difference in whether or not the hurricane resulted in a personal disaster.’ (Siepmann 137). Although the book only presents Abdulrahman’s and Kathy’s narrative, their experiences can be interpreted as part of a larger story and a larger problem. The narrative examines the response to 9/11 and hurricane Katrina and the ensuing racism. The criticism examined below demonstrates how the novel can be read as post-postmodern: firstly, as discussed in the theoretical framework, engagement is a characteristic of post-postmodernism as a response to postmodernism’s relativism. Secondly, the examples illustrate how Eggers uses subjectivity to enable him to criticize government responses to 9/11 and hurricane Katrina as well as the cultural racism which influenced these responses. To demonstrate these key arguments, I will examine the book’s criticism.

Firstly, Eggers criticizes racism and the western notion of Syria by placing that idea of Syria in contrast with Zeitoun’s personal memories of his homeland. The opening scene, for example, paints a romantic image of men fishing in Syria (Eggers, Zeitoun 3). The western idea of Syria is also
compared to Zeitoun’s family’s idea of the United States. The fear of Zeitoun’s family in Syria of the living conditions in the United States comes across as ludicrous at first because they present the United States as a third world country. Kathy hears from Abdulrahman’s relatives how misrepresented New Orleans is in the media. (Eggers, Zeitoun 183). They ask her to return to Syria: ‘How can you live in that country? They asked. You need to move back here. Syria is so much safer, they said.’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 183). This view however, is mirrored in the idea of Syria in the United States. Kathy remembers her vacation in Syria and how her stereotypical view on the country was corrected by its reality: ‘She’d had, she later admitted, an antique idea of Syria. She’d pictured deserts, donkeys, and carts – not so many busy, cosmopolitan cities, not so many Mercedes and BMW dealerships lining the highway heading north, not so many women in tight clothes and uncovered hair.’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 192). Attention is also drawn to the role of media which perpetuates this image of Syria as well as this image of the United States: ‘The media consensus was that New Orleans had descended into a “third-world” state. (...) She was reluctant to believe the hyperbolic and racially charged news coverage’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 109). The two presentations of each country mirror each other: both are presented to each other as countries with horrible living conditions and are ultimately wrong and not nuanced. These mirror images furthermore shows that the living conditions for immigrants in the United States differ from the general experience of the ‘first world’ living conditions of the United States. What might sound unimaginable to a privileged reader might be true in the case of Zeitoun. Abdulrahman travelled to settle in the United States because he would be safer there (Eggers, Zeitoun 253). After the disaster, however it turns out Zeitoun is less safe because of his origin and skin tone. This criticism as a result of comparing these two views is only possible as a result of the book’s subjective narration and Zeitoun’s personal story. Therefore, this illustrates Eggers’s use of subjectivity and exemplarity to move beyond postmodernist relativism and focus instead on post-postmodern engagement.

Secondly, Eggers shows Zeitoun’s unfair treatment when he was arrested despite his innocence: he is incarcerated without a proper trial, he is denied his rights (including a phone call) and locked in a cage (Zeitoun 219). Eggers represents this subjectively through the experience of Zeitoun. By doing this, he also succeeds in showing the reader the shortcomings of the government response and demonstrating the influence of the institutional racism on Zeitoun’s unfair treatment. Key to Eggers’s social engagement is that he does not solely critique Zeitoun’s treatment but the underlying islamophobia and racism. One way in which Eggers does this is by showing how Zeitoun’s situation
is not the result of individual mistakes or racism but it is the result of a larger, institutional racism. Zeitoun remarks for example: ‘there was something broken in the country’ (Zeitoun 262). Zeitoun acknowledges that the United States is fallible and he describes himself and his situation as collateral damage: ‘He was a mistake. In the grand scheme of the country’s blind, grasping fight against threats seen and unseen, there would be mistakes made. Innocents would be suspected. Innocents would be imprisoned. He thought of bycatch.’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 263). He is aware of the growing islamophobia after the terrorist attacks of 9/11: ‘Each of the few times he had been pulled over for a traffic violation, he knew the possibility existed that he would be harassed, misunderstood, suspected of shadowy dealings that might bloom in the imagination of any given police officer.’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 212). Abdulrahman blames himself for becoming too comfortable and trusting in the righteousness of the American justice system: ‘He knew better. He had been careful for so many years. He had kept his head low. He had been a model citizen.’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 262). When he is accused of being al Qaeda in Camp Greyhound his fears are confirmed. The fact that his treatment results from an institutional problem and not individual hate becomes more clear at the end of the book when Kathy and Abdulrahman contact some of the guards that he had encountered. All agreed that his treatment had been unfair and that they had made a mistake (Eggers, Zeitoun 306). Abdulrahman’s experience has exemplarity: his personal narrative critiques a larger reality. A post-postmodern reading of this second example focuses on the narrative’s representation and engagement. Both are made possible by the exemplarity of the narrative’s subjective story. The narratives subjectivity enables Eggers to criticize racism.

4.6. Conclusion: The reconstruction of values and the role of literature
As mentioned above, Zeitoun also criticizes the role of the media in constructing false or unnuanced views of Syria and New Orleans after the storm. As shown in the book, the media coverage presented New Orleans after the storm as overrun by looters and criminals. Siepmann argues that survivors of the hurricane were traumatized twice: they were the victim of the hurricane but were also considered criminal (137). Zeitoun criticizes this panicked and biased news coverage. By offering a more detailed and personal look at New Orleans after the storm, the novel makes the reader aware of the incongruities in the news. In contrast to the media, Zeitoun encourages the reader to empathise with Abdulrahman and to take a different point of view. The medium of literature lends itself to the
reconstruction of values because of its ability to narrate a subjective truth while remaining authentic. Literature is able to communicate subjective truths and values that could not be otherwise expressed. Eggers’s call for empathy and humanism is linked to his ability to provide a subjective narrative.

Eggers furthermore presents his values in the character of Zeitoun: he stylizes Zeitoun ‘as a Muslim-American hero in a period of anti-Muslim sentiments.’ (Siepmann 140). Abdulrahman’s polite and dignified behaviour is contrasted with the dehumanizing treatment of the guards in the prison. He is portrayed as a patient, faithful, kind person who helps his neighbours survive in the aftermath of the hurricane. In the end, Abdulrahman ends his story very hopeful, despite his and Kathy’s trauma. The narration switches to present tense and Zeitoun ‘envisions this city and this country not just as it was, but better, far better.’ and ‘if he can picture it, it can be.’ (Eggers, Zeitoun 325). The book ends on a hopeful note and a call not only for the people of New Orleans to start mending their city but also for all readers to start working on a better world.

This reconstruction of values and call for humanism is announced in the dedication of the book: Eggers cites names of Arab Americans and ends with ‘For the people of New Orleans’. He emphasizes their identity as part of the American people while they are often portrayed as outsiders or immigrants. Eggers engages with the problematic government response to hurricane Katrina and criticizes the dehumanization which was a result of the chaos of the hurricane but also of the widespread racism and islamophobia that emerged since 9/11. He criticizes this and calls for more humanism instead. He succeeds in writing about this reality by writing the personal narrative of Zeitoun. Despite this subjective perspective he is enabled to engage with much broader themes. Zeitoun’s narrative can be seen as an expression of this larger situation because of exemplarity. Such a personal narrative can only be expressed in literature. Hence, Eggers’s belief in the role of literature to address these problems and to reconstruct values. He contrasts experience of Zeitoun with the fear inducing media reports, as a result it becomes clear that a subjective narrative can express more truth perhaps than the effort of the news to represent reality objectively.
5. What is the What

5.1. Introduction
The second biography I will analyse is What is the What. A novel about the life of Valentino Achak Deng, a refugee of the Sudanese civil war who is allowed to immigrate to the United States. The novel is based on the real experiences of Deng. His story takes place during the Second Sudanese Civil War from 1983 until 2005. The war arose out of a conflict between North and South Sudan which were unified by the British colonial forces before they withdrew in 1953 (Eggers, What is the What 176). These two regions however, differ greatly in culture, ethnicity and religion. The Second Sudanese Civil War was a result of an ongoing conflict between the North and the South. In the North the Islam was the most dominant religion while the South had been converted to Christianity by the British colonizers. The conflict arose when the North, where the central government was situated, wanted control over the South to install the Sharia. The South responded with an independence movement: the Sudan People’s Liberation Army or ‘the SPLA’. During Deng’s journey however, both forces hurt him: the SPLA which should have stood on the side of South Sudan, drafted child soldiers and fired on innocent people.

In the mid-1980s, Deng’s village Marial Bai is attacked by murahaleen, Sudanese horsemen which were funded by the North. The village is destroyed and Deng loses his mother. Alone, he keeps fleeing. He becomes part of ‘the Lost Boys’, a group of children travelling to Ethiopia in hope of finding refuge. On their journey their lives are threatened by famine and dehydration as well as wild animals. The Lost Boys were furthermore threatened by both sides of the conflict. The forces of the North and the murahaleen would kill the Southern people or take the boys captive to sell them as slaves. The Southern rebel force, the SPLA, was trying to recruit the Lost Boys as soldiers. As part of the Lost Boys he travels from South Sudan to Ethiopia and then to Kenya in hope of finding shelter. At last they arrive in Kakuma, a large and relatively safe refugee camp. In Kakuma, Deng is responsible for some of the Lost Boys and he has the chance to educate himself. Eventually, in cooperation with the Lost Boys Foundation, the United States agrees to accept some of the children. After ten years in Kakuma, Deng receives this opportunity. He was planned to depart on 9/11/2001. Despite the attacks he is allowed to depart after a few days and start his life in the United States. This narrative is combined with Deng’s life at the present in the United States. A robbery is the...
incentive for Deng to begin telling his story. He repeats: ‘if you knew what I have seen’ (*What is the What* 32). Deng tells his entire story of his life in Sudan, Kakuma and his arrival in the United States to a listener. He begins telling his story, for example, to ‘tv boy’ who is guarding him during the break-in (*What is the What* 36). He speaks to someone in the room even though they do not hear him. By doing this, the book consists of multiple, long flashbacks.

In this analysis of *What is the What*, I argue that Eggers moves beyond postmodernism and represents reality by writing the subjective perspective of Deng. By appropriating the voice of Deng he surpasses postmodernism’s problematization of objective representation. As a post-postmodernist, Eggers focuses instead on communicating values. The subjective narration enables him to communicate humanist values and to draw attention to the human rights infringements to people living in Sudan. Eggers furthermore, educates the audience and draws attention to the Western ignorance in relation to this problem. Underlying Eggers’s post-postmodern social engagement, is an effort of Eggers to enable communication and to give a voice to the unheard story of people in Sudan. Firstly, I will discuss the continuing engagement and activism of Eggers as seen in *Voice of Witness*. Secondly, I will illustrate my argument by having a closer look at storytelling in the novel. Lastly, I will analyse the social engagement of Eggers.

### 5.2 Background: Voice of Witness

By writing this novel, Eggers again expresses his social engagement, characteristic of post-postmodernism. He strives to acknowledge and to draw attention to the Second Sudanese Civil War and other violations of human rights. *What is the What* was the first project of Eggers in this context. It constituted the motivation of Eggers to raise more awareness. To expand his influence and voice, Eggers co-founded *Voice of Witness*: an organization that gives a voice to people who would otherwise not be heard (O’Gorman 26). Eggers wants to draw attention to more accounts of experiences like Deng’s story. The foundation has the purpose of raising awareness about social and human rights injustices (O’Gorman 26). In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina and under influence of publishing his book *Zeitoun*, Eggers also organized Voices of the Storm with a similar purpose: to offer a voice to the survivors and their experiences (Siepmann 137). Eggers and Deng furthermore arranged for all the proceeds of *What is the What* to go to The Valentino Achak Deng Foundation: a charity which funds the college education of Deng, the peace and humanitarian relief organizations
in Darfur and the rebuilding of South Sudan and Marial Bai (What is the What 478). These projects are characteristic of Eggers’s post-postmodern engagement. This aim of social engagement of Eggers is also a purpose of this book.

5.3. Preface on representation: autobiography, novel or both?

Postmodernism argued that objective representation is impossible and announcing to do so is consequently problematic. As a result, literature avoided such claims and reflected on its own medium. Post-postmodernism asks if representation is still possible and how? In What is the What Eggers deals with this question. Eggers enables representation by offering a subjective perspective. Eggers combines this subjectivity with reality claims. The authenticity of representation is claimed in different ways. This is announced before the novel itself begins: firstly, in the labels of the novel and secondly in the preface of the novel.

Firstly, the book is simultaneously categorized as an autobiography and a novel. Eggers combines these labels as a method to move beyond postmodernism: by doing this he can freely represent Deng’s subjective reality while maintaining authenticity. The title reads: ‘What is the What The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng A Novel by Dave Eggers’. Eggers thus firstly introduces his narrative as told from a subjective perspective characteristic of autobiography. Secondly, the genre of autobiography also implies that the book is a work of nonfiction: that the narrative is truthful and factual. Lastly, the title also reads ‘novel’ which contradicts the nonfiction element of the genre of autobiographies. A novel indicates fictionality which gives Eggers the freedom to divert from the factual story of Deng. By adding this label Eggers emphasizes the constructed nature of the narrative, as I will discuss in the analysis of the preface as well. This emphasis on the narrative’s construction of reality is characteristic of postmodernism which problematized the mediating effect of language and text. The awareness that Eggers expresses about the novel’s mediation of reality prevents the narrative from becoming what postmodernism problematized: the novel does not pretend to represent reality exactly. At the same time however, Eggers asserts the authenticity and truthfulness of the book. This paradoxical combination illustrates the post-postmodern attitude described by Toth as ‘an attempt to relax the rules’ (The Passing of Postmodernism 123). Eggers expresses awareness of the constructed nature of his novel but chooses to emphasize the truthfulness of the narrative anyway, which would be problematic in postmodernism. Toth sees this effort to renew meaning, communication, truth and mimesis despite
postmodernism’s claims, as a ‘defining characteristic’ of post-postmodernism (Krijnen 188). Eggers chose this combination instead of attempting an objective representation of the Sudanese War because objective representation was deemed impossible in postmodernism and because a subjective narration will enable empathy and communication which is a characteristic objective of post-postmodernism.

Secondly, the preface of the novel furthermore announces the subjectivity of the story as well as the representational accuracy. The preface is a letter addressed to the reader, written by Deng instead of Eggers. In the preface, Deng states that the novel is not an attempt to represent the Second Sudanese Civil War but that it is the presentation of his life and his experiences. He writes: ‘This is simply one man’s story, subjectively told.’ (What is the What np). He emphasizes the subjective nature of the narrative. Despite the focus on the fact that the novel tells a subjective truth, Deng also asserts the accurate representation of the novel: ‘And though it is fictionalized, it should be noted that the world I have known is not so different from the one depicted within these pages.’ (What is the What np). While this sentence argues accurate representation, it also announces the representation as subjective because it states ‘the world I have known’. The book again avoids claims of objective representation by presenting all representation as referencing Deng’s subjective experience. However, because the novel is based on true events it also maintains authenticity. This combination ultimately serves to enable the author, the witness but also the reader to connect despite their sociological and racial status (Yost 149). Eggers represents reality only as the subjective reality of Deng and by doing this he moves beyond the limitations of postmodernism.

The preface furthermore announces the objective of the novel: to inspire communication. This focus on communication is a post-postmodern characteristic, as I concluded in the theoretical framework. Deng states the purpose of this book: ‘to reach out to others to help them understand the atrocities many successive governments of Sudan committed before and during the civil war’ (What is the What np). The sentence introduces Eggers’s vision on literature that can be characterized as post-postmodern: the role of literature is to communicate and not to represent reality objectively. An example of this objective of communication is the map of Eastern Africa included in the preface. This metatextual support enables the reader to envision the story more clearly. It therefore, reinforces the representational accuracy as well as the empathy of the reader. The map also supports the historical information as ‘metatextual historical information’ (Eaglestone 79). Because the book has the objective of educating its audience about the life of Valentino Achak Deng, it consequently,
also aims to educate the reader about the Second Sudanese Civil War. The novel aims to communicate and educate its readers on the situation in Sudan as Deng states in the preface: ‘you will learn about the two and a half million people who have perished in Sudan’s civil war.’ *(What is the What np)*. A second example of Eggers’s use of Deng’s subjective perspective to communicate with the reader is the introduction to the Sudanese War: a character, Dut Majok, explains the historical situation of the war to Deng *(What is the What 176)*. By doing this, Eggers succeeds in offering some background information to the reader while at the same time maintaining the subjective narration of Deng. This demonstrates how Deng’s subjective narrative allows Eggers to communicate with the reader in a way that only literature can: with empathy.

5.4. Storytelling: the Role of the Narrator and the Reader
Firstly, the narration of the novel deals with the relation between narrator and reader because it reads as if Deng is telling his story to the reader. In the preface and in the novel he addresses the reader for example: at the end of the novel for example, he states ‘I speak to you because I cannot help it’ *(Eggers, What is the What 474)*. This complicated relation, introduced in the preface, between the narrative and the readers, between Deng and Eggers and autobiography and novel is best understood by examining the narration in the novel. Whereas an autobiography normally means that the protagonist of the book is also the writer, in *(What is the What)* the protagonist is Deng and the writer is Eggers. The novel is narrated by Deng which means Eggers appropriates his voice. The first person narration is combined with the internal focalization of Deng which encourages the reader to fully empathise with him. At the end of the novel, the reader can feel Deng’s hope for his life in the United States: ‘My chest ached and my head throbbed with the great limitless possibility of the morning, and when it came, the sky was washed white, everything was new, and I hadn’t slept at all.’ *(Eggers, What is the What 472)*. The empathy which the narration evokes is important for communicating with the reader. Eggers cannot claim to accurately portray the Sudanese Civil War but representing Deng’s story is possible. The narration of the novel demonstrates Eggers’s use internal focalisation to communicate with the reader to raise awareness of the Second Sudanese Civil War.

Secondly, there is a theme of storytelling in the novel which expresses the role of literature for post-postmodernism’s purpose of communication. In the narrative, Deng addresses different listeners and tells his story to them in his mind. First Deng addresses ‘tv boy’: ‘TV Boy, I tell you,
this method works.’ (What is the What 36). Next he addresses his Christian neighbours, later Julian, a receptionist at the hospital, and his customers at the gym (What is the What 130, 233, 428). Deng expresses his frustration that people do not listen to his story and do not understand him. When he addresses Julian at the hospital for example, he is frustrated with the miscommunication. Deng feels misunderstood and thinks that the hospital refuses to treat him because they fear he will not pay his fee. He addresses Julian and expresses his frustration: ‘It is six o’clock, Julian. We have been in the waiting room for two hours. The pain in my head has not diminished, but is less sharp than before. I expected help from you, Julian’ (Eggers, What is the What 233). Deng however, only speaks these words to Julian in his mind. His lack of actual communication illustrates his difficulty to tell his story to others. It is only in this novel that Deng succeeds in completely telling his story. The role of literature is thus important to communicate truths. Literature is such an important medium because it facilitates empathy. At the end of the novel, Deng addresses the reader as he had in the preface: ‘I speak to these people, and I speak to you because I cannot help it.’ (What is the What 474). This statement corresponds with his letter at the beginning of the book in which he also calls on the reader to listen to his story. This communication between Deng and the reader is the objective of the novel: to make the reader aware of the atrocities in Sudan. He vows to keep telling his story: ‘I will tell stories to people who will listen and to people who don’t want to listen, to people who seek me out and to those who run.’ (What is the What 475). The statement also problematizes the ignorance of people in the United States, especially the wilful ignorance (Eaglestone 81): ‘How can I pretend that you do not exist? It would be almost as impossible as you pretending that I do not exist.’ (Eggers, What is the What 475). The reader who is addressed, will feel compelled to take action and to become more engaged in matters such as the Sudanese Civil War. This demonstrates the post-postmodern engagement of the text which is possible due to the subjective narration of Deng.

5.5. Criticism and social engagement

Characteristic of Eggers’s post-postmodernism is his social engagement. This social engagement is part of his post-postmodernist attempt to reconstruct values. Underlying his engagement is an endeavour to raise awareness in his readers and an attempt to promote human rights. Above, I already introduced some aspects of Eggers’s social engagement: firstly, the novel of What is the What in its entirety has the objective of giving voice to Deng as a witness and to tell of his
experiences to Western readers. This objective was stated explicitly in the preface. Secondly, Eggers furthermore co-founded the organization of *Voice of Witness*. Thirdly, the reader was explicitly called upon in the preface and in the ending of the novel to act against human rights violations. Lastly, to reconstruct human values Eggers criticizes not only the situation in Sudan but also Deng’s situation in the United States. Through the eyes of Deng he shows the reader the mistreatments Deng faces in both countries. This engagement demonstrates Eggers’s post-postmodern attempt at representation as well as reconstructing values.

5.1 Human Rights Violations in Sudan

Firstly, Eggers criticizes the atrocities and human rights violations in the Second Sudanese Civil War. The novel shows these conditions to the reader through the perspective of Deng. This is post-postmodernism’s subjectivity which was discussed above. An example of such criticism is the moment in which the Lost Boys are forced to move on their first night out of the desert, before they reach Ethiopia. The boys are treated inhumanely: they are violently chased out of the little village and they are denied water or food while starving because the soldiers want to make place for ‘important people’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 204). The soldiers who were supposed to protect the Sudanese, dehumanize the Lost Boys. This is demonstrated by the fact that the soldiers call the boys insects: ‘Move. Get these mosquitoes out of our way. (…) Get out of here, you insects!’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 204 – 205). As a result, they have to sleep in ankle deep mud. By showing this mistreatment Eggers makes the reader aware of the situation in Sudan.

The Lost Boys are again denied better living conditions in Ethiopia. Deng’s arrival in Ethiopia is tragic because of his disappointment when he arrives. The place, which was his hope for refuge and better treatment, is the same as Sudan: ‘It looked exactly like the other side of the river, the side that was Sudan, the side we left. There were no medical facilities. No food. No water for drinking. – This is not that place, I said.’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 207). Their arrival makes clear that there is no real refuge or ideal country which they had hoped for: ‘The walk to Ethiopia, Julian, was only the beginning.’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 233). In scenes like these, Eggers makes the reader aware of the living conditions in countries like Sudan and the novel defends and reconstructs human values. The subjective narration of the novel allows for the reader to empathise with Deng and consequently, feel more engaged.
5.2 Disillusionment in the United States

Secondly, Eggers makes the reader aware of and criticizes Deng’s treatment in the United States. Deng projects his expectations of Ethiopia on the United States. A motif that illustrates this is Deng’s image of ‘bowls of bright oranges’. He first imagines that these would be waiting for him in Ethiopia: ‘my expectations had come to include homes for each of us, new families, tall buildings, glass, waterfalls, bowls of bright oranges set upon clean tables.’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 233). Deng is disappointed when he reaches Ethiopia because it does not differ from Sudan, as described above, he states: ‘This is not that place’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 233). When they are chased out of Ethiopia and have to walk to Kenya, Deng has lost his expectations: ‘I had no dreams of bowls of oranges. I knew that the world was the same everywhere, that there were only inconsequential variations between the suffering in one place and another.’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 314). His dejection is remedied in Kakuma and when he is allowed to immigrate to the United States, he projects these ideals on the United States instead: ‘America, in its way would provide a home for us: glass, waterfalls, bowls of bright oranges set upon clean tables.’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 469). Deng again imagines ‘bowls of bright oranges’ waiting for him in the United States. In both instances, Deng wishes for a home. The oranges, glass and waterfalls symbolize a peaceful home for Deng. The comparison of these two citations makes clear that there is an undeniable parallel and the disappointment of Deng in Ethiopia will also be paralleled in his disillusionment in the United States. His disillusionment of the United States is announced at the beginning of the novel when Deng states: ‘I am tired of the promises [of this country].’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 13). The promises mentioned, include the ideal of the American Dream, perpetuated by the United States itself, as well as Deng’s own expectations.

He expects the opportunities which the United States promotes: ‘I was sure I would have my degree in short order, and would then move on to an advanced degree in international studies, a job in Washington. I would meet a Sudanese girl there and she would be a student in America, too, and we would court and marry and form a family, a simple family of three children and unconditional love.’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 469). In reality, he still lives with Achor Achor, he does not succeed in entering college and he is not earning enough to support himself. After the burglary at the beginning of the novel, he continues to be denied his rights: the police does not help him and the hospital first refuses to treat his wounds (Eggers, *What is the What* 218, 233). A major case of his disillusionment is the death of Tabitha: the girl he loves is stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend...
(Eggers, *What is the What* 320). His dream of starting a family seems lost as well. He addresses her and continues telling of his experiences in the Sudanese War: ‘Tabitha, I will love you until I see you again.’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 322). Deng feels as if he is doomed to misfortune: “‘God has a problem with me,” I told Bobby’ (Eggers, *What is the What* 321). The suffering he hoped to leave behind in Kakuma has followed him to the United States. Eggers thus not only criticizes the human rights violations in Sudan but also the disillusionment and treatment of Deng in the United States. By doing this Eggers avoids implying a superior position of the United States by criticizing Deng’s situation in the United States as well (Yost 158). Eggers’s post-postmodern reconstruction of values thus goes beyond the borders of Sudan in this novel. The United States also has a need for criticism and the renewal of values.

5.6. Conclusion: The reconstruction of values and the role of literature

To conclude, Eggers succeeds in moving beyond postmodernism’s problematization of objective representation by telling the subjective truth of Deng’s experiences instead. Eggers criticizes both the human rights violations in Sudan and Deng’s treatment in the United States. The narrator of the novel addresses the reader and calls for awareness and action. Underlying this criticism is his defence of values. Eggers surpasses postmodernism’s relativism and reconstructs values.

Eggers’s call for awareness and his chosen medium of the novel are key to his post-postmodern engagement. His solution to aid Deng corresponds with the fundamental goal of post-postmodernism: communication. The novel offers a solution: the readers must listen to Deng’s story and educate themselves so that they might understand others better. The novel begins and concludes with a call to readers to listen to his story: ‘I will tell stories to people who will listen and to people who don’t want to listen, to people who seek me out and to those who run.’ (*What is the What* 475). Literature takes a central role in post-postmodernism’s aim of communication.

The values reconstructed in *What is the What* arise from Eggers’s engagement and criticism on human rights violations. Eggers’s engagement demonstrates post-postmodernism’s focus on literature as a means to raise awareness and consequently, to reconstruct values. *What is the What* demonstrates that, whereas, in postmodernism literature itself was problematized and became self-referential, in post-postmodernism literature is rediscovered as a medium that can facilitate change and the reconstruction of values.
6. *The Circle*

6.1. Introduction
The last novel which I will analyse is *The Circle*. In *The Circle*, Eggers takes a different approach in comparison to the previous books analysed: instead of emphasizing accurate representation, Eggers wrote a fictional novel. There are clear references to reality, however, especially to the popularity of social media and its dangers in contemporary society. Mae is the protagonist who has been newly hired in The Circle thanks to the influence of her friend Annie who has a high position in the company. Mae works in Customer Experience but her social activity online and at events is equally important to the company. The Circle is an internet company specialised in social media. The Circle compromises all functions of social media in its first innovative idea: ‘TruYou’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 21). This was an invention of Ty Gospodinov, the first of the leaders of the company: the Three Wise Men. ‘TruYou’ connects each person with one online account and thus makes it impossible to be anonymous online: ‘one account, one identity, one password, one payment system, per person’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 21). There is no more need for multiple accounts on different websites: email, social media and even the user’s bank account is connected. By inventing this, the Circle makes other social media sites unnecessary: the Circle ‘subsumed Facebook, Twitter, Google, and finally Alacrity, Zoopa, Jefe, and Quan.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 23). This first invention marks the beginning of the Circle’s goal of transparency. Bailey expresses his belief in transparency which serves: ‘documentation and accountability, and we need to bear witness. And to this end, I insist that all that happens should be known.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 67). This goal to have knowledge of everything is the purpose of Bailey, the second of the Three Wise Men. Stenton is the last of the Three Wise Men and he is responsible for monetizing Ty’s invention. Throughout the novel, the reader witnesses the dangers of the Circle’s ideas and its effects on Mae. Mae is fully convinced by the system of surveillance and she is not critical of it. By the end of the novel, she has lost her loved ones and continues happily supporting the Circle.

I will argue that the Circle can be read as a post-postmodernist novel: firstly, because of its social engagement in criticising the dehumanizing effect of social media and secondly, because of the novel’s defence and reconstruction of humanist values. These values include privacy, freedom, empathy, kindness and communication. Communication is especially important because I
previously, in the theoretical framework, discussed communication as the post-postmodernist aim to move beyond postmodernism. In this novel, Eggers shows why communication is so important: for humanism. To demonstrate my argument I will first discuss the role of representation in the genre of dystopia. Subsequently, I examine the novel’s problematization of contemporary issues of social media and data collection as Eggers’ post-postmodern engagement. Secondly, I will examine how Eggers criticizes and engages with the concept of panopticon to understand the surveillance in the novel and how this influences the subjugation of Mae. Thirdly, I will argue that Eggers’ humanism is expressed in his problematization of the dehumanizing effect of social media. Lastly, I will argue that the novel fulfills the post-postmodern aim of reconstructing values.

6.2. Dystopia

In The Circle, Eggers criticises contemporary social media and data collection not with postmodern techniques of fragmentation but by writing a dystopian novel. The novel warns the readers of the dangers of social media: its effects on politics, privacy, freedom and communication. Eggers succeeds in referencing reality while avoiding postmodernism’s problematization of objective representation. The dystopia furthermore fulfils the post-postmodern aim of engagement and the reconstruction of values because Eggers uses the genre to criticise technological surveillance and to defend humanist values. The Circle lends itself to comparisons to classic dystopian novels, like 1984 by George Orwell and Brave New World by Aldous Huxley, because of the pervasive theme of surveillance. Pignagnoli for example describes the Circle’s intentions as ‘in plain Orwellian fashion, the Circle supposedly works to make the world a better place.’ (151). Although the similarities with 1984 are undeniable, there is an important difference: whereas, in 1984, the surveillance was done by the government, in The Circle surveillance and privacy is privatised. Secondly, McManus compares The Circle with Brave New World, rather than 1984, because of the focus they have in common on extreme sociability: ‘Total sociability is one thread binding Brave New World and The Circle, and distinguishing the category of dystopian fiction to which they belong from other texts of the genre.’ (84). Characteristic of The Circle are thus the themes of surveillance and communication. Before I explore these topics, as panopticon and the value of communication, I will first examine how The Circle can be defined as a dystopia.

Firstly, The Circle can be analysed as a dystopia which enables Eggers’ post-postmodern engagement. The Circle first presents itself as a utopia: it is an ‘imaginary ideal society that dreams
of a world in which the social, political and economic problems of the real present have been solved.’ (Booker 127). The Circle aims to solve problems like crime, corruption and violence with ‘transparency’: ‘if we all, as a society, decide that this is behavior we’d rather not engage in, the fact that everyone knows, or has the power to know who’s doing it, this would prevent the behavior from being engaged in. This is just as you said – you wouldn’t have stolen if you knew you were being watched.’ (Eggers, The Circle 288). Transparency thus means complete surveillance by installing cameras as well as collecting all online activity. The Circle however becomes a dystopia: ‘an imagined world in which the dream has become a nightmare’ (Booker 127). Throughout the novel the ‘closing’ of the Circle is announced: the moment of completion and total transparency. One way in which transparency is expanded and consequently becomes problematic, is in democracy: the Circle wants their users to be registered to vote through their account with the good intention of encouraging more people to vote (Eggers, The Circle 385). It is Mae however, who takes it a step further: ‘So why not require every voting-age citizen to have a Circle account?’ (Eggers, The Circle 388). What seems an improvement of democracy actually dismantles the democratic institution: by enabling polls ‘It might even eliminate Congress. If we can know the will of the people at any time, without filter, without misinterpretation or bastardization, wouldn’t it eliminate much of Washington?’ (Eggers, The Circle 391 -392). Immediately, this idea receives criticism: ‘There seemed to be one particular zing with heat, something about how all this could or would lead to totalitarianism.’ (Eggers, The Circle 393). Mae however, disregards this problematization, even when Ty warns her for its dangers: ‘once it's mandatory to have an account, and once all government services are channelled through the Circle, you'll have helped create the world's first tyrannical monopoly.’ (Eggers, The Circle 401). The Circle presents the dystopia as a totalitarian surveillance state in which there is no freedom or anonymity.

An example of the post-postmodern engagement is the novel’s warning of the implications of surveillance on politics and its effects on democracy. Eggers uses the book’s fictionality to critique contemporary issues of privacy in a time of dominant social media. Although many dystopias have been written about similar issues, Eggers’s novel is different because he makes clear references to reality and specific issues. For example, to the stressful effect of ‘likes’ on Facebook and Instagram which correspond to the Circle’s ‘zings’. The Circle seems dangerous mostly because the company knows no boundaries and does not accept criticism. Its power goes beyond that of a normal social media company. This is made clear in a speech of senator Williamson: ‘We believe
that the Justice Department will see the Circle for what it is, a monopoly in its purest sense, and move to break it up, just as they did with Standard Oil, AT&T and every other demonstrated monopoly in our history. The dominance of the Circle stifles competition and is dangerous to our way of free-market capitalism.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 173). The senator wants to break up the Circle to limit its power and monopoly. Coincidentally, Williamson has a scandal not long after her speech: ‘Williamson. You didn’t hear? She got busted for all kinds of weird stuff. She’s under investigation for a half-dozen things, all kinds of ethical violations. They found everything on her computer, a hundred weird searches, downloads – some very creepy stuff.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 206). At the moment of the defamation of senator Williamson it is not confirmed to be the Circle’s doing. The reader’s suspicion is confirmed however, at the end of the novel when Ty admits to Mae that the Circle was responsible for this: ‘What do you think happened to Williamson? Remember her? She threatens the Circle monopoly and, surprise, the feds find incriminating stuff on her computer. You think that’s coincidence? That’s about the hundredth person Stenton’s done that to.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 483). In response to Williamson’s scandal, the Circle expands its project for transparency: ‘there’s another area of public life where we want and expect transparency, and that’s democracy.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 205). Under the pressure of the Circle, other politicians decide to go ‘transparent’: senator Santos, for example, decides to film every aspect of her day so she can hold no secrets from her voters (Eggers, *The Circle* 209). The purpose of this is to end corruption but at the same time it makes politicians unable to criticise the Circle or to opt out.

This criticism on social media’s influence on democracy is mirrored in the novel’s criticism on the influence of social media on individuals. The evolution to transparency in politics is parallel with Mae’s evolution: the defamation of senator Williamson and following political developments are paralleled and reflected in Mae’s development to transparency. Firstly, in the same scene as the defamation of senator Williamson, Mae is worried about her own information in the cloud. The week before Francis had filmed their sexual activities without her consent and because of the Circle’s policy of collecting knowledge that video can be found in the cloud: ‘The video hadn’t been viewed by anyone else, but if it was on his phone, it was in the Circle cloud, and accessible to anyone.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 204). Annie reassures her that no one will ever see the video: ‘You know that. Ninety-nine percent of the stuff in the cloud is never seen by anyone.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 204 – 205). In the same scene however, senator Williamson is defamed by using information on her computer and online activity. It becomes clear to the reader that this reassurance is an empty
promise. Consequently, the reader realizes if Mae criticized the Circle she could receive the same treatment and the video could be released publicly. Mae however, does not realize this and instead she continues supporting the Circle. In the end, she goes transparent, similarly to senator Santos, and she contributes to the completion of the Circle. Characteristic of Eggers’ post-postmodernism, the novel thus also criticizes the Circle on a subjective and individual level.

The dystopia in *The Circle* does differ from traditional dystopias in two ways: firstly, its subjects participate willingly and happily which furthermore means that they help create the regime (McManus 84): Mercer criticises this in a letter: ‘You and your ilk will live, willingly, joyfully, under constant surveillance’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 367). The ‘Circlers’ have been convinced that this surveillance is positive: ‘*The Circle* transforms America into a totalitarian surveillance state with everyone’s blessing.’ (Pignagnoli 152). I will argue however that Mae does not participates completely willingly but rather that she has lost her individual will: ‘And here Mae again had the feeling that she was a very short-sighted person, who repeatedly jeopardized all she’d been given by the Circle.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 281). In this scene Mae has been convinced by Bailey to go transparent. Mae does not seems happy about this but rather brainwashed by Bailey and the company’s ideology. Secondly, *The Circle* differs from traditional dystopia because ‘the questioning—or ‘counter-narrative of resistance’—comes most powerfully (which is to say, not very) from those outside of or marginal to the dystopian sphere.’ (McManus 88). Whereas normally, Mae would be the centre of resistance as the protagonist, in *The Circle*, she is subjugated and the resistance comes from outside the Circle instead and has no resonance within. Above I discussed both Ty’s warning of the completion of transparency and Mercer’s criticism on the lack of real communication for example. I can conclude that the genre of dystopia enables Eggers’ post-postmodern engagement because it makes possible a criticism on contemporary social media in a fictional setting. Attempting this level of criticism while claiming to represent reality would not be possible because of postmodernism’s problematization of claiming such big truths. Next I will discuss how the Circle’s surveillance can be understood as panopticon and what the effects are on Mae.

6.3. Panopticon

Previously, I concluded that Eggers uses the genre of dystopia to be socially engaged, as is characteristic of post-postmodernism. The novel criticises the effects of social media and presents
the Circle as a totalitarian surveillance state. The surveillance in the Circle creates a panopticon. Before I analyse the dehumanizing effect of the panopticon which prevents post-postmodernisms reconstruction of humanist values, I will first define panopticon and how it is installed in the Circle.

Panopticon is a concept introduced in 1791 by Bentham in his design of a prison (Caluya 622). This term was later used and made famous by Foucault in his discussion of power ‘as an exemplar of the shift in mechanisms of social control.’ (Caluya 622). Bentham designed a prison in which the cells of the inmates were built, circling around the guard’s tower. The cells have ‘a window facing out of the building and another facing the tower such that the backlighting effect would allow anyone within the tower to see all inmates. On the other hand, the tower was designed in such a way that one could not tell whether it was occupied.’ (Caluya 622). Foucault examined this idea in his study on power *Discipline and Punish*: he concluded that the effect of the Panopticon was ‘to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power’ (Foucault 201). The power becomes automatic because the inmate does not know when he is being watched and therefore has the consciousness of being watched all the time. Caluya states that the result of the panopticon ‘was the internalisation or interiorisation of the watchtower’s gaze, such that the prisoner became his own overseer.’ (624 – 625). The effect of this surveillance structure is that the prisoner is not only imprisoned but, because he is ‘subjected to a field of visibility’, ‘he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.’ (Foucault 202-203). In other words, the prisoners visibility has an effect on his mind as well. As a result, the inmate is not only imprisoned but also mentally subjugated. I will argue that this is the case with Mae as well. Before Mae’s subjugation is examined, I will first examine how the panopticon manifests itself in the Circle.

Secondly, I will analyse how the concept of panopticon can offer a framework to understand the surveillance of the Circle. The prison designed by Bentham was an example of a power structure to Foucault. The panopticon therefore can offer a framework for many power structures, like the Circle in the novel or the influence of social media on society in general. Firstly, the setting, the campus of the company, evokes the concept of panopticon because of its glass walls and consequently, the visibility of everyone. This can be seen in the description of ‘the glass eatery’: ‘designed such that diners ate at nine different levels, all the floors and walls glass.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 15). The real panopticon however, is not found in the architecture of the buildings but in the collection of data through social media, cameras and all online activity. Throughout the novel, the company invents
new technology of surveillance, for example ‘ChildTrack’ which implants a tracker in children to prevent kidnapping (Eggers, *The Circle* 86). One of the most important projects which strives to make transparency possible is ‘SeeChange’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 66). This project places small cameras around the world so that everything might be visible. The intentions of this project are good: ‘“Now imagine the human rights implications. Protestors on the streets of Egypt no longer have to hold up a camera, hoping to catch a human rights violation or a murder and then somehow get footage out of the streets and online. Now it’s as easy as gluing a camera to a wall.”’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 65). Despite Bailey’s good intentions his methods are problematic: he installed the example cameras ‘with no permit, nothing. In fact, no one knows it’s there.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 62). This lack of boundaries could be dangerous: when Mae steals a kayak to explore the bay, she is filmed without her knowledge. As a result, the police comes although she meant to return the kayak. The next day Bailey convinces her to ‘go transparent’. She is expected to take part in ‘SeeChange’ and she has to wear a camera at all times: ‘Mae, in the interest of sharing all she saw and could offer the world, would be going transparent immediately.’ (Eggers, The Circle 304). The Circle creates a panopticon because of their desire to know everything: ‘all that happens must be known’ (Eggers, The Circle 67). When Mae participates in the SeeChange project, she is fully submerged in the panopticon and is constantly visible. Next, I will argue that, as a result, Mae is subjugated and dehumanized.

6.4. The Dehumanizing Effect of The Circle: The Subjection of Mae

Previously, I discussed the novel’s post-postmodern engagement in relation to the genre of dystopia and panopticon. The presentation of social media as a panopticon criticized its influence on both politics and individuals. The Circle’s panopticon subjugates Mae and has a dehumanizing effect. Under influence of the Circle Mae dehumanizes herself and the others around her. I will argue that this subjection and dehumanization of Mae leads to a defence and reconstruction of humanist values which is the aim of post-postmodernism. From the beginning of the novel Mae is rather passive: when she arrives in her office for example and they activate her screens she refers to herself passively: ‘And then I’ll be installed.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 16). Throughout the novel Mae is dehumanized in different ways: firstly, people in the Circle are reduced to numbers and scores. Secondly, the Circle takes over all means of communication and real communication is lost. Thirdly, Mae is completely dehumanized as she lacks empathy with her loved ones. Eggers’ criticizes this
loss of humanist values as a result of social media. By showing the result of extreme social media and consequently, the loss of these values, Eggers defends these humanist values and rights. The criticism results in a reconstruction of post-postmodern values, including communication and empathy. This reconstruction demonstrates that a post-postmodern reading of this novel is productive because the novel fulfils the most important purpose of post-postmodernism: to move beyond the relativism of postmodernism and to reconstruct values.

Mae’s lack of resistance and criticism demonstrates that she has been subjugated by the Circle’s panopticon. As explained above, the structure of a panopticon makes the inmate, or generally the person under surveillance, his own guard. The person under surveillance corrects their own behaviour because the person feels watched or is aware he could be watched at every moment. Key to Bentham’s panopticon is that its influence on the prisoner is not only physical but also psychological. Mae, blinded by the good intentions of the Circle and her need to surpass Annie, is indoctrinated and participates willingly. Mae sometimes resists Bailey’s aim of knowing everything, for example when Mae sees the ratings of who voted to like her and those who did not like her, she admits: ‘she didn't want to know how they felt.’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 410). However, Mae does not become resistant to the Circle. At the end of the novel, Mae is completely indoctrinated and Ty is too late to ask for her resistance. The subjugation of Mae is demonstrated in the dehumanization of Mae. This can be seen in the way she reduces herself to numbers, as her ratings, as well as in the lack of empathy Mae shows towards her friends. Next, I will examine how Mae is dehumanized.

Firstly, the Circle and its social media is dehumanizing because it reduces people to ratings. From the beginning of the novel the quality of Mae’s work is judged on the basis of her score. This becomes more extreme when Mae goes transparent. Francis convinces her to rate his sexual performance: ‘”I want you to rate me,” he said.’ (…) “You get a perfect 100.” (Eggers, *The Circle* 380 - 381). After a speech, Francis reduces Mae’s performance to numbers as well: ‘”Was I okay?”” “A 100”’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 393). Their relationship is reduced to numbers instead of intimate conversations and emotions. Mae’s reliance on being rated as a person instead of praised demonstrates that she has become indoctrinated by the system of the Circle. When ‘demoxie’, a polling project she helped create, is tested, one of the question is ‘Is Mae Holland awesome, or what?’ (Eggers, *The Circle* 404). Again, Mae is reduced to numbers. When ninety-seven percent votes they like her, she is only concerned with the remaining three percent: ‘Three hundred and
sixty-eight people loathed her. She was devastated.’ (Eggers, The Circle 405). Next, I will discuss the effect of this mediation of human relationships through social media on Mae’s communication.

Secondly, the novel criticizes the loss of direct communication as a result of communicating through social media. Mae’s subjection and consequently dehumanization can be seen in her loss of communication. Throughout the novel Mae has less contact with her parents as well as her friends Annie and Mercer. When she sees Mercer for the first time since she started working at the Circle, she is deaf to his objections when she reads a review of his artwork: ‘“There were other comments, too, and most of them were nice. There was actually one really funny one.”’ She began scrolling through her phone. “Mae. Please. I’m asking you not to read it.” “Here it is: ‘all those poor deer antlers died for this shit?’” “Mae, I asked you not to read me that.” “What? It was funny!” “How can I ask you not to do that in a way where you’ll respect my wishes?” (Eggers, The Circle 129).

Mae is unable to communicate with Mercer. All her communication becomes mediated through the Circle’s technology. The Circle’s destructive influence on Mae is clear as Mae is losing herself. She describes a tear opening inside her as she becomes more transparent and consequently, loses contact with those she loves: ‘The tear was growing within her, opening quickly, a fathomless blackness spreading under her.’ (Eggers, The Circle 333). Despite feeling this negative effect of social media, Mae goes transparent. As a result of her transparency she loses all real communication: Mercer for example tries to contact her through a letter one last time to warn her of the Circle but Mae does not listen. Finally, Mercer writes that they are unable to communicate due to her involvement in social media: ‘But we’ve taken very different evolutionary paths and very soon we’ll be too far apart to communicate.’ (Eggers, The Circle 367). It is significant that Eggers defends the importance of communication as this is also the purpose of post-postmodernism.

Lastly, the dehumanizing influence of the Circle is completed in Mae’s lack of empathy for others. This development is mirrored in the Circle’s evolution to completion. In the presentation of another invention to complete the Circle, ‘SoulSearch', Mae searches for Mercer who has moved into the woods. Mercer flees for the people and drones and when he realizes there is no escape, he drives off a bridge and kills himself (Eggers, The Circle 461). Instead of resulting in a realization that the Circle is too radical, Mercer’s death is presented as something that the Circle could have prevented. Mae nor the Circle take responsibility and instead Mercer is blamed for his mental instability: ‘Mae, this was clearly a deeply depressed and isolated young man who was not able to survive in a world like this, a world moving toward communion and unity.’ (Eggers, The Circle
Her lack of empathy results in the death of Mercer and the coma of Annie. Even after Mercer’s death and subsequently, Ty’s warning Mae remains loyal to the Circle. The novel ends in a chilling scene: Mae, looking at Annie’s unconscious body, accuses the flesh and bones to be unnecessary boundaries. Even Annie’s thoughts should be accessible: ‘Mae reached out to touch her forehead, marvelling at the distance this flesh put between them. What was going on in that head of hers? It was exasperating, really, Mae thought, not knowing. It was an affront, a deprivation, to herself and to the world. She would bring this up with Stenton and Bailey, with the Gang of 40, at the earliest opportunity. They needed to talk about Annie, the thoughts she was thinking. Why shouldn’t they know them? The world deserved nothing less and would not wait.’ (Eggers, The Circle 491). Mae does not think of Annie as human anymore but a vessel of information: Mae has become completely dehumanized. In this warning, Eggers defends values as empathy and privacy. The warning results in a post-postmodern reconstruction of those values.

6.5. Conclusion: The Reconstruction of Values

Above, I argued that the novel criticizes the dehumanizing effect of social media and surveillance. Underlying this criticism is a defence and reconstruction of humanist values. As described above, these values include privacy, freedom and especially empathy and communication. The importance of these values furthermore demonstrate the usefulness of post-postmodernism’s framework: in post-postmodernism communication has become the new objective of literature. In the novel, communication is important because it facilitates empathy and confirms people’s humanity whereas the company exchanges real communication with ratings on polls or zings. This defence of humanist values is made explicit at the ending of the novel when Ty tries to convince Mae to read a statement for her viewers: the statement concerns ‘a list of assertions under the headline “The Rights of Humans in a Digital Age.”’ (Eggers, The Circle 485). The title itself indicates the focus on human rights which Eggers is so involved with. The assertions include: “We must all have the right to anonymity.” “Not every human activity can be measured.” “The ceaseless pursuit of data to quantify the value of any endeavour is catastrophic to true understanding.” “The barrier between public and private must remain unbreachable.” At the end she found one line, written in red ink: “We must all have the right to disappear.” (Eggers, The Circle 485). The values discussed above are confirmed in these statements: the values of privacy and freedom as well as the criticism on the dehumanizing effect of ratings and the influence on politics are repeated in these statements. Instead of a hopeful
ending, characteristic of Eggers, the novel ends disturbingly with the Circle close to completion. Eggers ends with a warning for the reader with the purpose of making the reader aware of contemporary issues with social media. I can conclude that post-postmodernism offers a useful framework to understand Eggers’ engagement as well as his reconstruction of values.
7. Conclusion

In the introduction to this dissertation, I addressed Eggers’s statement on cynicism: ‘Whatever you do, though, don’t accept any cynicism’ (Bex 17). His refusal of cynicism and his call for social engagement as response to such cynicism can be interpreted as a characteristically post-postmodern attitude. To examine if Eggers could indeed be characterized as a post-postmodernist, I applied a post-postmodern reading to four novels by Dave Eggers. In the theoretical framework I examined this contemporary shift from postmodernism to post-postmodernism. Postmodernism problematized the construction of reality by language and consequently deconstructed these mediated truths, including values. Postmodernism’s deconstruction was so influential however, that postmodernism became institutionalized. Post-postmodernism emerged as a response to postmodernism’s relativism. Postmodernism was accused of relativism because of the extensive deconstruction which devalued morals. In my definition of post-postmodernism, I focused on engagement, authenticity, the reconstruction of values and the purpose of communication characteristic of post-postmodernism. Firstly, post-postmodernism focuses on social engagement in response to postmodern relativism. Engagement is an important characteristic of the novels of Eggers. In Zeitoun, Eggers criticized institutional racism and the government responses to hurricane Katrina. In What is the What, the human rights violations in the Second Sudanese Civil War were criticized as well as the treatment received by the immigrants in the United States. The Circle problematized the influence of social media and the lack of privacy.

Secondly, authenticity of the novels was important because it enabled this criticism. After postmodernism, unmediated representation of reality was deemed impossible. Each novel used different techniques to move beyond this impasse. Each book had a different technique but they have post-postmodern characteristics in common. Firstly, I concluded that A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius’s self-referentiality enabled Eggers to move beyond postmodernism. The self-referentiality presented the novel as constructed as well as authentic. The self-referentiality in A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius, served not only as a postmodern awareness of mediation but also created authenticity because of the narrator’s openness about the changes made to the real facts. Zeitoun and What is the What, I concluded, move beyond postmodernism and enable representation with the narrative’s subjectivity. Subjectivity not only enabled representation but also encouraged empathy in the reader. That subjectivity enables authenticity because the novels
presented their reality as a personal truth. This empathy is crucial to Eggers’s social engagement: through the eyes of the protagonist the reader experiences the human rights violations the narrator was subjected to. The criticism of the novel is more effective due to the empathy of the reader. What is the What for example tells Deng’s experience of the Second Sudanese Civil War. The book does not pretend to be an objective representation: Eggers furthermore argues the fictionality of the book by adding the label ‘novel’. It is Deng’s personal account of his experiences that makes the novel authentic. The Circle’s fictionality combined with clear references to contemporary issues allows Eggers to represent and criticise modern social media. This last novel differs from the other three because Eggers does not assert that this book represents reality. Instead, the book’s references to reality can be found in the clear parallels between the book’s fictional company of the Circle and reality’s Facebook and Google.

Thirdly, I concluded that each novel attempts to reconstruct values. Underlying the engagement of the novels was an attempt of reconstructing values. Zeitoun, for example, combines subjectivity with exemplarity to enable representation as well as criticism. The subjectivity allowed Eggers to present the novel as a representation of the experiences of Zeitoun. The exemplarity of Zeitoun’s experience however uses Zeitoun’s example to criticise larger institutional racism. Underlying the criticism of Zeitoun’s treatment in prison is a call for humanism. Similarly, the description of the experiences of Deng in What is the What firstly, criticise the human rights violations in Sudan but secondly also call for more humanism in the treatment of immigrants in the United States. The novels not only call for humanism, they attempt to reconstruct values themselves. A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius narrates Eggers’s search for values even though he knows that they are only constructions. The novel argues for the importance of values even though they are constructions. The medium of literature lends itself to the reconstruction of values because of its ability to narrate a subjective truth while remaining authentic and because it enables empathy. Literature’s ability to make readers empathise with the novel’s protagonist makes it a suitable medium to defend humanism and reconstruct values.

Lastly, the characteristics discussed in the post-postmodern reading of the novels reveal why Eggers chooses to write novels to spread his ideas instead of, for example, documentaries: literature, or ‘the novel’, is ideally suited for Eggers’s use of a subjective perspective and empathy. Eggers uses empathy to make his criticism more effective and only in literature can such a high level of empathy be reached. Eggers’s engagement demonstrates post-postmodernism’s focus on literature
as a means to raise awareness and consequently, to reconstruct values. Eggers’s post-postmodernism focuses on the role of literature to communicate values and criticism. In the Circle for example, communication is important because it facilitates empathy and confirms people’s humanity whereas the company exchanges real communication with ratings on polls or ‘zings’. Literature fulfils post-postmodernism’s purpose of communication. I can conclude that the post-postmodern reading of the four novels of Dave Eggers revealed a better understanding of the novels. The post-postmodern reading furthermore revealed the connection between the four novels and what creates coherence in Eggers’s oeuvre: firstly in their social engagement, secondly in their subjectivity and thirdly their authenticity. All these characteristics serve the same post-postmodern purpose of reconstructing values.
Works Cited


