



# Reception of Uwem Akpan's *Say You're One of Them* in Oprah Winfrey's Book Club

*Anna Poppen*

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Seminar paper from the year 2011 in the subject English - Literature, Works, grade: 1,0, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, language: English, abstract: In 2009, the debut book "*Say You're One of Them*" by the Nigerian author Uwem Akpan became a bestseller after being chosen by the American TV star Oprah Winfrey for her popular Book Club. The five short stories in the book are set in different African countries and describe horrible events such as child abuse, prostitution and religious wars. Akpan writes his fictional stories through the eyes of children and claims to be speaking for African children in general. After being presented on the Oprah Winfrey Show and on Oprah's website Oprah.com, Akpan's book became very popular, especially in the US. Literary scholars have not published any studies about Akpan's stories yet, so there is no scientific work about the book. However, the short stories were discussed intensely by the members of "Oprah's Book Club", who read the book on Oprah's advice and exchanged their ideas about the stories on message boards on the internet. In the past few years, scholars of literary and cultural studies have given more and more attention to Oprah's Book Club and its effect on the practices of reading and talking about books. Several writers have also focused on the internet as a setting for discussions about books. The phrases "give a voice to" and "speaking for" are important catchwords in the field of postcolonial studies. In "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" Gayatri Spivak (1995) exposes the process of giving a voice to the subaltern as a process of colonial domination. By trying to speak for those who do not or cannot speak for themselves - in Akpan's case the African children - writers tend to ignore the heterogeneity of the subaltern and take an essentialist point of view. This problem has been discussed in connection with various pieces of postcolonial writing, and plays a role in the interpretation of Akpan's *Say You're One o*

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