Isabel Kalous

BLACK TRAVEL WRITING

Contemporary Narratives of Travel to Africa by African American and Black British Authors

[transcript] American Culture Studies

Isabel Kalous
Black Travel Writing

American Culture Studies | Volume 35

Isabel Kalous is an alumna of the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture at the University of Giessen, Germany, where she completed her dissertation in English and American Literature in 2020. Her research interests include African American literature, slavery and cultural memory, transnational American studies, and cultural mobility studies.

Isabel Kalous

Black Travel Writing

Contemporary Narratives of Travel to Africa by African American and Black British Authors

[transcript]

This publication was accepted as a doctoral dissertation with the title "Contemporary Black Travel Narratives: Tracing Roots/Routes to Africa and Beyond" by the Faculty 05 - Language, Literature, Culture at the Justus Liebig University Giessen in 2020 in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The EOSC Future project is co-funded by the European Union Horizon Programme call INFRAEOSC-03-2020, Grant Agreement number 101017536
The free availability of the e-book edition of this publication was financed by the project EOSC Future.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (BY) license, which means that the text may be remixed, transformed and built upon and be copied and redistributed in any medium or format even commercially, provided credit is given to the author. For details go to https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Creative Commons license terms for re-use do not apply to any content (such as graphs, figures, photos, excerpts, etc.) not original to the Open Access publication and further permission may be required from the rights holder. The obligation to research and clear permission lies solely with the party re-using the material.

First published in 2022 by transcript Verlag, Bielefeld
© Isabel Kalous

Cover layout: Maria Arndt, Bielefeld
Printed by Majuskel Medienproduktion GmbH, Wetzlar
Print-ISBN 978-3-8376-5953-5
PDF-ISBN 978-3-8394-5953-9
https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839459539
ISSN of series: 2747-4372
eISSN of series: 2747-4380

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

Contents

Acknowledgements ... 7

I Introduction ... 9
1. Points of Departure: Tracing Roots/Routes to Africa ... 9
2. On the Current State of Research ... 15
3. Route Map: Theoretical Premises, Methods, and Objectives of this Study ... 25

II Traveling Black—Traveling Back ... 31
1. Black Im/Mobilities Past and Present ... 33
2. Diasporic Return and the Significance of Africa in the Black Imagination ... 48

III An Invisible/Kaleidoscopic Genre: Black Travel Writing ... 63
1. Defining the Terms: Genre and Genealogy ... 65
2. The Transnational Slave Narrative and the Roots of Black Travel Writing ... 76
3. Developments and Trajectories ... 91
   3.1 Travel Writing as a Venue for Criticism ... 92
   3.2 "What a Difference a Border Makes": Transformative Travel Experiences and Literary Self-Exploration ... 99
   3.3 Twentieth-Century Black Writers in/on Africa ... 106

IV Contemporary Black Travel Narratives ... 115
1. (Re)Writing Roots ... 117
   1.1 Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995) ... 118
   1.2 Isaiah Washington's *A Man from Another Land: How Finding My Roots Changed My Life* (2011) ... 132

2. Disenchanting Africa ... 144
2.1 Eddy L. Harris's *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992) ... 146
2.2 Keith Richburg's *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* (1997) ... 162
3. Searching for Home ... 180
3.1 Ekow Eshun's *Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in Africa and Beyond* (2005) ... 182
3.2 Emily Raboteau's *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora* (2013) ... 198
4. Tracing Routes ... 213
4.1 Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) ... 214
4.2 Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007) ... 230

V Conclusion: Ambiguous Arrivals ... 249

Bibliography ... 255
Primary Sources ... 255
Secondary Sources ... 256

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my supervisors: Dr. habil. Michael Basseler was instrumental in shaping the project and provided guidance through each stage of the process; Prof. Dr. Karsten Fitz offered much appreciated advice and encouragement that was indispensable. Thank you! I would also like to extend my gratitude to the FAZIT Foundation for the financial assistance they provided toward the completion of my dissertation. Finally, a heartfelt thanks to my family, friends, fellow doctoral students, and colleagues from *The International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture* for their motivation and emotional support throughout the PhD journey.

I Introduction

1. Points of Departure: Tracing Roots/Routes to Africa

The year 2019 marked four hundred years since the first enslaved Africans arrived on North American shores.[1] Having been violently uprooted from their native land, transported across the Atlantic Ocean, and sold to colonists, their arrival in the British colony of Virginia is generally seen as the beginning of slavery in North America. Ghana commemorated the quatercentenary of this historical moment by declaring 2019 as the Year of Return. A massive marketing campaign launched by the Ghanaian Tourism Authority invited "the Global African family" to visit Ghana and celebrate "the cumulative resilience of all the victims of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade who were scattered and displaced through the world" ("Year of Return"). African-descended people from around the world accepted this invitation and over the course of the Year of Return, thousands of international visitors made their way to the country. Though Ghana has been particularly popular, other West African countries too have long been prime destinations for Black travelers. Historical sites of the slave trade, such as the Elmina and Cape Coast castles, have attracted large numbers of tourists. An interest in the history of slavery, the idea of returning to an ancestral homeland, and the desire to engage with questions of identity and cultural heritage have also inspired so-called "roots travel," a term denoting that the travel destination is chosen based on the traveler's ancestry (Dillette 2). Historian Ana Lucia Araujo recently compared the Black diaspora's current attraction to Africa to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, a period

1 Historians point out that "the history of black people in the United States is usually dated from the first arrival of a sizable number in territory that would become the United States." However, free and enslaved "Africans were already present in the Western Hemisphere before 1619" (Painter 21; see also Guasco).

during which African American arts and culture were celebrated. Araujo explains that "the diaspora wants to experience their culture and feel accepted in a place where racism is not so engrained as in many parts of the West" (qtd. in Adamu).

For many Black travelers, the journey to Africa is often an extremely emotional experience that elicits complex and ambivalent feelings. African American novelist Jacqueline Woodson, who visited Ghana in the Year of Return, expresses her emotions eloquently in an essay published in the *New York Times* in which she recounts her travel experience:

> I feel something deep and old and terrifying. [...]
> I had never been to Africa. But stepping out of that airport the first morning, it felt as though I had always known Ghana. [...]
> [...] Can I belong here? Has this country truly called me home?
> [...] A feeling as old as my body itself overcomes me—that I have never felt whole in one place. In Africa, like America, I am only halfway home. My body belonging to both and neither place. (Woodson)

Woodson's mediations on her stay in Ghana are exemplary of the perception of Africa by Black travelers. She addresses many of the prevalent themes and concerns that preoccupy travelers, including questions of identity, home, and belonging as well as the tension between familiarity and strangeness. For travelers like Woodson, a journey to Africa incites an exploration of their personal connections to the continent, which often presents a necessary step toward a better self-understanding.

This study examines the phenomenon of Black travel to Africa through the lens of travel writing. It brings together a range of contemporary autobiographical travel narratives published between the 1990s and early 2010s by African American and Black British authors. Their narratives are accounts of a personal journey undertaken by the traveler-writer. Among the selected texts are, for example, Eddy L. Harris's *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992), Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995), Keith Richburg's *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* (1997), Ekow Eshun's *Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in Africa and Beyond* (2005), and Emily Raboteau's *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora* (2013). While the travel narratives differ in tone and style, already their titles point to the writers' shared interests in issues of cultural and national identity, heritage, race, belonging, and home. Taken together, these texts reflect the Black diaspora's continuing interest in Africa. The travel

narratives also demonstrate that the writers' engagement with Africa is not only theoretical and imaginative but entails actual journeys to the continent. In other words, questions pertaining to identity in relation to Africa are not contemplated in an abstract space but are explored in specific geographies.

Considering that a truism of travel writing is that the physical journey of the traveling and narrating subject is mirrored in an interior journey (Roberson 221), it is apparent that the travel narratives under scrutiny represent both a journey to Africa and an exploration of the self. This self-exploration occurs while the subject is in motion—that is, traveling to and across Africa—but also during the subsequent act of writing about the experience. As the excerpt from Woodson's essay demonstrates, her trip prompts an engagement with deeply personal questions. The editors of *Mobility at Large: Globalization, Textuality and Innovative Travel Writing* (2012) underscore, travel writing can "challeng[e] the unified sense of the self in motion" (Edwards and Graulund 199), engendering processes of self-exploration in relation to space. For the traveler-writers who are in the focus of this study, "travel and its textual representation combine to create a space in which identity can be affirmed, discovered, or renegotiated" (Youngs, "Pushing" 71). These observations stimulate a set of intriguing questions that are central to this study: What is the role of travel writing in the processes of examining questions of identity, origin, belonging, and home? How is the motif of the journey represented in the narratives thematically and formally? What are the functions of this literary form for Black travelers? What can contemporary travel narratives tell us about the importance of Africa for the Black diaspora? Which concerns and themes are predominant in the writings of travel to Africa? How is Africa represented in these narratives and which functions do specific representations have? How do premediated images and attitudes toward the continent influence the depiction of Africa? To answer these and related questions, the present study combines research from the fields of literature, African American studies, diaspora studies, cultural studies, cultural mobility studies, and history and delves into the topic of Black travel and the literary representation thereof.

The books that constitute the corpus of this study are oftentimes labeled as autobiography, memoir, or creative nonfiction. In productive contrast to research that categorizes the texts in this way, my study conceptualizes them as travel narratives. This approach illustrates how these narratives can be fruitfully read within the generic frame of travel writing and draws attention to the production, reinvention, and performance of the self in relation to different

cultural, social, and political contexts as well as in relation to spatial locations. Moreover, it prompts an examination of how the genre of travel writing—a literary form that is traditionally associated with White[2] (European) travel and criticized for the role it played in imperial endeavors—has been shaped in the hands of Black writers. Along with an exploration of contemporary Black travel narratives, the present study also examines the literary history of the genre of Black travel writing, illuminating its development, prevalent themes, and trajectories. I thereby seek to contribute to the study of travel writing and its manifold forms. Scholars have attested that travel—or, more broadly, movements both forced and voluntary—is a defining characteristic of the history and experience of the Black diaspora. For example, historian Robin D. G. Kelley contends that "the history of black people has been a history of movement—real and imagined" (16) and these movements also pervade their literary and cultural productions. Travel is thus a key theme in the literature of the Black diaspora. Yet, Black travel writing has received limited scholarly attention to date, despite the upsurge of publications in the field over the past decades. Drawing on research in travel writing studies as well as on scholarship from the areas of transnational African American studies, cultural studies, and history, this study seeks to correct this oversight.

The practice of journeying to Africa in an effort to discover more about oneself is not a twenty-first-century phenomenon (Dillette 1). Questions of identity, home, and belonging such as those contemplated by Woodson have indeed preoccupied people for as long as they have been displaced from Africa: Since the beginning of the slave trade, Black people have returned to the continent from various parts of the globe to explore its meaning for their sense of

---

2 While it has become a common practice to capitalize 'Black' to denote an ethnic identity, the capitalization of 'White' is currently debated (see, for example, the article "Why We Capitalize 'Black' (and Not 'White')" by Mike Laws). In this study, I choose to capitalize 'White' because I agree with the argument put forth by Ann Thúy Nguyễn and Maya Pendleton from *The Center for the Study of Social Policy* that "[t]o not name 'White' as a race is, in fact, an anti-Black act which frames Whiteness as both neutral and the standard" (Nguyễn and Pendleton). They reason that "the detachment of 'White' as a proper noun allows White people to sit out of conversations about race and removes accountability from White people's and White institutions' involvement in racism" (Nguyễn and Pendleton). While being aware of and condemning the capitalization of 'White' by White supremacists, the intentional use of the uppercase 'W' is meant to prompt White people, like myself, to reflect on issues of equality and privilege. Direct quotes, however, have not been changed.

self. From the American Colonization Society's repatriation efforts in Liberia in the nineteenth century to Markus Garvey's Back-to-Africa movement in the twentieth century and the roots trips to the slave forts, Black people have traveled as individuals and as part of formally organized groups, as emigrants, repatriates, settlers, missionaries, and tourists for reasons as diverse as the travelers themselves. Literary and cultural productions contributed to the allure of Africa and popularized journeys to recover ancestral relationships. The boom in genealogy research, which is fueled by the genetic testing industry, has also spurred engagement with African history and has motivated diasporic travelers to make the journey to the continent. The travelers analyzed in this study thus follow in the footsteps of other travelers, historical and contemporary, who have made the journey to Africa.

In the cultural imagination of the African diaspora, Africa has played a key role ever since enslaved Africans,[3] who had survived the violent journey across the Atlantic Ocean, arrived in foreign lands. Various cultural and political meanings have been projected onto the African continent and its people. In the Black diasporic imagination, Africa functions as an identity-constituting space and a symbolic homeland. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, African diaspora writers from the United States and Britain traveled to the continent and recounted their experiences in travel narratives. Although their transatlantic travels had different motivations and agendas, what they have in common is their desire to explore the meanings of Africa for their conceptions of self, reiterating the question that Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen poses repeatedly in his poem "Heritage" (1925): "What is Africa to me?" While this question reverberates through their travel narratives, their literary journeys initiate an engagement with broader themes related to diasporic identification and belonging, displacement, contested memories of the past, and legacies of slavery that continue to affect Black people in the present. Traveling abroad, then, is a way for people to (re)examine possible connections and affiliations to the African continent as well as

3 I use the term 'enslaved' and not 'slave' to emphasize that slavery was forced upon people and not intrinsic to their identity. As Katy Waldman writes in a 2015 *Slate* essay on the subject, "To reduce the people involved to a nonhuman noun [is] to reproduce the violence of slavery on a linguistic level; to dispense with it amount[s] to a form of emancipation" (Waldman). Likewise, I use 'enslaver' instead of 'owner,' 'master,' or 'slaveholder' because these terms reduce the enslaved person to a commodity and empower the enslaver.

to explore their often-troubled relationship with their home nation. As James T. Campbell notes in his extensive study of African American travelers, their journeys to Africa "cast fresh and unexpected light on their relationship to the United States" and illustrate that "Africa has served historically as one of the chief terrains on which African Americans have negotiated their relationship to American society" (xxiv). Campbell's statement applies to other diasporic travelers too, as my analyses of the narratives by Black British authors demonstrate.

However, while the journey to the imagined ancestral homeland is for some travelers a way to discover and form direct relations with it, others are highly skeptical of the act of recovering a lost homeland and reconnecting with lost kin. Others still are driven by a quest for roots while simultaneously criticizing such an endeavor. Such accounts reveal ambivalent conclusions about the meaning of Africa as homeland but also about the mobile subject's motive for traveling. These accounts show that travel narratives are often characterized by opposing impulses and underscore the assertion that "[m]utual imbrication rather than clear opposition between a desire for roots and an embrace of diasporic existence is symptomatic of our post-millennial moment" (Hirsch and Miller 2).

When speaking of the Black or African diaspora, it is necessary to underline that this term does not denote a homogenous collective, but instead refers to different groups of people with an African heritage who are highly diverse in terms of their geographical, social, economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and therefore can be better thought of as a transnational "imagined community" (Anderson). In the words of historian Colin Palmer, "diasporas are not actual but imaginary and symbolic communities and political constructs" (29). Africans and their descendants moved to different parts of the world, voluntarily or involuntarily, during different periods in time, forming a diaspora with a global presence (Raphael-Hernandez). Scholarship has drawn distinctions between different African diasporas, such as the old or historic African diaspora and the new African diaspora. The old African diaspora refers to Africans who were dispersed throughout the Americas and the Caribbean from the 1500s to the 1800s as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and who shared the collective memory of slavery, segregation, and racism; the new African diaspora refers to those whose voluntary movements to America, Eu-

rope, and Asia began in the latter half of the twentieth century.[4] While highly diverse, diasporic communities share certain characteristics, including “an emotional attachment to their ancestral land,” a community consciousness or sense of “identity that transcends geographic boundaries,” an awareness of their displacement, and an awareness of “their oppression and alienation in the countries in which they reside” that may incite the wish to return to the ancestral homeland (Palmer 29). In this study, I use the concept of the Black or African diaspora as an umbrella term to refer to Black or African American and Black British writers.[5]

2. On the Current State of Research

Considering that “[t]he traveller’s tale is as old as fiction itself” (Hulme and Youngs 2), it may come as a surprise that it was not until the 1980s that the study of travel writing began to develop from a niche area of study to an established research field. Skeptically eyed by literary scholars as a “middlebrow form” (Thompson, *Travel Writing* 3), it had long been dismissed as a genre of low esteem due to its mainstream popularity. The last two decades of the twentieth century saw a boom in texts produced under the label of travel writing as well as the reissuing of classics and intensification of research on the topic. An impulse for the formation of the discipline of travel writing studies was generated by a shift that occurred in the humanities in the 1980s, designated as a theory revolution; literary scholars directed their attention away from established canons of dominant narratives and toward small narratives and texts from the margins to recover alternative voices that had previously been disregarded (Kuehn and Smethurst 1). Providing an expansive reservoir of texts, travel writing proved to be a rich resource for study, inspiring research across different fields, bridging literature, history, cultural studies, geography, and anthropology. Scholars such as Tim Youngs, Alasdair Pettinger, Carl Thompson, and Peter Hulme have spearheaded the research on travel writing over the past three decades and contributed immensely to

4 See also Robin Cohen (2008) for an introduction to the theory of diaspora and an overview of global diaspora studies. Cohen provides an analysis of different types of diaspora and the changing meaning of the concept in the twenty-first century.

5 Importantly, the labels ‘African American,’ ‘Black American,’ and ‘Black British’ are historically constructed categories that have been subject to change.

an ever-growing body of critical and historical analyses, journals, and series on this strikingly interdisciplinary field of research. Since then, numerous introductory works, companions, handbooks, article collections, and keyword collections are being published on a yearly basis.[6] That travel writing studies have developed into a prolific and burgeoning academic research area is also demonstrated by the establishment of academic journals and book series on the topic as well as its institutionalization at universities (for example, the *Centre for Travel Writing Studies* at Nottingham Trent University was founded in 2002).

The proliferation of travel writing studies since the 1980s is related to the rise of postcolonial studies, which has facilitated our understanding of the power dynamics between mobility, identity, and representation that are at work in travel writing. In particular, the works of Edward W. Said and Mary Louise Pratt are credited with providing the impetus to study travel writing as well as generating invaluable insights for the analysis of travel narratives that incited much of the subsequent scholarship in the field. Said's seminal 1978 publication *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* is a foundational text of postcolonial studies that introduced the genre into scholarly debates by making travel writing an essential part of the corpus. Influenced by the work of Michel Foucault and his approaches to literary and cultural analysis, *Orientalism* brings the pivotal role of travel literature in European imperial projects to the fore and illustrates the mechanism at work between travel, discursive representation, knowledge, and power. The years following Said's publication saw a rapid growth of scholarship about travel writing and postcolonialism. Subsequent scholarship on travel writing predominantly focused on the works of European and North American explorers, colonizers, and missionaries to uncover the strategies used to legitimize colonization, revealing how travel writing was employed as an imperialist tool. Focusing on the literature of travel and exploration about South America and Africa from the mid-eighteenth century onward, Pratt's 1992 *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, a pathbreaking work on the connection between imperialism

6 For an introduction to the field of travel writing studies see *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), edited by Hulme and Youngs; *Travel Writing* (2011) by Carl Thompson, the four-volume publication *Travel Writing* (2012), edited by Youngs and Forsdick; for American travel writing, see *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* (2009), edited by Bendixen and Hamera; for keywords, see *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies* (2019), edited by Forsdick et al.

and travel writing, extends Said's analyses and exposes the role of European travel writing in the production and dissemination of knowledge about what was pejoratively perceived as "the rest of the world" (5). Pratt's study is an important postcolonial critique of travel writing that highlights the connection between ideology and aesthetics. Since its publication, it has had a significant influence on ensuing works of travel studies, not least because it introduced new theoretical vocabulary that has been taken up in the fields of literary and cultural studies. Said's and Pratt's foundational work remains highly important within the field of travel writing studies and continues to energize and inspire new research.

Successive generations of critics have illuminated the ways in which the genre worked in colonial contexts and examined travel writing's suffusion with racial and imperial ideologies. For example, David Spurr (1993) outlines rhetorical strategies in travel narratives—a rhetoric of Empire—that define Western conceptions of the non-Western world. His and other works illustrate how travel writing, while claiming to depict other places, people, and cultures authentically, creates discourses that define a Western self in contrast to a non-Western Other. Traditionally, travel writing (re)affirms the supposed superiority and authority of the travel writer's own culture, values, and beliefs, while devaluing others. Representations of Africa in nineteenth-century Western travel writing are particularly potent examples of the discursive denigration, demonization, and exoticization of the continent and its people, aiming to highlight the superiority of the West and justify Western expansion, civilization, and intervention. A central tenet in critical works such as Tim Youngs's *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850-1900* (1994) is that colonial travelogues tell us less about the places they purport to depict objectively and far more about the traveler-writer's own perspectives, ideologies, and assumptions. In light of these inquiries into the topic, it comes as no surprise that for quite some time the genre of travel writing has been "demonized" (Edwards and Graulund, "Introduction" 1) and considered a "cultural by-product of imperialism" (Ivison 201). This contestation is also connected to the fact that travel, and by extension travel writing, is often equated with "European(ized) travel" (Edwards and Graulund, "Introduction" 2). As a result, less attention has been paid to writers of non-European descent. Moreover, many scholars tend to focus on travel texts that feature voyages of exploration or leisurely and tourist journeys, neglecting involuntary movements and journeys undertaken out of necessity. As John D. Cox rightly cautions, "this restrictive focus defines the genre too narrowly, however, for people have long traveled and

written about their experiences for myriad reasons" (13). Importantly, focusing on diverse accounts of travel provides a more complicated and nuanced picture of the genre and its historical roles and purposes.

Postcolonial criticism, however, also enticed a reevaluation of perspectives and voices that had been silenced in traditional accounts of travel. Research on travel literature partly shifted its focus from revealing the colonial gaze and illustrating the imperial impulses in Westernized travelogues to narratives produced by (formerly) colonized people. This recuperative strand of critical work centers on the transgressive and liberatory potential of travel writing by marginalized authors and texts. For example, in their important work *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (1998), Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan stress the genre's potential to articulate cultural critique and progressive political positions—an aspect that is also explored in Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund's edited collection of essays *Postcolonial Travel Writing: Critical Explorations* (2011) and in their aforementioned study *Mobility at Large* (2012). While early scholarship in the field focused predominantly on pre-twentieth-century narratives of European travel and mobility, the scope has broadened and diversified. This is exemplified by publications such as *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Travel Writing* (2018), edited by Robert Clarke, which explores travel narratives by writers from formerly colonized nations, examining diverse topics such as the legacies of colonization, globalization, migration, gender, and race.

An increase in critical attention to travel writing by authors of African descent was motivated by the enormous influence of Paul Gilroy's seminal work on cultural studies: *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (1993) was an early intervention into discourses on travel that proposed seeing travel as a framework for thinking about the experiences of enslaved and free Black people in the Atlantic world. Gilroy warns against the creation of categories of different forms or types of travel, seeing that the experiences are far too complex. Pointing to the literary productions of Black intellectuals and writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he stresses that their work illuminates "the folly of assigning uncoerced or recreational travel experiences only to whites while viewing black people's experiences of displacement and relocation exclusively through the very different types of travelling undergone by refugees, migrants, and slaves" (133). Importantly, his work conceptualizes travel as a means to understand the experiences of Black subjects. With his examination of transatlantic biographies of artists, authors, and intellectuals, Gilroy presents a history of the Black Atlantic in which people of the African

diaspora are not perceived as victims and human commodities, but as autonomous individuals who participated in the making of a modern world. Furthermore, the significance of his work derives from its emphasis on the meaning of Africa in the creation of Black diasporic identity and the transnational and transcultural connections between people from different shores.

With these foundational contributions made by literary, postcolonial, and cultural studies scholars, the late 1990s witnessed an upsurge in interest in the travel writing by Black authors, as is demonstrated by three collections of primary texts: *Go Girl! The Black Woman's Book of Travel and Adventure* (1997), edited by Elaine Lee; *Always Elsewhere: Travel of the Black Atlantic* (1998), edited by Alasdair Pettinger; and *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing* (1998), edited by Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish. They deserve to be mentioned because they made significant contributions to the emergent interest in Black travel writing, which had, until then, rarely drawn scholarly attention. Lee's edited collection presents a multitude of extracts from female-authored travel writings—including, for example, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and Audre Lorde—aiming to inspire and encourage other Black women to travel (for this purpose, the book also offers trip planning advice and includes a resource guide). Pettinger's compilation of travel texts is international in scope and covers the period from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth century, presenting an abundance of literary forms of travel writing, including diaries, letters, autobiographies, memoirs, anthropology, poetry, and fictional accounts that reflect the diverse forms of mobility. Gilroy's Black Atlantic model provides the historical and geographical frame for *Always Elsewhere* because, as Pettinger writes, it "encourages us to think of the diaspora not as a river, gathering its tributaries in a relentless voyage to a final destination, but a vast ocean that touches many shores—Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, the Americas (North, Central and South)—criss-crossed in all directions by people, goods and ideas" ("Introduction" ix). Accordingly, the collection of primary texts underscores the diversity of diasporic travel experiences and their literary representation. Importantly, it incorporates accounts of the violent Atlantic crossing of captive Africans and narratives of formerly enslaved individuals, thus broadening the understanding of travel writing.

In a similar manner but with a somewhat narrower focus on African American travel writing, Griffin and Fish's anthology assembles a variety of travel narratives produced between the early nineteenth and the late twentieth century. The anthology's structure, which organizes the texts according to

geographical regions (Africa, France, and Russia) and types of travelers (such as adventurers, missionaries and activists, statesmen, scholars, journalists, and tourists) highlights the multiplicity of travel destinations as well as the different motives and forces that have compelled African Americans to travel around the world. All three anthologies celebrate the myriad narrative accounts of Black travel and fulfill a meaningful function with regard to "the broader project of 'decolonizing' or 'democratizing' travel literature" by "challenging the way the canon of 'great works' of travel writing has tended to automatically privilege white men" (Pettinger, "Introduction" xi-xii). Significantly, these works help to correct the notion that Black people have traveled less, or only for specific purposes, and produced fewer accounts of their travels compared with White travelers.

Another noteworthy publication is the 2003 special issue of the *BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review*, edited by R. Victoria Arana. This is the first book-length collection of research articles about Black travel writing. Moreover, it includes a selection of short travel accounts, poems, and a resource guide listing books, Black professional organizations related to travel, festivals, and other resources for Black travelers. Adopting a transnational perspective, the contributions to this issue examine a host of Anglophone travel narratives and travel poems from different periods and geographies: for example, the eighteenth-century travel poems by Phillis Wheatley, the accounts of travel to Africa by twentieth-century intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, and postcolonial travel narratives by Caryl Phillips and Jamaica Kincaid. Equally diverse are the approaches to the texts and themes that are analyzed in the collection. However, while this special issue effectively sketches the breadth of Black travel writing and illustrates various approaches to study the texts, it lacks a conceptual focus and a systematization of travel writing.

More focused designs are presented in studies focusing on singular Black traveler-writers (such as Virginia Whatley Smith's 2001 edited collection of essays on Richard Wright's travel writing) as well as those that scrutinize particular regions (such as Maria Christina Ramos's *Mapping the World Differently: African American Travel Writing About Spain*, 2015). For instance, in *Black and White Women's Travel Narratives: Antebellum Explorations* (2004), Cheryl J. Fish considers the connection between travel, gender, and race and examines nineteenth-century travel narratives by African Jamaican nurse Mary Seacole and African American Nancy Prince, among others. Her analyses demonstrate how travel writing allowed women to represent themselves outside of dominant cultural narratives, opening up discursive spaces to articulate criticism

and speak with authority on private and public issues such as slavery and women's rights. The potential of travel writing as a venue for criticism is also a topic that Gary Totten tackles in his *African American Travel Narratives from Abroad: Mobility and Cultural Work in the Age of Jim Crow* (2015). Totten's discussion of the interrelation between identity and mobility is an important contribution to the study of Black travel writing. He examines different African American travelers, including Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington, and Zora Neale Hurston, and their literary productions during the era of segregation. Totten's thesis resides in the argument that these writers accomplished cultural work through their mobility and writing as they challenged prevailing assumptions about the experience and history of African Americans, countering racial denigration and marginalization. *African American Travel Narratives from Abroad* is particularly relevant for the study at hand because it examines the ways travel writing has been strategically employed by African Americans; for instance, to protest segregation and discrimination, to articulate progressive political positions, to participate in transatlantic debates, to underscore (female) agency and professionality, and to challenge stereotypes pertaining to Black mobility and representations thereof. My outline of the genre's trajectories and developments draws on Totten's findings.

The increasing attention devoted to Black travel writing is also reflected by a number of articles and the topic's inclusion in companions, introductions, and collections of travel literature (see, for example, Youngs, "Pushing" and "African American Travel;" Pettinger, "At Least One;" V. W. Smith, "African American Travel"; Shaw-Thornburg, 2011). Such chapter entries and articles focus exclusively on African American travel writing; nevertheless, they provide extremely helpful introductions to the topic as they highlight the significance of travel and travel writing for African Americans and identify recurring themes in travel writing (for example, the preoccupation with the meaning of home). Crucially, these scholars do not view African American travel narratives as a subgenre of the Anglo-American literary tradition of travel writing. Rather, they suggest reading these narratives as texts that emerged from and draw on the tradition of the slave narrative—that is, autobiographical accounts by formerly enslaved people that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As V. W. Smith writes, "African American travel writing draws its expression from the slave experience and the genre known as the slave narrative" ("African American Travel" 213). Similarly, Angela Shaw-Thornburg asserts that when the African American travel narrative is seen as a revision of the slave narrative genre, the important connection between au-

thority, mobility, and narrative comes to the fore (51). My study builds on this proposition and delineates how Black travel writing developed from the slave narrative.

Notwithstanding the increasing diversification of the field of travel writing studies, the accounts of Black travelers remain an understudied aspect of the genre. As scholars in the field have speculated, this neglect may be due to the classificatory challenges that this hybrid form of writing presents. However, classifying these texts not as travel writing but, for example, as autobiography, results in a lack of critical attention to "the significance of mobility and its relationship to subjectivity" (Griffin and Fish xiv). Other reasons for the scarcity of research on the subject are, as Youngs specifies, the persistent tendency to focus on coerced journeys of Black subjects rather than on the free and self-initiated forms of mobility, such as tourist journeys and professional travel; but also, postcolonial scholarship's insufficient attention to African American travel writing—which addresses many of the prevalent themes that can be found in postcolonial literature ("Pushing," 72).

Although there is a scarcity of critical investigations of the genre of Black travel writing in general, especially with regard to contemporary works, a significant amount of scholarship exists that focuses on African American travel to Africa. The majority of this scholarship is situated within historical frameworks and is concerned with the biographies of Black individuals and the historical, cultural, and political circumstances under which they traveled. Such studies, however, are often not text-based studies. In *Black Writers Abroad: A Study of Black American Writers in Europe and Africa* (1999), Robert Coles examines nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American writers who left the United States and analyzes their reasons for leaving and the impact it had upon the writers' lives, careers, and work as well as upon the Black American literary tradition. The study presents astute observations on the concept of exile and the phenomenon of expatriation that is prefigured in slave narratives. Still, it does not offer an in-depth literary analysis of the travel narratives nor does it conceptualize Black travel writing as a genre. Likewise, historian Kevin Kelley Gaines's *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (2006) is first and foremost a historical study of transnational intellectual and social movements during a significant period in American and Ghanaian history.

Published in 2006, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* by historian James T. Campbell provides a comprehensive survey of the transnational voyages of African Americans over the course of two centuries.

Campbell situates the journeys of enslaved Africans, Black colonists, missionaries, political leaders, intellectuals, writers, and journalists within their historical and cultural contexts and skillfully reveals the motivation and reasons underlying their travels to Africa. Focusing on a variety of Black American travelers, Campbell reveals the significance of Africa for Black Americans and shows that, while travelers explored their relationship to Africa, their journeys also incited reflections on their relationship to the United States. His argument that Africa has served as an important terrain on which African-descended people have explored their relationship to American society and reflected on broader cultural developments is one of the major theses on which this study elaborates (xxiv). Along similar lines, Nemata Amelia I. Blyden's *African Americans and Africa: A New History* (2019) offers a detailed survey of African Americans' relation to the African continent, spanning from the era of slavery to the present and covering different, overlapping diasporas. Blyden lucidly illustrates how African Americans have engaged with the continent in different ways, examines their diverse and often conflicting attitudes toward Africa, and demonstrates how Black Americans' relationship to the continent has influenced the way they have identified and described themselves.

The studies by Campbell and Blyden touch on another area of interest upon which the present study builds, namely, the representations of Africa in the literature of Black writers. Marion Berghahn was among the first to explore African American writing about Africa in *The Image of Africa in Black American Literature* (1977). Her work is an important demonstration of how the White image of Africa—formed over centuries in the Western imagination and predicated on the alleged cultural superiority of the West while simultaneously degrading Africa—shapes Black Americans' perceptions of the continent. Tracing the images of Africa in the works of Black American writers from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, she reveals a range of attitudes toward the continents; these span from a complete disregard of Africa and an emphasis on their 'Americanness' to a radical identification with Africa that could even incite the writers' journey to the continent. John Cullen Gruesser has expanded on this topic: Building on his earlier work *White on Black: Contemporary Literature About Africa* (1992), in which he carves out conventions of Africanist writings by Anglo-American writers, *Black on Black: Twentieth-Century African American Writing about Africa* (2000) highlights the different ways Black Americans engage with Africa in their literary productions. This study and his article "Afro-American Travel Literature and Africanist Discourse" (1990) detail how both fictional texts and nonfictional travel narratives

draw on established discourses about Africa that represent the continent either as a dream or nightmare. According to Gruesser, the fundamental impact of Africanist discourse has prevented African American writers from depicting a more nuanced picture of the African continent compared with that of their White counterparts ("Afro-American" 5; *Black on Black* 137-38). Considering the range of works analyzed, Gruesser's study is in need of updating to evaluate whether contemporary Black travel writers remain tied up in Africanist discourse or succeed in creating a more complex image of Africa.

Based on this survey of the current state of research on Black travel writing and African American journeys to Africa, the achievements, shortcomings, and remaining desiderata can be summarized as follows: Over the past two decades, travel writing studies have increasingly paid attention to texts produced by writers who depart from conventional notions of the (White, Western) traveler-explorer. African American travel writing in particular has come to be seen as a rich source for studying and understanding the Black diasporic experience in the United States. Scholars have pointed to the significance of travel in African American literature, the relationship between mobility and identity, and the influence of the accounts of formerly enslaved individuals on subsequent forms of travel writing. Yet, the existing scholarly contributions to the topic tend to offer only a limited overview of African American travel writing and its key themes. In many instances, these studies only refer to texts from the postbellum era or the narratives by Black Americans in the mid-twentieth century (established and well-known authors such as Wright, Du Bois, and Angelou are most often in the focus). Often, travel narratives are treated as a source for extracting the biographical and background information of the author, rather than being analyzed as texts with unique literary qualities. Another shortcoming is the insufficient connection drawn between the notion of mobility in these narratives and the construction of a traveling subjectivity. Moreover, although it has been asserted that geographical, imagined, spiritual, and emotional travel are of key importance to the diasporic experience in general and the literary output in particular, studies that treat the subject at a broad textual level are lacking. It is therefore unsurprising that no systematic study of the conventions and forms of Black travel writing exists. Another central deficit is the lack of analyses of contemporary Black travel narratives through a transnational lens. An exclusive focus on African American travelers fails to acknowledge the overarching themes and concerns that connect seemingly disparate Black travel texts and ignores the transnational dimension of the genre. Therefore, adopting

a transnational perspective, as this study does, makes it possible to discover breaks and continuities that might otherwise go unnoticed.

In essence, no in-depth textual analysis and interpretation of the travel trope in Black travel narratives has been provided thus far. Therefore, the present study seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship by providing a close textual analysis of Black travel narratives. It is my aim to extend and expand reflections on the trope of travel and exemplify the significance of volitional movement for the African American and Black British experience. By bringing together travel narratives by Black American and Black British authors, my aim is not to provide a comparison based on different national literary traditions, but rather to highlight recurring concerns, motifs, and forms in order to carve out the genre traits of the Black travel narrative.

3. Route Map: Theoretical Premises, Methods, and Objectives of this Study

My interrogation of Black travel narratives builds on the premise that travel, as a lived reality and cultural practice, shapes literary traditions and that reciprocally, narrative representations of travel inspire and inform the actual journeys of individuals. Literary works are not removed from reality; they are not aesthetic objects or entities to be studied in isolation. Neither does literature simply respond to or reflect an extra-literary world, that is, experiences, events, and phenomena. Instead, literary texts generate, form, and shape our realities and cultures (Nünning and Nünning 16). Scholars such as Nelson Goodman (1978) and Jerome Bruner (1991) have drawn attention to the ways that our realities are constructed in and through language, emphasizing the significance of studying the intersections between narratives and cultures. The genre of travel writing in particular shows that there is a connection between text and travel: literature reflects these journeys and shapes them into narratives, while also being shaped by them. In this way, literary journeys influence actual journeys by informing collective assumptions and knowledge about places and by outlining travel paths.

The interplay between literary journeys in travel narratives and extra-literary journeys can be captured by the threefold concept of mimesis developed by Paul Ricœur (1984 [1983]), which facilitates our understanding of the transformation and representation of experience and social reality through narration. Taking his lead from Ricœur's concept, Ansgar Nünning productively

applies the three aspects of mimesis—prefiguration (the way a literary text is shaped by an antecedent, pre-literary reality), configuration (the representation of pre-literary reality through aesthetic and narrative techniques, which is the only aspect that can be analyzed with a literary approach), and refiguration (the effects of such configurations on the extra-literary reality)—to his theorizations of the travelogue: The stories of travel that are recounted in the travel narrative are influenced, or prefigured, by preexisting knowledge about places, which is generated, for example, by different media and texts; and they are informed by their literary predecessors as well as by individual, collective, and cultural memories of extra-literary journeys (Nünning 130-36). While drawing on actual journeys, travel narratives provide textual representations of travel and aesthetic expressions of mobility that, in turn, shape practices of travel. Underscoring the capacity of travel writing to encourage real-life journeys, Emma Bond notes that literary representations of travel—with "their imaginative and affective properties"—can thus "have a mobilizing, or moving effect" (7). The travel narratives on which this study focuses demonstrate that the writers who travel to Africa and recount their experiences step in the footprints of earlier sojourners, literally and metaphorically. The routes taken by Black travelers are historically produced and their accounts are shaped by literary representations of earlier passages. My survey of the historical, cultural, and literary travels of the African diaspora underpins the reciprocal relationship between narratives and representation of travel and travel as a lived reality.

Based on these considerations, the significance of cultural studies for the literary analysis of texts becomes pertinent. Literary and cultural studies, with their detailed attention to issues of narration, rhetoric, metaphor, plot, and genre are well equipped to examine the forms and ideological functions served by discourses of travel and mobility. Studying the relation between real-life travels, the significance of mobility in the history and experiences of diasporic cultures, the phenomenon of roots trips to Africa, and travel as a key motif in the literature of the Black diaspora necessitates an approach that merges cultural and historical scholarship with careful textual analysis and theoretical reflection. This study, therefore, offers a close and wide reading (Hallet 2007) of contemporary Black travel narratives, coupling literary methods of analysis with questions and theoretical approaches from a cultural studies perspective. To approach selected travel narratives via a close and wide reading practice draws attention to detail and the unique aesthetic qualities and narrative properties of individual texts (close reading), while

also situating and interpreting the text within its wider cultural and historical context (wide reading). In doing so, this study aims to contribute new insights to the research on contemporary Black travel writing.

The African continent is not just a prime travel destination but also an important topic in literature and criticism. From the early writings by formerly enslaved people to the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and the twentieth-century novels by writers such as Alice Walker and Charles Johnson, the continent has been a prevalent theme in the literary imagination of Black writers (see Gruesser, *Black on Black* xi). Africa figures prominently in the contemporary African American and Black British fiction as, for example, Leila Kamali's 2016 study on the cultural memory of Africa in the literature of the Black diaspora demonstrates. Nonetheless, my focus lies not with fictional engagements with the continent, but with works that recount an actual journey to the African continent proper. This, however, does not imply that travel narratives are understood as texts that authentically represent what has happened or how it 'really' was. Rather, they are seen as an interpretation of the bygone travel experience. In this sense, my study moves beyond discussions of whether these texts represent Africa in objective ways and whether the subject's feelings toward and engagement with the places visited can be deemed authentic. I demonstrate that the journey is a central moment to the development of a self and that travel narratives are means to textually explore a sense of self in relation to the African continent as well as to examine, negotiate, and rethink national and cultural affiliations. As Edwards and Graulund point out, travel narratives prompt an "examination of the complex relationships between space, place, movement and identity, and the multiple ways in which these relationships can be represented" (*Mobility at Large* 202). Travel writing encourages an exploration of different positions and identities while the subject moves through space. The narratives analyzed in this study show how writers probe their connection to Africa, negotiate questions of belonging, and engage with the history of the Black diaspora. The physical journey, therefore, is interwoven with an interior, emotional, historical, or intellectual journey.

The travel narratives analyzed in detail in this study were published between 1992 and 2013. Marked by greater opportunities for travel, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed an upsurge in travel narratives about Africa published by Black writers, reflecting the rising numbers of journeys to the continent by tourists, journalists, writers, scholars, as well as those who sought to resettle permanently in the homeland of their ancestors.

A similar peak could be registered in the mid-twentieth century, a time when Black American intellectuals, writers, and political leaders traveled to soon-to-be or newly independent African nations. Mirroring the diversity of travelers that have embarked on journeys to the continent, this study includes texts by established writers, such as award-winning author Caryl Phillips, prominent figures, such as former US President Barack Obama and actor Isaiah Washington, as well as lesser-known authors whose works have mostly escaped scholarly scrutiny, such as those of Emily Raboteau and Ekow Eshun. By bringing these books together and putting them in dialogue with each other, the study seeks to offer new perspectives on the texts. Situated in the fields of Black literary studies and transnational African American studies, this study primarily centers on African American literary productions and interrogates the historical and cultural context of Black mobility and travel in the United States. However, it also includes travel narratives by African-descended authors from Britain. In doing so, it does not seek to establish parameters for comparison based on different national literary traditions; rather, it aims to show that the desire to journey to Africa and the contemplation of questions connected to identity and history that such a (literary) journey entails are topics prevalent in Black diasporic writing more generally. Furthermore, while these travel narratives address particular national topics and concerns, the discourses in which the texts engage often transcend national borders. In this regard, the travel narratives that comprise the corpus of this study were chosen on the basis of the topics they cover and the forms of expression and representation that they use—in other words, the textual properties of the narratives. Departing from a categorization of works solely based on the authors' countries of residence and from a comparativist pattern between two different national literary traditions, the study responds to the changes that have occurred in the field of American studies over the past three decades, namely the shift in perspective from national units of analysis to transnational concerns and discourses (Hornung and Morgan 1-2).

In addition to the analyses of eight contemporary travel narratives, my other goal in this study is to outline the genre traits of Black travel writing. I contend that the contemporary travelogues on which the analyses focus are part of a literary tradition of transnational Black travel writing that developed from the genre of the slave narrative. As an early form of Black travel writing, slave narratives foreground the important intertwinement of mobility, freedom, and subjectivity and create tropes and narrative patterns that were adopted and adapted by succeeding generations of writers. I maintain

that Black travel writing should not just be understood as the marginalized writers' response to a European literary tradition. Rather, I seek to show how travel writing by Black authors, specifically those from the United States, developed as a distinct and unique form of literature in its own right. This idea connects to the wider focus of this study, which is to chart new territory in the field of travel writing studies by outlining a genealogy of Black travel writing and sketching the contours of a genre that has yet to be examined more thoroughly.

The journeys to the African continent that are represented in contemporary travel narratives cannot be adequately studied without considering the larger historical and cultural contexts of Black travel and travel writing. Historical travels of individuals and collectives, their narrative representations, as well as the modes and conventions of the travel writing genre inform the paths and destinations chosen by contemporary travelers and their strategies to represent their experiences. The difficulty of escaping prefigured plots and aesthetics shows that travel writers are unable to liberate themselves from the constitutive impact and formative power of established narratives and pretexts (Pfister, "Intertextuelles Reisen" 113). Travelogues are informed by their literary predecessors as well as by individual, collective, and cultural memories of extra-literary travels. Chapter II, therefore, provides the historical and cultural context and theorizes different forms of travel. The principal concern of this chapter is to frame and situate Black travel and Black travelers in a history of diasporic movements and to chart the diverse forms of engagement with the African continent. These engagements, as I will show, include actual journeys to Africa, such as back-to-Africa movements, expatriate travels, and modern roots tourism, as well as figurative returns, such as journeys of the imagination that manifest in cultural and literary productions and engagement with Africa for the purpose of self-identification. These literal and figurative returns underscore the significance of Africa in the history and experience of the Black diaspora. The chapter further illuminates how Africa has historically been imagined and endowed with different meanings and shows how images of the continent have been subject to change depending on the specific historical and cultural context.

Chapter III centers on the genre of travel writing by defining its features and delving into the tradition of the genre. It expands upon the claims made by scholars that the transnational genre of slave narratives established the foundations for Black travel writing. It then presents the historical context from which Black travel writing emerged and carves out its major thematic

concerns, trajectories, and literary aesthetics to demonstrate how form and content have been employed and developed by Black travel writers of later generations. This discussion of early forms of Black travel writing establishes the basis of the analyses of contemporary travel narratives in Chapter IV. This chapter is divided into four sections, each of which offers an analysis of two travel narratives. Rather than organizing these sections chronologically according to the date of the travel narratives' publication, they are arranged around specific thematic foci. Finally, the study concludes by reflecting on further avenues of research in the field of Black travel writing as well as on the current resurgence of interest in Africa as a possible site for relocation.

II Traveling Black—Traveling Back

> [T]he history of black people has been a history of movement—real and imagined. Repatriation to Liberia and Sierra Leone. Flight to Canada. Escape to Haiti. The great Kansas Exodus. The back-to-Africa movements of Bishop Henry McNeil Turner and Marcus Garvey. The 49th State movement. The Republic of New Africa. The Rastafarian settlement of Shashamane, Ethiopia.
>
> —*Robin D. G. Kelley, Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*

> To travel, I must always move through fear, confront terror.
>
> —*bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation*

I have suggested in the introduction that the journeys to Africa undertaken by African-descended people today are part of a larger tradition of Black travel to Africa, which dates back to the eighteenth-century repatriation of formerly enslaved people from America, the Caribbean, and Britain. Since then, innumerable travelers have made the journey from various parts of the world across the Atlantic Ocean. Past and present journeys reflect the diaspora's perennial preoccupation with Africa that arises from historical experiences and memories of displacement, dispossession, and exile. As Kelley notes in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2002), travel and movement, whether coerced or volitional, have shaped the history and experiences of the Black diaspora (16). I therefore posit that understanding past forms of travel and the meanings attached to them is crucial for the analysis of contemporary (return) journeys.

The connection between past travels of large collectives and personal travel experiences is made explicit by feminist scholar bell hooks. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), hooks considers the implications of travel for a person of color. She recalls incidents when she was interrogated and strip-searched by White officials upon her departure from Europe—an experience

of travel that she describes as an encounter with "the terrorizing force of white supremacy" (174). Importantly, hooks connects this experience to the historical movements of the African diaspora when she writes, "It helps to be able to link this individual experience to the collective journeying of black people, to the Middle Passage, to the mass migration of southern black folks to northern cities in the early part of the 20th century" (174). Situating her individual experience within the larger context of "the collective journeying of black people" (174), hooks underscores that her experience is not singular in this respect. It is indeed encompassed by the history of the Black diaspora, a history that is marked by dislocation, exploitation, and exclusion but also—and this seems to be even more important to hooks—by resistance, perseverance, and renewal.

Maintaining that contemporary experiences of travel as well as their literary representations must be considered within a historical and cultural context, this chapter elaborates on the meaning and history of Black mobility in the United States. Accordingly, it draws on historical scholarship, cultural studies, and mobility studies, an interdisciplinary research field that emerged in the early 2000s out of the social sciences and was spearheaded by scholars such as John Urry, Mimi Sheller, and Tim Cresswell. The field's broad conception of mobility—it encompasses "embodied and material practices of movement" as well as "the representations, ideologies, and meanings attached to both movement and stillness" (Sheller, "New Mobilities Paradigm" 789)—is particularly fruitful when examining the history of Black travel. This complex understanding of mobility opens new perspectives on the diversity of movements and modes of mobility, highlighting their multiple and complex meanings for Black subjects.

This chapter is divided into two sections and focuses on the diverse movements of Black diasporic subjects. The goal of the first section is to carve out different forms of travel that inform the history of the African diaspora. In particular, my focus will be on the African American experience and the significance of mobility as well as the different meanings associated with it. It will demonstrate that, as Griffin and Fish underscore, Black "mobility is often connected to the impulse for increased opportunities and the desire to find a home or homeland as well as for the purpose of pilgrimage, exile, and pleasure" (xiii). Moreover, this section provides an account of the ways that Black mobility has been limited and how the fight for the right to move freely is intertwined with struggles for freedom and equality. The second section of the chapter examines the diverse engagements of the Black diaspora with Africa,

highlighting the significance of the continent in the Black imagination. The fact that African-descended people persistently turn their gaze toward Africa reveals its centrality as a site of identification. The section explores the idea of return and outlines different repatriation efforts. In this context, return refers not just to realized returns (that is, actual journeys back to Africa) but encompasses imagined returns as well (these may include efforts to establish and maintain links to an originary homeland as well as political or intellectual engagement with it—a 'turn to' Africa, so to speak).[1] Examining these diverse returns to Africa, it becomes apparent that the relationship to the African continent and the meanings projected onto it vary according to Black travelers' relationship with their home country and are contingent on the historical, social, and political context. Accordingly, the chapter illustrates how Africa has been imagined and scrutinizes Black Americans' different attitudes and competing impulses toward the continent.

1. Black Im/Mobilities Past and Present

Scholars have alerted us to the significance of movement and travel, both real and metaphorical,[2] for the history of the diaspora by drawing on the narrative arc of travel as a key trope of the African American experience: The argument that Black American history is profoundly shaped by movements is a central idea in the works of Ira Berlin (2010) as well as those of Howard Dodson and Sylviane A. Diouf (2004), who argue that African American "culture and history are the products of black peoples' various movements, coerced and voluntary" (9). The range of movements they describe and explore encompasses large-scale movements, such as migrations, as well as the small-scale movements of individuals, including journeys of escape and bodily moves.[3]

1 The editors of *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind* (2004) expound that in diaspora literature, returns take on different forms. They understand return not just as the physical act of transport and the journey back to the originary homeland but also as a process over time, revealing that returns can be "*imagined*, *provisional*, and *repatriated*" (Long and Oxfeld 6).

2 For a detailed survey of travel metaphors in cultural criticism and theory see Janet Wolff (1993) and Caren Kaplan (1996).

3 While Berlin's *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (2010) focuses on four different migratory movements, or passages, Dodson and Diouf's *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience* (2004) identifies thirteen different movements

Two forms of movements are of particular importance. As Youngs asserts, African American history "rests on two archetypes of travel: the forced journey into slavery, signified by the middle passage; and the willed flight to freedom" ("Pushing" 72). These movements persistently shape Black travel and demonstrate that mobility bears different meanings. While the forced journey across the Atlantic Ocean denotes domination and oppression, free and self-regulated movements are associated with agency and resistance and are central aspects of liberty and emancipation.

Before considering the various forms of travel and the meanings attached to them in more detail, some remarks on the conceptualization of the term travel are necessary. One could certainly object to the idea of understanding the forced path into enslavement as a form of travel. Historically and in the original sense of the term, the Middle Passage describes the second, or middle, leg of the three-part voyage from Europe to Africa to the Americas and back to Europe. The triangular routes took European traders to Africa to exchange goods for enslaved Africans, then across the Atlantic Ocean to sell captives in the West Indies and North America, and finally back to Europe. The violent Atlantic crossing of an estimated 12.5 million captives, two million of whom died during the journey,[4] stands for a history of dehumanization and racialized terror that lies at the heart of Black diasporic culture. In the face of unimaginable human suffering, the Middle Passage presents as a rupture from cultural and geographical roots. For this reason, hooks cautions that "[t]ravel is not a word that can be easily evoked to talk about the Middle Passage" (173) and other forms of coerced mobility. Her hesitation to use travel in this context is based on the notion that the term, in a conventional sense, is layered with European histories of imperialism and

---

that are seen as significant to understand the African American experience. These include, for example, the transatlantic slave trade, enslaved people's emancipatory journeys from bondage to freedom, the colonization movements, the migration movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the more recent relocation of African-born people to the US. The focus on migration as a key aspect of Black American history and culture illuminates the diverse experiences of Black people in the United States. Moreover, reading African American history as a history of migrations, Berlin offers new perspectives that complicate the linearity of the "old master narrative" from slavery to freedom and demonstrates the ongoing struggle for full equality and freedom (11).

4 The website *Slave Voyages* (slavevoyages.org) provides the most comprehensive database documenting the transatlantic slave trade.

tied up with images of the leisurely travel of the White bourgeois male. The Middle Passage as well as hooks's own travel experiences and her "encounter with terrorism" (174) surely do not fit such received understandings of travel. Forced and restricted movements disrupt established connections between travel and freedom. Acknowledging what James Clifford aptly summarizes as travel's "historical taintedness, its association with gendered, racial bodies, class privilege, specific means of conveyance, beaten paths, agents, frontiers, documents, and the like" (39), it is necessary to theorize travel "outside conventional borders" so as to produce associations "with different headings—rites of passage, immigration, enforced migration, relocation, enslavement, and homelessness" (hooks 173). Furthermore, this requires us to recognize the dominance of some travel experiences and narratives over others, and with it the difficulty of articulating experiences such as those of hooks (173). Therefore, deconstructing the term in its historical context and reconfiguring conventional conceptions of travel allows for the inclusion of more diverse experiences of travel.[5]

In the afterword to *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Travel Writing*, Pratt compels us to consider this argument from a literary studies point of view. Echoing the concern of hooks, Pratt poses the question of whether we should think about the Middle Passage as travel and proposes that there might be a difference in the way we approach this question: "is this a conceptual, a political, or a moral question?" ("Afterword" 226). Considering that forms of involuntary and forced mobility, such as coerced displacement, the flight of refugees, human trafficking, and economic migrancy "also generate corpuses of stories and texts" (226), it can be argued that conceptualizing the forced journey across the Atlantic as travel and its literary representation as travel writing presents an opportunity for travel writing studies' sustained engagement with different forms of mobility (for example, forced, voluntary, leisurely, professional, and tourist). To view disparate journeys through the lens of travel writing, as this study does, facilitates an understanding of how

5 Forsdick and colleagues identify "a paradigm shift in the understanding of cultures of travel" that was introduced with works by scholars such as Said, Clifford, Pratt, hooks, and Kaplan in the late twentieth century. Their works attempt to liberate and decolonize the signification of travel, an effort that also entails a critical engagement with the concepts of culture and identity as autonomous entities. Forsdick et al. assert that "[t]he questioning of these concepts challenges the stability of the traveller's identity, and calls for a recovery of neglected journeys as well as a reexamination of what it means to travel in the postcolonial era" (61).

these representations counter, connect, and respond to more traditional accounts of travel and travel writing. Moreover, seeing that "[i]nvoluntary migration generates a literature where the equation of mobility and freedom breaks down" (227), it seems that a redefinition of the genre and the terms at large is imperative for entangling conceptual, narrative, and metaphorical connotations of travel writing. Renegotiating the parameters of travel, then, influences our perception of the genre; textual representations of mobility, in turn, shape our visions of travel. A more capacious understanding of the term travel thus facilitates an exploration, connection, and contrast of literary and cultural narratives produced by such different forms of mobility.

The Middle Passage undoubtedly persists as one of the most significant journeys in the travel writings of African diasporic authors. In line with Pratt, other travel writing scholars have also confirmed that "[t]he experience continues to generate narratives of travel, both imaginative and factual" (Youngs, "African American Travel" 112) and emphasized that "African American travel writing remains haunted by the ancestral memory of the Middle Passage [...]. Every subsequent journey is liable to be measured against it" (Pettinger, "At Least One" 81). The reason why the memory of the Middle Passage continues to figure prominently in travel writings might simply be the fact that it represents "the defining moment" of the Black diasporic experience (Pedersen 225). This also holds true for travel narratives written by authors who do not have historical ties to the displacement caused by the transatlantic slave trade. Moreover, narrative accounts of self-directed, independent travel, including professional and tourist trips to Africa, pit themselves most obviously against the Middle Passage, the quintessential form of involuntary movement. In many Black travel narratives, the autonomous journey of the narrator is juxtaposed, explicitly or implicitly, with the 'initial journey' and the oppression, dehumanization, and violence it denotes, demonstrating that the memory of the Middle Passage is a stable reference in these texts. Tracing the slave ships' routes in the opposite direction, for example, from the United States to Africa, transatlantic crossings by Black individuals, such as those recounted in the narratives that will be discussed in the second part of this study, can be perceived as a symbolic reversal of the Middle Passage. The reversal of historically produced routes may be read as a response to the historic oppression and victimization, and traveling can be understood as a form of agency that had historically been denied to Black subjects. The images created by such reversed journeys counter those lasting images of African-descended people

being carried across the ocean in the holds of ships that are evoked by the history of the transatlantic slave trade.

The Middle Passage stands for the extreme violence of the slave trade and, as historian David Eltis underscores, is "probably the purest form of domination in the history of slavery as an institution" (117). The domination of African captives is epitomized by their profound immobilization.[6] This immobilization is strikingly visualized by the familiar images of the cross-section of a slave ship: Chained together and densely stacked in the hold, the captives were rendered immobile even as the ship sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. Cresswell describes the Middle Passage as "an illustration of both transnational mobility […] and extreme enforced immobility" ("Black Moves" 19-20). The forced journey across the Atlantic thus embodies im/mobility[7]—"a paradox that runs through African-American culture" (Seiler, "Racing Mobility" 101). The African diasporic experience is indeed informed by involuntary and willed movement, imposed immobilization, as well as by efforts to create roots and claim places. As Berlin asserts, the dialectics of mobility and immobility—of movement and place, routes and roots, fluidity and fixity—create a "contrapuntal narrative" that "ripped across some four centuries of black life in mainland North America, the alternating and often overlapping impact of massive movement and deep rootedness touched all aspects of the experience of black people" (18).[8]

6 Despite the physical immobility and containment, enslaved Africans were by no means passive and resisted their capture whenever possible by jumping overboard and into the ocean or staging revolts, among the most memorable being the *Amistad* rebellion in 1839. The story of enslaved Africans seizing control over the ship under the lead of Sengbe Pieh (also known as Joseph Cinqué), the ensuing capture, and legal battle before the Supreme Court that resulted in the restoration of their freedom has captured the popular imagination and accentuates the resistance, courage, and agency of the captive Africans (see Rediker, *Amistad Rebellion*).

7 Mimi Sheller, in her important study *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (2018), reminds us of the interdependency of mobilities and immobilities: "The use of '(im)mobilities' is meant to signal that mobility and immobility are always connected, relational, and co-dependent, such that we should always think of them together, not as binary opposites but as dynamic constellations of multiple scales, simultaneous practices, and relational meaning" (19).

8 Along similar lines, Harvey Young argues that "*stillness*, like movement […], is an integral and defining part of the Black Diaspora" (42). He points out that "[c]ontrary to popular belief, movement was not the primary feature of the Middle Passage. Captives were not always *running* from captors, *marching* (as captives) to loading docks, *sailing* on boats to the Americas, and *marching* (yet again) to auctions to be auctioned. Within and

Berlin describes the various meanings attached to movement and place when he writes,

> Movement—forced and free—sometimes meant material loss, social dislocation, and spiritual fragmentation, yet sometimes signaled material gain, social improvement, and spiritual renewal. In slavery and freedom, black people twisted the meaning of movement and place, transforming places of repression into places of liberation and places of confinement into routes of escape. (20)

The 'initial journey' across the Atlantic that forced millions of Africans into slavery stands for involuntary mobility and is connected to displacement, subjugation, and oppression mobility. In Black American history and culture, however, mobility is also linked to liberation: Travel—to escape from slavery, in the form of migration and repatriation movements, and as a means to protest injustice and claim rights—connotes freedom, agency, and resistance.

Importantly, the Middle Passage does not only refer to a past moment in history but is also employed as a wide-ranging concept. The editors of *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World* (2007) explain that "the middle passage is not merely a maritime phrase to describe one part of an oceanic voyage; it can, rather, be utilized as a concept—the structuring link between expropriation in one geographical setting and exploitation in another" (Rediker et al. 2). They further state that "the concept of the middle passage has relevance to a range of migrations involving the coerced movement of people, sometimes simultaneously with the slave trade, as part of a worldwide process of capitalist development that spanned centuries and continues to this day" (2). They argue that current inequalities and injustices, for example, the disproportionate number of people of color imprisoned in the United States, can be understood as corrosive legacies of the Middle Passage and the system of slavery.

Sheller emphasizes that "[t]he history of bodily freedom of mobility is perpetually accompanied by unfreedoms, limitations, and impairments—but

---

betwixt these movements, there was a lot of stillness. The captives, confined within holding cells, spent more time waiting to travel the Atlantic than it took them to sail across the ocean. Once loaded on the boats, the shackled captives continued to have limited spatial options. They remained immobile even as they moved" (42). Harvey's finding underscores the importance of considering the different meanings and implications of mobility and immobility in the context of Black diasporic experiences.

also intertwined with resistances, counter-movements, and subaltern moves" (*Mobility Justice* 64). The transatlantic slave trade and enslavement in the Americas destroyed the ability of African-descended people to move freely and determine their own bodily movements (58). The control over enslaved peoples' mobility was a method for governing Black labor and the key to domination upon which the exploitative, capitalist system of slavery was built. On plantations, enslavers asserted their power over the people held in slavery by controlling their spatial mobility. Black peoples' movements were monitored and controlled through laws and social practices; for instance, overseers watched the movements of enslaved laborers working on plantations; slave patrols enforced curfews and checked Black people for a pass that gave them permission to move outside the boundaries of their enslavers' property; slave catchers chased self-emancipated individuals and returned them to their enslavers. Therefore, White people's concerted effort to control enslaved people's mobility was in fact a form of immobilization. Writing on slavery in the antebellum South and the relationship between space, gender, and power, historian Stephanie Camp succinctly notes that slavery "entailed the strictest control of the physical and social mobility of enslaved people, as some of the institution's most resonant accouterments—shackles, chains, passes, slave patrols, and hounds—suggest" (12). As Camp notes, "laws, customs, and ideals had come together into a systematic constriction of slave movement that helped establish slaveholders' sense of mastery" (6). However, despite these fundamental impairments, people held in slavery persistently struggled to alter their conditions. They found ways to resist what Camp calls the "geography of containment," that is, the combination of different forces employed by enslavers to systematically monitor the behaviors of enslaved populations and control their movements through space and time (6). Pushing the limits of their physical and spatial confinement, enslaved people carved out ways to challenge or destroy the constrictions imposed on them by systems of control. Under the constant threat of violence, they clandestinely moved according to their own wishes and needs whenever possible. In both revolutionary and everyday ways, they defied the efforts of their enslavers to control, dehumanize, and immobilize them.

Regardless of the systems of control that limited their mobility, Black people sought out ways to move and even escape their confinement. Importantly, for enslaved African Americans, self-emancipation from slavery was predicated on their ability to move: to escape from the enslaver's control and the physical and psychological confinements of the plantation zone, to hide and

prevent recapture, and to survive in hostile and unfamiliar terrain (Sheller, *Mobility Justice* 59). Through travel, freedom seekers transgressed the laws of bondage and took control over their mobility. Michelle Commander stresses the gravity of this act when she states, "Mobility—a person's control over his or her place in the world—is central to subjectivity and to one's sense of self" (8). The journey from bondage to freedom, therefore, signifies resistance to the dehumanization and objectification of Black people during chattel slavery and presents a quest for dignity and selfhood that they had been denied. For enslaved people, travel evolved into a means to assert their humanity, their psychic and bodily liberty. Such emancipatory journeys illuminate that "travel demonstrates agency, even if circumstances have left its actors with little choice. It provides a space for a degree of self-determination" (Youngs, "African American Travel" 117). Breaking free from bondage and liberating themselves from slavery's physical and psychological shackles allowed enslaved people to resurrect themselves from "social death," that is, the "imprintable" and "disposable" status imposed on them by the system of slavery (Patterson 7). The interconnection of travel and selfhood is also a central aspect in the writings of formerly enslaved and self-emancipated individuals, which I discuss in detail in Chapter III.

Narratives of freedom in African American history revolve around stories of flight and travel. An example is the Underground Railroad, the informal network of people who assisted freedom seekers in their perilous flight from slavery in the South to the free states of the North and Canada by guiding them along secret routes and providing hiding spaces and refuge along the way. In the American cultural imagination, the Underground Railroad has evolved into a myth that connects physical mobility to liberation. Like other means of transport, the train advanced into a symbol of freedom and is an imagery that figures prominently in Black literature, music, and art. Importantly, "as vessels of modern mobility and embodiments of freedom," these means of transport "served as the very antithesis to the ownership, confinement to land and shackles to place that defined the experience of enslavement in the antebellum South" (M. Hall 91). Yet, historical experiences of racial segregation and discrimination complicated such conceptions of freedom, giving paradoxical significations to images of the train and the railroad (91, 101).

The fight for the freedom of mobility is persistent throughout the history of African Americans. Since the pre-Civil War era, the importance of self-initiated and unrestricted movement has been an essential aspect of Black peoples' struggles for justice and equality. Although free travel was perceived as a basic

civil right, it was withheld from African Americans. For free Black people in the antebellum North, the ability to travel without constrictions advanced into a core value in their quest for equality and citizenship, as Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor's insightful *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship Before the Civil War* (2016) shows. They understood travel, and by extension equitable access to transportation systems and public spaces, as a quintessential aspect of social citizenship. Black travelers sought to exercise their rights as free citizens but found their mobility thwarted by the formal segregation on public transport (which was not yet institutionalized), racialized violence, and the denial of United States passports for international travel. In response, activist travelers transformed the cars and compartments of public conveyances into "critical sites for equal rights protests" (2). They protested the obstruction of their mobility by physically resisting their confinement to the Jim Crow car, arguing with White fellow passengers and railroad personnel, writing letters of complaint to state representatives, and suing railroad companies (2-3). For instance, journalist and civil rights activist Ida B. Wells famously resisted a conductor who tried to force her to move from the ladies' car to the 'colored car' (even though she had purchased a first-class ticket) by biting his hand.[9] Like Wells, countless other Black travelers challenged racial segregation and the discriminatory policies on public transportation in the nineteenth century, initiating a protest tradition that informed the subsequent struggles for civil rights. Therefore, the protests against transportation restrictions of the 1950s and 1960s must be understood "as the culmination of a long and sustained history of Black protest against segregated transportation" (Bay, *Traveling Black* 12).

Laws and regulations—such as the Fugitive Slave Act (passed by Congress in 1793 and further strengthened in 1850) that required Northerners to aid in the seizure and return of self-emancipated freedom seekers—most obviously prevented African Americans from traveling freely. However, social customs and practices as well as popular culture played an equally crucial role in curbing the opportunities for movement. Slave advertisements created stereotypical images of self-emancipated individuals that were circulated through

---

9 Demonstrating her commitment to fight for her rights, Wells recounts the incident with the conductor as follows: "He tried to drag me out of the seat, but the moment he caught hold of my arm I fastened my teeth in the back of his hand. I had braced my feet against the seat in front and was holding to the back, and as he had already been badly bitten he didn't try it again by himself" (18-19).

newspapers calling for the capture of the so-called 'fugitive' (a term that perpetuates the stereotype of Black criminality). The Black body in motion—previously immobilized by chains and confined to slave ships, auction blocks, and plantations—was equated with criminal and unlawful movement. As Pryor underlines, White Americans "criminalized black travel by making it appear illegal, suspicious, unconscionable, inappropriate, and anathema to American identity" (45). As a result, anti-Black vigilantism was fostered as White people were encouraged to monitor and curtail Black movements in public spaces (46). In popular culture, too, Black mobilities were presented as dangerous and criminal. The figure of Jim Crow, a nineteenth-century minstrel show character played by a White performer in blackface, portrayed a violent, drunk, and lecherous Black traveler (91-92). This criminalization of Black mobile bodies was in effect another way to immobilize African Americans and limit their spatial mobility.

The limitations on travel and mobility that existed before the Civil War continued in the post-emancipation period and beyond, albeit in different forms, even though the passing of the Civil War Amendments (also known as Reconstruction Amendments) formally abolished slavery and granted African Americans the rights of citizenship. Reversing many of the gains of Reconstruction, the 1896 Supreme Court decision of the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*—which was itself a fight over the right to travel freely[10]—made racial segregation in public spaces constitutional on the condition that 'equal' facilities and public accommodations were provided for Black Americans. While the system of racial segregation decisively influenced all aspects of life, its effects were particularly palpable in forms of transportation (Sheller, *Mobility Justice* 61): Black passengers were relegated to the back of the buses and confined to separate compartments on trains with the purpose of 'keeping them in their place' and making autonomous movement difficult, if not impossible. In addition to the discomfort and the humiliation they experienced in the 'colored section,' they were also exposed to harassment and

10 In 1892, Homer Plessy deliberately challenged the segregation in the public transportation system in Louisiana when he refused to leave his seat in the "Whites-only" passenger car. The ensuing legal battle went to the Supreme Court and ultimately granted constitutional permission to state laws that enforced racial segregation in public accommodations and services for Black and White Americans. It was not until 1954, when the Supreme court overturned its former decision in the case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, that racial segregation was outlawed (Duignan).

physical violence. The circumscription of travel was a denial of the freedom of mobility as well as of citizens' rights and privileges that was upheld until the mid-twentieth century.

Along with the efforts to desegregate public schools and secure voting rights, mobility was an essential issue in the struggle for civil rights in the twentieth century. Seeing that autonomous mobility epitomized freedom and resistance to oppression and inequality, it is indeed difficult to overestimate its significance. As the bus boycotts and Freedom Rides demonstrate, the fight for the right to travel without discrimination has been at the center of Black people's quest for justice. Cresswell confirms that "the politics of race and the politics of mobility (particularly public transit provision) have moved side by side through the civil rights movement" (*On the Move* 261). Trains and buses became notorious sites of political protest as Black activists challenged their spatial confinement and status as second-class citizens. Among the most popular figures in the fight for citizens' rights on public transportation is certainly Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat for a White passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. The fight against racial discrimination was also conducted in airports. Battling the desegregation of airport terminals, African Americans turned them into "territories of confrontation over the renegotiation of racial identities in postwar America," as the 2017 study *Jim Crow Terminals* reveals (Ortlepp 10). Black people's persistent and tireless opposition to travel segregation, therefore, was a crucial part of the struggle for equality.[11]

As an instrument "of defiance and dignity in the journey to full equality" (Sorin 12), the automobile played a crucial role in the mobilization of Black travelers.[12] African Americans with the financial means to purchase a car were able to take part in the early twentieth-century American dream of unbound spatial mobility, independence, and autonomy that was encapsulated by the

11 See Mia Bay's important study *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (2021) for an in-depth account of the history of Black mobility and resistance.

12 In the landmark study *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (2008), historian Cotten Seiler examines the racial politics of automobility and shows that automobility evolved into a powerful source for African Americans seeking access to the public sphere. See also Gretchen Sorin's *Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights* (2020) for a detailed study on African American travel during segregation, the role of the automobile, and the significance of Black travel guides. Sorin provides a remarkable exploration of (auto)mobility in relation to race that intertwines historical scholarship and personal accounts and experiences.

open highway, while simultaneously avoiding the humiliation and discrimination they often faced on public transport. At the same time, however, they were confronted with different obstacles as they drove through the segregated nation: The fact that hotels, restaurants, gas and service stations, and many other roadside establishments discriminated against Black customers and refused to serve them curbed the travel options and turned road trips into difficult endeavors. On the open road, Black motorists often experienced harassment and threats of violence. Traveling, therefore, required careful planning and minutiae preparation (see Bay, "Traveling Black" 22-24).

A number of travel guides catered specifically to African American motorists and travelers and provided invaluable information on hospitable businesses and accommodations across the United States. Victor H. Green's *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (1936-1966) is probably the best-known travel guide.[13] Its existence and the fact that it was published for three decades testify to the perils and dangers that Black travelers faced. Heralded as the "Bible of black travel" (Taylor, "Roots"), it aimed to make traveling safer and more convenient for African Americans. It had other significant functions as well: Through its descriptions of popular travel destinations it encouraged African Americans to travel and explore the nation—"There is much to be seen and more to learn, of this our land which offers everything of beauty, wonder and history" (Schomburg, "1950" 3)—and thereby claim access to public spaces. Its depictions of "African Americans as upwardly and outwardly mobile vacationers [and] habitually mobile business travelers" (Seiler, *Republic of Drivers* 118) functioned to demonstrate that Black travelers, too, belonged on highways, trains, and airplanes, inscribing them into discourses of tourism from which they had been excluded. Importantly, the *Green Book* promoted the idea that travel could dismantle prejudice and stereotypes by facilitating interracial encounters and creating a better understanding between Black and White Americans. Quoting Mark Twain on the cover of its 1949 edition, the *Green Book* pronounced, "Travel Is Fatal to Prejudice" (Schomburg, "1949"). In the editors' view, the practice of traveling paved the way to equality. Expressing their unwavering optimism and belief in progress, the editors asserted, "There will be

13 For a comprehensive account of the *Green Book*, see the study by cultural historian Candacy Taylor with the programmatic title *Overground Railroad: The Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America* (2020). In addition to Taylor's work, Sorin's recent book presents the most in-depth study of the travel guide.

a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States" (Schomburg, "1948" 1). From this perspective, tourist and vacation travel gained social and political relevance and was an act of both pleasure and defiance. The *Green Book* mobilized African Americans and encouraged them to move forward: literally, by traveling through the United States, and figuratively, by moving forward on the road to justice and equality.

African Americans traveled despite the dangers and the many constrictions they encountered. Historian Gretchen Sorin stresses the weight of such travel when she remarks that "with each mile they traveled, ordinary African Americans challenged prohibitions that prevented them from traveling and from entering segregated spaces;" travel, therefore, was a way "to claim the rights of citizenship and push the boundaries of racism" (17). To put it differently, not just activists pushed for the rights of unrestricted travel and equal access to public spaces; the leisurely journeys of tourists and the professional journeys of business travelers also challenged the status quo. Through travel, Black Americans defied the racialized spatial order and fought segregation in landscapes of travel and beyond. Segregation eventually became unconstitutional with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Two years later the *Green Book* ended publication.

While the opportunities for travel have increased in the post-civil-rights period, Black people's mobility is still circumscribed. Travel continues to be bound up with considerable risks for Black Americans as evidenced by the two travel alerts that were issued by *The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (NAACP) in 2017: One advised them to exercise caution when traveling through the state of Missouri due to the high number of race-based incidents; the other warned travelers about American Airlines' discriminatory and disrespectful treatment of Black passengers.[14] The issuing of these nationwide travel alerts was a novelty in the history of the civil rights organization. This and other examples, such as the reports on racial discrimination on Airbnb and the controversial screening programs of the Transportation Security Administration agents at US airports, illuminate the impairment of Black travel in the twenty-first century.

The immobilization of Black bodies continues today in different forms. For instance, the stop-and-frisk practice, which allows law enforcement officials to stop, question, search, and detain suspect passengers and drivers

14 The travel advisory for American Airlines was lifted after nine months.

without probable cause, affects people of color disproportionally. In 2013, this was brought to light by the federal class-action lawsuit *Floyd v. City of New York*, which revealed disparities in the pattern of who was stopped and interrogated by the New York Police Department. One reason for the stopping of predominantly young Black men was what the official police forms called "furtive movements," which were described as suspicious bodily moves or behavior that could, however, not be further specified (Cresswell, "Black Moves" 15). Obviously, this strikingly exposed the sustained and disturbing disparities in the treatment of different racial groups. The racial profiling and the harassment of Black drivers by the police have introduced the phrase 'Driving While Black' that has been adopted to other quotidian activities that people of color practice under the risk of being assaulted or intimidated.[15] The criminalization of Black movements is also linked to the police shootings of Black people and constitutes a key concern of the Black Lives Matter Movement formed in recent years. Rod Clare underscores that the issue of mobility is central in this struggle for equality and justice when he states, "Implicit in the rise of the BLM and its attendant demands and concerns is the long-standing issue of black mobility. That is, *where* can black people go and *when* can they go there?" (123).

Recent scholarship has brought attention to the historical roots of these forms of immobilization and shown how the criminalization of Black mobility and corporeal movements is tied to a history of constructing and perceiving Black bodies in racialized ways. Scholars have emphasized that the impairment of mobility by way of stops and interrogation, which have become commonplace for people of color, resonates with different forms of monitoring Black mobilities that are prefigured by earlier episodes in African American history. In *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015), Simone Browne

15 The term 'Driving While Black' developed in public discourses of the 1990s and is an expression that plays on the phrase 'driving while intoxicated,' which describes the criminal offense of driving while impaired by alcohol or drugs. 'Driving While Black' refers to the disproportional risk of Black drivers being stopped, searched, or arrested by law enforcement officials for minor infractions or without apparent reason at all and is associated with racial profiling. Similar phrases have spun off—such as 'Walking While Black,' 'Shopping While Black,' and 'Living While Black'—that draw attention to the racial harassment people of color experience during quotidian activities. This issue has taken on new urgency as media reports of racial profiling sum up. See also A. Davis (1997) and Gilroy ("Driving While Black").

exposes how modern surveillance technologies and practices (such as biometric technologies and security practices at airports) descend from slavery, in particular the methods used to surveil, control, and subjugate (enslaved) Black people (for example, slave patrols, lantern laws, the requirement of identity papers and slave passes, slave tags, and the branding of bodies as a means of identification).[16] Moreover, in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2020 [2012]), legal scholar Michelle Alexander outlines the immobilization of people of color in the United States through mass incarceration. Prisons represent sites where Black bodies are kept immobile. Alexander posits that the criminal justice system bears similarities to the racial caste system in the Jim Crow era when African Americans were treated as second-class citizens. Although Black im/mobility is not the focal point of her important study, she effectively illustrates how different forms of immobility are intertwined; in particular, the physical confinement and immobilization of people and the limited opportunities for upward social and economic mobility. Alexander explains that "the major institutions with which [African Americans] come into contact are designed to prevent their mobility. To put the matter starkly: The current system of control permanently locks a huge percentage of the African American community out of the mainstream society and economy" (16). Along these lines, Sheller argues that "[r]acialized mobility systems in the United States originate in the system of slavery and its coercive and violent controls over black bodies and mobilities" (*Mobility Justice* 60); these systems influence Black mobility to this day. In other words, the slave trade and enslavement continuously inform the lives of Black people and determine their options for movement and travel.

Thus far, I have outlined the diversity of different forms of travel that have played a crucial role in the African American experience. I have highlighted

---

16 Browne writes, "Current biometric technologies and slave branding, of course, are not one and the same; however, when we think of our contemporary moment when 'suspect' citizens, trusted travelers, prisoners, welfare recipients, and others are having their bodies informationalized by way of biometric surveillance, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes without consent or awareness, and then stored in large-scale, automated databases, some managed by the state and some owned by private interests, we can find histories of these accountings of the body in, for example, the inventory that is the *Book of Negroes*, slave ship manifests that served maritime insurance purposes, banks that issued insurance policies to slave owners against the loss of enslaved laborers, and branding as a technology of tracking blackness that sought to make certain bodies legible as property" (128).

how spatial movements are connected to freedom, liberation, justice, and citizenship, as is the case with the journeys of the enslaved to pursue their freedom, the nineteenth-century transit justice struggles, and the significance of mobility during the Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, the travels of Black people are also associated with oppression, dehumanization, and immobilization. By considering various forms of travel and the meanings attached to them, it is possible to define travel in broader terms to include experiences of travel that have often gone unnoticed. In line with Cresswell's assertion that "[w]e cannot understand new mobilities […] without understanding old mobilities" ("Towards" 29), I maintain that it is indispensable to consider the above-presented implications of travel when analyzing contemporary narratives of travel. To be certain, the journeys of Black travelers that are analyzed in this study reflect a particular privilege, financially, if nothing else; however, their mobility should not be simply understood as a given. In the context of the cultural history of Black im/mobility, their physical mobility underscores the significance of travel for people of color, which is certainly not lost on these travelers. The associations of travel with limitation and confinement on one side, and freedom, self-determination, resistance, and citizenship on the other, are crucial for understanding the underlying connotations of journeys and movements that inform Black travel and its representation in literary production.

2. Diasporic Return and the Significance of Africa in the Black Imagination

> To the heirs of those uprooted people, Africa quickly became a distant, intangible entity, yet for many it also remained a pivotal constituent in their search for identity, a quest for cultural roots.
>
> —*Daria Tunca and Bénédicte Ledent, "The Power of a Singular Story: Narrating Africa and Its Diasporas"*

> What is Africa to me?
>
> —*Countee Cullen, "Heritage"*

Throughout American history, the continued denial of citizens' rights and privileges and the devaluation of Black lives have led African Americans to gravitate toward Africa in a variety of ways. For instance, they have traveled

to the continent to settle either temporarily or permanently in the homeland of their ancestors and they have turned to the continent for the purpose of empowerment, cultural identification, and inspiration. The journeys to Africa and the resulting literary and cultural engagement reflect the desire of Black people in the diaspora to make sense of their personal as well as their collective and historical relationships with the continent. In the following, I examine the performed and imagined returns to Africa and delineate the different significations of Africa in the Black diasporic imagination. An understanding of Africa's centrality for the self-conception of the diaspora and the meanings attached to it is essential for the analysis of contemporary narratives of travel to Africa. As I demonstrate in Chapter IV, all of the travel narratives analyzed in this study are concerned with the question eloquently expressed by Cullen: What is Africa to me? Evidently, responses to this question vary depending on the particular cultural and historical context.

From the moment that Africans were violently uprooted from their native lands and transported to the Americas, they desired to return to Africa. The Middle Passage was for almost all Africans a one-way journey that forever separated them from their homeland. People of African descent had to create ties to the foreign and hostile land where they lived and slaved. However, they maintained a connection to Africa and expressed their persistent links to their native countries by preserving the memories of the place and by sustaining cultural and religious practices and customs, passing them from one generation to the next. The idea of Africa as the land of origin remained vital to many, as did the wish to return: "The notion of a return to the point of origin," as Gilroy points out, "predate[s] any formal organisation around this goal" and in the imagination of the enslaved, they would return to Africa eventually, even if it was only in the afterlife (*Black Atlantic* 208). In historical accounts of the slave trade and the Middle Passage, stories appear frequently of enslaved Africans jumping overboard to their deaths to free themselves and let their souls return home to Africa (see, for example, Rediker, *Slave Ship*; Snyder 2015). Similarly, tales of enslaved Africans who ascend into flight to escape from slavery and return to an African homeland permeate the African American folklore tradition. The flying African embodies mobility and resistance to slavery and oppression. Referring to this tradition of flight, Commander writes, "Literal and figurative flights closer to Africa are indicative of the ceaseless reconfigurations of resistance to elide racism and its attendant systems of domination" (5). She further points out that "Black Americans have been perpetual travelers enraptured by the promises of flight since the Middle

Passage. Flight is transcendence over one's reality—an escape predicated on imagination and the incessant longing to be free" (7). For centuries, then, the idea of return has persisted in the cultural imagination of people of African descent long after slavery ended.[17]

Religious beliefs also played a crucial role in strengthening the idea of return. While scholars have pointed out that religious indoctrination and conversion were used as a means of social control over enslaved Africans (as they were taught submissiveness, piousness, and acceptance of their condition), they also emphasize that enslaved people embraced the Christian tradition because it provided narratives of emancipation and freedom as well as access to symbolic resources, which they could interpret according to their purposes (Paul 168). In particular, the biblical narrative of the emancipation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery by God emerged as an important symbol and a metaphor for their own enslavement. Enslaved people of Christian faith discovered within the Exodus story a narrative that allowed them to interpret and make sense of their condition. Albert J. Raboteau, a renowned scholar of American religious history, explains that Black Christians appropriated the Exodus narrative and "articulated their own sense of peoplehood. Exodus symbolized their common history and common destiny" (13). The narrative also nurtured enslaved people's internal resistance because it contradicted White Christians' racist claims that Black people were inferior to them and therefore destined to slavery. Sustaining their belief in a future where they would eventually be freed, the Exodus narrative provided a refuge. This belief also entailed the idea of a Promised Land, or Canaan, which "referred not only to the condition of freedom but also to the territory of freedom—the North or Canada" (14). In the Black imagination Africa, too, emerged as the Promised Land to which African-descended people were meant to return. The idea of a return formed the foundations of the Black Zionist tradition. The Exodus narrative found its way into spirituals sung by the enslaved, in abolitionist writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in speeches held

17 For an account of the stories of flying Africans in the folklore of enslaved people, see Jason R. Young's 2017 article "All God's Children Had Wings: The Flying African in History, Literature, and Lore."

during the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century and served as a blueprint for the Rastafari belief that developed in the 1930s in Jamaica.[18]

The first organized efforts to return to Africa began in the eighteenth century. From then onward, formerly enslaved and free Black people from North American as well as from other Western societies began to repatriate to Africa, inciting the long tradition of traveling and emigrating to the continent that has come to be known as Back-to-Africa movements. Many others followed their routes to Africa, including Black missionaries, emigrationists (that is, proponents of emigration), intellectuals, scholars, political figures, and tourists. The repatriation of Black people began after the American Revolutionary War. Several thousand enslaved Black people joined the fight on the side of the British, enticed by the promise that they were to earn their freedom. After Britain's defeat, some of the Black Loyalists settled in Nova Scotia or were brought to London by British forces. In both locales, however, they faced hardships and frustration, such as severe climate, food shortages, and labor exploitation in Canada, and discrimination and poverty in England. Seeking alleviation from the precarious living conditions of London's so-called 'Black Poor,' the charitable organization Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor supported the founding of a British colony on the west coast of Africa. This first effort at repatriation was a historic event: In 1787, a ship set sail for Sierra Leone carrying several hundred members of the Black community from London who established a rudimentary coastal settlement upon arrival. A few years later, in 1792, some 1,200 Black Loyalists from Nova Scotia followed and built a second colony. In both colonies, however, the settlers faced conflicts with local Africans and were plagued by disease as they were ill-equipped for life in such an environment.

The repatriation of Black people from America to Sierra Leone was also supported by the American Colonization Society (ACS) founded in 1816. Established and dominated by White people, their motives to sponsor and encourage Black emigration initiatives were highly controversial. Some thought of their work as a humanitarian effort aimed at relieving Black people from slavery; others subscribed to the belief that White and free Black people could not coexist and thought it best to remove the Black population from the United

18 On the Exodus narrative as a key cultural metanarrative of Afro-Atlantic communities, see Rhonda R. Thomas's *Claiming Exodus: A Cultural History of Afro-Atlantic Identity, 1774-1903* (2013).

States. Southern enslavers who were members of the ACS backed the endeavor because they saw the growing population of freeborn and recently emancipated Black people as a threat to the institution of slavery. Black Americans predominantly denounced ACS-sponsored emigration; they viewed it as a deportation scheme meant to remove free Black people from the country where they had been born (Blyden 103). However, the ACS played an important role in the repatriation efforts of Black Americans as the organization acquired land and over the course of the nineteenth century brought a few thousand migrants to West Africa. In 1819, the organization founded another colony south of Sierra Leone: the Republic of Liberia, which became an independent nation in 1847. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed a significant increase in Liberia's settler population. Regardless of the many hardships they faced, from the arduous ship voyage that cost the lives of many prospective settlers to the difficulties that emigrants encountered when landing on African shores, Black Americans continued to leave the United States, having lost faith in a country that did not accept them as equals. Their journeys testified to the intense longing for freedom and a better life.

In the nineteenth century, Black "emigrationists looked upon Africa as the new promised land, a land of milk and honey where its offspring in the diaspora could return and thrive" (Kelley 21). Among the most influential figures calling for Black repatriation to Africa were the merchant and shipowner Paul Cuffe, who brought 38 Black settlers to Sierra Leone in 1816; Daniel Coker, who immigrated to Sierra Leone and become the first Methodist missionary; the physician Martin Delany, who led an exploration party to West Africa in the 1860s; and Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, who founded the International Migration Society and organized two voyages to Africa in the late nineteenth century which brought Black emigrants to Liberia.[19] These emigrationists carried American political, legal, social, and cultural conventions with them as they prepared to settle in Africa. Supporters of emigration and the settlers who were steeped in American belief and value systems viewed it as their responsibility to 'enlighten' native Africans. The return of Black Americans to Africa was seen "as a kind of civilizing mission, bringing Christianity to the heathens and technology and knowledge to the backward natives," an endeavor to redeem Africa—not from European colonialism but from the decline of its civilization, thus signaling a "radically different cultural approach to 'return'"

19 For a detailed study on Black emigrationists and colonizers, see Campbell (2006) and Blyden (2019).

(Kelley 21). Gaines, who connects the imperialist civilizing mission with the ideology of racial uplift, explains that those who supported and participated in this mission believed that they could demonstrate their fitness for US citizenship and counter racial stereotypes by presenting themselves as "agents of civilization" ("Black Americans" 437). This attitude says much about how Black emigrationists of this time thought about Africa. As a result, the consequences of Black emigration and colonization were often disastrous for the local population because the newly arrived settlers did not view Africans as equals and frequently exploited and dispossessed them (Dodson and Diouf 77). Needless to say, there is an inherent irony in the way that people fled from discrimination and exploitation in the United States only to arrive in Africa and establish themselves as the superior population, devaluing the culture of the local inhabitants.

Unsurprisingly, controversial stances on the debates about emigration existed within Black American communities. The idea to return to their ancestral African homeland resonated with those who felt that they would never be fully integrated into American society and that their struggle for equality was a delusion. True freedom, they argued, was to be sought outside the national boundaries of the United States. In their imagination, Africa transformed into a utopian, paradisiacal homeland where Black people could prosper free from oppression and exploitation. Moreover, their return to the continent presented an antidote to the dispossession they experienced in the United States. For them, Africa was both a past and future home. By contrast, opponents of Black emigration, such as Frederick Douglass, did not think of Africa as a potential homeland and rejected the colonization movements. To them, Africa was irrelevant and repatriation efforts were seen as a distraction from the necessary struggle for equality in the United States (Campbell 67). Reasoning that they were first and foremost Americans, they argued that Black people belonged in the United States and were determined to fight for their rights and claim the country in whose building and development they had played a quintessential role. They displayed fierce opposition to emigration and denounced the movement, trusting that they would gain freedom and equality in the United States at last. The different sentiments and attitudes demonstrate that throughout history, Black people were divided on the topic of repatriation. Furthermore, the controversies over this issue also reveal the heterogeneity of Black people's experiences in the United States.

Back-to-Africa movements often coincided with times of despair in the United States. Black Americans' fears of never being able to fully participate in

American society and culture were reflected in the rising interest in repatriation initiatives. Although the number of these initiatives declined in the post-emancipation period, when the abolition of slavery engendered a new sense of optimism in a brighter future in America, several historical moments saw an upsurge in emigrationist sentiments. Especially during times when it seemed that hopes for integration and equality would never be realized, repatriation initiatives flourished. One such period was the last decade of the nineteenth century: In the 1890s, the interest in emigration peaked, particularly among Black people in the South because this period was marked by the rise of racial violence and pervasive discrimination (Blyden 126-27). With unprecedented rates of lynchings of Black people, this period is referred to by historians as the nadir of race relations (Logan 23). In the face of rising violence and the institutionalized segregation, which profoundly curbed many of the rights Black people had gained during Reconstruction, the hopes for integration and citizenship rights vanished, causing African Americans to reassess their place in society and rethink their prospects in the country (Blyden 127). As Africa was perceived by many as a safe haven from discrimination, they sought out ways to emigrate to the continent. In terms of actual numbers of people leaving the United States during this time, the movement was relatively small compared with pre-Civil War emigration.[20] Nevertheless, as Campbell stresses, "numbers alone do not reveal the movement's full significance"—rather, the meaning of the movement is to be found in the way it prompted "a searching debate among African Americans, posing fundamental questions about black identity, history, and destiny" (103). That is to say, the importance of Black colonization and emigration is not so much found in the number of people making the journey across the ocean but in the ways that Black Americans engaged with issues concerning their self-conception both in relation to the United States and Africa as well as their current and future place in US society. Black Americans' relationship to Africa, therefore, reveals much about the domestic issues and concerns that were relevant for them at the time.

In the early twentieth century, the Back-to-Africa movement was reinvigorated by Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey. A radical pan-Africanist who emigrated to the United States, Garvey founded the nationalist United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which promoted racial pride and advocated for Black Americans' return to Africa. Garvey's UNIA excited unprecedented

---

20 Campbell notes that only an estimated 2,500 Black Americans settled in Africa in the four decades following the Civil War (103).

popularity for the return idea and attracted supporters from North and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Great Britain. Calling for African independence and for people in the diaspora to return to their ancestors' homeland, Garvey envisioned a Black-owned shipping line, the Black Star fleet, sailing to conduct trade and bring Black Americans to Africa. In the end, however, Garvey's mission failed: The shipping line went bankrupt and he was accused of fraud and sentenced to prison before being deported from the United States in 1927. Although his vision was never realized, and, ironically, he himself never set foot on African soil, his influence remained strong.

In spite of many unsuccessful efforts to return to Africa, the desire to leave the United States has endured throughout history.[21] The search for an alternative homeland in Africa and beyond testifies to African Americans' estrangement from and disappointment with the United States. Proposals for repatriation to another place express the wish for a new beginning and are a manifestation of the Black diaspora's "freedom dreams"—that is, "the dream of a new world" envisioned by political activists, intellectuals, and artists which has fueled social movements and political engagement (Kelley 3, 126). Africa was and remains a fertile ground to plant and nourish the dreams of African-descended people—as a home, a place to reconnect with cultural roots, and as a space that can offer the reconciliation of emotional and psychological divisions caused by history.

Yet, although Africa has been central in Black American thought, very few people actually traveled or emigrated to the continent. Most African Americans engaged with Africa imaginatively, creatively, intellectually, or politically. Whereas the first generation of Africans who arrived in chains in the Americas had tangible connections to and concrete memories of the places they were forced to leave behind, subsequent generations were farther removed from their land of origin and their cultural heritage. Consequently, the perception of Africa underwent significant transformations. For Black people, their ties to the continent were often a source of shame because of the internalized

21 In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Africa was the most important destination for African American expatriates and intellectuals in search of an alternative homeland. But other potential sites of relocation were also considered, including Haiti, the Caribbean, and Canada (see, for example, Dodson and Diouf 69-74). In the twentieth century, Paris, France, became an important meeting point—and sometimes even a new home—for Black intellectuals, artists, expatriates, and refugees (see, for example, Fabre 1993).

derogatory images of backwardness and primitivism that pervaded American thought. But Africa was also a place of desire, a site of Black diasporic beginnings and cultural origins, a sanctuary from racism, and an ancestral home that could provide a future for Black people from around the globe. Moreover, the projection of Africa as a mother who awaits her long-lost children from the diaspora expresses the longing to recall and reclaim the continent. In this regard, the feelings and attitudes ranged from revulsion and rejection to pride and appreciation. Visions of the continent changed over time, depending on the particular historical context, but Africa has always been and remains an "abiding presence in black political, intellectual, and imaginative life" (Campbell xxiii).

Cultural and literary productions served as a canvas for people of African descent to contemplate the meaning of Africa and think about themselves in relation to America and Africa as well as the world in the early twentieth century. The 1920s saw a cultural and aesthetic return to an African heritage: During the Harlem Renaissance, African American arts flourished and were widely celebrated. Africa seized the imagination of creative artists who sought to reestablish cultural connections to the continent. Turning to Africa as a source of inspiration and pride, they countered the popular perception that African Americans had lost their ties to African cultures because of slavery and the rupture it created. In the cultural imagination of the diaspora, Africa was constructed as a space imbued with different and conflicting meanings. Africa's image during the Harlem Renaissance was characterized by mythical and romantic notions, which were products of the imagination rather than stemming from actual experiences. Literary responses to Africa were often ambivalent as they conjured a space that is simultaneously familiar and strange, primitive and uncivilized, a source of cultural origin and an unknown territory, a place of escape from racism in the United States, a home, and a site of cultural renewal (T. Harris 25-26). These images often relied on and were shaped by prefigured ideas of the continent, both positive and negative. Cullen's poem "Heritage," which was written during this time, demonstrates the ambivalent image of Africa in the literary and cultural imagination. Here, Africa takes shape as a space with fluid and shifting meanings.

Africa fulfills important functions in the processes of collective identity formation. It is a persistent but ever-evolving signifier in conceptions of Black identity. African Americans' relationship with Africa has always been central in understanding and identifying themselves—but this has never been an easy task. Campbell confirms the significance of Africa in the Black imagination

when he contends that "African Americans continued to look to Africa, seeking in its dim outlines a clue to the meaning of their own bitter, bewildering history" (xxiii). The personal stances toward Africa of Black individuals are also reflected by the changing denominations at different points in time: Labels such as 'Afro American,' 'Black,' 'Black American,' and 'African American' reveal different identity politics and different ways to define and formulate individual and collective identities in relation to Africa.[22] Some felt a close connection to Africa; they saw the continent as their homeland and imagined Africans as brothers and sisters. Referring to themselves as *African* Americans, they stressed their cultural African heritage. Others, however, distanced themselves from it, arguing that centuries of separation from Africa had turned them into (Black) Americans. The disconnection and alienation they felt toward Africa were often also a result of the prevailing negative perceptions and representations of the continent. African-descended people have imagined and continue to see themselves as part of a diasporic community that has its roots in Africa. The idea of transnational connections between Black people based on shared African origins is central to strategies of identification as well as resistance against nationalist and racist historiography. However, such "essentialist, romantic ideas about black cultural unity" are also heavily criticized (Kelley 16). What transpires is that people of the Black diaspora engage with Africa in different ways and attach different significations to the continent (surely, African migrants of recent decades who have direct ties to specific places and peoples in Africa engage with the continent differently than do African Americans whose engagement with the continent is most often purely imaginative). Importantly, African Americans' relationship with Africa has continuously been changing and complex attitudes toward the continent exist, ranging from contempt and disregard to solidarity and pride (J. H. Meriwether 11).

In the mid-twentieth century, as Black nationalist sentiments rose, African American engagement with Africa was particularly palpable: The African independence and decolonization movements were symbolically linked with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, representing a

22 For a detailed overview of the changing denominations and the identity politics behind these labels, see the introductory chapter (tellingly titled "I'm not African. I'm American") of Blyden's *African Americans and Africa*. See Manthia Diawara's *In Search of Africa* (1998) for a discussion of the ramifications of American, African, and African American identity constructions.

common political struggle against oppression that strengthened the imagined ties between Black Americans and Africans. During this time, African Americans became outspoken proponents of African liberation and sought to lend political support. In contrast to previous periods, "African Americans embraced contemporary, as opposed to historic, Africa" (J. H. Meriwether 1) and openly identified with the continent. This renewed sense of identification and the cultural celebration of Africa was expressed in African Americans' embrace of African fashion, food, cultural and religious practices, political outlooks, and the adoption of African names. It was also reflected in travels to the continent: From the late 1950s until the 1970s, a number of Black people sought to resettle in Africa temporarily or establish long-term residence. In contrast to the organized repatriation efforts, during this time people mostly traveled to Africa as individuals or in small groups. Among the most common destinations was Ghana, the former Gold Coast.

In 1957, under the leadership of President Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence, carrying not only the dreams and aspirations of the African continent but also those of Black Americans who came to identify strongly with their African heritage. This promising vision of Africa in the diasporic imagination reached a peak in the 1960s and gave rise to a new wave of travelers. President Nkrumah—a prominent advocate of Pan-Africanism who sought to unify African-descended people—was mindful of the freedom struggle that was being fought on the other side of the Atlantic and invited Black Americans to relocate to Ghana and participate in the building of the new nation. The West African country, therefore, became the chosen home for many professionals, political leaders, activists, intellectuals, and writers, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, and Maya Angelou.[23] Their discontent with the situation in the United States as well as their search for identity and community motivated their journeys to Africa. Africa's growing allure as a continent shaking off the shackles of colonialism presented a contrast for these individuals to the conditions at home, the unfulfilled aspirations and disappointed hopes for justice, and the persistent forms of discrimination and unequal opportunities in a structurally racist environment (Coles 125-26). However, many of the 'returnees' experienced a profound sense of alienation, isolation, and disillusionment with their new homeland (see ch. III, sec. 3.3). Black repatriates' inability to integrate into

23 Gaines's *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (2006) offers a detailed study of Black Americans in Ghana in the mid-twentieth century.

their adopted societies and, importantly, the fall of Nkrumah in 1966, led many to return to the United States.

In the post-civil-rights era, the publication of Alex Haley's 1976 award-winning novel *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* and its television adaptation, one of the most-watched television programs of all times, incited a resurgence of interest in African Americans' relation to Africa. Combining fictional writing, family stories, and autobiography, *Roots* covers two hundred years of Black diasporic history and tells the story of Haley's family; beginning with his great-great-great-great-grandfather Kunta Kinte, who was kidnapped by slave traders from his native village of Juffure in the West African country Gambia and forcibly brought to America. Haley accomplished what many in the diaspora longed for: to retrace the routes of their ancestors back to Africa. By creatively retracing his ancestry across generations back to Africa, Haley not only rewrote his own family history but symbolically filled the void caused by the historical ruptures of the slave trade and slavery, thus providing the Black diaspora in America with a concrete history. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains that the best-selling novel "provided flesh and bone to the elusive ancestors that black people [...] conjured in the absence of proof denied by slavery" ("Foreword" xiv). Moreover, Haley's "*Roots* gave a name and shape to the longing for a verifiable identification of personal and cultural beginnings" (Hirsch and Miller 1); for this reason, the book had a tremendous effect on the discourses of cultural origins in the United States. Black American perceptions of African ancestry shifted from the atrocities of slavery and the feelings of shame connected to it to an accentuation of pride in their African cultural roots. As scholars have stressed, Haley's epic narrative of his family's history "was largely responsible for creating a new consciousness in mainstream America of the slave past from the perspective of the enslaved" (Dubey and Goldberg 598). By drawing on the quintessential American narrative of progress, success, and the fulfillment of the American Dream, *Roots* proofed tremendously appealing to Black and White audiences alike. As Madhu Dubey and Elizabeth S. Goldberg point out,

> *Roots* gratified the demands of both black cultural nationalism and American patriotism: Haley's journey of genealogical recovery fed black pride by affirming African origins for contemporary black identity, while the 'up from slavery' narrative culminating in the spectacular individual success of Alex Haley, a descendant of slaves, attested to the fulfilled promise of the American Dream. (598-99)

The book and its adaptation aroused a nationwide interest in genealogical research, inspiring people to learn about their past and family history.[24] *Roots* represents a literary manifestation of the phenomenon of roots trips and shaped Black diasporic travelers' expectations of Africa. Undoubtedly, it popularized the roots journey and lead to the expansion of diaspora tourism to Africa. The invocation of *Roots* in medial and literary narratives and its frequent appearance as an intertext in contemporary accounts of Black travel testify to its cultural significance—its powerful and persistent transnational influence.[25]

Clearly, Back-to-Africa movements have subsided in the twentieth century. As Blyden notes, "Although African Americans have sought a homeland in Africa, and some have settled on the continent, either temporarily or permanently, it continues to exist largely in the imagination of black Americans" (204). However, the idea of return and desire to reconnect with the ancestral continent prevails until today and is reflected in the roots trips to Africa as well as the flourishing of DNA testing to reveal ancestral connections. Since the late twentieth century, Africa has been a preferred destination for Black diasporic tourists, who are drawn to historical markers of the slave trade, many of which are located on the African west coast. The former slave forts and dungeons, such as the Elmina and Cape Coast castles, with their 'Door of No Return' through which African captives were forced, mark the point of embarkation on the dreadful journey across the Atlantic and into slavery. These sites figure as the symbolic points of connection between the continent and the diaspora. Visits to Africa thus elicit explorations into the history of slavery and reflections on the condition of the Black diaspora. This persistent engagement with Africa, be it in the form of actual travels to the continent or symbolic journeys of the imagination, elucidates the importance of Africa for the Black diaspora. Africa serves as a source for identification (personal, collective, and political) and cultural heritage and as inspiration for artistic, cultural, and literary productions. Return, both literal and figurative, is al-

24 For an account of how Haley's *Roots* inspired a boom in multicultural and self-revelatory genealogy, see Jackie Hogan's *Roots Quest: Inside America's Genealogy Boom*, especially 28-31.

25 The essay collection *Reconsidering Roots: Race, Politics, and Memory* (2017), edited by Erica L. Ball and Kellie Carter Jackson, offers an assessment of the impact of the *Roots* phenomenon, in particular its influence on the discourse on slavery, race, and civil rights.

ways concerned with questions of identity, origin, and the past and future of the Black diaspora.

III An Invisible/Kaleidoscopic Genre: Black Travel Writing

That the genre of Black travel writing offers an immensely rich reservoir for scholarly inquiry is not at all surprising. After all, the variety of travel experiences discussed in the last chapter stress the fact that Black people have traveled for centuries—as enslaved laborers and also as repatriates, missionaries, professionals, and tourists. For just as long, these travelers have produced written accounts of their experiences. Yet, despite the emphasis on the longevity, literary viability, and exuberant diversity of Black travel writing that is amply demonstrated in the primary source collections *A Stranger in the Village* (1998) and *Always Elsewhere* (1998), Black travel writing remains an almost "invisible genre" (Arana, "The Invisible Genre") and research into the topic is scarce. For the most part, scholarly contributions to Black travel writing center on singular works or concentrate on African American travel writing as a closed unit of analysis. It is therefore the aim of the present chapter to bring narratives of travel by Black writers into focus and thereby address the research lacuna that was outlined in detail in the introductory part of this study.

I begin this chapter with an introduction to the genre of travel writing in general, which, as multiple scholars in the field attest, is a diverse literary form that stretches across many genres. The chapter provides a definition of how travel writing is understood and employed in this study and entails a discussion of the relationship between fictional and factual modes of narration and their implications for reading accounts of travel. In the next step, the chapter zooms in and contours the diverse and eclectic genre of Black travel writing. Whereas inquiries of Black travel writing focus almost exclusively on African American literary productions, I seek to highlight the transnational character of Black travel writing and show that neither authors of travel writings nor the prevalent themes of their narratives can, or should, be confined

to one national literary tradition, as both writers and works transcend national borders literally and metaphorically. I use the contested term 'Black' as a terminological umbrella to account for the writings of African American and Black British authors to underline the transnational nature of this form of travel writing. However, my choice to use 'Black' to denote literary works produced by authors with different national and ethnic affiliations certainly risks the danger of oversimplification, essentialization, and homogenization.[1] It implies a homogeneity within Black communities and groups which obviously does not exist. Recognizing the shortcoming of the signifier 'Black,' Pettinger states, "Unfortunately it seems that—if only in the immediate short term—Black travel writers will not be more widely known unless they are explicitly and primarily identified as such, even though this runs the risk […] of seeming to make essential claims about 'race'" ("Introduction" xii). I recognize the danger of imposing an essentialist paradigm on the literary works by writers identified as Black and of reducing their complexity, but I also believe that the distinctiveness of these texts cannot be brushed aside (as will be demonstrated in my outlining of the features of the genre).

Finally, I trace the emergence and literary history of Black travel writing and locate early forms of the genre within the realm of slave narratives—the writings of formerly enslaved individuals of African descent that emerged in the eighteenth century in the Atlantic world. Here again, my focus lies on the transatlantic and transnational nature of a genre that has traditionally been associated with the African American literary tradition. Situating these early Black travel narratives within a transatlantic framework, instead of tying it to one national literary tradition, makes visible how travel writers with diverse national affiliations—as well as those with no clear national affiliations at all, such as Caryl Phillips, who has been described as the Black Atlantic writer par excellence with "multiple cultural allegiances" (Ledent, "Black British Literature" 17)—draw on the formal and thematic traits of canonical travel texts and how they respond to, expand, revise, or repudiate the ideas

1 In his study *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004), Mark Stein offers an insightful discussion of 'Blackness' in relation to literary works. With regard to the term Black British literature, he notes that "[d]ifferentiations of this sort are not uncontested; it is vital to consider, however, that differentiations need not be absolute. Categories always leak. Grouping 'black' texts together, and defining what is meant by 'black texts,' is possible if it is conceded that the same texts could be grouped differently, according to distinct parameters such as gender or genre, theme or style" (9).

of their predecessors. Analyzing the characteristics of slave narratives, the context of their production, their agendas, and purposes underlines their transnational character. These early forms of Black travel writing anticipate subsequent travel-themed literature. I look at the developments, trajectories, and prevalent themes that occur in Black travel writing, an account that is selective rather than exhaustive. The outline of the genre's themes and developments in the chapter creates the basis for later analysis.

1. Defining the Terms: Genre and Genealogy

> What is not a journey?
> —*Tzvetan Todorov, "The Journey and Its Narratives"*

Colleen J. McElroy's *A Long Way from St. Louie: Travel Memoirs* (1997) is a beautifully written account of her experiences traveling the world. Particularly noteworthy are the narrative's poetic quality and its unique textual form—frequently, the text on the page is arranged in the shape of an object that corresponds to the theme of the respective passage. Significantly, in the essays and poetry that comprise her travel narrative, McElroy addresses the invisibility and marginalization of Black people in discourses of travel and tourism:

> I wasn't raised with images of black explorers. In history books, my past was connected to the vast diaspora of slavery, race riots, and a few expatriate artists who fled this country. Accounts of great travels never included black people, so I had no role models. […] I have found no stalwart African American ladies, fresh from climbing the Himalayas or surviving the swelter of tropical heat, romanticism intact. I have only my own wanderlust—and my grandmother's belief that there are black folks everywhere on this earth. (*Long Way* iv-v)

The images of Black female travel that McElroy invokes in this passage are typically absent in discourses on Black travel and travel writing. As noted earlier, Black travel is often linked to involuntary movement and displacement. In addition, conventional perceptions of travel and travel writing connect both practice and genre to "white, male, Euro-American, middle-class" cultures (Holland and Huggan xiii), thus excluding the perspectives and experiences of Black travelers. A remarkable account of a woman's extensive travels across the globe, *A Long Way from St. Louie* challenges stereotypical representations

of travel. The narrative reveals "a sense of writing back against the dominant traditions of the genre" as "McElroy seeks […] to reclaim a genre often strongly associated with racism and imperialism, and to make a space in that genre for voices and perspectives that have historically been marginalized or suppressed" (Thompson, "Travel Writing Now" 211). McElroy also combines her clear-eyed observations on the racial and gendered dynamics of travel and mobility with her personal history as an African American woman.

Unfortunately, McElroy's travel narrative has not yet received the attention it deserves as very few literary scholars have studied her work.[2] There is also a research gap concerning Black travelers in the study of travel writing in general, despite the fact that already two decades ago "the amount of scholarly work on travel writing [had] reached unprecedented levels" (Hulme and Youngs 1). What are the reasons for this scholarly neglect of Black travel narratives? In his article "Pushing against the Black/White Limits of Maps: African American Writings of Travel" (2010), Youngs makes an important observation concerning the lack of scholarly attention paid to African American travel writing. He argues that both readers and critics have focused on narratives of forced mobility (for example, the Middle Passage), necessary movements (for example, the escape from slavery), and journeys that were undertaken because of social and economic disadvantages (for example, the migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban centers of the North, Midwest, and West in the twentieth century). Leisurely journeys with deliberately chosen destinations by well-situated, independent Black travelers—such as the one presented by avid world traveler McElroy—"do not fit with the dominant conception of African American writing arising from coercion and suffering" (72). Despite changes in the perception of travel and travel writing, people of color are frequently excluded from discourses surrounding travel. The conventional definition of travel writing continues to be "too closely tied to the image of a particular kind of travel: it neglects others, or at least forgets that other kinds of travel also find their way into print" (Pettinger, "Introduction" ix). Trying to overcome this restrictive focus, Pettinger has suggested a redefinition of categories and a change in critical reading practices that entail a regrouping of texts that would not be classified as travel writing according to established generic conventions (ix). In reference to Pettinger's contestation, Angela Shaw-Thornburg endorses the assumption that "[i]f African-American

2 The articles by Pettinger ("African American") and Youngs ("Pushing") are an exception.

literature of travel is to become more visible, critical readers must ultimately examine their reading practices" (53).

At issue is also the difficult relationship between African American literary criticism and postcolonial studies. Youngs contends that although postcolonial theory has spurred travel writing studies for decades, it has not adequately accommodated African American travel writing ("Pushing" 72), which may be surprising when considering the otherwise inclusive nature of postcolonial studies and the obvious thematic and formal similarities that African American writing shares with texts labeled as postcolonial ("African American Travel" 110).[3] Griffin and Fish, the editors of one of the early anthologies dedicated solely to African American travel writing, identify the genre's hybridity as another possible reason for this lack of scholarly attention. They conclude that the diversity of texts subsumed under the label of travel writing—ranging from autobiographical accounts to diaries, letters, guidebooks, ethnographical material, and much more—explains why this rich literary form "tends to fall between the cracks or get classified as autobiography" (xiv). In other words, due to its diversity and generic indeterminacy, it may be challenging to sketch the outlines of a distinct genre.

3 While Youngs argues that African American writing should be included in postcolonial frameworks, considering that the United States can be seen both as a formerly colonized and neocolonial nation with its continuing legacies of slavery and the oppression of Native Americans ("African American Travel" 109-10), Pettinger cautions that "the situation of slaves and their descendants in the United States is not readily amendable to a colonial or post-colonial analysis. As an oppressed minority, their travel writing might be expected to be oppositional in some way; yet, when describing journeys overseas, it would not be surprising if they began to resemble those of white Americans visiting those parts of the worlds over which the United States exerts formidable economic, political and cultural influence" ("At Least One" 79). However, Pettinger argues that the growing body of critical approaches to the genre of travel writing, in particular postcolonial frameworks, has to be reconfigured and adapted to account for the "cultural significance of geographical mobility in the African American (literary) tradition" (81). John Cullen Gruesser agrees that the experiences and the literal and cultural productions of African-descended people in the United States differ from those created by people from (formerly) colonized countries. Noting that African American literary criticism tends to be "resistant to postcolonial theoretical concepts," he nevertheless argues for the inclusion of African American writing in postcolonial theory (*Confluences* 2). To employ postcolonial approaches to the study of African American cultural productions seems adequate given "the long history of African American engagement with issues such as colonialism, displacement, and syncretism" (3).

The primary works that constitute the corpus of this study reflect the diversity that Griffin and Fish ascribe to the genre of Black travel writing. It is possible to find these narratives shelved under labels such as (presidential) autobiography, memoir, journalistic account, neo-slave narrative, historical writing, creative writing, or simply creative nonfiction. All of these generic categorizations entail various possibilities for analysis and reveal distinct aspects of the texts, perhaps even yielding different interpretative insights. As Ralph Cohen asserts, "Genres are open systems; they are groupings of texts by critics to fulfill certain ends" (210); therefore, the generic categorization of works is contingent on the decisions of critics. The classification of a work also frames readerly expectations and, even before that, the literary and aesthetic choices made by the author are shaped by generic traditions and conventions. The same text can thus be embedded and read in different literary traditions. For this reason, assigning a specific genre to a text is already an act of interpretation (Reinhart 133-34).[4] Therefore, approaching the works that will be discussed in the analysis through the lens of travel writing, itself a composite literary form that includes rather than excludes the genres named above, is particularly fruitful for a sustained engagement with the intertwinement of subjectivity and mobility presented in the narratives. It draws attention to the aesthetic forms of works that can be overlooked when the texts are read as nonfiction or autobiographies, which may result in a reading of the text that is simply concerned with excavating biographical information of the author's life rather than the literary qualities of the text. Moreover, the theories and discourses produced within the academic field of travel writing provide avenues for analysis: These include, for example, theorizations on the intertwinement of writing and the construction of (national) identity, conceptualizations of self and otherness (including the inherent power dynamics), as well as an exploration of the generic conventions and standardizations of travel writing.

Genres, as scholars have shown, are subject to transformation.[5] In the case of travel writing, this assertion holds particularly true. The genre of travel writing is characterized by instability, shifting boundaries, and definitions

4 On the formation and transformation of genres, see Alastair Fowler's *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (1982). Fowler argues that genre categories are modified continuously even by texts that seemingly represent their established configurations and conventions.

5 For analyses of the factors that incite change within a genre, see Basseler et al. (2013).

contingent on cultural dynamics, historical events and developments, sociocultural contexts, and critical genre theorization. Multiple scholars have highlighted the difficulties of outlining this rather nebulous genre:

> Travel writing [...] is hard to define, not least because it is a hybrid genre that straddles categories and disciplines. Travel narratives run from picaresque adventure to philosophical treatise, political commentary, ecological parable, and spiritual quest. They borrow freely from history, geography, anthropology, and social science, often demonstrating great erudition, but without seeing fit to respect the rules that govern conventional scholarship. (Holland and Huggan 8-9)

Scholars contend that as a form that "has always defied definition and demarcation" (4) it is best characterized by its "fluidity" (Hamera and Bendixen 3). The complicated relationship between travel writing and genre may also be the reason for the "few sustained applications of theory to travel text" and the lack of a "general travel theory as such" (Youngs, *Cambridge* 166). Its complex nature, blurring boundaries, and shifting borders are partly a result of the fact that, as Carl Thompson observes, "the term 'travel writing' encompasses a bewildering diversity of forms, modes and itineraries" (*Travel Writing*, 1-2). But what complicates it is also what makes it appealing to literary scholars, namely the genre's historical breadths (including texts from antiquity to the present), the expansive spaces and geographies covered in the texts, the travel writers' various purposes and motivations for traveling, the diverse types of travelers, and the multifaceted modes of writing. Furthermore, travel writing's inclusiveness allows for the pairing and comparing of highly disparate texts and multiple overlapping forms of writing. Without question, the genre's "seemingly competing strands of the empirical and the rhetorical, the scientific and the literary, the documentary and the artful, the objective and the subjective, are in fact among the main elements that continue to generate scholarly inquiry and debate" (Pettinger and Youngs 1).

Open definitions of travel writing can include almost all texts dealing with travel—whether it is treated as a topic, metaphor, or underlying structural pattern of the narrative. Going further, the genre can accommodate virtually every text if one agrees with the idea that narrative itself can be understood as a journey. According to Michel de Certeau, stories "traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories" (115). One could therefore conclude that "[e]very story is a travel story" (115). However, such an inclusive and overtly

expansive definition is not always productive. When every story can be considered a form of travel, the possibilities for application come at the expense of theoretical specificity. Due to travel writing's generic flexibility, some scholars have argued that literature about travel is too diverse to be fitted within the boundaries of a literary genre. The possibility to subsume almost all kinds of texts under the term has prompted Jan Borm to question the adequacy of calling travel writing a genre at all. In Borm's view, "It is not a genre, but a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fiction and non-fiction whose main theme is travel" (13). Borm's skepticism is not misplaced. When travel writing is considered to include literally every text that is formally or thematically informed by travel, it is difficult to define the parameters that make a sustained analysis of travel narratives possible.[6] For this reason and in the context of this study, I seek out a more precise definition of the genre in my analysis of Black travel writing.

Many scholars agree that travel writing is characterized by specific thematic elements and modes of writing. These narrower definitions of travel writing[7] describe it as predominantly nonfictional texts (in the sense that nonfiction is the dominant mode of narration) written from the first-person point of view that describes the narrator's journey(s) and the spaces they have passed through or temporarily dwelled in (Pettinger and Youngs 4). The travels presented also shape the structure and plot of the narrative, although the extent to which the structure of a work is influenced by the process of travel varies greatly. A travel narrative is an account of a presumably 'real' journey undertaken by the narrator who identifies as the author of the book. In this sense, the travel narrative complies with the autobiographical pact (Lejeune 1989) that puts forth the assumption of a nominal identity between protagonist or principal character, narrator, and author of the text. This premise, however, does not imply that a differentiation between these instances is unnecessary; instead, the contrary is true. When analyzing travel narratives (and this also pertains to the autobiographies) one must remember to distinguish between the author (the historical-biographical person who has written the

---

6 See also Youngs's *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, chapter 1, for a discussion of the question of genre.

7 I use travel narrative and travelogue interchangeably and subsume these terms under the umbrella of travel writing; however, some literary scholars object to this usage of terminology and distinguish between the different terms (see Borm 18-19).

text), the narrator or travel writer (the narrating I who remembers and recounts the travel experience), and the traveler (the experiencing I or principal character who undertakes the journey) (Nünning 141-42). There are obvious overlaps with the traditional autobiography, but in contrast to the autobiography, which has as its main theme a person's development and retrospectively retells a substantial part of an individual's life, the travel narrative focuses on select experiences of the traveling persona.[8]

To be sure, the elements of this definition—nonfiction, first-person perspective, real journey—are certainly ambiguous and by no means absolutely definite. In particular, the assumption that travel writing is nonfiction or factual writing is an aspect that demands closer investigation. It is important to note that the border between nonfiction and fiction writing is blurry because travel writing also employs features that are ascribed to the novelistic genre. In their traditional form, travel narratives purport to describe the traveler's experiences accurately and represent places and people visited by them in an objective manner. Because of the genre's implicit truth claim and its association with authenticity and objectivity, "[m]any readers still hope for a literal truthfulness from travel writing that they would not expect to find in the novel" (Hulme and Youngs 6). They typically expect these accounts to be realistic records of what the traveler—an eyewitness who presents documentary evidence—has experienced during the journey. However, Barbara Korte stresses that "accounts of travel are never objective; they invariably reveal the culture-specific and individual patterns of perception and knowledge which every traveller brings to the travelled world" (6). This interwovenness of factual and fictional writing raises questions not only about genre that extend beyond the travel narrative but also about the ethical implications of

8 Simon Cooke provides a useful definition of (autobiographical) travel writing, distinguishing it from autobiographical writing: "While autobiographies and biographies are often presented figuratively in terms of travel ('life is a journey', as the cliché has it), travel writing rarely presents a cradle-to-grave (or rather, cradle-to-the-present) account, at least not in a linear fashion. Rather, it usually focuses on a portion of life. [...] [I]t is a genre which, almost by definition, documents experiences away from the trappings of one's 'normal' life. [...] [T]ravel writing often does present more transformative episodes and experiences. The journey of self-discovery or self-transformation is perhaps the most powerful form such resonant episodes can take" (19). See also chapter 5, "Revealing the Self," in Thompson's *Travel Writing* for an account of autobiographical aspects in the travel narrative.

travel writing, which have long been topics of debate (C. Fowler 57-58; see also Hulme, "Patagonian Cases").

Like other literary narratives, the travel narrative is discursively transmitted and constructed. It is in the act of writing that the experience of travel is endowed with meaning. Thompson remarks that "[t]ravel *experience* is thus crafted into travel *text*, and this crafting process must inevitably introduce into the text, to a greater or lesser degree, a fictive dimension" (*Travel Writing* 27-28). These considerations have significant implications for the literary analysis of travel narratives, especially with regard to the relationship between the actual journey and its literary representation. To present their journeys, writers transform the actual experiences into narrative. This act of transferring travel experiences into written text entails different steps of (re)organizing the remembered material, including the selection and arrangement of events and occurrences that are considered meaningful and are thus imbued with significance that is neither inherent nor given. Furthermore, for the discursive representation of the journey, travel writers employ literary techniques that are contingent upon the generic conventions of travel writing (Nünning 137). Crucial roles in the process of configuration are played by intertexts, cultural memory, and genre conventions. The representation of reality in travel narratives is therefore "premediated and prefigured in manifold ways by a number of cultural models, genres, schemata and texts" (129). Travelogues are influenced by their predecessors, which established themes and forms of narration. A journey to an unknown place is also influenced by the traveler's cultural attitudes, presupposed visions, desires, anxieties, and expectations of the place, which in turn determine what is selected and represented in the texts that are written about it. While some narratives self-reflexively address the subjectivity that informs the process, others do not. Travel writers carry ideological baggage that informs their experiences and later also the writing produced about the journey.[9] Such prefiguration and premediation can also be found in the pilgrimage travels of diasporic Africans to the African continent, or roots trips, that are discussed in this study.

9 "The Grand Tour" is a preeminent example of how travel routes, both physical and textual, are premediated and prefigurated. As Pfister specifies, "The Grand Tour of Continental Europe constituted for the English travellers of the 17th and 18th centuries one of those canonized travel programmes, which in countless, variously interconnected ways 'pre-scripted' routes, schemata of perception and evaluation, main points of interest and sights-to-be-seen" (qtd. in Nünning 131).

Travel writing follows in the traces of its literary predecessors—geographically along well-trodden paths and figuratively along textual and rhetorical conventions of earlier travel narratives (Pfister 1). This traveling in traces is most obviously performed in so-called 'second journeys,' a term coined by Maria Lindgren Leavenworth in her study *The Second Journey: Travelling in Literary Footsteps* (2010). These are travel accounts of journeys where the traveler-writer follows the path of their (literary) predecessors, seeking to reproduce and even relive the experiences of earlier travelers (Leavenworth 11-12). Yet, even those traveler-writers who set out to discover new trails, both in the physical sense as well as in their writing, follow somehow in their predecessors' footsteps. In the same vein, Pfister points to the impossibility of escaping prefigured routes, plots, and aesthetics and emphasizes that travel writers are unable to liberate themselves from the constitutive impact and formative power of established narratives and pretexts. He explains,

> Even if there have always been travellers who have insisted on not following traces and on relying for their accounts on autopsy alone, only on what they have seen with their own eyes, at a closer look it becomes evident—be it only in their forceful gestures of negating intertextuality and erasing traces—that they, as all travellers, have always tapped the achieves of the cultural memory of both their own and the other culture. ("Travellers" 1-2)

As the analyses of contemporary travel narratives in Chapter IV will show, the travelers follow well-trodden routes to Africa that are both geographical and textual. More often than not, these texts take the accounts of travelers who have made the journey before them as their reference points.

Having examined the genre of travel writing in general terms, the remainder of this section zooms in on Black travel writing in particular to carve out what accounts for its distinctiveness. Arana describes Black travel writing as a "kaleidoscopic" genre with a longstanding history: "Black travelers have been producing consciousness-raising, world-shaking travel writing for ages" ("A Kaleidoscopic Genre" 3). She goes on, saying, "The wide array of travel destinations and traveling experiences, authorial purposes, narrative styles, and cultural implications of the writing we bundle into the generic category *black travel writing* is staggering" (4). The aforementioned anthologies by Griffin and Fish (1998) and Pettinger (1998) testify to the variety that Arana addresses and illustrate the range of writings by Black authors and the manifold types of travelers and mobilities depicted in these narratives. These include the writings of formerly enslaved subjects, travel accounts by missionaries, intellectu-

als, political leaders, philanthropists, artists, exiles, expatriates, and tourists. This variety, however, is hardly surprising when considering that "[f]or over two centuries black travelers have journeyed to the seven continents and beyond" (Griffin and Fish xiii). Illuminate the diversity of this genre is important because it corrects the notion that Black people have traveled less and produced fewer accounts of their journeys compared with their White counterparts.

Despite the high degree of eclecticism and the wealth of forms that can be found in travel narratives by Black authors, Arana, in her introduction to the special issue of the *BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review* identifies an important feature that characterizes Black travel writing: that is, the attention paid to issues surrounding race ("A Kaleidoscopic Genre" 4). While she cautions that easy generalizations and homogenization must be avoided when referring to the genre, a preoccupation with the topic of race and an emphasis on the distinct perspectives of Black travelers can indeed be found in numerous travel-themed texts by authors of African descent.[10] I return to McElroy's travel memoir as a preeminent example of a traveler-writer who self-reflexively addresses her particular perspective, or vision, which emanates from her personal history and her subject position:

> I carry my past with me. I know that my perceptions are shaped by that past, the bags and baggage of America [...]. I am the great-granddaughter of a slave, a member of the sixth generation of African descendents who have survived diaspora on American soil. [...] I am a Western woman, and I must always be aware of how that life has affected my vision, my ability to see myself as akin to and different from the people I meet. (*Long Way* vi)

In this passage, McElroy mentions several aspects that influenced her perspective and her perceptions of the people and places she visits: As a descendant of enslaved people, a woman, and a Westernized individual, she carries

10 The subtitles of the travel narratives by Eddy L. Harris, Keith Richburg, and Barack Obama, 'A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa,' 'A Black Man Confronts Africa,' and 'A Story of Race and Inheritance,' respectively, gesture to the texts' engagement with questions pertaining to race and to racial and national identification. Especially the titles of Harris's and Richburg's works signal to readers their author's unique perspectives as Black American—not *African* American—traveler-writers. In a similar vein, journalist Lynne Duke, who wrote about her time in Africa in Africa in *Mandela, Mobutu, and Me* (2003), notes at the beginning of her narrative that she looked at Africa through the eyes "of an African American and a woman" (ix).

a particular story and history with her. She suggests that her identity and experiences as an African American create a distinct vision, noting that "I am always aware that my vision of the world will differ from that of my usual travel companions" (224). These 'usual' companions that accompany her on trips are predominantly White. During a journey to Australia, McElroy's specific vision makes her attentive and empathetic to the Aboriginal people's invisibility in the major cities of Australia, which she compares to the absence of Black people in filmic depictions of downtown New York (Youngs, "Daughter" 58-59). It is this perspective that distinguishes McElroy from her fellow (White) travel companions and that, arguably, sets her writing and that of many other Black authors of travel narratives apart from the literature authored by White travel writers. Moreover, it is not only the particular way McElroy *looks at* the world, but also the way that she *is looked at* by others—"Overseas, I am always the sight to see" (*Long Way* 7)—that draws attention to her position as a Black subject, a woman, a world traveler, and a professional writer. Importantly, for Black travelers, it is not only about *seeing things* differently while abroad but also about *being seen* differently, a topic that is often addressed in their texts.

A preoccupation with issues of race and Blackness is a recurrent theme in many works of Black travel writers who, as Dorothy Lazard contends, "take their readers on parallel journeys into the known physical world as well as the internally perceived world of race" ("Reading" 180). She observes, "Unlike their white counterparts, Black travel writers, as racialized people, bring a strong sense of race consciousness to their work" (180). For example, they often reveal a particular interest in the racial climate of the places they visit and identify with people who are marginalized; as a result of the close identification, the Black travel writer becomes "the subject of the piece as well as its narrator/conscience" (180). Their travel experiences are also shaped by their experiences as Black subjects whose "bags and baggage" (*Long Way* vi), to use McElroy's words, are the histories and legacies of displacement, oppression, and exclusion. Topics such as race, racism, racial and national identification, and racial solidarity often surface in the travel narratives of writers of African descent. However, this certainly is not the sole concern of the texts. To confine Black travel narratives to these themes would not do justice to the hybridity of the genre.

Having scrutinized the characteristics of the genre of travel writing in general and of Black travel writing more specifically, the following section outlines its development and trajectories. In particular, it traces the genre's roots

back to the eighteenth-century slave narratives. A close examination of the crucial role that mobility and its intertwinement with ideas of freedom and the narrative creation of subjectivity play in the slave narrative will show that these are topics taken up in succeeding travel narratives. It further sketches out some of the most important and prevalent themes in Black travel writings and looks at the ways in which they are formally presented in the narratives. Approaching the eclectic texts that comprise the corpus of this study from the perspective of travel writing shows how these works draw on the formal and thematic traits of earlier travel writings by critically examining, responding to, and engaging with their predecessors.

2. The Transnational Slave Narrative and the Roots of Black Travel Writing

Travel—and mobility more broadly—is a key element in the literature of the Black diaspora. The earliest texts that foreground the centrality of mobility, physically and metaphorically, are the slave narratives. These "tales of escapes" produced by formerly enslaved people can indeed be read as the first Black travel narratives (Youngs, "African American Travel" 113). Emerging in the 1770s and 1780s, the primary purpose of the autobiographical accounts by self-emancipated individuals was to bring an end to the exploitation of enslaved Africans—first, by ending the transatlantic slave trade and later, by abolishing slavery altogether (Gould 11). Slave narratives developed into "popular and effective means of fighting slavery" (12) that exposed the horrors of enslavement and testified to the humanity of the enslaved, thus encouraging readers to support the cause of abolition. The texts gave rise to the African American literary tradition, but their influence on American literature in general and other national literary traditions can also not be overestimated. Virginia Whatley Smith expounds that early Black travelers "embarked upon unauthorized liberatory initiatives for the purposes of emancipation, re-identification, regeneration, or self-reliance" and "inaugurated an eclectic genre of domestic and transnational travel writing" ("African American Travel" 197). Importantly, despite traditional perceptions of the genre as a distinct African American literary form, I wish to stress the transnational dimension of the slave narrative. The assertion that this early form of Black travel writing is transnational in nature is based on the fact that the slave narrative genre did not just develop in an American context; instead, its genesis can be lo-

cated within the Atlantic world of the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries. Accordingly, I conceptualize the slave narrative as a transnational genre and outline the thematic and narrative conventions it established, which shaped succeeding narratives of travel considerably.

In his introduction to *The Classic Slave Narrative* (1987), Gates emphasizes the exclusiveness of the slave narrative as an African American genre: "In the long history of human bondage, it was only the black slaves in the United States who [...] created a *genre* of literature that at once testified against their captors and bore witness to the urge of every black slave to be free and literate" ("Introduction" ix). While Gates's 1980s study remains relevant, its preoccupation with claiming the genre as an African American literary tradition and situating it within a specific national context must be challenged. Indeed, many definitions of and approaches to the slave narrative emanate from studies that locate the genre in an (African) American context. And, while it is certainly appropriate to frame the slave narrative as a particularly American literary form that engages with distinctively American issues (that is, slavery and the condition of Black people in America), it is important to note that the genre, like the system of slavery itself, is a transnational rather than an American one. Therefore, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American literature reflects the cultural exchanges between America, Africa, and Europe. Gates's meditation on the exclusiveness of the genre as African American has thus been debated by scholars. Defying the idea that the slave narrative belongs to just one national literary tradition, George Elliott Clarke has disputed Gates's claim and argued that the texts should not be understood as exclusive to the literature of the United States. In his article "'This Is No Hearsay': Reading the Canadian Slave Narratives" (2005), he describes a distinct Black Canadian literary tradition of the slave narrative—which is an equally tricky proposition—but also advocates for an international approach to slave narratives that recognizes their mobility across national and cultural borders. Helen Thomas identifies a "historical tendency to classify the slave narratives as either 'African-American,' 'Afro-English,' 'Black,' 'Black-British,' rather than prioritise their transatlantic characteristics and contexts" (374). However, when dealing with travel-themed literature written by highly mobile subjects, a persistent emphasis on its rootedness in particular national and cultural geographies may be counterproductive. Scholarship, therefore, has shifted its focus to the genre's transnational character. Reflecting critical trends that reevaluate American literature in a global context, researchers have proposed approaches that consider the multiple locales in which slave

narratives were produced and that employ diverse theoretical paradigms to interpret them in order to acknowledge the genre's complexity (R. Thomas, "Locating Slave Narratives" 329; see also H. Thomas, 2016; Siemerling, 2015).

Declarations of a transnational turn gained currency over the last three decades, and such debates point to a transnational reassessment that has occurred in North American and literary studies, heralded by scholars like Donald E. Pease. Multiple approaches and concepts have developed that challenge established spatial conventions and call for a transcendence of the boundaries of nations as an analytical paradigm, which are considered inadequate when examining the complexities inherent in historical, cultural, and social bonds and interactions. Calling nation-centered approaches into question, scholars have proposed a 'worlding' of American studies, by which they mean the locating of American studies within transnational or global contexts (Scheiding and Seidl 2014).[11] This has propelled a rethinking of geographical dimensions from which the Atlantic world as a distinct field of study emerged.

Accordingly, transatlantic literary studies zoomed in on the cultural and historical ties between English and North American literature and stimulated discussions of a transatlantic literary history, canon formation, and new approaches to literature. Drawing attention to the connections and reciprocal relations between texts and de-emphasizing national literary traditions, transatlantic literary studies defy the premise that national "literature is a self-contained sphere, cut off from aesthetic developments, intellectual discourses and literary practices happening elsewhere" (Straub 3). In this regard, a transatlantic and transnational literary studies perspective aims to bring different national literatures together or even challenge the very notion of national literature. Furthermore, it emphasizes the connection that results from shared historical experiences, cultural exchanges, circulation of ideas and theories, as well as transatlantic interdependencies (these relations become especially apparent when focusing on the period of colonization when the routes

11 In their 2014 anthology *Worlding America*, Oliver Scheiding and Martin Seidl propose an approach to early American literature—based on the work of philosopher Martin Heidegger—that reexamines this literature in a global context. The authors focus not on the origination or the birthplace of a genre or of a national culture, but on "the constant movements of stories, writers, and themes from the seventeenth into the nineteenth centuries" (1). Capitalizing on circulation instead of origin, they move away from traditional categorizations of literature according to nation, authors, periods, or genres (8-11).

of commerce brought continents closer together). Such an approach facilitates an exploration of how literary movements and genres such as the slave narrative developed in parallel on both sides of the Atlantic (1-2).

In this context, Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic paradigm provides a productive approach to the study of transnational and transatlantic slave narratives, because it puts into focus the Atlantic Ocean as the space of cultural flows in which a Black cultural tradition took shape beyond the confines of nation and essentialist racial identities. *The Black Atlantic* illuminates a path to explore this tradition and theorize the Black diaspora. Transcending national and ethnic boundaries, slave narratives can be seen as literary expressions of the "transcultural, international formation" (4)—the Black Atlantic—that is characterized by the forced and voluntary journeys of people crossing the ocean, an ongoing cultural exchange generated by the transatlantic slave trade. The dispersal of African-descended people and the experience of trauma and displacement are central to the formation of a Black Atlantic culture. According to Gilroy, this shared history of slavery and racialized terror lies at the heart of a Black diasporic culture and has given rise to a distinct consciousness that finds expression in cultural and literary productions. Examining the transatlantic biographies of artists, writers, and intellectuals, Gilroy renders a history in which African-descended people figure not as victims and human commodities but as autonomous individuals "engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship" (*Black Atlantic* 17). Slave narratives are expressions of these struggles and products of the cultural exchanges of the early Atlantic world, constituting part of a transnational literary archive. As Kerry Sinanan argues, they "reflect the transatlantic relationships, histories, cultures and ideologies, and need to be approached as nexuses where these congruences and conflicts are manifest. Crucially, this dialectical history of the slave narrative demands that the genre itself be read as fluid and heterogeneous" (62).

Framing the slave narrative in transatlantic and transnational terms directs attention to the multiple ways in which people, ideas, political movements, and genres cross and transcend national boundaries. The biographies and works of African-descended people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveal the difficulty, or even inadequacy, of trying to create and confine mobile Black writers to rigid ethnic and national categorizations. Vincent Carretta reminds us that "[t]he anachronistic term 'African American' is not a category capacious enough to cover eighteenth-century English-speaking authors of African descent" ("Back" 11). Indeed, a glance at the lives and

works of prominent Black writers, travelers, and abolitionists demonstrates this assertion: for example, Ignatius Sancho (c. 1729–1780) was born aboard a slave ship sailing toward the West Indies and later taken to London, where he became a composer and an abolitionist writer. His letters, which were published shortly after his death, are among the earliest accounts of slavery written in English by a formerly enslaved person. Poet Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753–1784), who is credited with figure-heading the African American literary tradition, was taken from her native home in West Africa to America, where she worked as an enslaved servant in the household of the Boston commercialist Wheatley. Unconventionally at the time, she was educated by the Wheatleys and later traveled in their son's company to London, where she published her first collection of poems. She gained transatlantic recognition both in Britain and America. Ottobah Cugoano (c. 1757–after 1791)—who was sold into slavery from present-day Ghana and shipped to Grenada, where he experienced first-hand the horrors of the slave plantations—became a prominent figure in eighteenth-century London, where he published an account that demanded the total and immediate abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of all enslaved Black people. Mary Prince (c. 1788–c. 1833), born into enslavement in Bermuda, seized her freedom while traveling to England with her enslaver. There, she published her book titled *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* (1831), the first account of the life of a Black woman published in Britain.[12]

And then there is Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745–1797), "the quintessential transatlantic African" (Carretta, "Back" 18) and an outstanding example of a transnational, Black Atlantic author. His 1789 slave narrative *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* is considered one of the most significant literary productions of its time.[13] The narrative is a recollection of his extensive travels, both in chains and free:

---

12 The biographical information on Sancho, Wheatley, Cugoano, and Prince derives from the following sources: Fisch (2007), Carretta ("Introduction;" "Back"), and Carretta and Gould (2014).

13 Carretta's biographical research on Equiano has called the account's veracity into question. Carretta discovered historical documents that indicate that Equiano was born in South Carolina, not in West Africa, and thus creatively reimagined his life in Africa and the Middle Passage (see Carretta, *Equiano the African*). This information certainly does not diminish the significance of Equiano's testimony; rather, it serves as a reminder that in autobiographical (travel) writing the boundaries between factual and fictional writing are fluid.

As an enslaved subject, a servant to a naval officer, cabin boy, and finally as a free man, Equiano's travel routes crisscrossed the Atlantic and took him from North and Middle America to the West Indies and beyond. Eventually he settled in Britain, where he became an outspoken opponent of slavery and where his narrative was first published, making him a widely recognized individual. The title of Equiano's work hints at the fluid and shifting conceptions of self: 'Olaudah Equiano,' 'Gustavus Vassa,' 'the African.' These identity concepts defy easy national and racial categorization. In the text, the narrator Equiano defines himself in geographical and national terms as African and later as Black Briton, as well as in more diasporic terms as traveler, sailor, and abolitionist. As Elizabeth A. Bohls notes in *Slavery and the Politics of Place* (2014), geographical movement is a catalyst for personal transformation. She argues that Equiano's "narrative method, setting his earlier and later selves in dialogue, loosens or relativizes their spatial affiliations to produce a narrating consciousness that passes through diverse places, without becoming exclusively identified with one or another" (139). Equiano's self-conception expresses a plurality of cultural backgrounds and is representative of the complex identities of eighteenth-century Black travelers in the Atlantic world.

Examining Black writers and travelers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it becomes apparent that they should be understood as transatlantic writers and citizens because perceiving them simply as Black or African American and Black British authors diminishes their cultural impact. Together, the works of writers such as Sancho, Wheatley, Prince, and Equiano reveal their complex sense of self as Black Atlantic subjects, Africans, and, respectively, Black Americans and Black Britons. The letters, poems, and narratives produced by these early Black writers and travelers reflect their authors' heightened transnational mobility and foreground issues of migration, identity, and citizenship that are negotiated against the backdrop of varying land- and seascapes. Furthermore, they highlight the ways in which their ideological and abolitionist agendas developed as they traveled across the ocean. These writers transcended national borders in geographical, literary, and imaginative terms. This underscores the assertion that neither they nor their literary productions can be contained within rigid categories of nation, geography, and ethnicity. For this reason, their work is best characterized as a "literature of diasporic movement and cultural encounter" (Carretta and Gould 2). Slave narratives reflect the writers' mobility and the cultural encounters that took place in the early Atlantic world. Therefore, they should not be tied to only

one specific cultural, national, or geographic origin, but be perceived as a genre that took shape and was formed in the transnational space of the Black Atlantic.

A careful examination of the slave narrative genre reveals the importance of the travel trope and the multiple ways it permeates this literary form. However, while the constitutive elements of the genre have been insightfully discussed by many literary scholars, the aspect of mobility in all its myriad forms has received less sustained attention.[14] In Chapter II, I have described the manifold implications of travel and mobility in the history of the African diaspora. Turning to the meaning of travel in the slave narrative, I outline how the concept of mobility presents an important paradigm for analysis. The principle aim I wish to achieve is to conceptualize the transnational slave narrative as a form of travel writing. Although several scholars have already made the connection and affirmed that contemporary Black travel writing is rooted in the slave narrative tradition, very few have explicitly treated slave narratives as travel narratives and explored the theme of travel at the thematic and aesthetic levels of the text in detail (a noteworthy exception is the 2005 study by John D. Cox). Reading slave narratives as travel writing highlights the significant role of mobility both in the journey from slavery to freedom and in the metaphorical journeys (that is, emotional and intellectual) represented in the texts.

The fact that the subject's journey from slavery to freedom is at the heart of the slave narrative supports the argument that the writings of the formerly enslaved represent an early form of Black travel writing. In addition, movement, both in terms of physical travel as well as metaphorical and figurative mobility and its imbrication with the writing of the self, are the defining aspects of slave narratives and are examined in the following. The link between narrative subjectivity and literacy (and/as freedom) has been a pivotal focal point in the study of the slave narrative. Scholars highlight the connection between physical freedom and intellectual striving by linking the development from enslaved to free individual to the acquisition of literacy. In their introduction to *The Slave's Narrative* (1985), Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. contend that the genre "arose as a response to and refutation of claims that

14 For a concise overview of the conventions of the slave narrative, see James Olney's important article "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature" (1984), especially 49-51.

blacks *could* not write" (xv). Referring to this statement, Pettinger adds that these texts also reflect the writers' refutation of "the assumption that they could not *travel*" ("At Least One" 80). His remark points to the essential function of mobility in and for the slave narrative. Slave narratives attest to the mobility of Black people by depicting their travels as enslaved and as free people. What is more, they often foreground and celebrate their transcendence of the spatial and physical confinements imposed on them by depicting the pleasures of self-determined movement (80).

In *Traveling South: Travel Narratives and the Construction of American Identity* (2005), John D. Cox stresses the crucial role of mobility in the creation of these texts when he argues that for the authors of slave narratives, travel was a "precondition" to the writing and publication of their narratives (65). Slavery, Cox posits, "could not be simultaneously experienced and written" (65). Moreover, slave narratives "suggest that travel and slavery are mutually exclusive, so travel transforms the slave's movements into self-directed action and consequently destroys slavery" (66). On the level of the text, fee and autonomous mobility reflects the writers' ability to take control over their lives, free themselves from slavery, and construct textual identities for themselves. Equiano's *Narrative* offers an exemplary account of how the narrator evolves from an enslaved subject to an independent transatlantic traveler who directs his own movements. As his narrative effectively illustrates, for the writers of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century enslavement and freedom narratives the construction of identity and subjectivity "relies on the reclamation of travel and the progress from travelee to traveler, from object to subject, from property to propertied citizen" (Lucasi 523).

Stressing the connection between slavery and immobility, slave narratives often portray slavery as a condition that profoundly immobilizes people. By contrast, self-determined movements and autonomous travel signify emancipation, liberation, and freedom. Analyzing the function of the rhetoric of travel in antebellum slave narratives, Pettinger likewise asserts that "[i]f the voyage is figured as a journey from oppression to freedom, oppression and freedom themselves are defined in terms of the ability (or not) to move freely" ("What a Difference" 139). Escape, flight, and subversive bodily movements also represent resistance to the immobility imposed on Black people under slavery. Moreover, even when Black people emancipated themselves and acquired their freedom, the discrimination and injustices they experienced are represented as obstacles that limit their opportunities for movement. Referring to the mid-nineteenth-century narratives of Frederick Douglass and

William Wells Brown, Pettinger observes that "their oppression in America is most readily symbolized, not by the threat of kidnappers or the laws preventing them from voting or holding public office or the difficulty of getting a job or furthering their education, but by the restrictions on movement in public places" ("What a Difference" 139). For them, self-initiated and autonomous movement is tied to the acquisition of agency and with it the control over their own lives. In this way, their wish to move freely reflects their desire for empowerment and resistance to oppression.

Douglass's 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* provides a preeminent example of how narrative connects freedom and mobility: Douglass's yearning for freedom conflates with his desire for independent movement in his apostrophe to the ships sailing down the Chesapeake Bay toward the sea. This eloquent and emotionally charged passage may be read as one of the most powerful and memorable moments in Douglass's narrative:

> You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free! [...] O that I could also go! Could I but swim! If I could fly! [...] God, deliver me! Let me be free! [...] I will run away. I will not stand it. [...] Only think of it; one hundred miles straight north, and I am free! [...] I will take to the water. This very bay shall yet bear me into freedom. The steamboats steered in a north-east course from North Point. I will do the same; and when I get to the head of the bay, I will turn my canoe adrift, and walk straight through Delaware into Pennsylvania. When I get there, I shall not be required to have a pass; I can travel without being disturbed. (71-72)

The passage foregrounds different modes of movement—walking, running, swimming, flying—and emphasizes the importance of self-initiated mobility for the narrator. Notably, the narrative associates Douglass's enslavement, his 'unfreedom,' with immobility and imprisonment, which is signified by the chains and shackles that tie him down. By contrast, the mobility of the ships, which are loosed from the moorings and free to sail around the world, emerges as an emblem of freedom and liberty. Douglass envies the mobility of the sailing ships and contrasts their movements to his own: The ships' movements are supported by "the gentle gale" so that they "move merrily" and without force; Douglass's movements, however, are not only limited but also

determined by "the bloody whip" of his vicious enslavers (Cox 76; see also V. W. Smith, "African American Travel" 198-99). The passage reveals that the narrator's vision of freedom is one of undisturbed travel, of mobility unlimited by confinements such as slave passes. His own physical mobility is therefore perceived as an essential step for acquiring his freedom. Thus, the narrative links freedom from slavery, domination, and oppression to the ability to physically move according to one's wishes.

Douglass's address to the sailboats takes place at a time during which he experiences an extreme form of enslavement, being tamed and "broken in body, soul, and spirit" (*Narrative* 70) by a vicious overseer. The sight of the mobile, outward-bound sailboats has a powerful effect on the narrator and inspires and renews his will to escape. Revitalized by the sight, he regains his determination to liberate himself. While he initially juxtaposes their mobility with his own immobility, as the passage progresses he increasingly aligns himself with their movements. The passage then moves from the narrator's contemplation of his current condition (immobilized or forced to move against his will) to his rising desire for mobility, his desperate pleading with God ("Let me be free"), and finally to his assertive resolution to escape ("I will run away"). It illustrates how the narrator increasingly takes control over his life. What begins as an address to the vessels turns into Douglass's "personal Declaration of Independence" (Cox 75). This excerpt anticipates his subsequent fight with the enslaver who broke him, which follows shortly after the above scene, and which eventually leads to his attainment of emotional, spiritual, and physical freedom.

The slave narrative represents the transformation of the enslaved subject into an individual able to exert control over their own movements, which can be described as a "transformation from bound slave to free traveler" (Cox 16). The titles of many slave narratives underline the transformation of the formerly enslaved subject. Furthermore, the use of phrases such as 'ex-slaves,' 'escaped slaves,' 'runaway slaves,' and 'fugitive slaves' shows that the experience of slavery could only be narrated and retold for others "from a space at least partially removed from the institution itself" (65). This signals a profound break between the identity of an enslaved subject and that of a free one. As Cox emphasizes, "The significance and power of these different phrases used to describe slaves who have effected self-directed travel highlight the centrality of movement to the very definition of slavery" (65). The successful escape and the attainment of freedom are also frequently accompanied by the renaming of the subject. In literary representations of slavery, travel advances

into a means of resistance and subversion of the statutes of slavery because it defies the immobility imposed on the subject as well as the forced movements determined by the enslavers.

In the narratives produced by Black Americans, the thematic trajectory from bondage to freedom is reflected by the subject's pursuit of agency and control over their mobility and their geographical journey from the slave-holding states of the South to the free states in the North and Canada. Analyzing canonical stories and myths in African American literature, Robert Stepto conceptualizes the narratives of self-emancipated individuals as narratives of ascent. The vertical trope, up from slavery, is mirrored in the narrative pattern and the subject's spatial journey from South to North. Illuminating the significance of the representation of space, Stepto draws attention to the ways geography and landscape are imbued with special meaning: The "symbolic geography" in the slave narrative is often an expression and manifestation of social structures (167-68). For example, the American South and the North emerge as significant geographical and symbolic entities. The narrative space of the American South represents racial terror, dispossession, injustice, and economic exploitation. However, as a highly complex and ambiguous literary spatial formation, the South also represents a homeland for African Americans that encompasses their histories and experiences. By contrast, the North—including Canada, or 'Canaan Land'—figures as a realm of relative freedom, which is imagined as 'the free soil,' the 'Promised Land,' and the destination of the freedom seekers of the Underground Railroad. The imagery of the spatial divide between the South and the North figures prominently in many slave narratives. Yet, it has also been inverted when the narrative trajectory does not follow the South to North trajectory or when the freedom associated with the North is revealed to be elusive. For example, Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861) exposes the pervasive forms of racial discrimination and segregation in the supposedly free northern states. The narrator's experiences betray the image of the North as a safe refuge for formerly enslaved and self-emancipated people who feel a constant threat of recapture and re-enslavement—a result of the Fugitive Slave Act.[15]

15 There are other examples of slave narratives that do not follow the established course from bondage to freedom, from the South to the North, from enslaved subject to independent traveler, and from illiteracy to literacy. Solomon Northup's 1853 slave nar-

The slave narrative links the liberatory journey from bondage to freedom, mirrored in the narrator's physical and geographical mobility, to the metaphorical journey of intellectual development and the acquisition of literacy. Like self-determined, autonomous mobility, the pursuit of literacy is presented in the slave narrative as an emancipatory act of defiance and resistance against the laws of enslavement. During the antebellum period, anti-literacy laws served as means of controlling the enslaved population and Black people violated these laws at great risk.[16] The thematic significance of literacy to the humanity of the enslaved has long been recognized in scholarly interrogations of the slave narrative genre. As Davis and Gates phrase it, autobiographical writing allowed formerly enslaved people to write themselves "into the human community through the action of first-person narration" (xiii). Obtaining a public voice and writerly authority is represented as a pathway to freedom. The self-emancipated individual becomes the author of their own story through the creation of a textual identity—the act of writing oneself into being—and claims selfhood, humanity, and authority in a world that had persistently denied them the status of a free individual and human being. Douglass masterfully depicts the inextricable connection between literacy, freedom, and identity by evoking the image of a pen that could be placed in the cracks on his feet stemming from the frostbite wounds he suffered as a child: "My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes" (*Narrative* 39). Douglass links the physical body, which has been violated by his enslavers, to the act of writing. The pen—a symbolic instrument with which he attends to the wounds afflicted by slavery—is used as a tool to write himself into existence. Through the textual creation of a self, he attains psychological freedom (see also Olney 55). The quest for freedom, therefore, is coupled with corporeal mobility and with the development of an authorial voice.

---

rative, *Twelve Years a Slave*, is a case in point; it tells the story of Solomon, a freeborn New Yorker, who is kidnapped in Washington, DC, and sold into slavery.

16 Anti-literacy laws forbade enslaved people to learn how to read and write. They were established by Whites out of the fear that literacy and education would endanger the institution of slavery. Especially southern plantation owners feared that when enslaved people were able to communicate via written messages, they would plan escapes and incite revolts and insurrections. Moreover, the education of Black people challenged Whites' racist belief in Black inferiority, which served as an argument to justify slavery.

Crucially, the act of writing is an act of self-creation and a textual assertion of the subject's existence. This claim to existence—pronounced straightforwardly by the words "I was born"—can be found in the works of Douglass, Jacobs, Brown, and many others. Such affirmation of subjecthood together with the portraits of the authors, their signatures, and authenticating documents, contribute to the authors' existential claims of being in the world (Olney 52). The self-authored narrative thus emerged as a corrective to the externally imposed identity constructs created by a racially oppressive society. As the authors of slave narratives wrote themselves into being, they became mobile in the sense that they could escape and shed the fixed and limiting definitions that had been forced upon them and articulate new Black subjectivities. Furthermore, slave narratives highlight the acquisition of literacy because it is through writing that their authors were able to fashion a public persona. While they had been literally and metaphorically confined to a place and position in society, in their writing they were able to assume different roles. Moreover, authors of slave narratives wrote against White perceptions of Blackness as inferior, asserting their intellectual and moral authority to write about issues of personal and public relevance (see also Davis and Gates xxvi). This attests to the contestation that, while "[f]irst and foremost, the slave narrative is a text with a purpose: the end of slavery" (Fisch 2), it also fulfilled crucial functions relating to identity formation: Therefore, these texts were both political documents and literary records concerned with the creation and expression of Black identities.

In an insightful analysis of Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Cox makes a convincing case for the significance of physical mobility in the attainment of literacy and brings to the fore once again the importance of travel in the slave narrative. Cox places Douglass's metaphorical journey from illiteracy to authorship into the context of physical and spatial movements that permeate the text (71). It is thus worth citing at length his astute analysis of a passage of Douglass's text in which the narrator relates his method of acquiring reading skills. Douglass expounds how, while running errands and moving according to the commands and instructions of his enslaver, he befriended children on the street, making them his teachers and exchanging bread for knowledge and reading lessons. Emphasizing the significance of mobility and its connection to literacy in Douglass's description of how he learned to read, Cox explains,

> Douglass performs the movement his master has demanded but alters the purpose to his own advantage. Thus, Douglass is able to perform several types of movement simultaneously, not only geographical but also social, racial, and intellectual. In the streets, where the rigid strictures (and structures) of the slave household are in some flux, Douglass crosses social and racial boundaries, by befriending white children […]. [T]hese children are teachers even before they begin to instruct Douglass in reading, for their ability to wander these urban streets at will exemplifies for Douglass the paradigmatic freedom of travel he seeks eventually to attain. […] Douglass learns to read 'at different times and in different places' […], in those spatial and temporal spaces that existed on the margins of slave ideology. (72-73)

As Cox demonstrates, it is the narrator's ability to move and transcend social and racial boundaries that enables his intellectual and educational journey. Like the physical flight from slavery that transforms an enslaved person into an autonomous mobile subject, the acquisition of literacy facilitates textual self-creation and demonstrates agency and empowerment.

Once they were free from the immobilizing forces of slavery, many Black people traveled extensively to campaign for abolition and to make their messages read and heard. Through travel and writing, Black abolitionists and activists were able to participate in transnational political and social discourses. For them, domestic and overseas travel was a way to advocate for the antislavery cause and to find support for the fight against slavery. Black activist travelers such as Equiano and Douglass presented arguments against slavery to the public by demonstrating that they themselves were examples that challenged the widespread belief in Black inferiority. Importantly, they also illustrated that an African American culture had developed despite devastating circumstances. In addition to relating personal experiences of suffering, narrators spoke on behalf of other enslaved people, expressing a collective voice and identity. With the goal to alleviate Black people's collective suffering and pain, Black abolitionist writers sought to reveal to the public the evils of the system of slavery. Relating the horrors of slavery in painstakingly vivid descriptions, their testimonies documented and exposed the injustices of the systems and the wrongdoings of enslavers. For example, Jacobs's *Incidents*, the first female-authored slave narrative published in the United States, raised awareness of Black suffering, in particular how slavery affected women. The

narrative testified to the interlocking system of oppression and exploitation,[17] while defying the assumption that enslaved women were mere victims. Fighting "against oppressive sexual and racial authority," it depicts the "gendered transformation" of Linda Brent, the pseudonym under which Jacobs wrote, "from helpless slave girl to woman with some control over her life" (McKay 97).

On the other side of the Atlantic, Mary Prince sought to educate the English reading public who had been oblivious to the appalling conditions under which enslaved people worked as domestic or field laborers in the Turks Islands salt ponds (Williamson 1). Prince, who traveled with her enslaver from Bermuda to England, where she seized her freedom, exposed in her 1831 slave narrative the horrors of enslavement she experienced in the West Indies. Her writing illustrates how the slave narrative served as a venue to formally articulate critique. In her narrative, Prince addresses her readers with a sentimental appeal:

> Oh the horrors of slavery!—How the thought of it pains my heart! But the truth ought to be told of it; and what my eyes have seen I think it is my duty to relate; for few people in England know what slavery is. I have been a slave—I have felt what a slave feels, and I know what a slave knows; and I would have all the good people in England to know it too, that they may break our chains, and set us free. (*History* 25)

To persuade readers to join the fight against slavery, Prince stresses the authority of experience, specifically her experience as an enslaved subject in the British colonies. Prince's mobile Black body bears testimony to the horrors of slavery and her narrative is emotional, moral, and political in its appeal to the reader. Like Prince, others also presented themselves as eyewitnesses to the sufferings of enslaved people and thereby established credibility, making it possible to enter debates concerning the humanity of African-descended people and discourses on race and freedom. Their mobility, both enforced and voluntary, was a source of knowledge on which they drew to educate people about the horrors of slavery and to persuade them that slavery was harmful for all members of society, both enslaved and free.

---

17 In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991), sociologist Patricia Hill Collins coined the phrase "interlocking system of oppression" (44) in her depiction of Black American women's oppression that results from the imbrication of categories such as race, gender, and class.

As the above meditation on the slave narrative has shown, the intertwinement of movement and travel, subjectivity, agency, resistance, and freedom plays a crucial role in the narratives of formerly enslaved subjects. In these narratives, which can be read as early forms of Black travel writing, the escape from slavery is coupled with the quest for freedom and self-assertion. For the authors of slave narratives, the act of writing was a way to assert their humanity and create a textual identity for themselves. Travel as well as travel writing advanced to means of resistance and the narrative became a vehicle to voice criticism and call for social action. The slave narrative's thematic complexes, narrative patterns, and modes of writing provided literary templates for other texts. Robert Coles underscores that the narratives produced by these early travelers and freedom seekers "created a model that future black writers built upon or extended" (11). For example, African American novels of the 1960s and 1970s revisited elements of the slave narrative and reconfigured its generic conventions. Black British and Black Canadian authors also took up developing and expanding the genre (see, for example, Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge*, 1991; Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*, 2007; Andrea Levy's *The Long Song*, 2010). These neo-slave narratives are concerned with slavery and its effects in the Atlantic world and beyond and testify to the significance and vitality of the slave narrative's legacy.[18] In many contemporary novels on the subject, travel is a ubiquitous motif—metaphorically (as time travel in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*, 1979) and as a major theme and structural element, determining the plot and narrative design (for example, the violent journey across the Atlantic in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*, 1990 and the travels of the protagonists in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, 2016 and Esi Edugyan's *Washington Black*, 2018).

3. Developments and Trajectories

Thus far, I have outlined the formation of Black travel writing and traced back its roots to the slave narratives that emerged in the Atlantic world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The slave narrative, I have argued, should be understood as a transnational, rather than a national, literary tradition that

18 See Ashraf H. A. Rushdy's *The Neo-Slave Narrative: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (1999) for a detailed account of the genre of the neo-slave narrative.

developed across the Atlantic and was shaped by diverse mobilities. The writings of formerly enslaved and self-emancipated individuals highlight the significance of mobility as a precondition to attaining freedom and in the fight against the dehumanizing system of slavery. I have suggested that mobility is a central thematic and formal aspect in the texts that is interwoven with the construction of an autonomous mobile subject. The inquiry into the objectives, themes, forms, and conventions of the slave narrative paves the way for examining how subsequent travel writers draw on the repertoire of tropes and devices established in these early narratives of travel. In the following, the development of Black travel writing and its features and trajectories are outlined to assess how literary depictions of travel have transformed against the backdrop of changing political, cultural, and historical contexts. Due to the eclecticism of the genre, the presentation of forms and topics is suggestive rather than exhaustive. Within the scope of this study, it is impossible to outline the manifold themes and forms of Black travel writing without falling into the trap of generalizing and reducing its complexity. For this reason, I focus and elaborate on three key aspects that I deem especially pertinent in Black travel writing: First, the genre's function as a venue for criticism that marginalized subjects employed to articulate their discontent with the existing social and political order, call for social action, and express progressive political ideas; second, the aspect of border crossing and the effects this has on the travelers and their writing; and third, the representation of journeys to Africa. By scrutinizing these focal points, I seek to sketch the contours of the genre of Black travel writing via its development, continuities, and breaks.

3.1 Travel Writing as a Venue for Criticism

Considering that Black "travel is rooted in restraint, defiance, flight, and remaking" (Youngs, "African American Travel" 120), it is arguably self-evident that travel writing fulfills important functions for marginalized and oppressed subjects. Slave narratives were an expression of their writers' striving for reform and presented interventions into transnational discourses of slavery and equality. In line with the protest tradition inaugurated by the slave narrative, travel writing is "a deeply political genre, often radical in its politics and form" (120) that writers use to put forth their social and political agendas and influence national debates. The literary descendants of early travel narratives by self-emancipated subjects also engage with topics of social and political relevance. For Black Americans, travel writing has long

served as a means to voice their critique of the US-American society and to speak with authority on private and public issues. In their narratives, these writers often contrast their experiences abroad with the situation at home, revealing how racial discrimination and oppression manifest, among other aspects, in the limitation and restriction of free movement, which excluded people of color from gaining the full rights of citizens. Travel writing has thus provided a medium that Black writers strategically used to criticize their home society. Using the formal conventions of the travel narrative, they issued a call for social action and demonstrate their will to incite societal transformation. Likewise, in many contemporary travel narratives, the narrator casts a critical gaze on the conditions they temporarily left behind.

Many authors of slave narratives from the United States traveled widely as abolitionists and activist speakers on lecture tours around Europe. For them, travel abroad offered a vantage point to reflect on the situation back home and compare the United States with other countries where they experienced relative freedom from open racial discrimination. The recollection of a journey allowed these writers to illustrate an actual flight, or temporary escape, from an oppressive environment and gave them the opportunity to voice an explicit critique of their society. From outside the United States, activist travelers and writers refashioned anti-slavery arguments. In particular, Great Britain was a location where they could present progressive political agendas and garner both political and moral support (Coles 38). Shaw-Thornburg underlines the political dimension of travel and travel writing about Europe:

> By traveling to and documenting their travel to European metropolises nineteenth-century African Americans sought to intervene in representations of the US and to move discussions of US racism to the fore of that struggle over representation. The exercise of their mobility allowed them to become audible and politically efficacious in a way denied to them by their marginal status in the US. Travel to Europe is presented as one of the necessary but unfortunate consequences of racism in the US, and these journeys are presented as virtually involuntary. At the beginning of this tradition, the practice of producing the travel narrative is explicitly a political act of resistance. (55)

The travel narrative of the nineteenth-century writer and anti-slavery activist William Wells Brown, son of an enslaved woman and a White enslaver from Kentucky, is an excellent example of the writer's employment of the genre to advance his abolitionist agenda. Brown's travel across Europe inspired his 1855 narrative *The American Fugitive in Europe: Sketches of Places and People Abroad*.

Having previously published a slave narrative to great acclaim, he was already an established and celebrated professional author and orator in Europe by the time his travel narrative was published. Traveling internationally allowed Brown to view his experience as a formerly enslaved subject—a person who was discriminated against in the nation he called home—from a different perspective. In his travel narrative, "Brown sought to discredit pro-slavery arguments, draw attention to national differences in racial attitudes, and demonstrate that an America free of racism was a possibility" (Schmeller 111). To do so, he strategically used the descriptions of his tourist travels and productively employed the thematic and generic features of the contemporary Anglo-American travel narrative, which had become highly popular, to serve his purposes. Charles Baraw refers to Brown as a "fugitive tourist," which he defines "as a celebrated fugitive slave publicly performing the conventional practices of nineteenth-century aesthetic tourism," and indicates how the author employs established conventions of Anglo-American travel and travel writing such as "historical sightseeing, museum-going, literary pilgrimages, and the sentimental encounter with the Other" (453). Drawing on these conventions, Brown "transforms them into powerful counter-narratives that expose the instability of monumental histories of nation, empire, and race" (453). While neither the role of the tourist nor that of the US-American male citizen were readily available for him inside the United States, his narrative serves to represent Brown as a self-made intellectual visitor interested in historical and cultural sites. Brown's descriptions of the tourist sites he visited—from Notre Dame, Versailles, and the Louvre in Paris to Westminster Abbey and the Royal Academy in London—serve to construct an image of a cultured traveler and to display his "cultural competence" to protest the widespread assumption of racial inferiority (455). Moreover, fashioning himself as a traveler "strengthen[ed] his claim to cultural and political power of the cultivated gentleman of letters" (Stowe 67). In his narrative, Brown "presents his credential as an intellectual, a reformer, a cultivated gentleman, and a fighter for freedom" (72), hoping to change racial attitudes and work toward ending slavery. Seeing that travel writing was gaining widespread popularity at the time, the genre was a fitting means to convey his perspective and reach a large readership.

Travel narratives were employed to criticize US-American law, racism, and the treatment of African Americans by contrasting the situation in the United States with other countries or exposing the baleful consequences of racial inequality. Gary Totten's *African American Travel Narratives from Abroad*

(2015)—which focuses on African American travelers during segregation, including, for example, journalist and activist Ida B. Wells and Arctic explorer Matthew Henson—illustrates how Black travelers performed cultural work and how their textual representations of travel created a counter-discourse that challenged stereotypes of Black mobility. Wells's travels and her textual accounts are excellent examples of Black travelers' cultural work. Wells journeyed extensively to political conventions and educational meetings—to the extent that travel became her vocation. Through her writing, she contributed to public debates on topics such as women's rights, segregation, national politics, and lynching. To fight the racial terror she experienced first-hand, she led an anti-lynching campaign in the United States and traveled to Britain in the 1890s to advocate for equal rights. Her accounts of her extensive travels are significant for multiple reasons: They describe the practices and horrors of lynching, criticize lynch law, and show how racial segregation results directly from the legacies of slavery. She strategically deployed her travel writing to incite transformation in a society characterized by racialized violence and segregation. Moreover, her texts highlight her mobility as a woman of color and simultaneously draw attention to the ways in which Black mobility was circumscribed through segregation and racial violence (Totten 3). Crucially, by foregrounding her liberated mobility and professional agenda, "Wells challenges notions of enforced travel, slave labor, and diminished subjectivity" and thereby "reimagines slavery's transatlantic passages as routes that mobilize black bodies to resist segregation and violence and move toward empowerment" (18). For Wells and other Black female writers of this time, the motif of travel—which had historically been more or less inaccessible to women—developed into a constitutive component of their literature, particularly in autobiographical writing (Mason 338). Both as a reality and a metaphor in their writings, travel provided them with the opportunity to create a unique voice, articulate their experiences, and participate in national debates. Notably, "[t]ravel or journey became synonymous with action and commitment to social change" (339). Wells's texts demonstrate that "her travels were often militant political statements" (342). Articulating a powerful critique of racial segregation and inequality, these texts expose the irrationality of racism and subvert popular stereotypes of Black (female) travel, thus underscoring once again that travel and writing were important sources of agency and resistance.

Wells's travel writing is remarkable in that she positions herself as a professional and in contrast to tourist travelers. Instead of relating tourist experiences, Wells foregrounds her professional authority and anti-lynching

agenda (Totten 17). In her narrative, she presents herself as an eyewitness to the horrors and irrationality of lynching, claiming writerly authority and underscoring the value of her testimony. Assuming the position of a professional journalist, writer, Black female traveler, and eyewitness, she pits "her writing and traveling persona against familiar tropes of leisure travel," rejecting both the role of the tourist and the images of Black travel constructed in the accounts of other African American traveler-writers whose texts frequently revolve around adventure and the fantastic sights of travel (17-18). For example, when relating her experiences in London in *Crusade for Justice*,[19] Wells writes the following: "I have been too engrossed in the work which brought me here to visit the British Museum (although I pass it every day), the Royal Academy or Westminster Abbey, which every American tourist does visit" (174). Pointing out that she is too busy to engage in tourist activities, she underscores her commitment to the fight for justice and against lynching in the United States. Her text shows that she draws on generic conventions of Anglo-American travel writing in order to invert established themes and to emphasize her mission. To put it simply, her work is more important to her than the tourist pleasures London holds for its visitors. In contrast to Brown, who "publicly adopts the role of a *cultivated* fugitive, integrating tourism and its representational strategies into his own antislavery discourse" (Baraw 453), Wells repudiates the status of a tourist and instead emphasizes her role as a journalist who travels for the sake of her work. Articulating her experiences of travel in her narratives and employing the knowledge obtained through her mobility, Wells—like other Black travelers—represented herself as a knowledgeable and credible professional and used the genre of travel writing to create a public persona, a position from which she could speak with authority.

There are few parts in Wells's text in which she employs typical tourist rhetoric (see Totten 20). Remarks on the weather or complaints about the train's uncomfortable seating are strategically used to venture into a comparison between Britain and the United States and as a way to present her unremitting critique of the situation for Black people 'back home.' A comparison between the countries serves in many Black travel narratives of the time

19 Wells never finished writing her autobiography, but the manuscript was edited by her daughter and posthumously published in 1970 as *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. Several chapters had already appeared in the Chicago *Daily Inter-Ocean*, a progressive White newspaper for which Wells worked as a special correspondent.

to expose the hypocrisy of a nation that stresses the liberal values of freedom and equality while denying citizens' rights to large parts of the population. Such a comparison further allowed travel writers to imagine and craft a vision of a nation free from racial discrimination and degrading treatment of people of color. Employing what Pettinger identifies as a rhetoric of contrast, denoting the contrasting literary depiction between different countries and different travel experiences within these countries, this narrative strategy is "characterized by opposing impulses—both to exaggerate and to minimize the differences" ("What a Difference" 137). For instance, in her account of her travels to Britain, Wells compares Liverpool, which had once been a major slaving port, with the United States and comments on how the city treats its Black inhabitants with respect. Wells writes,

> Liverpool has learned that she can prosper without the slave trade or slave labor. Her docks are crowded with ships from all parts of the world. And the city, with its population of six hundred thousand souls, is one of the most prosperous in the United Kingdom. Her freedom-loving citizens not only subscribe to the doctrine that human beings regardless of color or condition are equal before the law, but they practice what they preach. (*Crusade* 135)

Emphasizing that Liverpool has developed into a prosperous city even without relying on forced labor, the text passage continues with a description of the freedom Black people enjoy in Britain, where they can ride public conveyances without harassment, are treated courteously in restaurants and hotels, and may visit museums and theaters. Her descriptions function as a means to juxtapose the United States and Great Britain and criticize US-American politics and society, in particular institutional segregation and racial violence. Furthermore, Wells employs the comparison to conjure a vision of a society based on equality and justice, signaling her hope that the United States would someday follow the example set by Britain. Like Liverpool, which has a history steeped in the transatlantic slave trade, Wells suggests that the United States, too, would prosper if they were to accept Black people as equitable citizens. As Wells's narrative demonstrates, these comparisons sometimes entail the romanticization of locales outside of the United Stated as spaces characterized by political freedom and equality for people of color. In the imagination of many Black Americans, therefore, Europe advanced into a site of relative liberty and equality. The perception of Europe as a safe haven for Black Americans, however, belies the fact that racism existed there as well; nevertheless, it may have been felt less intensively by these travelers.

For Wells, as well as for many of her contemporaries, travel to Europe was a respite, if only temporarily, from the rampant racism she experienced at home. The ability to travel and to write about the experience allowed female writers like Wells to forge unique public voices to enter and intervene in local, national, and transnational debates and to articulate their critiques pertaining to topics such as slavery, education, and women's rights. As female travelers and writers fought against the limitations on their mobility, they simultaneously took up the fight against the racial and gendered confinements they experienced. Scrutinizing nineteenth- and twentieth-century travel writing by American women, Susan L. Roberson underscores that "[t]he freedoms of travel intimate other freedoms and identity transformations that become harbingers of social change" (217). Black American women like Wells traveled to campaign for women's suffrage, to fight segregation, and to advance their professional careers, thus demonstrating the empowering aspects of mobility. Doing so, they claimed their rights as citizens and defied racial and gendered impasses as well as attempts to immobilize them. As Roberson emphasizes, "By challenging immobility and spatial segregation, many traveling women also challenged economic, legal, and ideological restrictions that sought to keep them 'in place'" (217-18). Their increasing physical and cultural mobility allowed them to transgress real and metaphorical borders. Moreover, traveling and writing as women and descendants of enslaved subjects, they changed and transformed the conventions and perceptions of Black mobility and travel writing.

Importantly, Black people's mobility, as well as their textual representations of travel, demonstrated their resistance to spatial, social, racial, and gendered confinements. The travel narratives by Brown and Wells exemplify the potential of the genre as a mouthpiece for critique, both explicit and subtle. Journeying as tourists, social critics, political activists, and public intellectuals, these traveler-writers subverted the literary, geographical, and racial restrictions of their time. While the narratives of the two authors appropriate, subvert, and extend conventional generic forms of Anglo-American travel writing, it should be noted that certainly not all writings by Black authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be read as being oppositional. As a heterogeneous genre, Black travel writing expresses a variety of ideological agendas. African American travel writing during segregation was highly complex and sometimes contradictory. While cultural critique is embedded in many travel narratives authored by Black writers, not all serve as expressions of dissent against the status quo. "Travel writing is often rad-

ical and oppositional, challenging political, social and generic conventions," reason Pettinger and Youngs, "but to expect radicalism solely on the basis of ethnicity or gender or sexuality or other characteristics is to stereotype in its own way" (4). For example, Matthew Henson, an African American explorer who accompanied Robert Peary on several Arctic exploration voyages at the turn of the twentieth century, constructs in his travelogue an authoritative persona and an identity as an explorer through a rhetoric that draws on imperialism and racism (Totten 72). Still, much Black travel writing evinces the genre's potential as a venue for criticism.

3.2 "What a Difference a Border Makes": Transformative Travel Experiences and Literary Self-Exploration[20]

> Partly, I travel to discover more about myself. My journeys have taught me that a definition of who I am cannot be mapped on the simple black-and-white limits of state lines and borders.
>
> —*Colleen McElroy, A Long Way from St. Louie: Travel Memoirs*

> [I]t is by exploring the world that one begins to discover oneself.
>
> —*Tzvetan Todorov, "The Journey and Its Narratives"*

> The stories of travel are as important as the act of travel, however, for they are the linguistic vehicle through which a repositioning is accomplished. The writing, like the travel itself, is a process through which the self moves.
>
> —*Tim Youngs, "African American Travel Writing"*

Despite the many obstacles that restricted Black travel throughout the ages, Black people have traveled as abolitionists, lecturers, missionaries, sailors, and tourists, to visit family, or for professional reasons. However, traversing borders often presented difficulties and complications. The accounts of Black travelers frequently recount the problems faced in obtaining passports and visas and the harassment of border control and security personnel (here, bell hooks's travel experience again comes to mind). The obstacles encountered

20 Langston Hughes's much quoted phrase stems from his 1956 *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* (Hill and Wang, 1993). It is part of his meditation on the meaning of borders after he left war-torn Spain, where he spent time working as a reporter.

by Black travelers draw attention to the limitations and circumscriptions that Black mobile subjects confront. Examining the experiences of twentieth-century Black American travelers, Pettinger reminds us of the innumerous times that Black mobility was purposely restricted, such as when the State Department withheld the right to travel from Du Bois and Richard Wright; when British and US-American authorities prohibited several Black delegates from attending the 1919 African Congress in Paris; when Garvey was refused a passport by the British; or when Jamaican writer Claude McKay was prevented from entering British territory ("Introduction" xiv). However, while the literary record of the difficulties in traveling and border crossing underscores the many ways in which Black mobility is curbed, it also highlights Black people's resistance to these limitations. In many accounts of journeys abroad, such incidents provide the starting point for the author's contemplation on the contemporary situation for people of color in their home countries and abroad. Travel writing, as these texts demonstrate, thus serves as a tool for exploring and writing about 'home'—that is, the geographical, personal, national, and public space of their native countries—placing this home into perspective.

The transformative effects that traveler-writers report when dwelling in environments in which Black people are not subject to discrimination resonate in early travel narratives as well as in contemporary ones. Early Black American travelers noted that they were able to obtain a greater degree of freedom outside the national borders of the United States. They experienced that crossing borders brought about changes in how they were treated and perceived, revealing in their travel writing the artificiality of prescribed racial and social identities. Moreover, it allowed Black travelers to 'taste' freedom, which, as Pryor suggests, was not just a question of a person's legal status but a sensory state and an emotion (149). She writes,

> International travel afforded people of color the opportunity to exercise their ideas about citizenship, centered on unobstructed mobility, and, by extension, the ability to feel, breathe, hear, see, and assert that freedom in practice. Only by landing on foreign shores where the constant barrage of racism was absent, [...] could activists embody the full scope of what equality and citizenship could mean for themselves and for other people of color back home. (150)

In other words, travel was often a transformative experience for African Americans as they felt the weight of racism, which had tied them down, being lifted.

Thus, traveling abroad harbored the promise of freedom from racial discrimination.

As a principle, travel writing represents an engagement with difference as it relates an encounter with different people, locales, and cultures. However, through these descriptions of something 'other,' much more is unveiled about the observing and narrating subject. The internal journey is therefore inextricably tied to the external, spatial journey of the traveler-writer. As Roberson reasons, "One of the truisms of travel is that it transforms the journeying self, unsettling a static self-identity with movement through space and contact with different peoples and places" (221). Traversing geographical and national borders had powerful and transformative effects on Black travelers in the antebellum and postbellum periods. Traveling both within and across borders provides an impetus for literary self-exploration and reflection, often in relation to national and cultural identification and affiliations. The writings of African American travelers, such as Douglass, Brown, and Wells, exemplify how travel abroad and the subsequent retelling of the experiences facilitated an investigation of their identities as mobile Black subjects. For these authors, travel writing served as a medium to shape, construct, and reflect on their sense of self (see also Youngs, "Pushing" 71). Therefore, the geographical journey represented in the texts simultaneously invokes an exploration of the self, and changes in vantage point allow these writers to appropriate various identities.

The writings of the abovementioned authors exemplify the transformative experience of travel and the liberating power of mobility in their narratives. Black travelers also registered a change in attitudes toward them: Regarding his travel experience in Britain, Douglass writes in a letter, "I seem to have undergone a transformation. I live a new life," and continues saying, "I breathe, and lo! the chattel becomes a man" (*Life and Times* 172, 173). For Douglass, receiving respectful and courteous treatment in Britain was such a powerful and life-changing experience that he renders it in his narrative as a transition from an object into a human being; that is, from chattel to man. The unprecedented freedom he experienced is expressed in terms of gaining a new life. Furthermore, regardless of the fact that back in the United States his individuality, equality, and citizen status were not fully recognized, his existence could be fashioned in language on the pages of his account.

Brown made similar observations while abroad. His travelogue about Europe speaks to the transformative experience of travel: "The prejudice which I have experienced on all and every occasion in the United States [...] vanished

as soon as I set foot on the soil of Britain. [...] I was recognized as a man, and an equal. The very dogs in the streets appeared conscious of my manhood" (*American Fugitive* 40). The recognition of his manhood and the treatment he experienced in Britain allowed Brown to feel not only like a respected human being but also like a man. While he had experienced the humiliation and psychological emasculation that Black men were subjected to under slavery, outside the United States he felt a new kind of freedom. For Brown and others, travel abroad allowed them for the first time in their lives to feel like a woman or a man. Pryor describes this powerful sensation of being recognized on the basis of one's gender as "gendered freedom" (150-53). As the literary records of Black travelers' European journeys demonstrate, travel provided them with the opportunity to assume roles that had previously been unavailable to them. In Brown's narrative, the change in attitude toward him causes him to redefine himself, which is presented as a powerful emotional experience. Moreover, "Brown's travel writing allowed him a way to fully imagine himself as an American" (Schmeller 111). Thus, his European travels gave him not only a new perspective on racial attitudes but made it possible to create and claim an American male selfhood that he could not obtain in the United States.

In the late nineteenth century, a few decades after Douglass and Brown traveled to Europe, Wells also journeyed to Britain and wrote about her experience with exuberant joy. Testifying to the transformational power of her transatlantic journey, she writes that her stay in Liverpool gave her the feeling of being reborn: "To a colored person who has been reared in the peculiar atmosphere which obtains only in free (?) America it is like being born into another world, to be welcomed among persons of the highest order of intellectual and social culture as if one were one of themselves" (*Crusade* 135). In the narrative, these travel experiences serve to analyze the subject's identity and to explore what it means to feel like an American—a feeling that she can only explore outside the borders of what she tauntingly dubs "free (?) America." Wells's narratives show that travel writing presented a space for female writers in which it was possible to develop self-representations away from dominant cultural narratives. As Cheryl J. Fish illustrates in *Black and White Women's Travel Narratives*, women negotiate multiple identities and construct themselves textually within their writing, making it possible to fashion different gendered identities. Examining nineteenth-century women traveler-writers (both Black and White), she attests that their writings reflect a "mobile subjectivity" that is constituted through engagements with peoples, locales,

and cultures.[21] This mobile subjectivity is defined as "a fluid and provisional epistemology and subject position that is contingent upon one's relationship to specific persons, incidents, ideologies, locations, time, and space. It is a process that enables its agents to examine and create various constructions of the self and others" (6-7). This process facilitates the negotiation of identity in relation to different contexts. Therefore, setting their bodies and subjectivities in motion, travel and travel writing had powerful and empowering effects for Black female writers.

As a result of the persistent denial of equal rights in the United States, many writers contemplate the question of belonging. Leaving the nation of one's birth often brings about meditations on the questions of race and racial identity. The certitudes of racial stratification can be toppled by the writers' recognition that travel makes racial identity fluid: "Crossing borders involves not only a change of social status, but often a change of *colour* too. As different countries have different systems of racial classification one may be 'Black' in one country and not in another" (Pettinger, "Introduction" xiv-xv). Turning their observing gaze inward, Black travel writers register transformations in their self-perception and the perception of them by other people. While writers such as those discussed in this section were primarily regarded as 'Black' within the United States, beyond the nation's borders they were most often seen as both Black Americans and Americans. Travel, then, destabilizes the belief in fixed ethnic identities and unsettles notions tied to the concept of race—a theme that is explored on the level of the text—encouraging a renegotiating of the constructs of identity, nation, and home.

The exploration of and experimentation with racial, national, and cultural subjectivities in travel narratives speak to Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, which is described in his influential 1903 work *The Souls of Black Folk* and denotes the distinct experience of Black Americans under the conditions of racism. He expounds that African Americans in the United States face an internal conflict, a division of their sense of self. In the much quoted passage, Du Bois writes the following: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others,

21 Fish distinguishes her concept of mobile subjectivity from the mobile subjectivity of Rosi Braidotti's nomad. While "Braidotti's nomad is a female subject who resists settling into a socially coded mode of behavior," Fish describes a subject who is an actual traveler moving through space and who, in the process, overcomes "fixed identities" (7).

of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (694). As a Black American, Du Bois contends, "One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (694). Such contemplations permeate a range of Black travel narratives, especially in the twentieth century and beyond. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness—the ways one is looked at and defined by others while simultaneously looking at oneself from distinct perspectives—has important implications for Black travel writing. Black travelers tend to reflect a greater awareness and self-consciousness "than most whites of the effects of the tourist gaze on those who are subject to it" (Youngs, "African American Travel" 114). This contention also resonates with Arana's characterization of Black travel writing and her observation that this form of literature is marked by the writer's unflinching attention to issues of race ("A Kaleidoscopic Genre" 4). Du Bois's notion of double consciousness, as Youngs asserts, "may readily be adapted to the situation of the Black traveler who sees himself or herself through the eyes of others, within and beyond the borders of the United States. Travel affords a pivotal point from which one can survey the destination, departure point, and oneself in relation to each" ("African American Travel" 114). What is more, the movement through space incites a reexamination of the self. Black traveler-writers thus use the trope of the journey abroad to explore their sense of self in relation to the places they visit as well as to those places and countries they (temporarily) left behind. Such considerations underscore that the journey recounted and restaged in literature is inextricably intertwined with an interior journey of self-exploration.

Contemporary travel narratives express sentiments that echo those of their literary predecessors. For example, Dorothy Lazard—whose text is part of the aforementioned *Go Girl!*, a collection of travel-themed text by Black female writers, activists, and academics—writes about a trip to London in her early twenties. She relates that, to her surprise, her English hosts referred to her simply as American:

> My hosts referred to me as the 'American.' I had to accept the fact that, as quiet as it's kept in my own country, I am an American. Yet nothing in my experience had allowed me to think of myself in that way. At best I was a hyphenate: an African-American. Some derivative of the 'real' thing. In London I was a different type of 'other,' standing outside of another norm.
> *I am an American*. ("Finding" 222)

Lazard's experience recalls that of early Black travelers who wrote about how the fact that they were treated with respect in Europe surprised and delighted them. The passage also demonstrates that traveling and writing encourage the continuous probing of conceptions of identity.

The curiosity to learn more not only about other places, people, and cultures but also about oneself is expressed by McElroy in *A Long Way from St. Louie*: "I want to see for myself, to traverse the globe in random flight paths to places full of both surprise and disappointment, to give myself a vision of what it is like to be black and female on an unknown landscape" (v). The genre of travel writing—with its flexible definitions and mobile generic conventions—accommodates the traveling subject's process of reidentification, reflecting a refusal to be confined to a fixed place or position. McElroy's narrative underscores that travel writing often functions to explore the parameters of race, nation, and gender for her identity. Black writers' engagement with these issues can be understood as a consequence of the fact that "a complicated set of intersecting constraints affects the Western woman of color when she travels, given the cultural politics of racial visibility and the vulnerability attending her transit in inhospitable spaces" (S. Smith xv). Through the interior, self-reflexive journey, McElroy considers her position as a Western woman and her unique perspective as a person of color in places where tourists are predominantly White. Being a privileged traveler abroad but a marginalized subject at home, her double perspective engenders astute observations about the cultures and people she encounters. McElroy's travelogue effectively demonstrates the possibilities inherent in travel writing as a means for self-exploration and as a way to reflect on present-day concerns of traveling in a globalized world. Along these lines, Arana observers that contemporary travel narratives, "tell about travel from a self-conscious subject position of today's black international traveler, and all of them feature, as a central experience, the way travel to distant places stimulates self-examination, personal growth, and spiritual enlargement" ("A Kaleidoscopic Genre" 6).

In a similar vein, Elaine Lee emphasizes the potential of travel as a source of empowerment, recreation, well-being, respect, and self-esteem (14). In her introduction to *Go Girl!*, Lee underscores that for an African American woman, travel abroad can be a source of empowerment and facilitate a change in perception. Being regarded differently outside the United States, Lee's remark that she is "consistently treated like a human being" while traveling abroad (13) evokes the sense of freedom that other travelers have noted before. She recalls

her astonishment when she discovered "that in many parts of the world it is an asset to be a black woman" (13) and goes on, saying, "It's when I travel that I am told I'm attractive, courageous, and smart. In some parts of the world, I am even considered beautiful, yet in the U.S., I'm just a short, brown, skinny, ordinary woman who's been cursed with a good education, ambition, and an American Express gold card" (13). That travel is a source of empowerment, renewal, and transformation is particularly pertinent when Lee describes her experiences of travel to Africa. In Africa, she feels a sense of belonging and community. Upon her return to the US, she notes, "my back was straighter and my head was higher and I felt a rootedness and inner strength I had never felt before" (15). Importantly, the change in posture reflects the transformation that was brought about by her visit to Africa. This is reminiscent of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Black travelers who noted that the freedom they experienced abroad was an emotional and sensory experience.

3.3 Twentieth-Century Black Writers in/on Africa

> So I had finally come home. The prodigal child, having strayed, been stolen or sold from the land of her fathers, having squandered her mother's gifts and having laid down in cruel gutters, had at last arisen and directed herself back to the welcoming arms of the family where she would be bathed, clothed with fine raiment seated at the welcoming table.
>
> —*Maya Angelou, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*

A key characteristic of many Black travel narratives is that they express a desire for home and a place free from discrimination. At the turn of the century, many African Americans looked for a home outside the United States, noting with dismay that the end of slavery had not brought about equality but established institutional segregation instead (Martin 262). While some found new "physical and intellectual home[s]" in countries such as France and Russia, others were drawn to the African continent (262). Considering the Black diaspora's century-long engagement with the African continent and its role as an imagined homeland for people of African descent (see ch. II, sec. 2), it is unsurprising that many travelers made it their destination of choice. In contrast to the organized repatriation efforts of their predecessors, twentieth-century travelers had different and more personal motivations to journey to Africa. Individual travelers, including established artists, intellectuals, and political leaders, came to examine their personal relation to the continent—among the

best-known are Richard Wright, W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Eslanda Goode Robeson, James Baldwin, and Maya Angelou. They captured their experiences in travelogues, essays, poems, and magazine and newspaper articles, contributing to a boom in travel writing about Africa during the mid-twentieth century. The literary records of their journeys and their experiences in Africa constitute a corpus that has influenced and shaped subsequent travel writing about the continent. As the analyses of contemporary travel narratives in Chapter IV demonstrate, many texts respond to and critically engage with their literary forebears. This section, therefore, examines some of the most prominent narratives of travel to Africa that were produced in the twentieth century.

Emphasizing the continent's significant imprint on the consciousness of formerly enslaved subjects and their descendants, Virginia Whatley Smith contends that "[t]he loss of Africa as 'home' and the 'returned body' become rhetorical signatures in […] travel accounts by African Americans during antebellum and postbellum times" ("African American Travel" 202). In her outlining of African American travel writing, she expounds that "[i]n searching for equality and answers to cultural gaps in knowledge, the travel writers show a consistent tendency to return to states in Africa for inspiration and renewal" (213). However, Smith's contestation that "Africa comes to symbolize re-affirmation for the hybridized, American-born African searching for re-identification and definitions of self-reliance" (202) does certainly not apply to all Black travel narratives. While journeys to Africa can be reassuring—for example, Gaines observes that in the 1950s journeys to the continent were often represented as a "therapeutic 'return'" (*American Africans*, 55)—they can also be challenging, disorienting, and disappointing. Indeed, Smith's claim must be disputed considering that travel narratives about Africa do not always portray an individual whose identity is reaffirmed by their travel to the continent. Arguably, it is more often the case that the journey to Africa yields a contemplation of one's cultural, national, and racial identity, which may destabilize rather than affirm the traveler's sense of self. Especially when reality and imagination diverge and diasporic travelers discover that the places to which they 'return' look nothing like the "imaginary homelands" (Rushdie, 1991) they conjured in their imagination, feelings of alienation and confusion ensue that complicate the journey and the travelers' relation to Africa.[22] Travel

22 Salman Rushdie famously describes "imaginary homelands" as diasporic writers' creative textual construction of their places of origin: "It may be that writers in my posi-

narratives about Africa, therefore, are often characterized by ambiguity and ambivalence in relation to the place as well as in relation to the traveling subject's own sense of self.

A compelling example of a text that represents the writer's complex emotions of familiarity and strangeness toward Africa is the travel narrative authored by Era Bell Thompson, an African American journalist and writer for *Ebony* magazine. Thompson's journey across different African countries is recorded in her 1954 book with the evocative title *Africa: Land of My Fathers*. As the title suggests, she imagined herself as a returnee coming home to Africa, the land of her forefathers, to mend the ties of kinship that had been severed (Lansing 12). Like Thompson, many other Black Americans who traveled to Africa and wrote about their experiences foreground their complex emotions of intrinsic kinship and connection to Africans and their simultaneous feelings of alienation and anxiety. Frequently, these narratives document bewildering encounters with local people; such encounters are characterized by misunderstandings and misperceptions that undermine the traveler's expectations of their journeys. Unsurprisingly, when reality and imagination diverge, disillusionment and disappointment are often the consequence. The narratives that contemplate the idea of kinship, siblinghood, and familial links with African people explore the subject's relation to the people they meet by employing a "rhetoric of kinship" (Pettinger, "African American" 317). The rhetoric of kinship includes proclamations and assertions of siblinghood as well as its denial and rejection (318). This rhetorical strategy creates approximation and affiliation but also disconnection and distance between the narrator and the local African people. Examining physical resemblances, traveler-writers frequently articulate a sense of racial kinship with Africans. Moreover, many writers identify with African people on the basis of shared experiences of repression; they compare the oppression and exploitation of Africans by European colonizers to the history of slavery in the United States and the struggle for decolonization in Africa to that for civil rights in America. Often, however, they also recognize that the idea of familial ties

---

tion, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutilated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must do in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10).

and cultural bonds between Africa and the Black diaspora is problematic and complicated, seeing that they have only few things in common with the people they encounter in Africa. Significantly, travelers' disillusionment with Africa is largely connected to the realization that skin color or shared African origins do not necessarily make Black people kin. As Western travelers, their economic and social status creates profound divisions between them and the locals. Travel narratives, therefore, often relate the travelers' surprise when they are perceived as strangers or 'White' people. They discover that belonging is not a question of color in Africa. Unexpected moments of demystification and profound estrangement from the places and people they encounter together with the social, economic, and political realities of Africa they observe further challenge notions of a mythical place and complicate travelers' efforts to define themselves in relation to Africa. For this reason, some travelers refute the centrality of Africa for Black subjectivity, having experienced what Pettinger describes as an "[a]nticlimactic recognition of how little common ground they share" with the African people they met during their journey ("At Least One" 88).

Considering the various images and visions that have been attached to the African continent, it does not come as a surprise that these are also reflected in the writings about Africa by Black diasporic travelers. Depending on different historical moments, circumstances, and personal motives, these images vary decisively, ranging from depictions of a paradisiacal homeland to visions of darkness and chaos. Characteristic of many Black travel narratives is, however, the traveler-writer's longing and desire to reconnect with Africa. Evocations of Africa as a utopian place of equality, as a space of cultural rebirth, and as a source of inspiration permeate many travel accounts (M'Baye 153). But celebratory depictions of Africa are often accompanied by images of primitivism and backwardness. Notably, the image of Africa that has been formed over centuries in the Western imagination has exerted a pivotal influence over the Black American perception of the continent (see Berghahn, 1977). Expanding on his earlier work *White on Black*, in which he sketched the conventions of Africanist writing by Anglo-American authors and their depictions of Africa as morally and intellectually inferior, John Cullen Gruesser traces Africanist discourse in nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American literature in *Black on Black* (2000). He observes that nonfiction travel accounts are pervaded by elements of Africanist discourse, including binary oppositions, image projection, and the use of evolutionary language. Accounts of travel to Africa tend to create images of the continent that rely heavily on

the perpetuation of binary oppositions, presenting an ambivalent oscillation between nightmarish visions of a 'dark,' 'exotic,' and 'savage' continent and a nostalgic pastoralism. Shaped by Western images of Africa, Africanist discourse relegates the continent to a formless body that can be shaped and defined according to the agendas and desires of those who write about it, thereby simplifying and diminishing its cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and geographical complexities. Reflecting the persistence of certain stereotypical images over centuries, many Black literary engagements with Africa draw on discourses created in White Western travel literature. According to Gruesser, the exposure to such stereotypes and the impact of Africanist discourse kept African American writers from depicting a more complex picture of Africa ("Afro-American" 5; *Black on Black* 137-38). He concludes that "these texts show their authors' attempting but ultimately failing to escape the trap of Africanist discourse, which regards Africa either as a dream or a nightmare" ("Afro-American" 9).[23] Clearly, the images of Africa created in the travel narratives tell their own stories about the writers who produce them, revealing much about their attitudes, assumptions, and ideological standpoints.

In many Black travel narratives, notions of ambivalence and ambiguity toward Africa are palpable. Examples of writings that reflect the ambivalence outlined above can be found in the travelogues of Richard Wright and Maya Angelou: Richard Wright, who had already left the United States permanently for Paris in the late 1940s, traveled to the Gold Coast in 1953 shortly before its independence, where he met soon-to-be president Nkrumah and other political leaders; Angelou spent time in the newly independent nation with a host of other Black American expatriates. Both travel narratives express their writers' conflicting emotions toward Africa. Wright's 1954 *Black Power: Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* depicts a traveler-writer seeking to approach Africa without racial romanticism in an attempt to depart from the discourse of African American homecoming. His interest lay in understanding the political and cultural dynamics at work in the process of decolonization in a nation on the brink of independence and in exploring the diasporic relations between African Americans and Africans. Importantly, however, his

23 Gruesser argues that only a few writers have successfully produced more nuanced depictions of Africa. He notes that "it has been precisely those writers who recognized the problematic nature of specific literary forms and consciously constructed generic hybrids who have created some of the most effective—in revisionary terms—and memorable black American literary texts about Africa" (*Black on Black* 19).

narrative also reflects Wright's preoccupation with questions of identity: Before his departure from Paris, he wonders, "*But, am I African?*" (18) and "What does being African mean…?" (19). His questions draw attention to issues of identification, heritage, and conceptions of race that are explored throughout the text. During his sojourn in West Africa, he feels an "odd kind of at-homeness," a "solidarity that stemmed not from ties of blood or race […] but from the quality of deep hope and suffering […] from the hard facts of oppression" (409-10). What surfaces throughout the text is the tension between the notions of familiarity and strangeness that he feels toward Africa. Rejecting the idea that Africans and Black Americans are connected by ancestral ties, Wright expresses his belief that the shared experiences of oppression caused by enslavement and colonization account for his vague feelings of attachment. Nevertheless, his narrative strikingly demonstrates that Wright is unable to really connect with the people he meets. Despite the invocations of familiarity and the fact that he discovers similarities between African and African American cultural practices, he is taken aback by much of what he witnesses. Confused and appalled by the behavior and customs of the local population, the narrator resorts to generalizations and problematic claims about African people and culture. Wright's travel narrative, therefore, "stands out as the first major twentieth-century critique after decades of celebration and political rapprochement with Africa" (Levecq 91). Eventually he exclaims, "I had understood nothing. I was black and they were black, but my blackness did not help me" (161). Troubled by his experiences, he returned to Paris earlier than planned.

The traveler's complicated and contradictory emotions toward Africa—the feelings of being strongly bound to the continent and its people while also experiencing alienation and distance—create a tension that is reflected in many travel narratives. Maya Angelou's 1986 travel narrative *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* is a preeminent example of a text that foregrounds the traveler-writer's desire to belong and her conflicting feelings of familiarity and estrangement. It chronicles the years Angelou spent in Ghana in the early 1960s and contemplates the relationship between people of the African diaspora and Africans. Angelou imagines her move to Ghana as the return of the lost daughter—"The prodigal child," who is welcomed back by her family (*All God's* 21). While acknowledging that her sense of self is shaped by the unique experience of living in the United States as a Black American, Angelou seeks to claim her African roots and heritage. Trying to connect with people and feeling at home in Ghana, she frequently employs the rhetoric of kinship. She

approaches Africa with high expectations and romantic visions of a homeland, thus reflecting the spirit of the 1960s when Black Americans celebrated their African cultural heritage. The idealized visions of Africa, however, are continuously challenged in the narrative. Throughout the text, a critical and self-reflexive voice appears that comments on the sometimes naive expectations of the experiencing self. This distance between the experiencing I and the narrating I can be read as a result of the fact that Angelou wrote the account of her experiences in Africa some two decades after she had returned to the United States. It also suggests that she has gone through a process of reflection and reevaluated her experience. Consequently, the idealized images of Africa and the notion of return are undermined by frequent remarks about the disillusionment and disappointment that she and other Black returnees felt. Writing about the Black American expatriate community who consciously ignores the reality of life in Ghana—turning their eyes away from "the open gutters along the streets of Accra, the shacks of corrugated iron in certain neighborhoods, dirty beaches and voracious mosquitos" (*All God's* 18-19)—Angelou unveils their need for self-delusion: "We had come home, and if home was not what we had expected, never mind, our need for belonging allowed us to ignore the obvious and to create real places or even illusory places, befitting our imagination" (19). Throughout the book, there is a constant tension between her longing to be accepted and the feeling of disillusionment. Her disillusionment is particularly palpable when the narrator articulates the suspicion that diasporic return is an impossible homecoming: "I doubted if I, or any Black from the diaspora, could really return to Africa" (76). The narrative highlights her conflicting emotions and contrasts her romanticized vision and dreams with the bare reality of daily life in Africa, thereby creating inherent contradictions.

Angelou's narrative also demonstrates how the writer establishes her connection to Africa, while (at least partly) deconstructing the myth of the continent as a motherland. Seeing that her return has little impact on anyone but herself, Angelou notes how her adoration and love for the new home are one-sided and how her longing for kinship remains unanswered. Africa, she finds, is not the caring mother she has imagined who embraces her child but one who is indifferent to Angelou's presence. Nevertheless, the narrator works to establish a connection to Ghana and to forge kinship with Africans. For example, when she is mistaken for a member of the Bambara people she writes, "For the first time since my arrival, I was very nearly home. Not a Ghanaian, but at least accepted as an African. The sensation was worth a lie" (192).

This comment exposes her need for acceptance and her strong desire to feel a sense of belonging and kinship, even if this feeling is based on a lie. In a similar fashion, she avoids visiting the slave fort in Elmina for most of her stay in Ghana, consciously ignoring the complicity of Africans in the slave trade. This is her attempt to uphold the belief in a noble African past and to affirm the fantasy of return; however, her effort comes at the expense of considering a more complex version of history. Significantly, avoiding critical engagement with the difficult history of the slave trade as well as with the contemporary complexities of African life is necessary so that she can reconnect with her ancestral roots and feel a notion of home in Ghana. Although she eventually resolves to leave Ghana and return to the United States to participate in the Civil Rights Movement, she ends her narrative on a positive, affirming note by proudly claiming her African roots. Because Angelou, despite experiencing disillusionment, frustration, and estrangement, "refuses to relinquish her romantic image of Africa, and opts for the dream side of Africanist discourse" some consider the ending of *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* as "too easily manufactured" (Gruesser, "Afro-American" 18). However, I would argue that it can be productively read and interpreted as an expression of the ambiguities that Black returnees feel toward Africa, which manifest themselves as tensions in the texts—tensions that arise from the persistent longing for a home in Africa and the knowledge that the imagined Promised Land does not exist.

The accounts of travel to Africa that were published in the twentieth century, present the textual, symbolic, and geographical routes that many other sojourners have followed. They remain essential because these writings appear as intertexts in later works and the journey routes described by the texts are retraced by contemporary travelers. Moreover, the travel narratives discussed above demonstrate that Africa represents a space in which identity is discovered, (re)asserted, and negotiated (Youngs, "Pushing" 71). The notion that Africa serves as an important terrain upon which Black writers can explore their sense of self, is underlined by Angelou, who assesses at the end of her stay in Ghana, "If the heart of Africa still remained elusive, my search for it had brought me closer to understanding myself and other human beings" (*All God's* 196). Africa entices the Black traveler's self-exploration arguably more than any other locale. Some travelers attempt to forge bonds with the continent, while others dispute or deny any connection to Africa whatsoever and emphasize their 'Americanness' instead. The social, economic, and political realities of the continent they encounter often challenge prefigured notions of a mythical place and complicate their efforts to define themselves in rela-

tion to it. As American citizens, their economic and social statuses also create profound divisions between them and the people they encounter. Finally, depending on different historical moments, circumstances, and personal motives, the images of the African continent vary from the paradisiacal homeland, similar to the idealized depictions of Africa in poems of the Harlem Renaissance, to a backward place that invokes visions of darkness and chaos.

While the above-outlined thematic and narrative elements permeate much Black travel writing, it is necessary to note that these are not the sole foci in the literature by Black travel writers. Certainly, their narratives cannot and should not be confined to a limited range of themes and functions as this would mean imposing certain essentializing assumptions on the travel narratives. Despite the precautions against drawing rigid boundaries, it is possible, as I have shown, to identify specific roles and functions of Black travel writing. These include the employment of travel writing to articulate criticism on behalf of the collective, to craft an authoritative literary voice, and to intervene in discourses of race, equal rights, and racial discrimination. Travel writing further functions as a means of self-exploration and of presenting mobile Black subjectivities in an effort to defy rigid boundaries of identity in relation to nation, race, and social status. It evinces the employment of the narrative to create an individual identity on the page as well as the assertion of subjectivity as a form of protest and a way to overcome the constrictions that racism and discrimination had imposed on the personal and intellectual development of the individual.

The representation of Black mobility also demonstrates a form of resistance. The trope of travel and of the journey, both geographical and interior, is prevalent in a variety of works, where it figures as liberating and transformative, offering new possibilities for rediscovering and renegotiating the traveler-writer's identity. Often this negotiation is represented on African terrain, a pivotal locale for Black travelers. Although this overview of the characteristics and trajectories is by no means exhaustive, it does reveal several thematic and narrative continuities that build on early forms of Black travel writing and the transnational genre of the slave narrative. As the next part of this study demonstrates, contemporary narratives adopt, adapt, and modify the themes and conventions of early travel-themed literature.

IV Contemporary Black Travel Narratives

In the previous chapter, I contoured the transnational genre of Black travel writing and pointed to its recurring themes and forms. What is gleaned from the above outline of the genre is that travel writing serves as a means to explore the mobile subject's sense of self against the backdrop of a journey, prompting the definition, affirmation, or negotiation of the traveler-writer's identity while also functioning to examine the relationship of the traveler to the specific places in which the subject resides. More than any other location, Africa serves as the chief terrain for the Black mobile subject unto which complex questions of identity, heritage, national selfhood, and history are examined. I began to bring the two major foci of this study together—the genre of travel writing and the phenomenon of Black diasporic engagement with Africa—by scrutinizing the works of twentieth-century travelers about Africa. The analyses that follow delve even deeper into the forms and functions of travel to and writing about Africa. The goal is to show the variety of Black travel writings about Africa and underscore their similarities as well as differences.

This chapter is divided into four parts, each of which offers a close reading of two travel narratives with the focus on a particular theme that appears prominently in the texts. These themes include: 1) the search for roots in Africa and the discursive construction of connections to the continent on the level of the travel narrative; 2) the disenchantment of the idea of diasporic return and the traveler-writers' deconstruction of Africa as a mythical place for Black Americans; 3) the search for home and for a Promised Land in Africa and other places where Black communities reside; and 4) the critical engagement with and retracing of the history of the Black diaspora and the cultural memory of slavery and the slave trade. Accordingly, the arrangement of the travel narratives and chapters does not follow a chronological order but a thematic one. This structure reflects certain findings: For one, while some travel narratives

foreground certain topics and perspectives more than others, all of the works address the abovementioned themes but approach them differently. In regard to particular concerns and ideologies, there is no explicit development that unfolds chronologically, although it can be noted that more recent narratives tend to engage with the genre in a more critical and self-reflexive manner. Travel narratives such as those written by Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman reflect on the genre's problematic nature and probe the boundaries of travel writing as they depart from the conventionalized modes of narration.

1. (Re)Writing Roots

The significance of Alex Haley's Pulitzer-winning classic *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* for Africa-bound Black travelers and travel writers becomes apparent when considering that *Roots* is among the most prominent and frequently employed intertexts, a fact that also testifies to its enormous transnational influence. *Roots* filled in the contours of Black diasporic longing for an identifiable link to an African past and demonstrated the possibility of return and thus a symbolic reversal of the Middle Passage. In *Roots*, Haley discursively creates a connection between his own life and an African past, thereby countering slavery's gruesome destruction of narratives of origin and belonging. Retracing his family history back to Africa by means of a symbolic journey into the past and an actual journey to Gambia, he reconstructs an essential racial identity. His visit to the remote village of Juffure where he encounters a griot, a storyteller who preserves and passes down the local community's history through the oral tradition, is presented as the culmination of his journey. In *Rites of Return: Diaspora and the Politics of Memory* (2011), Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller describe the *Roots* script that influences many return narratives as follows:

> As a quest narrative, it exposes its research methods: travel to the village of Juffure in Gambia where Haley believed his slave ancestor Kunta Kinte was born, the collection of oral accounts of the capture and enslavement of his forebear, and the consultation of the manifest of *The Lord Ligoner*, the slave ship on which Kunta Kinte was thought to have crossed the seas to the United States. Using this evidence to construct a history of Kunta Kinte's representative life story, Haley set the stage for the performance of roots seeking and the climactic moments of recovery that have become common features of American collective self-fashioning. (1-2)

The two travel narratives on which this chapter focuses—Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995) and Isaiah Washington's *A Man from Another Land: How Finding My Roots Changed My Life* (2011)—draw on the narrative template of *Roots*, foregrounding such above-mentioned climactic moments of recovery. Furthermore, both works adhere to the return-to-roots formula, which Rüdiger Kunow outlines in the context of multicultural American literature. It represents the journey, or quest for identity, of a culturally uprooted protagonist seeking to recover their roots. Constitutive elements are the relocation of an alienated member of an ethnic

group within a home space, the resolution of an identity crisis, and the provision of closure, both on the level of *histoire* and *discours* (202).

Whereas Barack Obama's family history is tied to Kenya and allows him to establish connections with his extended family, Isaiah Washington has no distant relatives that he can search for in Africa. Like many African Americans, he is unable to trace the family line back more than a few generations and fill in the blank spaces of his family's history that were created by slavery. Both texts exemplify what Hirsch and Miller assert, namely that "originary homelands are not simply there to be recovered: already multiply interconnected with other places, they are further transformed by the ravages of times, transfigured through the lenses of loss and nostalgia, constructed in the process of the search" (3). *Dreams from My Father* and *A Man from Another Land* are quest narratives that present the traveler-writer's search for roots and affiliation with the African continent. However, as I show in this chapter, these roots and affiliations are narratively constructed. The travel narratives serve to form transnational ties between the narrators' lives in the United States and a perceived origin. In other words, travel writing 'roots' the individuals to specific locations on the African continent and to an ancestral past that provides them with a renewed sense of self and a purpose in life.

1.1 Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995)

Barack Obama's acclaimed first book *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, which has been praised for its elegant prose, presents a journey of self-discovery and personal development. It relates the narrator's passage from youth to adulthood, covering a time span from the 1960s to the 1980s. Obama's narrative journey begins with his upbringing in Hawaii and Indonesia, followed by his transition into adulthood, his education in Los Angeles, and his work as a community organizer in Chicago's South Side and ends with a transformative trip to Kenya where he meets the family of his deceased father. As the son of a White Kansan mother and a Black Kenyan father who is physically and emotionally absent from Obama's life, questions of identity and cultural heritage lie at the heart of his story. As Obama states in the introduction to *Dreams from My Father*, it "is a record of a personal, interior journey—a boy's search for his father, and through that search a workable meaning of his life as a black American" (*Dreams* xvi). The narrative employs the motif of the journey as a vehicle to explore the narrator's complex cultural and racial

background, linking the search for a better understanding of who he is to meditations on race and identity within a US-American national context.

Dreams from My Father has often been discussed in relation to the author's political career. Although it was first published in 1995 as an autobiography, the narrative was reframed as a presidential memoir and campaign autobiography when Obama's political ambitions became apparent (Couser 259). Literary and cultural studies scholars have also focused on reading the text within the African American literary tradition of autobiographical writing. This strand of scholarship analyzes how the narrative invokes canonical male-authored works of self-assertion and self-discovery, such as Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), and Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), by working through conceptualizations of Black masculine identity, selfhood, and community (D. Stein; see also Baillie 2011). Approaching *Dreams from My Father* in this way has frequently resulted in a predominant focus on the first two parts of the book, which narrate Obama's formative years.

By contrast, my analysis reads *Dreams from My Father* as an example of Black travel writing that foregrounds a quest for roots and a return to an African homeland. In particular, the main focus will be on the last part of the narrative entitled "Kenya," which relates the narrator's journey to Africa. I argue that travel writing functions to establish ties between the narrator and his paternal homeland as the traveling subject integrates into Kenyan culture and unites with family members. The journey culminates in a deliberately constructed celebratory homecoming to Africa, an arrival that ultimately brings personal closure. The roots trip to Kenya, however, sets itself apart from many Black travel narratives that depict a traveler who is a descendant of enslaved Africans. Obama's family line does not fade into the obscurity of the slave past;[1] therefore, the narrator's journey to Africa is not a return to "a symbolic

1 Without this "baggage of slavery" (Nyong'o 4), Obama's 'Blackness,' his nationality, and ethnicity were the topics of controversial discussions and debates when his presidential aspirations were announced. Critics have claimed that he would be unable to represent the African American experience because he is not connected to the history of slavery. The history of (post)colonialism, rather than slavery, accounts for Obama's Blackness or his presence in the United States. "[T]rapped in such a tautological exclusion from African Americanness" (3), Obama has worked to situate himself within the African American context. Obama's campaign rhetoric attempted to fit his transnational and multiracial heritage into an American framework and thus "regularly elided his cosmopolitan background in order to reweave his personal story into a U.S.-specific

space in an ambiguous cultural past" (Borman 102). Rather, it involves his engagement with the contemporary condition of Kenya and with his extended family. In this regard, Obama's narrative demonstrates that "return transforms the abstract terms of belonging—such as the presence of family or a felt sense of history—into historical and intellectual understandings of the self, where Africa is seen in specific rather than general terms" (103). As a revised form of Haley's *Roots* narrative, *Dreams from My Father* constructs rather than discovers ties to Africa and discursively locates the narrator within a Kenyan context through narrative strategies that are examined in the analysis.

Structured chronologically along the pivotal stages of Obama's life and organized around locations, the main narrative is divided into three parts—"Origins," "Chicago," and "Kenya"—and enclosed by the preface to the 2004 edition, a brief introduction, and an epilogue. Obama's journey of personal development and of his search for a purposeful narrative of his life begins by situating the narrator within a multicultural and multiethnic background in the first part, "Origins." This section covers a wide-ranging terrain, both in geographical and temporal terms: it relates the narrator's early years in Hawaii with his mother and grandparents, his time spent in Indonesia with his mother and stepfather, his education in prep school in Hawaii, and his college years in Los Angeles and New York. The title "Origins" is an intertextual reference to the book *Origins* (that young Obama received from his mother), which holds "a collection of creation tales from around the world, stories of Genesis" (*Dreams* 10). Like the book that assembles stories of creation, the first section of the narrative recalls the narrator's story of becoming, his own genesis (see also Essi 265). In this part, the narrator expresses his desire for a personal narrative of origin that accounts for his complex sense of self and that explains "the mystery of [his] own life" (*Dreams* 432). Obama's experiences as a Black man raised in a White family are not accommodated within American conceptions of identity. The absence of the father who left the family to return to Kenya when Obama was a toddler and died when his son was twenty-one created a void that the narrator tries to fill. He articulates his yearning for a story of origin to explain his Blackness, noting that his mother's "account of the world, and my father's place in it, was somehow incomplete" (52). In this sense, Obama's search for the history

---

narrative of slavery, segregation, and civil rights" (4). Somewhat ironically, he was connected to African Americans by the discovery of his maternal lineage's historical ties to southern enslavers in 2007 (4-5).

of his lost father, who “remained a myth to [him]” for most of his early life, underscores his desire for a narrative that explains his inheritance. The absent father thus leads the narrator to craft his own story, attempting to satisfy his “longing for a place […] and a fixed definite history” (104).

The narrator’s transition into adolescence is accompanied by feelings of confusion that are related to his position as a Black American. Trying “to reconcile the world as [he]’d found it with the terms of [his] birth” (*Dreams* 85), that is, to make sense of Blackness, Obama finds himself in a struggle: “I was engaged in a fitful interior struggle. I was trying to raise myself to be a black man in America, and beyond the given of my appearance, no one around me seemed to know exactly what that meant” (76). The prefabricated concepts of Black identity do not allow for a reconciliation of his personal experiences. As the narrative suggests, Obama found “himself restricted by white America’s construction of black identity” (Baillie 323).[2] The opening part of the narrative delineates the narrator’s struggle to come to terms with his ‘origins’ and cultural heritage and the absence of the mythical father figure that he knows only through family anecdotes and a brief visit that he paid his son. The narrator confides, “I had no idea who my own self was” (*Dreams* 82) and asks, “[w]here did I belong?” (115), signaling a sense of unbelonging and confusion about his identity that accompanied him through his childhood and young adulthood. These concerns point to a key theme in the book, namely “the absence of a meaningful narrative of origin that explains the narrator’s blackness and presence in a familial and cultural space that is almost completely non-black” (Essi 266). The division of the African and American self, what Du Bois conceptualized as double consciousness, stems not only from the absence of the father figure but also from the specific racial identity that uneasily fits into the hegemonic racial discourses in the United States. These questions eventually incite Obama’s trip to Kenya in his search to find answers relating to his father’s life and to his inheritance—that is, the Blackness and the “funny name”

2 The narrator’s realization that his choices and the roles he can assume as a young Black man in the United States are limited is expressed when he writes the following: “at the time when boys aren’t supposed to want to follow their fathers’ tired footsteps, when the imperatives of harvest or work in the factory aren’t supposed to dictate identity, […] the principle difference between me and most of the man-boys around me—the surfers, the football players, the would-be rock-and-roll guitarists—resided in the limited number of options at my disposal” (*Dreams* 79).

(*Dreams* viii), which his father had bequeathed to him. It is this inheritance, as well as his father's legacy, that requires exploration.

The narrative aims to resolve the tension that arises from the narrator's seemingly opposing cultural and racial affiliations by venturing on a quest for roots and tracing his paternal family line back to Kenya. The narrative trajectory is mirrored in the itinerary, a journey pattern that follows a course that points toward Kenya, the journey's destination both in terms of where the narrative ends and also where the narrator finds closure. The first part of *Dreams* already gestures to the pivotal journey and prepares for the last part, "Kenya," and Obama's visit to his family. As has been observed, the stories told in the first two parts of the book "consistently build toward the moment of symbolic return to Africa" (Borman 107). The significance of the visit to Kenya is anticipated when the narrator mentions in the introduction that the journey gave him a new understanding of and a new perspective on his life. From the very beginning, then, the narrative gestures to the climactic end and Obama's visit to Kenya as a constitutive moment and transformative experience, addressing the process and progress that yielded a reevaluation and reinterpretation of his earlier stories (107). The narrator states that "[i]t was only many years later, after I had sat at my father's grave and spoken to him through Africa's red soil, that I could circle back and evaluate these early stories for myself" (*Dreams* xv-xvi). On Kenyan ground, the narrator gains a new understanding of his family's history and incorporates this new knowledge into his personal story to arrive at a better understanding of who he is. From this vantage point ensues a retrospective reevaluation of his life. In this light, the narrative journey is a way of meaning-making and endowing stories with significance. Moreover, transforming the journey into a meaningful narrative through writing functions as an act of identity formation.

Similar to Obama's image of his father, the "Old Man," as he is referred to, the images of Africa that the narrator has formed over time are vague and ambiguous, comprised of the tales and anecdotes told to him by members of his maternal family. In their well-worn stories, his father is a construct, "a prop in someone else's narrative" (*Dreams* 26). The narrator recounts how he has spun a convenient story of his father that was naturally disproved when meeting him in person: "I had decided that I preferred his more distant image, an image I could alter on a whim—or ignore when convenient" (63). Even after the visit, the narrator discovers that his father "remained something unknown, something volatile and vaguely threatening" (63). Like the image of his father, Africa similarly figures as volatile and abstract in the first part

of the narrative (see also Smithers 494-95). Moreover, the narrator's image of Africa is informed by stereotypical conceptions of the continent and serves both as a source of pride and shame. Therefore, when traveling to Kenya, the images of Obama, Sr. and Africa both have to be revised, becoming more complex and complicated.

The third part, "Kenya," opens with a scene in transition, that is, with the narrator literally being in the air on the way from London to Nairobi. This opens up space for reflection and the narrator contemplates his interior confusion and his anxiety about his impending visit to Kenya. This transitory state of Obama's journey is also mirrored in his feelings of uncertain belonging, which the narrator describes when he states that he feels like "a Westerner not entirely at home in the West, an African on his way to a land full of strangers" (*Dreams* 301). The narration begins to resolve this conflict—this postcolonial condition of not belonging or identifying with one place completely—by emphasizing his ties to Africa and his distance from the Western or European context. Not only is he coming closer to his African heritage physically and geographically but also through forging a distance between himself and Europe. Notably, the narrator establishes a stark contrast between Europe and Africa, presenting Europe as a foreign and Africa as a welcoming space. Thinking back on his journey through Europe, the narrator describes himself as a lonely traveler who was "edgy, defensive, hesitant with strangers" (301), and thus underscores the disconnection he felt from the places he visited and people he encountered. He resolves, "It wasn't that Europe wasn't beautiful [...]. It just wasn't mine" (301). The feelings of alienation, of being an outsider or foreigner in Europe, and the hope of finally coming to terms with his African heritage resonate in the depiction of the weather: He flies out of Heathrow airport "under stormy skies" (299) to arrive in Nairobi at "an African dawn" with "high thin clouds streak[ing] the sky, their underbellies glowing with a reddish hue" (304). The way his first impression of Kenya is narrated already anticipates a positive, promising experience and reinforces an underlying sense of hope: The dawn represents the promise of a new day and signifies the imminence of a new beginning; this underlines the contrast between Heathrow's stormy skies, resonating with hostility, and the welcoming atmosphere of Kenya.

That Obama's journey to Kenya will turn into a homecoming is suggested several times throughout the first two parts of the narrative. For instance, when his Kenyan half-sister Auma visits him in Chicago, she urges the narrator to travel to Kenya by saying, "We need to go home" (*Dreams* 222). Her state-

ment implies that for Obama, Kenya is home. Furthermore, when a friend comments on the narrator's pending journey to Kenya, assuring him that "[i]t'll be just like *Roots* [...]. A pilgrimage" (302), the intertextual reference to Haley's paradigmatic story of return raises certain expectations: Obama, it can be assumed, will also be able to reconnect with his African roots and recover a personal narrative of origin. While the sojourn promises to be successful—after all, he has direct ties to Kenya—the narrative time and again suggests a more complicated story. In fact, a more hesitant stance is put forth by the narrator to signal his awareness of the possible pitfalls such a return might entail. The reference to *Roots* is immediately contrasted with a reflection on African Americans' idyllic vision of the continent as a potential homeland. The narrator discloses his ambiguous feeling toward Kenya, and Africa at large, when he states the following: "Africa had become an idea more than an actual place, a new promised land, full of ancient traditions and sweeping vistas, noble struggles and talking drums" (302). Here, the narrator reflects his awareness of the romanticized vision of Africa in the Black imagination. He aligns himself with other diasporic subjects gazing toward Africa to find meaning while simultaneously criticizing the selective and often superficial embrace of those aspects and facets of the continent that can be easily claimed: "With the benefit of distance, we engaged Africa in a selective embrace—the same sort of embrace I'd once offered the Old Man. What would happen once I relinquished that distance?" (302). The use of the first-person plural explicitly links the narrator to other diasporic travelers and with this, to the idea of return to an African homeland—a belief made possible only from a distant position that is ignorant to the lived realities of the continent. The reflective commentary on idealized visions of the continent signals that he recognizes them as potentially misleading. These reflections are placed in the text to underline the assumption that Obama's return, his homecoming, is not an easy task to achieve.

In a similar vein, his arrival does not immediately lead to a euphoric homecoming celebration because he is left waiting at the baggage claim at the airport and his excitement is overturned by the feeling of abandonment: "The rush of anticipation had drained away, and I smiled with the memory of the homecoming I had once imagined for myself, clouds lifting, old demons fleeing, the earth trembling as ancestors rose up in celebration. Instead I felt tired and abandoned" (*Dreams* 304-05). Rather than evoking romanticized visions of a return, the narrative gestures to a more complicated quest. Obama's 'return' to his paternal homeland, the narrative suggests, is a realistic home-

coming that requires from the narrator an engagement with the place. The narrator thereby separates himself from those diasporic tourists who come to Africa carrying the vision of a mythical place; these images often diverge from reality, creating notions of alienation and disappointment. In a similar fashion, the narrative raises doubts regarding the possibility of mending the divided part of his self and finding easy answers to complex questions of identity and belonging: "I'd come to Kenya thinking that I could somehow force my many worlds into a single harmonious whole. Instead, the divisions seemed only to have become more multiplied" (347). The insertion of such self-reflexive commentary functions to underscore the narrator's seemingly reasonable expectations, which defy the easy trajectories of the homecoming narrative. However, the frequently voiced skepticism about the success of his return fades into the background the longer he stays in Kenya. Increasingly, his closeness to Kenya is foregrounded by his growing ties to his Kenyan family and his becoming familiar with the place, the people, and Luo culture. Doubts regarding the success of his Kenyan journey are eventually cast aside and there is a steady progression toward narrative closure and a complete sense of self.

Beginning with the flight to Kenya, the narrator foregrounds his growing connection with his ancestral homeland. In comparison to Obama's stay in Europe, where he felt profoundly alienated, his arrival scene in Nairobi is interspersed with images of homecoming and family reunion that evoke notions of familiarity and belonging. *Dreams from My Father* hence alters the conventional portrayals of the traveling subject who arrives in the location of the visit, a foreign country, to be greeted by a culture markedly different from their own that we often find in travel narratives. Instead of recounting entering Africa as crossing the threshold into a different or foreign world with attendant notions of bewilderment, wonder, or confusion, the narrator's arrival reflects a homecoming. His relatives embrace him as the long-lost family member who has finally found his way home. He is greeted by their exclamations: "Welcome home" (*Dreams* 303), "My son has come home" (316), and "you have finally come home" (374). The familiarity he experiences signifies the beginning of a process of integrating into Kenya. Importantly, the narrator presents himself not as the tourist he was in Europe but as a returnee. To further emphasize the connection that the narrator already experiences in the very first moments in Kenya, a scene is presented in which he highlights how his name is recognized; he is identified as the son of Dr. Obama: "For the first time in my life, I felt the comfort, the firmness of identity that a name

might provide [...]. No one here in Kenya would ask how to spell my name, or mangle it with an unfamiliar tongue. My name belonged and so I belonged" (305). Contrary to the many instances in which his name has led to confusion and discrimination, in Kenya he is no longer just "a black man with a funny name" (viii) but instantly perceived as being of this place. The incident evokes a sense of belonging and establishes Obama's link to Kenya and locates the narrator in a particular place, culture, and family.

The narrative positions Obama simultaneously as a postcolonial subject, privileged Western traveler, and cultural insider. An elderly woman at the marketplace in Nairobi recognizes Obama as American and insists that he does not "look much like a Luo" (*Dreams* 310), disregarding his playful protest that he is indeed Luo. However, shortly after the encounter, he is mistaken for an unprofitable Kenyan customer at a restaurant. Whereas White tourists instantly receive attention and service, Obama and his sister are ignored by the waiters. The incident serves to create a connection between the narrator and other Kenyans, while simultaneously disassociating him from the tourists whom he observes in Nairobi and whose presence the narrator describes as "an encroachment" (312). He contends that "they were expressing a freedom that neither Auma nor I could ever experience, a bedrock confidence in their own parochialism, a confidence reserved for those born in imperial cultures" (312). Ignoring his own American background and privileged upbringing, he distances himself from these tourists; his criticism signals a growing familiarity with and immersion into Kenyan life. Moreover, by foregrounding the moments of inclusion and exclusion like those sketched above, the narrative thematizes the politics of belonging, which encompasses complex questions of identity, attachment, and location for Black diasporic travelers such as Obama.

Over the course of his time spent in Kenya, the narrator gradually draws nearer to the final destination, physically and symbolically, and embarks on another journey, where his search as well as his narrative come to an end. Together with his Kenyan relatives, Obama travels from Nairobi via train and bus to Alego, a remote village in the countryside where "Granny," the stepmother of Obama's father, resides on the family's rural homestead, the ancestral home and final resting place of his father and grandfather. The place is referred to as "Home Squared," denoting, as Auma explains, that in contrast to an urban residency in Nairobi where Kenyans live and work, the house or hut in the country is considered the "true home," the place "where your people come from" (*Dreams* 369). By traveling to "Home Squared"—or, in Obama's case, "Home

Cubed," as suggested by his half-brother because he lives in the United States and not in Nairobi (369)—the narrator takes part in a ritualized component of Kenyan life, a journey from the *house* in the city to the *home* in the country. The journey to "Home Squared" is portrayed as his return to the ancestral home and the point of origin. Notions of home and belonging that are connected to his trip to Alego are underscored as the narrator is warmly received by Granny, who welcomes him home and draws him into a tight hug before leading him into the house. Granny's house resembles a material archive of historical family documents. It is stocked with "various family artifacts" (374) including Obama, Sr.'s Harvard diploma and yellowing photographs of him and other family members. Finally, the character of Granny offers the long-sought-after narrative of his paternal lineage that provides Obama with an understanding of his own history and story of origin. Earlier in the text, he already gestured to this recovery of a story when he quietly muses, "If I could just piece together his story, [...] then perhaps everything else might fall into place" (372). In "Home Squared," then, he feels that "a circle was beginning to close, so that I might finally recognize myself as I was, here, now, in one place" (377). In this significant place, Obama finally receives the story that he has been looking for, which enables him to make sense of his Blackness and his feelings of confusion and alienation.

The narrative conjures a pastoral setting when describing the family gathering outside the house in the grass yard and under the shade of a mango tree, where the women braid their hair. It thus establishes an appropriate background for the scene in which Obama becomes symbolically connected to the place by way of the story of his forbearers. The passage announcing the paternal mythology, which is recounted by his grandmother, is characteristically poetic and merits attention:

> I asked Granny to start from the beginning. How did our great-grandfather Obama come to live in Kendu? Where did our grandfather work? Why did the Old Man's mother leave? As she started to answer, I felt the wind lift, then die. A row of high clouds crossed over the hills. And under the fanning shade of the mango tree, as hands wove black curls into even rows, I heard all our voices begin to run together, the sound of three generations tumbling over each other like the currents of a slow-moving stream, my questions like rocks roiling the water, the breaks in memory separating the currents, but always the voices returning to that single course, a single story… (*Dreams* 394)

Notably, the language barrier that circumscribes direct communication between the narrator and Granny, who speaks Luo, is torn down. While the preceding sentences and Obama's questions required a translation by Auma, whose character functions as a translator and cultural mediator throughout Obama's visit, the narrator now addresses Granny directly. This transgression of the language barrier symbolizes the narrator's growing familial and cultural intimacy. Moreover, it formally serves to create narrative cohesion by erasing the breaks and intermissions of a realistic depiction that would make the account that follows fragmentary (Shima 17; Essi 275). Furthermore, the cohesion and coherence of the 'single story' that Obama eagerly awaits are underscored by the imagery of the women braiding hair, which signifies an interweaving of narrative strands that combine to create the familial fabric that becomes Obama's inheritance. In a similar fashion, the evocation of images of water, streams, and currents speaks to the idea of the river as a symbol of African heritage as well as of a transatlantic link between Africa and the United States.[3] Based on this assumption, one can expect that Granny's story provides the connection between the narrator's formerly disparate worlds—his lives in the United States and Kenya. The above-cited passage is therefore indicative of the way that Obama's life story will ultimately be transformed into an ostensibly conclusive narrative that overrides the complexities and confusions that are tied to his sense of self as a Black man.

This story of the narrator's paternal forbearers is mediated in the form of a monologue, an oral testimony by Granny who takes over the narration for the next thirty pages. The ellipsis at the end of the passage marks a direct transition from Obama's narration into Granny's story. Granny's account begins with a delineation of the Obama family's ancestral lines of descent that has an almost biblical quality: "First there was Miwiru. It's not known who came before. Miwiru sired Sigoma, Sigoma sired Owiny, Owiny sired Kisodhi, Kisodhi sired Ogelo, Ogelo sired Otondi, Otondi sired Obongo, Obongo sired Okoth, and Okoth sired Opiyo" (*Dreams* 394). The narrative is rendered in "a

3 Analyzing images of water in the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, Maren E. Loveland notes that "[t]he rekindling of connection between a common African ancestry, the pastoral ideal, and the modern African American through water is a common motif in the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, a notion revealed in the exploration of the image of the river as a symbol of African heritage." She further remarks that the poet Langston Hughes "heavily emphasizes the significance of rivers in providing the poetic transatlantic connection between Africa and the United States in his deliberate use of this heavily signified image" (65).

creation myth tone" (Shima 17) that is strikingly reminiscent of the encyclopedic, multigenerational saga of Alex Haley's forebearers revealed to him by a village griot in *Roots*. Haley describes the encounter with the griot as follows:

> Spilling from the *griot*'s head came an incredibly complex Kinte clan lineage that reached back across many generations: who married whom; who had what children; what children then married whom; then their offspring. [...] I was struck not only by the profusion of details, but also by the narrative's biblical style, something like: '—and so-and-so took as a wife so-and-so, and begat ... and begat ... and begat...' (*Roots* 678)

Similar to how Haley learns about the origin of the Kinte clan, Obama is finally rewarded with the ancestral history of his paternal family, which fills the voids in his own life story. While Haley does not recount the exact story told to him by the griot, *Dreams from My Father* embeds Granny's story in the text. This story, however, is one of disappointed hopes and unrealized dreams, of estrangement, abandonment, self-destruction, and patriarchal domination that is quite different from the glorious family saga depicted in *Roots*. Obama learns about his father and grandfather and their attempts to reinvent themselves independently and lead lives that were purposely different from their fathers. He also learns about their dismissal of family expectations, his father's inability to provide for his family, and the silences that destroyed the ties between father and son. Contrary to how Obama imagined his grandfather, he was not an anti-colonialist but a servant for a colonial family. Along similar lines, the stories he heard about his father contrast with the anecdotes told by members of his maternal family, in which he was portrayed as charming, confident, and intelligent. Importantly though, the mystery that has surrounded Obama, Sr. and that propelled Obama's journey to Kenya and the search for his African heritage is finally resolved. As the narrator navigates his disappointment and forgiveness, the reconciliation with the past allows him to look forward. In this regard, discovering his father's life story is a way to discover himself.

The importance of Granny's account is visually marked by indentation. The omission of quotations marks and direct speech function to create a seamless narrative. Several scholars have commented on the distinct form in which this section of the book is rendered (for example, Shima 16-18; Essi 274-75). According to Thomas Couser, the seamless linear narrative is implausibly conveyed in the form of a long speech: "a single-sourced story is inserted whole into the larger narrative as if simultaneously heard, memorised, and

accepted as authoritative" (265). The narrative's departure from strictly realist depictions and the omission of disruptions and repetitions, which must undoubtedly have occurred, highlight how the narrative creates cohesion and coherence. It also signposts the climactic moment of reconciliation and closure found by the narrator at the end of the book.

The story of his family, or more precisely that of his paternal forebearers as told to him by Granny, is essential to Obama's own narrative, biography, and identity.[4] Drawing on what he has heard, the narrator appropriates the story and brings it to life by conjuring mental images of his father and grandfather that pass before his mind's eye: "I see my grandfather [...]", "The picture fades, replaced by the image of a nine-year-old boy—my father" (*Dreams* 427-28). As he projects his own emotions and experiences onto his male ancestors, he is able to arrive at a better understanding of their lives. Accordingly, by incorporating the story of his forbearers into the narrative, the narrator adopts his paternal legacy and makes it part of his own life story. In doing so, he underlines his claim to Kenyan roots. Taking into account that references to his mother and White maternal family are absent from the Kenya section, the new narrative of his Kenyan ancestors appears to replace the initial origin story, namely, Obama's upbringing in a multicultural and multiethnic context, which is presented in the first section "Origins." Equipped with new knowledge about his Kenyan legacy, the narrator is now able to piece together the story of his father, and with it make sense of his own. What follows is not only a symbolic reconnection and reconciliation with his father, whom he addresses directly—crying out, "Oh, Father" (429)—but also a cathartic experience at the gravesites of his father and grandfather that represents the narrative's epiphany:

> For a long time I sat between the two graves and wept. When my tears were finally spent, I felt a calmness wash over me. *I felt the circle finally close*. I realized that who I was, what I cared about, was no longer just a matter of intellect or obligation, no longer a construct of words. I saw my life in America—the black life, the white life, the sense of abandonment I'd felt as a boy,

4 Granny's story—Obama's immaterial inheritance—is supplemented with several documents he receives, that is, a collection of Obama Sr.'s letters as well as an entry in the book *Domestic Servant's Pocket Register*, which is reproduced in the text, that declares Obama's grandfather's status as a colonial servant. These documents serve as testaments to the existence and the lives of Obama's paternal forebears and represent a material inheritance.

> the frustration and hope I'd witness in Chicago—all of it was connected with this small plot of earth an ocean away, connected by more than the accident of a name or the color of my skin. The pain I felt was my father's pain. My questions were my brothers' questions. Their struggle, my birthright. (429-30; emphasis added)

With this revelation, Obama's return-to-roots story comes to a triumphal, albeit dramatically constructed end. Through the narrative act of weaving together loose ends into a 'single story,' the complexity of his multiracial heritage, a focal point of the first part of *Dreams from My Father,* is obliterated in the Kenya section. Intriguingly, it is on "Africa's red soil" (xv)—far away from the United States, where limiting racial categories, marginalization, and discrimination govern the everyday life of people of color and have complicated the narrator's sense of self—where the narrator can finally connect the parts of his life that have seemed incompatible, namely, "the black life [and] the white life" (430). He does so by relocating his own story within the history of his Kenyan family. The climactic and transformative moment is reflected by the change of weather that Granny had foreseen prior to her retelling of the ancestral history. Obama's anxiety is released and calmness washes over him as "[a] light rain [begins] to fall" (430), evoking notions of a new beginning and a rebirth. This closing scene suggests that Obama returns strengthened from the experience and is now prepared to begin a new chapter of his life in the United States.

The above scene acts as the preliminary end of the book and is only followed by a brief epilogue. By ending the main narrative in Kenya and at this particular moment of epiphany, the topics that would have to be addressed if the narrative continued to relate Obama's journey back to the United States would arguably have disrupted this narrative coherence. However, the closure that is achieved at the end leaves several questions unanswered. For example, upon his return to the United States, how do racial tensions affect his newfound sense of self? While effortlessly merging the different parts of his identity in Kenya, would he have to "slip back and forth between [his] black and white worlds" (*Dreams* 82) once he left? How would the relationship to his Kenyan relatives evolve, who see in him the lost son returned as well as "an American businessman" with his "hand poised on the spigot, ready to rain down like manna the largesse of the Western world" (330)? How would he attend to the responsibility that comes with him being embraced by his Kenyan relatives? Leaving such issues unaddressed, the epilogue summarizes and

quickly wraps up the last two weeks he spent in Kenya (see also Essi 277n12). The narrative then jumps ahead to his wedding, which took place several years after his trip. Recounting the wedding ceremony, the narrative focuses on the reunion with members of his Kenyan family. It presents harmonious images of families coming together and of the formation of a multiracial community. The narrator's proclamation that he "felt like the luckiest man alive" (442) concludes the book and underscores closure both on the thematic and formal level.

1.2 Isaiah Washington's *A Man from Another Land: How Finding My Roots Changed My Life* (2011)

> [T]his 250-year process of systematic dehumanization continues to have an impact upon a significant sector of African Americans today, crippling our ability to know ourselves and understand our past, to defer gratification, to believe in the future as an extension of a noble and admirable collective past of which most of us remain painfully unaware.
>
> *—Henry Louis Gates, Jr., In Search of Our Roots: How 19 Extraordinary African Americans Reclaimed Their Past*

Isaiah Washington's *A Man from Another Land: How Finding My Roots Changed My Life*[5] presents a back-to-the-roots story that also draws on the classic narrative trajectory presented in Haley's *Roots*. An American philanthropist, film producer, and actor, Washington is among "the most publicized roots-seekers of recent years," as Bayo Holsey notes (156). After Washington took a DNA test that revealed his connection to Sierra Leone and Angola, he sought to explore his roots and strengthen his ties to Africa by journeying to Sierra Leone. He recorded his experiences not only in his travel narrative but also in a documentary film, *Isaiah Washington's Passport to Sierra Leone*, released in 2010.

A Man from Another Land incisively illustrates the persistent desire of many African-descended people to reclaim ancestral connections to the continent. The media, tourist industry, and celebrities such as Haley and Washington himself also sustain the notion of Africa as the homeland. Moreover, cultural narratives have popularized Africa as a destination for Black diasporic tourists

5 It should be noted that Washington is not the sole author of *A Man from Another Land*. As indicated in the book, he wrote his narrative with the support of Lavaille Lavette.

and emigrants. African Americans' wish to trace ancestral origins remains unbroken in the twenty-first century and is encouraged by television shows and supported by DNA technology and inquiries into genealogical records. Genealogy documentary series emerged as a transnational phenomenon in the early 2000s and have spurred people's interest in their personal histories. Examples of the televised roots quests include the PBS's television series hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., including *African American Lives* (2006-2008) and *Finding Your Roots* (2012-2017), which featured research into the ancestral lineages of its African American guests. Among said guests were talk show host Oprah Winfrey, former astronaut Mae Jemison, comedian Chris Rock, and writer Maya Angelou. For the guests, as well as for the viewers, such shows often yield surprising information on previously unknown ancestors. *A Man from Another Land* follows the standard format of televised roots quests. In the shows, the quest is typically structured in three main parts, or acts, as Jackie Hogan observes in her study on the subject: the hook, that is "the mystery, existential question, or dilemma at the heart of the guest's roots quest;" the (physical) journey and the "search for genealogical evidence;" and the homecoming, which entails the individual's reflection on what has been learned from the quest (102). Many shows present DNA analysis as the doorway to a history that would otherwise remain obscure. Moreover, characteristic of the media depictions of Black diasporic return is "[t]he language of homecoming, and the idea it captures of Haley representing the return of his enslaved ancestor" (Holsey 151). This idea of a return to an imagined place of origin is frequently cast as a reversal of the atrocious journey of the Middle Passage and implies a triumph over the historical subjugation by Western traders and enslavers.

In the 2009 companion volume to the PBS documentary *African American Lives*, titled *In Search of Our Roots: How 19 Extraordinary African Americans Reclaimed Their Past*, Gates articulates the belief that DNA presents "a key to unlocking our African past." He declares, "For the first time since the seventeenth century, we are able, symbolically at least, to reverse the Middle Passage. Our ancestors brought something with them that not even the slave trade could take away: their own distinctive strands of DNA" (10). His statement implies the importance of roots and rootedness to a particular place for the identification of the Black diaspora. Gates further posits that "an exact match between an American's DNA and an African's DNA reveals a shared ancestor, and possibly a shared ethnic identity, that has been lost for centuries" (10). His contestation disregards the transnational routes of the diaspora and illuminates

a preference for singular racial or ethnic identity over more fluid forms of identity and self-understanding. Moreover, he proposes that a shared racial identity may be the key to transnational understanding between Africans and the diaspora. Such rhetoric also points to the idea of return as a means of reconciliation and healing, achieved by journeying to Africa. But while DNA ancestry testing may appear dubious, it certainly holds an appeal for root seekers. The interest in it highlights the desire of people to create tangible ties to a particular place in Africa and thereby heal the emotional wounds caused by the rupture in personal and family histories. However, in *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation After the Genome* (2016), Alondra Nelson remarks that "commercially available genetic tests that claim to specify genealogy, ancestral affiliation, or racial and ethnic identity are among the most conspicuous signposts of our genome age;" she thus warns against an uncritical belief in "DNA as a master key that unlocks many secrets" (7-8).

A Man from Another Land subscribes to the belief in a reconciliatory return and a reversal of the Middle Passage. Washington's travel narrative is a heroic story of a homecoming to Africa that presents itself as a twenty-first-century *Roots* story. In contrast to Obama, Washington has no familial ties to Africa that he can follow. Like many other African Americans, Washington is unable to trace his ancestral origins back for more than a few generations. With no distant relative to tell him his family's story, he uses the results of genetic testing to establish a link between his own life and Africa. Considering that Washington has no immediate personal connections to Africa or familial ties that he can search for, one may ask which roots he traces and claims. The analysis of his travel narrative explores this question. I posit that Washington selectively claims his ancestry and uses his story, which he presents as exceptional and singular, to affirm his connection to Africa. Although he voices his initial skepticism regarding genetic genealogy testing, he eventually embraces the opportunity that it promises. Thus, after receiving the lab results of a DNA test that confirm his connection to the ancestral homeland and specific African ethnic groups, he travels to the continent to further strengthen his ties. As I will delineate in the following, the narrative is an argument that supports his lifelong belief in his unique inheritance bequeathed to him by great Black men, and that demonstrates his profound engagement with Africa

through his philanthropical work, which he undertakes as a great personal devotion.[6]

In contrast to Haley, Washington's journey does not begin "in the dusty archives in which Haley researched his genealogy but rather, as befits the new millennium, with lab results" (Holsey 156). Washington receiving his test result thus figures as one of the many epiphanic moments in the narrative. Nelson examines the televised genealogy shows that have captivated viewers from the early 2000s onwards. She contends that the revealing of genetic test results to the individual and the root seeker's reaction to it has developed into a standard element of such shows. She explains that "the apex of the roots journey is 'the reveal,' a familiar concept in reality television. In this case, new or surprising information, often based upon genetic test results, is presented to a subject who expresses astonishment or elation or both, before an audience" (*Social* 95). Washington's narrative incorporates such a reveal scene and uses it to mark a turning point in the narrator's life. This first climactic moment presents the start of a personal journey that is then followed by his actual trip to Africa. The roots revelation is ceremoniously staged at the 2005 Pan African Film Festival where Washington is presented with an award. Evoking a solemn atmosphere that befits the emotional impact the revelation has on Washington's life, the narrative relates this important moment like this:

> The room […] seemed to go still. It felt like no one was breathing as Dr. Kittles started to speak. My ears were ringing loudly with anticipation and my heart pounded hard in my chest. […] I began to feel dizzy, and my legs felt weak; still, I refused to succumb. I felt transformed and complete at that moment. […] I heard him say, 'Isaiah, your results show that you share ancestry with the Mende and Temne peoples of Sierra Leone.' […] I felt reborn that night. (*A Man* 72-73)

The passage creates suspension by closely following the narrator's thoughts and emotions during the reveal and underscores Washington's profound sense of transformation and completion. The reveal is represented as a

6 While it is not the focus of this analysis, it should be noted that the narrative also represents the writer's attempt to rehabilitate his career. Washington fell from grace in Hollywood after he made an offensive remark on the set of a television show. To atone for his mistake, he represents himself in the narrative as the remorseful penitent who dutifully goes to therapy and tries to live up to his inherited greatness by doing philanthropic work in Sierra Leone.

turning point in the narrator's life because it facilitates a retrospective reevaluation and reinterpretation of his life and the experiences he had. Although the results he receives provide only an estimated proximity to a specific ethnicity—they show that he shares ancestry with the Mende and Temne people of Sierra and the Mbundu people of Angola (73)—they are without hesitation interpreted by the narrator as proof of his exceptional and unique fate. Genetic testing provides an estimation of shared ancestry, revealing matrilineage and patrilineal lines. However, it does not provide a direct connection to people or any immediate line of descent. As Nelson remarks, "ethnic lineage analysis does not associate a roots seeker with specific persons at precise spatiotemporal locations" and due to "technical limitations and historical dynamics, the associations inferred through the use of genetic genealogy are necessary provisional" ("Factness" 31). As Washington's adoption and approximation to Sierra Leone unveils, the connection that is established is narratively constructed, not given.

For Washington, the test results finally explain the "intense feeling of connectedness" (*A Man* 73) that he felt during his first trip to Africa: While yet oblivious to his roots, he experiences a distinct connection to the place upon his arrival. He relates how he "dropped down onto one knee, feeling an uncontrollable need to kiss the ground of Mother Africa," proclaiming, "I'm home again" (61). Similar feelings of connection also overcame the narrator while he was sitting at the edge of the Kunene River in Angola, sensing a physical and emotional link to the place (61-2). Looking back at this incident from the vantage point of knowing his test results, the experience and his feelings in Africa attain an even greater significance for the narrator. He chooses to identify more closely with Sierra Leone without explaining his reasons. Immediately after he receives the results, the narrator pledges to commit to helping Sierra Leone shake off "the international capitalist system" and the "colonist constructs," resolving that this is what he is meant to do (74). His instant identification with Sierra Leone leads to a strengthened sense of self. However, there is a strong notion of arbitrariness that surrounds Washington's embrace of Sierra Leone, seeing that he clearly exercises choice in his identification with the country. No explanation is provided in his narrative why he feels a particularly strong link to Sierra Leone. However, the results offered by such genetic genealogy testing "do not and cannot establish direct lines of descent and thus in practice are necessarily flexible and 'fictive'," as Nelson stresses ("Factness" 35). Washington's narrative thus exemplifies that "root seekers also become root makers" (35). The act of creating and constructing roots discursively is

strikingly illustrated in the travel narrative. Washington embraces the results of the test uncritically and, it must be added, selectively. He interprets them as the link between his past, present, and future that is tied to Africa, particularly to Sierra Leone's fate. Throughout the narrative, then, Washington works to confirm and strengthen these roots and his connection to his 'homeland.'

Already before the reveal, Washington embraced his African heritage, which he asserted through external and material things, including his attire. However, the new information he gains makes it possible for him to transform his rather abstract and symbolic connection to Africa into what he believes to be a concrete link: "No longer did I need cowrie shells hanging from my locks, African jewelry, African dance classes, or African drumming circles. [...] Africa had been inside me all along. [...] She was beckoning me and guiding me my entire life through my dreams" (*A Man* 73-74). The narrator's use of the female pronoun in reference to Africa is revealing and signals his conception of the continent as his motherland. Similarly revealing is his claim that the new knowledge completes the link between him and Africa, a link that was thought to be severed by slavery. Washington's genetic links to Sierra Leone emerge as the cure for broken connections and lost roots that counter the sense of alienation that he felt his whole life. He stresses that finally he "no longer felt like an outsider in the world" (107). The DNA test results and the knowledge that he has identifiable origins grant him an overwhelming feeling of belonging and connection to Africa that explains his feelings of difference and alienation in other places. The knowledge about his genetic connection to the continent also encourages changes in self-definition. In this regard, he refers to himself not only as African American but also as DNA Sierra Leonean, American-Sierra Leonean, or Sierra Leonean (Nelson, *Social* 99). The narrative emphasizes that the test results and the revelation of his origin yield a renewed sense of self and feelings of empowerment. Washington professes, "reconnecting with my Sierra Leonean roots was my life's purpose" (*A Man* 86). The knowledge of his origin leads to his engagement with Africa and entices his journey to Sierra Leone. Crucially, this engagement with Africa is not only emotional but entails an economic investment in the country when he commits himself to aid the development of Sierra Leone. Therefore, it can be noted that the results provide him with a sense of determination and open up the path and a possibility for travel and philanthropic engagement with Sierra Leone as he establishes a foundation to finance development projects.

The results of this genetic testing are employed strategically and selectively by Washington to craft a personal story for himself and to confirm his heritage and inheritance of heroic African (American) men. They are interpreted by Washington as proof that 'DNA has memory'—a conviction that becomes a mantra for him that is uttered repeatedly throughout the narrative and used to explain the notions of familiarity and the responsibility he feels toward Sierra Leone. It is also employed to emphasize his sense of self as a man who follows in the footsteps of great Black leaders. In contrast to Obama, whose narrative works to inscribe himself within his Kenyan family and culture, Washington's narrative does not picture the narrator immersing himself into a community. Instead, as Holsey notes, "Learning about his genetic code has functioned not to integrate himself within a racial community but rather to make him distinctive" (159). This distinctiveness—the belief in his exceptional destiny—is emphasized from the beginning of Washington's story. His determination to leave beaten paths, traverse barriers, and aspire to goals that others consider unattainable is connected to the history of courageous African freedom fighters. The narrator links his ambition and his will to achieve his goals to his inheritance when he states the following:

> I know that desire stems from the fact that I share a storied history, the same DNA, with great Africans and men of incredible courage. Men like Sengbe Pieh—Joseph Cinque as he was called during his historical trial—who had the bravery to lead the *Amistad* revolt. That history, that DNA, reflects a past of great accomplishment that eventually led me to my own place in history. (*A Man* 10)

Prone to overstatement, melodramatic moments, and the use of pathos, the narrator boasts of a legacy of heroic men and suggests that he himself embodies the spirit of Sengbe Pieh. Unsurprisingly, when he familiarizes himself with the history of Sierra Leone, it is the story of Sengbe Pieh, the icon of persistence and resistance, he is most interested in. "Like me, he was a child of Sierra Leone" (75), stresses the narrator. He briefly recounts the story of the *Amistad* rebellion led by Sengbe Pieh and the successful return of the African captives to their native land. Emphasizing the legacies of a glorious African past, Washington inscribes himself in a lineage of African leaders, claiming that their greatness, determination, and ambition were bequeathed on him (85). The narrative displays an obsessive privileging of individual historical actors and stores of success, victory, and heroism. Washington's appropria-

tion of African legacies and his superficial engagement with history, however, come at the expense of more complex stories of the past.

The narrative's cursory engagement with history also comes to the fore in a scene that relates the narrator's visit to the slave fort on Bunce Island. Washington familiarizes himself with the past, learning "of slaves who willed themselves to death while on the island and others, trying to escape, who were killed by sharks in the deep waters surrounding the castle" (*A Man* 139). While standing "in the center of a corral where three hundred slaves lived chained together," Washington acknowledges his feelings of anger and disgust and admits that he "felt hurt by the humiliation [the enslaved Africans] endured" (138-39). However, rather than exploring his conflicting emotions and examining the history of slavery and its effects on himself and other contemporary lives in the diaspora, he quickly moves on from "all of the horrific statistics and facts" (139) and turns toward those stories that foreground positive versions of history. Accordingly, he stresses the sense of pride he felt and exclaims that he is "a living testament to the indomitable spirit of my great-great-great-great-great-grandmother" (139). Throughout the narrative, the past is only briefly referred to and does not play an overtly significant role. Importantly, the travel narrative reduces the complex history of the slave trade to a transatlantic narrative that celebrates the individual's return from the diaspora as the end of a negatively connoted past.

A Man from Another Land frames Washington's journey to Sierra Leone as part of a long tradition of African American engagement with the continent. The narrator locates himself in an unruly male lineage of Black intellectuals and political activists such as Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X. He contends, "Like them, I wanted to reverse the effects of the Middle Passage and slavery and elevate black men back to their former place in history, as kings, treated with all the respect that position garners" (*A Man* 21). Appropriately enough, Washington begins his recollection of his 2006 trip to Sierra Leone in a chapter titled "Reversing the Middle Passage." The narrator's assertion that his journey to Sierra Leone represents a reversal of the Middle Passage reflects his belief that the return journey to Africa offers healing. Furthermore, he suggests that his presence in Africa closes a circuit, instilling a connection that was severed by slavery. Thus, Washington's journey is presented as a transformation that allows the narrator to symbolically casts off the shackles of slavery that confined his ancestors and that rendered him an outsider who felt displaced and alienated. Therefore, V. W. Smith's assertion that "Africa comes to symbolize re-affirmation for the hybridized,

American-born African searching for re-identification and definitions of self-reliance" ("African American Travel" 202) certainly pertains to Washington's narrative. It obviously adheres to the idea popularized in *Roots* that a return to Africa provides "answers to cultural gaps in knowledge" as well as "inspiration and renewal" (213).

The travel narrative strings together an array of epiphanic moments and revelations, and Washington's trip to Africa is presented as an emotionally charged undertaking. Shortly after his arrival in Sierra Leone, he learns that plans are under way to induce him as the chief of the village Ngalu. For the ceremony, Washington is dressed in custom-designed clothes, lifted up to be placed on a hammock, and carried on the shoulders of men to the beating of drums. While two hundred people gather to watch his coronation, he writes, "I felt that I was transcending time and space. [...] Nothing felt adequate to describe what was happening to my heart, my soul. [...] The drums and the music transformed me. My spirit was at peace. I felt as if I could do anything" (*A Man* 147). As he is inducted as chief, notions of transformation and transcendence accompany the ceremony. He receives the name Gondobay Manga II and in taking on the new name, he inherits the legacy of fearless warrior leaders. While he is crowned as chief, he also learns about the folklore tale of "'*a man from another land*' that will return to Sierra Leone to help rebuild it" (147). Unsurprisingly, Washington interprets the tale as a prophesy and fashions himself as the "man from another land" who returns to Africa, destined to participate in rebuilding the country. He understands himself as Sierra Leone's savior and his philanthropic work in the country as the fulfillment of his destiny. As Holsey notes, "Seeing himself as the embodiment of this mythical figure provides a momentous ending to the tale of personal transformation" (159).

Washington's journey is represented as affirming, reassuring, and fulfilling. From the first time Washington sets foot on African soil, the narrator highlights his strong physical and emotional connection to the continent, in particular to Sierra Leone. To underscore this intimate tie to the country and his identification with it, he employs a rhetoric of homecoming and kinship. He evokes notions of home and familial affiliation, for example, by recounting how people greet him with the words "welcome home" (*A Man* 121), by describing Sierra Leone as his "newfound homeland" (117), and by noting that a woman he meets displays an uncanny resemblance with his aunt from Houston (116). At a different point in the narrative, Washington describes a scene in which he joins people who are singing and dancing in the middle of their vil-

lage. By depicting how the people form a circle around him while singing and moving to the beat of the music, the narrative conjures an image of Washington being embraced by and integrated into a community. The collective "circling and singing" (237) is presented as a deeply emotional, spiritual, and intoxicating experience. Washington loses himself in the momentary delight of dancing: "I could feel the people around me filling me up with all that they could afford to give me… their love, their respect, their gratitude" (238). This is the kind of integration into the community that the narrator longed for. During the dance, his interpreter informs him that the dance moves he performed are "ancient *Ngoboi* moves" (238). The fact that he naturally and intuitively used dance moves that, unbeknownst to him, belong to a local folk dance, functions to highlight his cultural connection to the place and its people and his deep ties to the ancestral African homeland. Importantly, the narrative places Washington not just in a contemporary African community but also foregrounds his ancient ties to the continent.

Notably, throughout the descriptions of Washington's trip to Africa, Africanist discourse slips into the narration that mythicizes and exoticizes the continent. For example, the women he observes are depicted as "elegant, mysterious, rugged majestic, and sensuous beings" (*A Man* 63) and Africa is described as a "mysterious and ancient land" (68). Such descriptions of people and places seem to be incorporated in the narrative to underline Washington's adoration for the people, his respect for their culture, and his fascination with his newfound homeland. However, instead of highlighting the narrator's deepening connection with Africa, the descriptions have a different effect: They reveal his construction and consumption of African otherness and signify his Westernized "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990). Many of the images created in his book cater to tourist expectations and perpetuate cultural stereotypes of Africa. Moreover, the narrator reveals an appropriative and proprietorial attitude toward the people of Sierra Leone to whom he refers as "my people" (*A Man* 69) and people without a voice (166). Throughout the narrative, Washington endorses his desire to help the people of Sierra Leone by becoming their mouthpiece. He announces that he "would soon become a voice for the people of Sierra Leone… people who had no voice" (166). In a patronizing gesture, he repeatedly states that the people have no voice of their own to articulate their suffering and to arouse the concern of aid donor countries. Vowing to help Sierra Leone he tells people: "My name is Isaiah Washington and I'm here for you" (125). Moreover, when holding a speech at the NAACP convention in 2006, he asserts that "[t]he voice of

Sierra Leone was heard that day" (190). His statements reflect his underlying assumption that the people of Sierra Leone are passive and voiceless, unable to speak for themselves, and therefore dependent on his support.

Washington travels to Sierra Leone with a film crew of his own to document his experiences there. The recollection of his trip that is mediated in his narrative frequently resembles the atmosphere of a Hollywood movie starring Washington as the protagonist. He stages his journey in the documentary as well as in his text as a homecoming and presents himself as the heroic savior of helpless and voiceless people. Fittingly for an actor and producer, the travel narrative represents a series of epiphanic moments and often evokes a movie-like atmosphere. While in Sierra Leone, he tells his crew to "capture the beautiful" and insists on being filmed in shots that resemble action scenes, pushing for drama, while always being "[a]ware that [the] cameras were capturing every moment" (*A Man* 234). This feeling of shooting a movie dominates the narration and sets the pace. Throughout the trip, the narrator presents himself as the story's fearless hero. For instance, he rescues a little girl who is harassed by men (124-25, 135), he assists a surgeon in performing medical procedures on two children, and he puts out a fire in his hotel. These scenes read as if the text is straight from a movie script. Centering on such acts of heroism, the narrative expands Washington's bravery to cartoonish proportions.

The final epiphany comes at the very end of Washington's travel narrative when he is granted Sierra Leonean citizenship. The chapter is tellingly entitled "Making History" and presents "the culmination of a journey" because Washington is "the first African American man in history to achieve dual citizenship from the United States and an African country" (*A Man* 284). He proclaims, "I had realized a dream that phenomenal African American men [...] had long before I was born" (284). Again, the narrative capitalizes on Washington's distinctiveness, his singularity, and his exceptional personal story. As if to verify the truthfulness of Washington's astonishing, extraordinary tale and (life) journey, several pages are inserted in the middle of the book displaying photographs of the author. They show various images of Washington; for example, as a toddler, in scene shots from movies he starred in, at an award ceremony, and at his initiation as chief in Sierra Leone. These images visually retell the story offered in his travel narrative, seemingly attempting to lend credibility to his exceptional and incredible narrative.

Washington's journey to Sierra Leone is presented as a triumphal reversal of the Middle Passage that exposes his desire to reconstruct and claim a

mythical past—something that is fiercely disputed by other Black travelers and writers. It testifies to the yearning for ancestral roots and origins that people of African descent can follow and through which they can arrive at an understanding of their relationship to Africa. As he solidifies ties to his ancestral homeland, the elusiveness and the arbitrariness in creating such connections to Africa are illuminated. In this sense, both *Dreams from My Father* and *A Man from Another Land* present a variation of the classic *Roots* script. The narrators' journeys to Africa are staged as return trips that inscribe and place the traveler-writers in an African (American) male genealogy that empowers them and offers them a sense of wholeness, purpose, and even destiny. The journeys and the narratives are geared toward epiphany and closure. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the "return-to-roots" formula, which figures an alienated and questing protagonist whose journey to the roots leads to the resolution of an identity crisis, applies to the works analyzed above. As Kunow outlines,

> This discursive construction in which dislocation is finally overcome by 're-location', […] has […] a double function. On the level of *histoire*, it solves the identity crisis of a fictional character by reinstating him/her within an ethnic home space. On the level of the *discours*, it provides closure for the national cultural geography by a moment of ultimate arrival, inside a carefully circumscribed ethnic locality. (202; see also Antz 271)

For Obama and Washington, their travel experiences to Africa represent identity constituting moments that bring closure to their quests. The flow of events in the travel narratives underscores that the narratives are geared toward unity and closure. Both works create discursive links between the narrators' lives and Africa by inscribing themselves either within a family lineage or genealogy of heroic African forebearers, thus defining personal and cultural origins.

2. Disenchanting Africa

The two travel narratives on which this chapter focuses, *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992) by writer Eddy L. Harris and *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* (1997) by journalist Keith Richburg, present a sharp contrast to the works discussed in the previous chapter. This is not just because Harris and Richburg narrate much longer stays in Africa—Harris traveled for almost one year through more than twenty different countries and Richburg spent three years as a foreign correspondent for the *Washington Post* in Africa—but also because they reflect a different vision of the continent. The travel narratives by Harris and Richburg are representative of a strand in Black travel writing that developed in the late twentieth century, which approaches the African continent with far greater skepticism, if not rejection, compared with the previously analyzed works. The sentiments of African Americans toward Africa transformed in the post-civil-rights period and post-independence period when the hopes associated with the era of decolonization and independence in Africa began to fade. Especially in the last decade of the twentieth century, pivotal changes occurred on the African continent that influenced the perception of Africa by the diaspora. While the early 1990s presented a period of optimism and anticipation—Nelson Mandela was released from prison after almost three decades and propelled the end of Apartheid in South Africa, civil wars ceased, and dictator regimes declined—over the course of the decade, drastic changes occurred: these included the annulment of a democratic election in Nigeria, the war in Somalia after a failed United Nations' peacekeeping intervention, genocide in Rwanda, the outbreaks of diseases, and the spreading of violence and corruption (Campbell 365-66).

Although Black travel writing before and during the mid-twentieth century reflects a desire to connect with Africa and Africans—after all, Afrocentric sentiments demanded a positive depiction of the continent and the display of solidarity with the oppressed global Black community—a considerable number of works of the post-civil-rights era foreground Black travelers' disillusionment with the continent. They demonstrate that unfulfilled expectations—in other words, an unsuccessful homecoming or failed return—cause disappointment and often lead to a radical deconstruction of the myth of Africa as the Black diaspora's home. It is important to note, however, that such sentiments were not completely new and are expressed in earlier texts as well. To be certain, "the history of black American returns to Africa is replete with

cases of disappointment, alienation, and even revulsion," as Christine Levecq observes (90). For example, Wright's *Black Power* illustrates its author's inability to connect with Africa and understand the people he encountered. Wright's exclamation that he had understood nothing underscores his estrangement and alienation from the continent and his African origins (see ch. III, sec. 3.3).

Travel writers of the post-civil-right era, as Michelle Commander notes, "tend to focus more narrowly on the ruptures in their explorations of the role of Africa in the returnee's sense of self" and "have begun to complicate return narratives by openly discussing their journeys even when their stances are in flux and they question the viability of their diasporic visions concerning return" (58). To understand this change in perception, the historical context also needs to be considered: Travelers such as Harris and Richburg as well as other journalists and foreign correspondents, such as Lynne Duke and Howard French who also wrote book-length accounts of their experiences in Africa, were all born in the 1950s and traveled to Africa as relatively privileged US citizens and well-situated tourists or professionals. In contrast to earlier generations, they grew up with more liberties and increased opportunities for societal and political participation (Campbell 367). Moreover, African Americans engaged little with African politics and the postcolonial realities (the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa being the exception) during this time (371). Despite the frequent invocation of Africa as a homeland in Black American intellectual and popular discourses and the self-designation "African American" that emerged in the 1980s, "Americans of African descent were not claiming identity with contemporary Africans as much as reclaiming their own ancestral past—in Haley's terms, their roots" (370, 371).

The subtitles of the travel narratives by Harris and Richburg announce the authors' position regarding questions of identification. Their self-delineation as 'Black men' and 'Black Americans' capitalizes on the authors' distinct perspective as *Black* American but not *African* American travelers. They dismiss 'Africa' as a source of identification and instead seek to affirm their American cultural identity. While the works by Obama and Washington serve to discursively ingrain the narrator in an African context and to construct roots to an ancestral homeland, Harris and Richburg reject the idea of having meaningful ties to the continent. Their travel narratives, as I will show in the following, deconstruct idealized images of diasporic homecoming and disenchant the myths surrounding Africa. More precisely, Harris presents an ambiguous vision of Africa, whereas Richburg's paints an unflinchingly bleak picture. Both travel narratives, however, demonstrate that the image of Africa they con-

struct reveals little about the actual geographical and political entity and says much more about the writer's attitude, assumptions, and purposes.

2.1 Eddy L. Harris's *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992)

> [T]ravel involves an encounter between self and other that is brought about by movement through space, [and] all travel writing is at some level a record or product of this encounter, and of the negotiation between similarity and difference that it entailed.
>
> —*Carl Thompson, Travel Writing*

By the time *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992) appeared, Eddy L. Harris had already published *Mississippi Solo: A River Quest* (1988), a travel narrative about his journey down the Mississippi River in a canoe; he would later write another travel account titled *South of Haunted Dreams: A Ride Through Slavery's Old Backyard* (1993), a book about his motorcycle trip through the Southern United States. All three narratives place special emphasis on questions of identity in relation to place. In *Native Stranger*, Harris explores this issue as he travels alone across the African continent for almost a year by plane, bus, train, car, boat, and foot, encountering different peoples and traditions. The travelogue recounts Harris's journey through Africa and the many fleeting acquaintances with people he meets by chance and who invite him into their homes, making him a witness to the generosity, contentment, poverty, and despair of the people. Harris also scrutinizes government corruption, the enduring legacies of European colonialism, and the complex relationship between African nations to their former colonizers.

The ambiguous and oxymoronic title *Native Stranger* captures Harris's ambivalence toward Africa. Twisting the theme of the classic works to which his title refers—namely, Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), both of which explore the Black experience United and the condition of being a native of the country, while simultaneously being excluded and marginalized—the travel narrative foregrounds Harris's conflicting feelings of familiarity and foreignness. Harris demonstrates how his 'Americanness' makes him a stranger in Africa, despite the fact that his Blackness and his heritage could render him native in this place. As Commander observes, "To be a native stranger for Harris, then, is to have a sense of being from a place but not of that place. It is the state of being an outsider

within, someone in limbo, a constant wanderer" (60). From the position of the 'outsider within,' Harris negotiates his connection to Africa. As my analysis illustrates, the travelogue presents highly ambiguous and increasingly negative images of Africa. Ultimately, Harris's travel experiences cause him to reject mythical notions of Africa nurtured in the Black imagination, leaving him disillusioned with the continent. Africa and African people are presented as the cultural other against which the narrator identifies himself and which are employed to assert his American national identity.

The structure of the book follows the itinerary of Harris's journey, beginning with his departure from Paris, where he resided at the time, followed by his sojourn through numerous African nations from North to South. What characterizes Harris's travel narrative are the intimate and often sensuous descriptions of the places he visits, the attention to detail, the nuanced meditations on the interpersonal relationships with the people he meets, and the self-reflexive comments on his assumptions and perceptions. Through his traveling, and by extension his travel writing, Harris seeks to acquire a better sense of self and recognizes that the exploration of foreign landscapes and people really serves the purpose of discovering more about himself. As for so many other Black travelers, the journey to Africa is for Harris "a personal quest for understanding" (*Native Stranger* 34), an opportunity to learn and discover more about himself. Traveling across the continent, the narrator believes, would have transformative effects on him and would facilitate a better understanding of who he is: "I had some eerie feeling Africa could teach me about life [...] so that I could *see myself* better and better *define myself*" (27; emphasis added). Accordingly, the project of self-exploration continues on the level of the text, and travel writing functions as a means to probe different subject positions on African ground. To arrive at "a better understanding of place and self" (35), the narrator explores the meaning of Africa, pairing his ambiguous notions of the continent with established discourses on Africa.

Another characteristic of Harris's travelogue is the ambivalence with which he approaches Africa in his writing. Early in the narrative, he recalls various Western and Africanist discourses about Africa and thus begins his journey with an emotional and conceptual confrontation with Africa. The narrator signals his awareness of the influence these discourses have on his relationship with Africa. From the very beginning of the narrative and the outset of Harris's project to understand Africa and himself better, he acknowledges that premediated and prefigurated images of the continent complicate his aim when he writes, "Long before I ever went there Africa

was alive in my imagination" (*Native Stranger* 14). He recognizes that his own notions of Africa are shaped by "images from books," "newspapers and magazines," and "residual history learned in school" and that these visions of Africa influence his complicated and problematic aim "to find the truths of Africa" (25). Before Harris embarks on his journey across Africa, he recalls and contrasts different discourses surrounding the continent that have been formed over decades, not least in the genre of travel writing. The contemplation of diverse visions of Africa signals the narrator's self-reflexive engagement with such discourses and draws attention to the difficulties inherent in representing the continent. Moreover, the competing visions of Africa that Harris recalls reflect his conflicting emotions—ranging from anxiety and fear to anticipation and excitement.

Prior to his journey, Harris dreams of Africa and describes it in terms of its tastes, smells, sounds, and movements. The narrator writes,

> The Africa of my dreams tasted of dust and sand and sweat, smelled of heat and dried fish, echoed jungle rhythms and roaring laughter and the sounds of children starving. Cattle rustled in the marketplace and stirred up the dust. Women hurried along a sunbaked road walking barefoot, baskets on their heads, their backs noble and straight as arrows. The stew they rushed home to cook was pungent and vaguely sweet. The meat in their stew was rat. In the dark with my eyes closed, I could hear their children cry. (*Native Stranger* 26)

The passage evokes an image of Africa that is characteristically sensuous. In the narrator's dream, Africa is not merely a picture but a multifaceted experience—something that the narrator can hear, taste, smell, and feel. This panoply of sensation stirs the narrator's imagination. Although the rather idyllic scene described in the above passage is punctuated with the piteous cries of children, the Africa of Harris's dreams is a mysterious and alluring place. The long-standing 'Africa-as-dream' narrative becomes even more pronounced when he professes, "Africa was unknown and mysterious to me, inhabited by pygmy cannibals and Watusi giants [...]. Jungles and mountains and infinite plains. [...] [S]trange cities with stranger-sounding names rolling magically in the ear" (26). Arousing a vision of Africa as Eden complete with magnificent landscapes and majestic wild animals, the narrator acknowledges his longing to see "African spring," "migrating herds of wildebeest," "lion cubs hiding in the tall grass, baby elephants learning to galumph" (27).

In between the dream-like evocations of Africa, another, contrasting discourse is recalled that adheres to the myth of Africa as a nightmare (the subtitle of Harris's narrative, '… Heart of Africa,' already alludes to this discourse by recalling Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, 1899). It is an image of Africa that has become fixed within media representations and in the popular imagination of the West:

> Africa is Ethiopian babies with their bellies distended from starvation. […]
> Africa is dread and terror and worse. Africa is mosquitos.
> Africa is AIDS and malaria, river blindness and something called green monkey disease.
> Africa is death and darkness and flies. (*Native Stranger* 26)

The nightmarish visions of Africa are rendered in a detached, matter-of-fact style and in short, staccato sentences without the ornamental mode and sensual descriptions that are employed in the previous passage. Notably, there is a tense switch from past to present. Using the present tense to describe Africa as a nightmare world and to convey images of suffering, terror, disease, and death could suggest that the narrator perceives this version of the continent as more current and authentic than the images of his dreams.

Already in the very beginning and before the actual journey is retold, contrasting images of Africa are presented that encompass different cultural narratives of the continent, Westernized discourses, and the narrator's own desires, dreams, and experiences. The evocation of multifarious visions of Africa synthesizes the diverging, contradictory, and ambivalent meanings of the space in the cultural imagination. These contrasting perceptions of the continent as a dream and nightmare illuminate the ambiguity surrounding depictions of Africa and point to Harris's ambivalent feelings. Both discourses, often inextricably interwoven with one another, inform the way the narrator approaches Africa and shape his expectations. Retrospectively and from the vantage point of an experienced traveler who has acquired new knowledge and who has been changed by the journey, the narrator brings together the different images of Africa and his actual experiences. The result is an image of Africa that is remarkably abstract and fluid and that sharply contrasts the other images of the continent:

> The Africa in my dreams and the Africa I remember, now that I have been there, come together and diverge to form crisscrossing patterns of texture and color, light and shadow, like a *haunting abstract work of art* that domi-

> nates corners of the imagination, *a tapestry weaving itself out of what is real and what is pure imagination*, a tapestry whose *colors and cultures collide and overlap*, changing from country to country, religion to religion, from place to place and village to village. (*Native Stranger* 18; emphasis added)

The description of Africa as an abstract work of art points to the impossibility of representing Africa in a true and objective manner—something that travel narratives have traditionally purported to do. In this regard, the narrative undermines the genre's truth claim. It also highlights the narrator's own inability to judge what is true and what is imagined, underscoring the challenge of depicting and making sense of Africa.

Calling attention to his subject position as a Black American traveler, Harris introduces yet another vision of Africa—namely, that of an imagined homeland for Black diasporic people. Contemplating the idea of an African homeland and its powerful grip on his imagination, he insists that "[a] black man cannot visit Africa without such thoughts creeping upon him and altering the panorama" (*Native Stranger* 27). According to Harris, the vision of Africa as "a place of wonder, a place of return, [...] a place filled with promises of black dignity and rich with a sense of belonging" (106) infiltrates Black people's attitudes toward the continent. His statement that "the specter of Africa looms like the shadow of a genie, dormant but not altogether harmless" (13), suggests that he perceives the idea of Africa as home and a place of return as confining. The apparent impossibility to free oneself from this idea, he fears, thwarts his project of self-exploration.

Trying to escape the prefigured plots and routes, *Native Stranger* pits itself against the trope of return and homecoming that one finds in earlier works, such as Haley's *Roots* and Angelou's *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*.[7] In fact, Harris debunks the idea from the very beginning. Addressing the implied reader directly, he opens his narrative by stating plainly, "Because my skin is black you will say I traveled Africa to find the roots of my race. I did not" (*Native Stranger* 13). That the narrator is not concerned with tracing his

7 The narrator emphasizes that his journey is not a search for roots like that of Haley when he states, "I was not trying to find the village that had once been home to my people, nor would I stand and talk to people who could claim to be my relatives, as Haley had done. [...] My Africanism was abstract and I wanted it to remain so. I did not need to hear the names of my ancient ancestors or know what they looked like" (*Native Stranger* 138). Rather than trying to discover concrete connections to people, he views his connection to Africa as merely symbolic, as something that is tied to the past.

personal roots back to the continent, searching for distant relatives, or engaging thoroughly with the historical connection between Africans and African Americans is made sufficiently clear early on. He recognizes that the past continuous to shape the Black American experience when he writes, "The chains of slavery weighed heavily upon us" (107). And although he sees the unique historical and sociocultural experiences of Black Americans in the United States as significant for determining Black cultural identity, he perceives this history as a burden (Hållén 6). He writes, "Perhaps, then, by going to Africa I could see the past and then get rid of it, shed myself of this *roots* business once and for all, those individual shackles that chain us too often to the past" (*Native Stranger* 28). Contrary to many roots seekers, who wish to discover stories of origin that (re)connect them to the past and fill the gaps of knowledge caused by slavery, Harris perceives the past as a weight from which he tries to free himself. That Harris views the past as a burden and not something worth exploring in depth is also reflected in the narrative, which focuses on the here and now. Instead of delving into the histories of the countries he visits, the narrative is concerned with Harris's travel experiences.

While the wish to discover more about oneself while traveling pertains to countless travelers, Harris's motivation to see and define himself better derives from the complex condition of being Black in America; a motivation for traveling that he shares with numerous other Black travelers. Being Black *and* American, Harris carries "two cultural passports"—one passport is "stamped with European culture and sensibilities and history," "[t]he other was issued from the uniquely black experience" (*Native Stranger* 28). The metaphor of the two cultural passports is employed to describe his struggle to reconcile the conflicting feelings of connection and disconnection that he has toward Africa. However, rather than offering the narrator novel insights into his relationship to the continent and the people he encounters, he experiences the distinct cultural and racial perspective or sensibility as confining: "Somewhere between the blackness of my skin and the whiteness of my culture I am trapped" (106). Many Black travel writers address similar conflicting sentiments and attitudes, unveiling their ambivalent feelings toward the places and people they visit. However, observations concerning such ambivalence often either conclude a travel narrative or are only briefly discussed and then cast aside. By contrast, *Native Stranger* takes these contradictions and ambivalences as the starting point of its author's literary journey. Nicklas Hållén emphasizes that "what sets Harris's case apart from many similar accounts of travels in Africa is the fact that the text centres on and actively engages with

its internal conflicts and contradictions" (13-14). While, for instance, Obama's *Dreams* flattens out the contradictions and ambiguities surrounding his affiliation with Kenyans and Kenyan culture that arise during his journey, Harris's narrative foregrounds the negotiations of familiarity and estrangement. In this sense, the contradictions Harris observes in Africa and within himself find their way into the narrative.

To find out what Africa means to him and to discover its 'truths,' the narrator seeks to free himself from the prefigured visions of Africa—as dream, nightmare, or homeland—that nag at his consciousness and 'creep upon him' to alter his perspective and distort his impressions. How, the text seems to ask, can one explore the self in relation to place without pre-established assumptions and beliefs stemming from one's cultural and social background. For the narrator the answer lies in the way in which he travels and how he approaches Africa: Alone and without a fixed itinerary, predefined destination, or plan, he wants to venture away from the beaten track and immerse himself in the places and cultures he encounters. He seeks to practice what Hulme describes as the travel writer's "deep immersion" that involves the acquisition of intimate knowledge of "people and places unknown to short-stay travellers, let alone tourists" ("Travelling to Write" 97). For Harris, travel entails "walk[ing] a mile in another's moccasins to see what other men endure and to endure it with them" (*Native Stranger* 43) as a sign of solidarity and empathy. This involves, for instance, fasting during Ramadan while he is in Tunisia—"When I am in Tunisia, I do as the Tunisians" (41)—as well as the sharing of food and shelter with strangers. Throughout his journey, Harris emphasizes his desire "to be African for a while," "to shed [his] former self as if it were a snakeskin and see life, if possible, from a new point of view" (35). This intent reveals his relativistic outlook, open-mindedness, and willingness to expose himself to different experiences; but it also reveals his appropriative attitude and assimilatory engagement with other cultures that expose his privileged position as a Western traveler. Yet, it is his search for the things that people share, a common bond or sentiment, that distinguishes his travel practice from that of the tourists he observes. His self-fashioning as a traveler, he believes, allows for a sustained engagement with Africa and a better understanding of the continent and its people. Therefore, Harris tries to disassociate his journey from the adventure and romance of (roots) tourism.

This supposedly easy dichotomy between travel and tourism points to a range of underlying cultural assumptions, values, and prejudices that ascribe a certain superiority, intellectually and ethically, to the traveler—as opposed

to the tourist (Kinsley 237). While the notion of travel purports to grant more authentic experiences, Graham Huggan argues "that there is no meaningful distinction between the tourist and the traveler"—such a differentiation is artificial and prone to stereotypes (5). As Zoë Kinsley points out, the traveler-writer's insistence on being a traveler and not a tourist "is often a claim for individualism, a rejection of sameness" (238) and "encapsulates the traveller's desire to be different and individual, both in travel practice and text" (240). This desire manifests in Harris's wish to depart from the beaten track and carve out new paths for his travels as well as for the way he writes about his journey. Divorcing his travel from the tourist journey and the notion of inauthenticity that is attached to it, the narrator emphasizes his intent to take an unbiased look at Africa. He seeks out routes, modes of travel, and textual paths that allow him to view Africa, as well as himself, from a fresh perspective and through an untainted lens. This idealistic endeavor, however, is continually put to the test. As I outline in the following, over the course of his journey his resolution not to judge Africa purely by his own Western standards—and from his personal, cultural, or racial perspective—dissolves; eventually, he experiences an increasing sense of disillusionment and pessimism.

Initially, the narrator establishes his travel practice in opposition to the tourist journey by avoiding the paths of the tourists he encounters on his journey, proclaiming, "When they turned left [...], I turned right" (*Native Stranger* 43). The conscious physical and ideological separation from the clichéd figure of the tourist allows Harris to critically examine the implications of Western tourism in Africa. For example, he points to the power hierarchies and racial inequalities inherent in tourist businesses and notes that these differences stem from a colonial mentality (131). Only by divorcing himself from the position of the tourist can Harris declare, "I hate tourists for the same reason I hate Coca-Cola. They make every corner of the world a little more American" (71). Pairing Western tourists with America's corporate giant Coca-Cola, the narrator assumes a critical perspective on Western tourism as a form of neo-colonialism. Throughout the text and throughout Harris's journey, Coca-Cola reappears as a symbol, embodying American cultural imperialism, or coca-colonization as it has been dubbed. Predictably, the narrator can only temporarily erase his ties to the hegemonic culture as he himself is undeniably a representative of the international tourist industry and the neocolonial power structures behind it. Over the course of the journey, then, the supposedly straightforward distinction between traveler and tourist dissolves. Although the narrator is determined to stick to his idealistic premise

to approach Africa as a traveler—trying to "shed the snakeskin of assumptions and expectations and sensibilities of the world I come from" (188)—he recognizes time and again that he has much more in common with the tourists he disdains than with the local Africans. The narrator's inability to cast off his assumptions, expectations, and sensibilities is reflected by his craving for Coca-Cola, the drink that epitomizes the American way of life like few others. Harris admits that "Coca-Cola is as soothing as the sudden sound of English in a faraway place" and that "[i]t tastes like home" (72). When he experiences frustration, exhaustion, and disappointment during his journey, he succumbs to his craving for the 'taste of home' and eagerly gulps down cans of coke. Descriptions of his mounting thirst in the unbearable heat can thus be read as a metaphor for Harris's growing frustration, his disillusionment with Africa, and his identification and affiliation with American culture. Unable to uphold the distinction between traveler and tourist, the narrator notes self-reflexively that he too is just another American tourist. He thus admits, "You want to remove yourself from these people, call yourself a traveler, but you can't. You and they are one. You and Coca-Cola are one" (72). Harris's dilemma is underscored by the collapse of the traveler/tourist dichotomy.

The contradictions inherent in Harris's project of self-exploration as well as in his descriptions of Africa are manifested in a scene where he visits Gorée Island, which served as a slave-trading station between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries and is located off the coast of Senegal; it is among the premier pilgrimage destinations of Black diasporic roots seekers and heritage tourists. The visit brings the narrator closer to what can be considered a geography that embodies the roots of the Black diaspora and may thus have been framed as a homecoming. For the narrator, however, this is not an emotional return or homecoming. Rather than exploring personal connections and feelings toward the place, the narrator presents an account which, as one scholar observes, is "rife with contradictions [and] demonstrates the narrator's ambivalence" (Bennett 13). Approaching Gorée Island from the water, Harris takes in the view: "Out in the harbor Gorée Island sits like a scab on the smooth skin of the evening sea, raised like a welt, ugly and dark in the distance and misshapen. In daylight and up close the island is as pretty and precious as a prize, its low buildings glimmering faintly pink in the newly risen sun" (*Native Stranger* 123). The gruesome image of the island as a scab on the sea's skin in the pending darkness of the evening—which alludes to a wound caused by the transatlantic slave trade that has not yet healed—stands in stark contrast to the picture that presents itself to the narrator in daylight. During the day,

the place is transformed into an aesthetically pleasing sight of bright colors, meshing together the blue of the sea and the sky, the green of the plants, and the red of the flowers. This observation appears to unnerve the narrator because no obvious marker draws attention to the history of the island and its slave cells. What follows the visual observation of the island is a brief account of its past, which is described as "a river of blood. A river of tears. A river of history" (123), and a short recollection of the history of the slave trade and the Middle Passage. Supporting the argument that Harris is not overly concerned with discovering and engaging with the past and the history of the slave trade, his account is hastily concluded with the narrator noting that the slave cells on the island are "monuments to a history long forgotten" (125).

Overall, Harris's account of his visit to "the most substantial symbol of his return—one of the most significant sites that legitimizes the word *native* in this text's title" (Commander 62)—is written in a detached, impersonal style. This lack of personal commentary and emotional response evinces a break in an otherwise highly personal, emotive, and self-reflective account and comes as a surprise considering the significance of the place for diasporic travelers. Intriguingly, the meaning of Gorée Island as a symbolic place of return for the Black diaspora is downplayed. On the one hand, the scene serves to express the narrator's ambivalence to the continent that is manifested in the descriptions of the landscape, the contrasting images of the Gorée Island, and in the change of the narrative style, which suggests Harris's insecurity of how to interpret the place. On the other hand, it functions to deconstruct the myth of homecoming because this symbolic point of departure for the Black diaspora does not evoke overwhelming emotions and feelings—such as loss, grief, and anger or forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing—in the narrator.

Although Harris's initial intent is to approach Africa unbiased and free from preconceived ideas about the continent—he repeats, mantra-like, that "[i]t is folly to judge this place by standards that are so foreign to Africa" (*Native Stranger* 278)—he increasingly judges the people, their behavior, and traditions according to his own cultural and personal standards. While his judgments are not always directly articulated, the narrator's opinions surface through the commentary. Several incidents illuminate his inability to refrain from such personal judgment. For example, his observations of veil-wearing Mzabite women in Ghardaïa, Algeria, are rendered in an account that purports to be objective and mindful of the traditions and the cultural value of the veil. However, he seems unable to fend off judgment when he describes the veiled women as being "*ancient* in their ways" (59; emphasis added) and

"cock[ing] their heads awkwardly like birds searching for worms" (60). The portrayal of the veiled women as 'ancient' and 'awkward' exemplifies the narrator's perception of the tradition as dispensable, stuck in time, and lacking progress. Making his position more explicit, the narrator poses the following rhetorical question: "how liberating can it be when a woman is forced to stumble along with one arm carrying the groceries or a baby, the other hand holding the veil closed?" (60). Harris frequently recalls his initial endeavor and reminds himself of the necessity of accepting the customs and traditions he observes without judgment. Yet, when he argues with a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mali about patriarchal structures and female circumcision, which Harris condemns as an "idiotic ritual" (215), a shift in attitude can be registered. Apparently, Harris discards his cultural relativism approach and instead declares that there are universal values that every culture has to cherish: "But aren't there some absolutes in life that have nothing to do with cultures and only with humanity? Poverty. Dignity. Equality" (216). The question unveils his belief in the existence of universal human rights and values that are not to be negotiated. Abandoning the premise to accept the traditions and customs of the cultures he encounters, he then suggests that such an approach might even be inhuman and dangerous: "A traveler ought to be sensitive to the other cultures and customs he encounters, for they are often very fragile, but for the sake of *nothing* ought a man abandon his humanness" (236).

As Harris progresses, his journey becomes more taxing and challenging as he tries to hold on to his premise to adapt to the ways of life he encounters, to endure the hardships of the people he meets, and to submit to the forces he cannot or should not try to control. His endeavor is accompanied by notions of surrender, self-abandonment, submission, and the relinquishment of self-control:

> If I was going to travel like a leaf on a breeze, letting myself be guided by whim and wind and rumor, feeling the helplessness the Africans feel, then I would need to surrender to the caprices of nature and also of authority. My life suddenly was not my own. I found myself sitting in the lap of gods, the lap of destiny, and the lap of authority. (*Native Stranger* 174)

That this initial aim to surrender to authority and travel at the mercy of nature and God is prone to failure and set up for disappointment is quite obvious considering that Harris declared his belief in individual responsibility and agency earlier in the narrative when he states, "Our lives are our own, and what we make of the world is our fault and our responsibility" (153). As

he travels through Africa, adhering to his self-imposed rules, the narrator increasingly suffers under the climate, the unswerving heat, and the deprivation and hardships that stem from the lack of clean water, electricity, and food. Hence, anger and frustration increasingly build up in the narrator as he witnesses misery, despair, and hopelessness all around him. Appalled by the abject poverty he sees and the beggars asking for money, the narrator concedes, "I was tired of being seen as some savior. The African poverty was at last getting to me" (177). Moreover, being perceived as the well-situated American traveler that he is causes Harris to become suspicious of the hospitality extended to him, leading him to question the underlying motives of strangers who invite him into their home. His own powerlessness to change things and the helplessness he feels when faced with the pain and anguish of people drive him to the edge of what he can bear. While in Mali, an incident with a begging woman carrying a child profoundly unsettles the narrator. The woman's poverty and despair elicit feelings of shame and guilt in Harris. He concludes that no matter how much money he gives to the people, he will never be able to end their misery. For Harris, the begging woman and her child embody the pain, hopelessness, and helplessness he begins to see almost everywhere he goes, which brings him to the verge of despair. He literally flees from this scene of unbearable suffering and flies out of the country the next day—a response that can be read as an attempt to forge a physical and emotional distance between him and the suffering people (217-18).

Over the course of Harris's journey, Africa loses the magic and his descriptions of places and people become increasingly bleak. Before venturing on his journey, the magical and strange-sounding names of cities incited his curiosity. Yet, as he travels through Burkina Faso, he finds that "[t]here is magic in the African place-names, but there is none in the air. There is nothing magical anymore in the rutted roads and the dying sheep or the dust in the eyes and throat" (*Native Stranger* 266). His statement blatantly underscores his disillusionment with Africa. The travelogue thus demystifies the continent as a place of magic and wonder by constructing an image of Africa as a site of hopelessness, poverty, and despair. The narrator also debunks notions of return and belonging, which he regarded with skepticism from the very beginning. He explains his frustration and his disappointment by saying that he has come too close to Africa and that he has seen too much that led to the continent's disenchantment: "When you get too close to a thing, it loses its magic" (266). During a boat trip in Zaire (the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo), the narrator ultimately discards whatever notions of

Africa as a mythical homeland he might still have harbored and endorses his estrangement from African people, noticing once more that he has more in common with his White fellow travelers than with the Africans who look like him. When the captain of the boat tells him to move to Zaire, which he frames as Harris's symbolic African home, and to help the country grow and develop, the narrator unceremoniously responds: "I could never live in Africa [...]. I had been here too long already" (299). When the captain counters and asks if he prefers to live among Whites, the people whose "ancestors stole your ancestors from this place and took them to America as slaves" (300), the narrator—in a provocative gesture—turns to his White English travel companion to thank him. By doing so, he implies that he is indeed grateful that his ancestors were taken from Africa. Consequently, Harris concludes this episode with the words, "The spell was broken" (300), thus indicating that he has banished the mythical images of Africa that infiltrated his attitude toward the continent.

Harris's discontent with his journey, and by extension with Africa, is manifested in the portrayal of the places and peoples he encounters. For example, employing sweeping generalizations, he characterizes Africans as "patient and acquiescent" (*Native Stranger* 279), helpless and submissive to authority (207, 281), and as having "no tradition of democracy and self-assertion" (174). Drawing on Africanist discourse, he repeatedly states that they "simply have no voice" (175)—echoing Isaiah Washington's proclamations. Harris argues that the lack of democracy and agency, which he views as a consequence of Western colonization, makes Africans submissive to authority. Examining the enduring influence of former colonial powers in Africa, the narrator employs the metaphor of slavery to talk about the continent's "continued colonial—or neocolonial—ties to the old slave master" (122). He postulates that because of the West's continuous intervention, Africa was never left alone and allowed "to be what it was, what it could have been, what it ought to be" (213). This leads him to the conclusion—which may be understood as a message addressed to the reader—that the future of Africa and that of the West are inextricably tied together. Suggesting that Africa will remain dependent on the West because of the continent's inability to sustain itself without foreign involvement, he declares, "Africa's work remains. And ours too" (315). What exactly this work entails and what future he foresees for the continent is not explained; thus his statement remains purely rhetorical. What does become sufficiently clear, however, is that Harris does not see himself becoming personally involved

with Africa and that he rejects taking on any kind of responsibility. Instead, he gestures to the economic responsibility and political influence of the West.

The narrative's final description of Africa combines Harris's personal observations and stereotypical images of the continent. While he signaled his awareness of the implications of Western discourse about Africa at the beginning of his narrative by recalling these discourses, they are now rather uncritically employed in his own descriptions. In an impressionistic account of how he perceives Africa, Harris summarizes, "There is Africa the cliché, Africa the postcard view. Africa is a Biafran baby," "AIDS," "Africa is traditions that will not allow it to move forward," "Africa is joy in spite of the pain," "Africa is incredible generosity" (*Native Stranger* 312). He ends the enumeration by writing, "Africa is. . . ." (312). Unable to reach a conclusion, Africa remains contradictory and potentially confusing to Harris. The ellipses at the end of the passage signal the narrator's inability to make sense of it. His ambivalent feelings toward Africa—oscillating between fascination and revulsion—are expressed by the multiplicity of images that comprise his descriptions of the continent. His project of self-exploration played out on African terrain thus appears futile, as was already anticipated in the very beginning of the narrative. Therefore, at the end of his journey and his travelogue, much is left unresolved: "After almost a year in Africa, I have no answers. Only this one question remains: *Who am I?*" (311). Having found no answer to his question, he acknowledges that "[i]f you cannot know yourself, how can you expect to know a place like Africa? You can't" (311). He thus admits that "Africa brings out the contradictions in the traveler" (312), revealing his awareness that his account of Africa, which is itself contradictory and ambivalent, reveals more about himself than about the continent.

Over the course of the journey, it has become clear to Harris that Africa plays only a minor symbolic role in his conception of self. Harris does not identify with Africa and repudiates affiliations to African people by emphasizing a perceived cultural divide. Stressing the importance of Western cultural values such as individualism, order, and material comfort and juxtaposing them to the disorder and submissiveness that he believes characterize Africa and its people leads him to the conclusion that there is nothing that connects him to Africa: "I do not feel part of this place, it's true, nor a part of these people simply because of an accident of birth. I am not one of them" (*Native Stranger* 313). The narrator defines his selfhood in explicit opposition to what he claims characterizes African people. Interestingly, the differences between African people and Harris are initially charted in superficial terms;

at the beginning of his journey, the narrator comments on how his appearance and physical characteristics set him apart from the people in Tunis: "I am tall and I am very dark. I have not shaved my beard and there is not another beard in the city. I wear clothes that set me apart and attract attention [...]. My clothes are not African clothes. [...] My walk is not an African walk" (35-36). Harris's height, skin tone, and beard as well as his clothes and the way he walks visually mark him as an outsider. He is not just perceived as a *stranger* but also as being *strange* (35), attracting shy glances or open stares from people in the streets. By contrast, toward the end of his journey, the difference between Africans and Harris is no longer registered in terms of outward appearance but in terms of character, behavior, customs, and culture. Reversing his earlier claim that his appearance marks him as a stranger, he now recognizes basic similarities between him and the local people; however, he emphasizes their fundamental difference: After almost one year of traveling across Africa, he remarks, "I am sitting alone, surrounded by *dark strangers* who call me brother [...]. I am isolated, not really one of them. [...] We share little more than the color of our skin and the fact of our humanness" (285; emphasis added). Having journeyed through Africa, Harris's perception of self and others has changed. He no longer considers himself the stranger but instead attributes this 'strangeness' to the people he encounters, thus perpetuating the stereotype of African strangeness.

Notably, Africa serves as the contrastive foil against which Harris asserts his American identity. Emphasizing his individuality, Harris reinstates a firm sense of difference between him and African people and commits fully to his Americanized perspective. The exposure to cultural otherness through travel confirms his identity as an American, causing him to claim the appellation 'Black American' and reject the signifier 'African' altogether. He asserts that there is too much that separates him from Africa to call himself an *African* American. Underscoring the cultural gap between himself and the local people, the narrator foregrounds his desire for unconstrained mobility—which he depicts as a distinct feature of his 'Americanness'—and contrasts it to the immobility that he believes to be a defining trait of 'Africanness.' Harris thus constructs the United States as a space of unrestrained mobility, ignoring the way Black mobility is circumscribed in his home country, both literally and symbolically (see ch. II, sec. 1). Accordingly, Harris's mobility is represented as a sign of his Americanness, which is articulated when he states, "I will go home to *my world* [...]. I will *drive the road* as far as my eye can see and beyond. There will be *no roadblocks to stop me*. No one will ask me for my identity papers.

And the *roads will be good*. / When I'm tired of *driving*, an *airplane* will be waiting to *fly* me somewhere else" (*Native Stranger* 313; emphasis added). It is clear, then, that for Harris being American encompasses the right to travel freely and with a certain level of comfort. Fashioning himself as an independent, individualistic, and mobile American, Harris accentuates the divide between himself and African people.

In contrast to Harris's descriptions of the United States and his Americanness, Africa is constructed in the narrative as a space inhabited by immobilized people, where free movement is restricted and discouraged. Paradoxically, despite the fact that he traverses much of the continent and visits over twenty different countries, the narrator feels that his mobility is heavily limited in Africa (for example, he points to the difficulties he experienced when crossing borders from one country to another). Consequently, notions of stillness and immobility are ascribed to Africans: "Their lives are not their own. They *sit* in the laps of the gods. Destiny and fate are held always in the hands of someone else. They *sit* and they *wait*. They *wait* for rain. They *wait* for salvation. They *wait* for God. They have been *waiting forever*" (*Native Stranger* 148; emphasis added). The repetitive sentence structure functions to underscore the alleged monotony of African life and the lack of agency, which frustrates the narrator. Significantly, Africans are described as passive, immobile, and submissive, which is stressed by the repetition of the verbs 'to sit' and 'to wait.' Although Harris acknowledges that much of what he criticizes "is a product of colonial servitude" (313) and the imbalanced relationship between former colonizers and African governments, he also implies that the problem is rooted in the character, or nature, of Africans who lack individual determination.[8] 'African immobility,' for Harris, represents an antithesis to the progress and modernity of the West. Clearly, by associating Africa with immobility, backwardness, dependence, helplessness, passivity, and submissiveness, the narrative echoes the stereotypes created by imperial discourses about the continent.

Native Stranger embodies several traits that have been identified as recurring motifs and strategies used in Black travel writing. Its imbrication with Africanist discourse illustrates the travel-writer's failure to escape the limited

---

8 Suggesting that there must be some flaw in the character of the African people, the narrator wonders, "is it the African character or the colonial presence that defines the way Africa is? The colonials clearly have not left, and Africa asserts its own authority any way it can. And Africans readily submit to authority" (*Native Stranger* 174).

and prefigured visions of Africa. Moreover, it underscores the contention that Africa serves as a terrain upon which travelers negotiate their identity in relation to both the United States and Africa. Harris is an example of a traveler who reaffirms his national identity by defining himself in contrast to Africa. In this regard, his travelogue shares similarities with Keith Richburg's travel narrative, to which I turn next.

2.2 Keith Richburg's *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* (1997)

> This is Africa. These are just bodies dumped into a river. Hundreds. Thousands. No one will ever count. […] Because this is Africa, and they don't count the bodies in Africa.
>
> —*Keith Richburg, Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa*

> Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book.
>
> —*Binyavanga Wainaina, "How to Write about Africa"*

Keith Richburg's journalistic travel narrative *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* is a record of his experiences in Africa in the early 1990s where he worked as *The Washington Post*'s bureau chief in Nairobi, Kenya. Richburg traveled extensively across the continent in his role as a foreign correspondent and spent his three years in Africa covering, among other topics, the United Nations intervention in Somalia, the AIDS pandemic, and the Rwandan genocide. What characterizes Richburg's controversially received book are the reports on military coups, genocide, and dictatorships that depict Africa as a continent mired in an ongoing cycle of violence, corruption, poverty, bloodshed, and suffering. However, according to the praise for *Out of America* that is reprinted on the first two pages, it is "a dead-on portrait of a continent mired in misery and violence" (*Newsweek*), "a salutary dose of realism" (*Foreign Affairs*), and "[a] courageous effort to tell the truth" (*Journal of Blacks Higher Education*). While being applauded for his unflinching portrayal of Africa by some reviewers, Richburg's account has also been subject to substantial critique.[9]

9 African American readers attacked Richburg's book arguing that it presents a distorted image of Africa that caters to White audiences. They criticized Richburg's insufficient

Curiously, it is Eddy L. Harris who, in a review of *Out of America* for *The Los Angeles Times*, criticizes the book for being one-dimensional and presenting "nothing new." Harris asks, "where is the love to balance all that is terrible in this place that Richburg reveals to us?" "[W]here is any shred of hope or trust in an African tomorrow to counter his admitted cynicism?" ("Africa Betrayed"). As the previous analysis of *Native Stranger* has demonstrated, the narrative creates an image of Africa that, albeit ambiguous and multifaceted, is tainted by prejudices. It may well be argued, then, that *Out of America* begins where *Native Stranger* leaves off and that it articulates sentiments that Harris would have felt had he stayed any longer in Africa.

Richburg's account has been described as "a tale of disillusionment" (Campbell 373) and a "chronicle of an unhappy return" (Levecq 82) to Africa. The title of the travel narrative—a nod to Karen Blixen's 1937 memoir *Out of Africa* in which the writer nostalgically remembers a pastoral past, the time she spent in East Africa—already announces a violent "confrontation" with the continent. *Out of America* evokes the all too familiar images of bloodshed, death, and suffering created by early White European travelers, which continuously inform negative depictions of Africa. The view of Africa expressed in the narrative is one that has been disseminated by generations of Western

historical contextualization of African colonization and asserted that *Out of America* demonstrates the self-hatred of its author. Molefi. K. Asante, a scholar known for his writings on Afrocentricity, states that Richburg's book "is a sad testimony of an individual who is caught in the spiral of psychic pain produced by what Frantz Fanon and Robert C. Smith call *internal inferiorization*. [...] He has written a superficial, headline-grabbing attack on the African continent, and many of us who have lived, studied, and travelled in Africa find his book offensive and obscene" (182-83). In the afterword to the 1998 paperback edition of *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* (published by Harcourt), Richburg addresses the criticism targeted at him. He situates his work within a tradition of African American travel writing about Africa and points out that writers like Langston Hughes and Eddy L. Harris felt estranged from Africa and African people and used their writing to affirm their American identity. Emphasizing that the sentiments he articulated in the book were not new, he notes that it must be a matter of his tone—too emotional, harsh, and unforgiving—that drew such trenchant criticism (249-51). He notes that, after all, "*Out of America* is first and foremost a journalist's book. It was never intended as an academic tome or a work of political science. It is a personal memoir, a first-person diary [...] of my experiences as a reporter" (251). His statement reveals that Richburg was apparently less focused on exploring Africa's complexity—a rather surprising finding given his profession—than on representing himself as an American citizen and being accepted as such. This serves as a reminder that travel writing is employed as a means for self-exploration.

travel writers. Richburg's account contributes to the perpetuation of the myth of a lost and tainted continent. Its rhetoric and most of his depictions and characterizations of the continent "would fit easily in even the most lurid nineteenth-century Dark Continent travelogue" (Campbell 384). Notably, the book testifies to the persistence and staying power of century-old images of Africa as dark, primitive, and subordinate that are still employed in contemporary travel writing. *Out of America* exemplifies a trait of travel writing about Africa that emerged in the post-colonial period when new themes were inaugurated and old tropes reinvigorated; among "[t]he most important of the new-but-old themes was an emphasis on political dysfunction and social breakdown" (Franey 422). Other monolithic narratives of Africa as a primitive place—economically, politically, and psychologically—and as a continent in need of being saved from self-destruction through the West's benevolent intervention have shaped discourses on Africa in travel narratives (422-23). It has been observed that "Africa remains portrayed as a continent needful of guidance and protection from itself, whether through imperial conquest and exploitation, or rescued by aid packages administered by western governments and non-governmental organization alike" (Fabian 94)—a sentiment that is also articulated at the end of Harris's *Native Stranger* when the narrator concludes that "Africa's work remains. And ours too" (315). Although in more recent writings, "the discourse behind the images and framework regarding western perception of the African 'other'" have transformed—no longer do natural environments supposedly pose a danger as they have in the late nineteenth century—the dangers presented are now inherent in the sociopolitical environments (Fabian 94).

While a number of readers and critics have taken issue with Richburg's descriptions of Africa, to question the veracity of his account and to collate his depictions of the continent with more nuanced and balanced images is not my intention in this analysis. What should be restated, especially with regard to the many reviews of *Out of America* that treat Richburg's travel narrative as an objective and realistic account of a continent in demise, is that "representations produced by travel writers, the techniques they use for their rendering of reality, and their claims to truth, significantly depend on their perceptional perspectives, and on their values, norms, and ideological premises" (Nünning 141). Like all travelers, Richburg carries cultural baggage with him and looks at Africa through specific personal, historical, and cultural lenses. Considering that the narrative certainly tells us less about the actual continent and more about the narrator's own standpoints and ideologies, the goal of my

analysis is to show how the images of Africa created in the account underscore Richburg's bleak assessment of Africa and support his argument that the continent is irrelevant to him. The emphasis on the narrator's estrangement from the continent serves to highlight his national cultural identity as an American. More forcefully than Harris, Richburg dismisses any connection to Africa as he illustrates his emotional and cultural distance, thereby affirming "a national philosophy of individualism that ignores any cultural, social, or historical grounds for solidarity" (Levecq 82).

The journey recorded in the narrative is an accumulation of traumatic and traumatizing experiences for Richburg. Unlike Harris, Richburg does not defer his condemnation of Africa. Right from the beginning, he stresses that Africa is indeed a place of horror. Setting the tone for the whole narrative, the Prelude opens with images of death and plunges the reader straight into a scenery of unparalleled horror: It relates how Richburg stood at the Kagera River in Tanzania, watching the corpses of the victims of the Rwandan genocide float down the river. The vivid descriptions of the "bloated" and "horribly discolored" bodies (*Out of America* xix) apparently function to produce an emotional response from the reader, fueling repulsion and disgust. Conscious that this graphic depiction draws on monolithic narratives of Africa as a nightmare, the narrator writes, "It's one of those apocryphal stories you always hear coming out of Africa, meant to demonstrate the savagery of 'the natives.' [...] You heard them all, but never really believed" (xix). By presenting himself as a professional reporter and claiming the privileged and authoritative position of an eyewitness, the narrator confirms the 'apocryphal stories' about Africa. He endorsed that they were indeed his reality: "it was that image, and countless more like it, that I had to live with, and go to sleep with, for three years—three long years—that I spent covering Africa as a reporter for the *Washington Post*" (xx). Significantly, *Out of America* positions Richburg as an eyewitness to legitimize his claims. The narrator asserts authoritatively, "I watched" (xix), "I've been there," and "I've seen" (xxiii), employing the travel writer's standard defense to counter potential objections from readers (Campbell 383). The emphasis on his profession as a journalist who is committed to reporting facts functions to justify Richburg's pessimistic assessment of the contemporary state of the African continent. As a journalist and an eyewitness, the narrator claims an authoritative stance that lends weight to his personal accounts of Africa and discourages the reader from questioning his judgment. Having been there and having seen it all, as

Richburg declares, he depicts what he regards as the 'real' Africa, unembellished and undistorted by romanticized notions of the continent.[10]

The narrative adopts the strategy of direct address to the implied reader, making it an integral and influential component of the text. For example, when graphically narrating the ferocious scene at the Kagera River, Richburg comments, "I suppose you, the reader, find this image disgusting," and he asks, "Is this depressing you, all this talk of death and dead bodies?" (*Out of America* xx). On the one hand, the direct appeal to the reader signals the narrator's awareness that his pessimistic statements could likely trigger readerly protest; on the other hand, it also serves to establish an intimate connection between narrator and reader. The narrator invites, or rather urges, the reader to accompany him on his journey when he writes, "I want you to walk with me, hold my hand as we step over the rotting corpses together, stand beside me as we gaze into the eyes of a starving child. Then maybe you'll understand a little better what it is I am trying to say" (xxi). What he is trying to say, essentially, is that Africa is beyond redemption. Richburg believes that by accompanying him on his journey, the reader will arrive at the same conclusion. Furthermore, Richburg thinks that the reader will understand his contentious statement that he, a Black American and descendant of enslaved Africans, celebrates his ancestors' forced displacement from Africa—"thank God that I am an American" (xxiv). In the narrator's opinion, the slave trade saved him from being one of the "nameless, faceless, anonymous bodies" floating down the Kagera River (xxi). He thus proposes, "Let me be your guide, and try to follow along as I lay out for you here why I feel the way I do—about Africa, about America, and mainly about myself and where it is I now know I belong" (xxiii). What follows is not a personal disclosure or self-reflective exploration of his complex emotions and his ambivalent relation to the continent but rather a condemnation of Africa as a whole. Fashioning himself as the reader's guide, the narrator directs the gaze to the terror and violence he experienced, thereby preventing readers to see Africa's other sides.

10 The gruesome depictions of Africa dominate the narrative and forcefully overturn more nuanced and complex characterizations of the continent. Although Richburg writes that he has "also seen heroism, honor, and dignity in Africa, particularly in the stories of the ordinary, anonymous people" (*Out of America* xxiv), the positive descriptions of African life perish in the face of abject horror that is foregrounded in the narrative.

The journey on which Richburg takes his readers begins with his arrival in Nairobi, Kenya. The first chapter is titled “On Native Ground,” an ironic reference to the idea that Africa is the Black diaspora’s native land—an idea that the narrator obviously rejects. Rather than expressing sentiments of familiarity when arriving in Africa as other Black travelers have done, he conveys his negative impressions of Nairobi and its inhabitants when he depicts a city populated with “filthy beggar children of indeterminate sex,” “[s]hady-looking Indian shopkeepers,” vegetable vendors selling marijuana, “hustlers and swindlers,” “leggy prostitutes,” and Masai warriors (*Out of America* 8). Nairobi, the alleged native ground, is instantly defamiliarized by the “rotten, fetid stench” (4) that lies in the air, unnerving the narrator. When Richburg asks his companion, *The Washington Post*’s previous bureau chief Neil Henry who introduces Richburg to Nairobi, about the odor, he is told: “Hell, that’s Africa” (4). This is a hasty and unadorned introduction to the place by Henry whose story foreshadows Richburg’s own. Like Richburg, Henry is described as a gifted and ambitious young Black journalist whose spirit has been broken by his time in Africa. The narrator comments, “Now he was leaving, exhausted, beaten down by Africa. That should have been a warning for me” (4). From the very beginning, Richburg approaches Africa—“the land of his roots” about which he knew and cared little prior to his professional engagement (10)—with mixed feelings. While other Black travelers anticipate the transformative experience of their journey to Africa, expecting to feel a greater degree of freedom in a place where their appearance is the norm, Richburg is worried to be “just another face in the crowd” (21). Being in Africa, he fears, might shake his stable sense of self.

Interestingly, the first chapter relates not only Richburg’s arrival in Kenya, but it also briefly introduces his personal background, recounting incidents from his childhood and young adulthood in Michigan (presumably his actual ‘native ground’ to which the chapter title refers). About his childhood years, Richburg writes, “Mine was not what you might call a particular ‘black’ childhood—just a childhood, an average American childhood” (*Out of America* 10). He grew up in a neighborhood that is described as “racially mixed” (10) and seemingly free from racial tensions—something rather surprising considering the historical context. Even as a Black child in a predominantly White private school, Richburg did not encounter racism or harassment and was “never made to feel unwelcome, never subject to any hostility” (15). However, this somewhat picturesque description of his “mostly typical American boyhood” (11) is suddenly interrupted by a short passage about the Detroit Riot of

1967 that stretches across one and a half pages and that is simply introduced with the words, "Then the riot happened" (11). The rather minor narrative incident is noteworthy because it unveils much of Richburg's ideological position and attitudes toward Africa, anticipating his later evaluations of African people (Campbell 374). While the Detroit riots emanated from a systemic crisis generated by several factors—including the deindustrialization of Detroit, a looming economic crisis, a housing shortage, and rising racial tensions caused by the discrimination in housing and police violence against African Americans—in *Out of America*, the riots are inserted in Richburg's childhood story without any sort of historical contextualization (374-75). Richburg remembers his father saying, "I want you to see what black people are doing to their own neighborhood" (*Out of America* 12), as they watched a burning building. Notably, the narrative presents the riots as mob violence, irresponsible and self-destructive. The complex circumstances that led to this event are willfully disregarded and erroneously ignored. Discarding the impact of the past on the present, the narrator does not see a connection between the problems with which Black people in the United States struggled and the history of Black exploitation, oppression, and discrimination. Instead, he frames the high levels of crime, violence, and poverty as an African American pathology. Arguments based on race or the legacies of the past, he demands, should not be used as an explanation for social realities.[11] Likewise, at a different point in the narrative, he draws links between Africans and the Black "underclass" in the United States, proclaiming that Africa thought of foreign aid "the same way many American blacks see government assistance programs as a kind of entitlement of birth. In both cases, you're left with black people wallowing in a safety net of dependency" (180).

11 It has been noted that Richburg's travel account frequently disregards the significance of the historical background of the events he witnesses and reports on. The chapter "Thy Neighbor's Killer" is a case in point: Here, the narrator returns to the opening scene of the book, the time he stood on the bridge crossing the Kagera River and watched corpses floating downriver. As a journalist, the narrator must be well aware of the historic and current events that culminated in the Rwanda crisis; however, besides a very brief account, he "is not really interested in subtleties of historical contextualization," focusing instead on "convey[ing] the raw emotional impact of a country breaking down, of a community that has lost all sense of humanity" (Levecq 86). Dismissing the complex historical background, he depicts Africans as irrational and prone to self-destruction.

The biased relationship between Africa and the West, which Richburg discusses at length in various parts of the narrative, is also staged at the level of the character constellation: The West, specifically the United States, is represented as the reasonable entity that must provide for Africa and this image is mirrored in the relationship between Richburg and his Kenyan office assistant George, who stands metonymically for all Africans. George functions in the narrative as the embodiment of the flawed, even corrupt, African who is prone to lying and constantly asks for salary advances and pay raises. Scrutinizing his relationship with George, the narrator states that it gave him "a good idea about how Western governments must have felt after pumping money into Africa for years only to discover that it had been siphoned off and the hand was still extended" (*Out of America* 33). According to the narrator, George with his "African way of thinking" perceives his well-situated American boss as "the new *bwana*, or sir" (35), who has an obligation to help and take care of him and his family. Creating an analogy between his position and the Western aid donor countries, Richburg thinks of himself as the reasonable character, the fair employer whose "*Western way of thinking* said that [he] just wanted to pay [George] a fair wage for a fair day's work" (35; emphasis added). Like Africa pleading for foreign aid, the narrator accuses his sweet-talking assistant of playing "the guilt strings" because as a Black boss Richburg feels somewhat obligated to express sympathy and show some generosity (34). For the narrator, the differences between him and George—and by extension all African people—are proof of a "great cultural divide" (34). Seemingly unaware of the problematic assumptions inherent in such sweeping generalizations, he reproduces and perpetuates the constructed divide between the West and Africa.

From the very beginning of his book, the narrator positions himself as a cultural outsider and insists that he has no innate knowledge of African people based on a shared racial heritage. He points out, "I myself was not any more into the African mind than were my expat friends and colleagues. I, too, was living sheltered and shielded from Africa and from Africans [...]. I was also afraid of them" (*Out of America* 37). This statement affirms his American cultural identity and aligns him with his predominantly White colleagues while dismissing the idea that he could have a connection to the locals based on a shared heritage. In contrast to Harris, who acknowledges a connection to the people he encounters, even if this connection remains purely symbolic and is based only on their common humanity, Richburg vehemently opposes the idea of a shared link. In this context, Levecq notes that "Richburg's refusal

of any kind of identification with Africa might seem like a healthy, sophisticated questioning of the idea of an automatic solidarity anchored in blackness" (87). However, when inquiring into the theorizations of Blackness and post-Blackness, it becomes evident that "[t]he search for individualism and a certain independence from racial identity [...] cannot take place apart from a renewed commitment to a politics of solidarity" (89).

A major focus of the narrative is on Somalia, where Richburg reported on the unfolding crisis in the early 1990s. As the narrator reveals, it functioned as a "prism" through which he viewed "the rest of Africa" (*Out of America* 53), thus turning Somalia's fate into a symbol for the future of the entire continent. His obsession with the country stemmed from his eagerness to change what he perceived as improper media coverage and the meager international attention paid to the crisis. He discloses that as a Black reporter he saw it as his duty to expose the suffering people in Somalia and was angered by the lack of interest in the struggle of Black people on the African continent. Significantly, he remarks that it may have had something to do with "racial pride," which accounted for his presence in Africa as a Black reporter (51, 52). With his dispatches on the unfolding story and the pending famine in Somalia, he sought to arouse the emotions and feelings of responsibility of the political leaders in Washington, DC. He called for a humanitarian mission that was later carried out but that ultimately intensified the crisis. Somalia also became "the metaphor for [his] own disillusionment" (53) and a "turning point" "that would forever alter [his] view of Africa and how the continent could—or could not—be saved from itself" (64). Richburg recounts how US-American officials under the flag of the United Nations landed an attack on Somali leaders in Mogadishu, causing an unjustified assassination that resulted in the killing of four journalists by Somali civilians. The death of his friends and colleagues represents the turning point for the narrator and his relationship with Africa. Condemning the United States forces' attack, the narrator exclaims, "My own moral universe had just been turned completely upside down. We were the United States of America [...]. We were supposed to be the good guys" (81). The universe, or perspective, that has been turned upside down, is the belief in an unambiguous world order in which the United States adheres to laws and a code of conduct. Yet, the conclusions he draws from the occurrences are startling: The main target of his anger are the Somali people, who seem to corrupt any attempt by the well-meaning foreign aid and military missions "who flew into the *darkness* to bring a little bit of *light*" (65; emphasis added). Drawing on the discourse of Africa as the dark continent, the narra-

tive constructs Somalia as a "moral abyss" (81) that infects and corrupts even the most benevolent and selfless savior: "We had come into the jungle (or in this case, the desert) and adopted their survival-of-the-fittest rules. We had lost our moral high ground" (81), writes Richburg. The United States, to which Richburg ascribes reason and moral superiority, temporarily loses this moral high ground because it entered a territory of chaos and violence. Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that "Africa corrupts all those it touches" and that the continent "is a moral cesspool where best intentions come to die" (Levecq 90).

The narrator articulates a sense of personal betrayal by the Somalis, whom he initially sought to support (through his journalistic work) by drawing the international community's attention to their suffering. After the death of his colleagues, however, he reached an emotional turning point: "I'm left naked, shorn of all my truths and certainties, no longer sure of what I believe. And I'm hating them, the Somalis. Hating them because they betrayed me" (*Out of America* 89). Based on this realization, the narrator concludes, "I would have to arm myself with a new set of truths if I were to survive in Africa" (89). To arm himself with a new set of truths denotes seeing Africa as a lost continent, a dangerous and violent terrain. According to Richburg, one can only survive in Africa by adopting a certain mindset that excludes trust, hope, solidarity, and empathy. It is thus unsurprising that no matter where in Africa he stays, the narrator observes self-destruction, violence, crime, and corruption. Somalia is just one example in a litany of failing states and crumbling democracies.

Drawing on Africanist discourse, the narrative depicts Rwanda as a nation in demise, spiraling down into the abyss. It is described as a country that has "reverted to prehistoric times," with people "carrying clubs and machetes and panga knives and smashing in their neighbors' skulls and chopping off their limbs" (*Out of America* 91). Richburg unceremoniously remarks that the Rwandans are not "fully evolved human beings," but "cavemen" (91). He addresses the psychological effects these experiences have on him by stating that he cannot find the words to describe the tragedies he witnesses (99, 117), a confession made all the more pertinent when considering that finding the right words is part of his profession as a writer and journalist. The neglect of history, especially with regard to the legacies of colonialism in Africa and the lack of contextualization, is evident in several of Richburg's descriptions of sites of conflict. The reduction of complexity and the presentation of oversimplified narratives underscore his position that the past plays no central role in the present moment. Importantly, there are obvious parallels between his

rendition of the Detroit riots, where Black people senselessly destroyed their neighborhood (as Richburg's father professed), and his portrayal of the Somalis and Rwandans as irrational and violent. He also draws links between Black Americans' "backward-looking" attitude (179)—that is, their engagement with the legacies of the slave past and Jim Crow segregation—and the way Africans make Western colonization responsible for their plight. For Richburg, the past is not an integral part of the present, neither in the United States nor in Africa. This lack of critical inquiry into the past highlights the narrator's ideological position, which is rooted in "neoconservative beliefs about individual responsibility but also in deeply engrained American beliefs about freedom and the human capacity for reinvention" (Campbell 391).

Given Richburg's experiences at sites of war and conflict and his grim account of them, it comes as no surprise, then, that he feels no emotional attachment when visiting Gorée Island. His reaction is similar to Harris's in that he renders his visit in a detached fashion in the chapter that bears the ironic title "Homecoming." Certainly, Richburg's visit is not in the least framed by notions of diasporic homecoming and return or by any sort of personal or spiritual connection. Instead, his overall feelings are characterized by disturbance. Having witnessed the atrocities in Somalia and Rwanda, he condemns the idea of a maternal homeland and underscores his disconnection from Africa. He writes, "it was too late now. I had come to Goree from the East, from the darkness, and I had already seen way too much of Mother Africa, and what I had seen had already made me sick" (*Out of America* 162). In essence, for the narrator, the romance of diaspora is an illusion sustained by African Americans' ignorance of contemporary African realities and a superficial engagement with the continent.

At the end of Richburg's stay in Africa, his experiences leave him bitter and devoid of hope and compassion (*Out of America* 227). Appropriately enough, the last chapter of the travel narrative is titled "Retreat." Employing the language of warfare, Richburg describes his African journey as a battle fought and lost. He declares his 'defeat' and subsequent 'retreat' from the continent when he states, "I'm beaten down" (225). The last chapter, therefore, is a grim conclusion of his time in Africa. The narrator muses, "Africa. Birthplace of civilization. My ancestral homeland. I came here thinking I might find a little bit of that missing piece of myself. But Africa chewed me up and spit me back out again. It took out a machete and slashed into my brain the images that have become my nightmares" (225). Forcefully disputing visions of Africa as the Black diaspora's home, the narrator projects his fears, anxiety, disap-

pointment, and anger onto it. Africa is personified and portrayed as a violent perpetrator and senseless killer against whom he tries to guard himself. The fences around his property in Nairobi, the alarm system, the metal door on his house, the watchdogs, and the security guard he employs all serve "to prevent Africa from sneaking across my front yard and bashing in [his] brains with a panga knife for the two hundred dollars and change [he] keep[s] in [the] top desk drawer" (226). These precautionary measures symbolize the emotional shields set up to guard himself; and these shields do not allow that a different version of Africa enters his mind or heart. As a result, he stresses his disconnection from Africa and rejects the label *African* American: "I am an American, a black American, and I feel no connection to this strange and violent place. [...] I couldn't even bring myself to write 'African American'" (227). His statement functions to divorce the narrator from anything remotely African. Clearly, his text argues for an unbridgeable divide between him and the people he encounters and a cultural, emotional, and psychological disconnection from Africa that stresses his Americanness. Moreover, being away strengthens Richburg's connection to America and affirms his American identity. Having come to the conclusion that Africa is indeed a lost and hopeless continent, the narrator turns his attention to the United States. As Campbell points out, some African American travelers "have denied any connection to the continent, the better to advance their claim to full citizenship in the United States" (xxiii-xxiv). As Richburg's travelogue illustrates, Africa is the terrain upon which this validation of the self occurs. In this sense, his travelogue employs "Africa as a symbolic battleground to work out fundamentally American issues" (Levecq 82).

Having dismissed Africa as irredeemably lost, the narrative turns to the United States, conjuring a vision of a country that is on its way into a better future. Richburg's own story functions as an example of the country's continuous progress. To underscore his argument that Black Americans in the United States have every imaginable opportunity he presents the narrative of his life as proof and depicts his mostly idyllic childhood, his education at a prestigious university, and his professional career as a journalist of one of the nation's leading newspapers as anything but exceptional or privileged. Issues such as systemic racism and racial discrimination are touched upon only very briefly: The narrator admits "that being black means being different, alien, never quite belonging" (*Out of America* 231) and recognizes that he too experiences various forms of racism and microaggression in America. For example, he notes how he is eyed suspiciously in stores when he is not dressed

in a suit and tie, addresses the difficulties he sometimes has when hailing a taxi in New York or Washington, and explains that he is careful to take off his sunglasses when stopped by the police while driving (228-29). However, when he looks at the United States from a distance, he endorses "that nothing makes you appreciate your own country like traveling away from it [...]. I see the flaws, I curse the intolerance, I recoil from the racial and ethnic tensions. [...] But even with all that [...] I recognize that it's the only place I truly belong" (235). Although the forms of racism that Richburg briefly addresses point to the pervasive problems in American society and culture as well as to the enduring legacies of slavery and segregation, they are made to appear as mere inconveniences in comparison to the abject conditions with which the narrator sees himself confronted in Africa. Based on these contestations, he summons Black Americans, the "sons and daughters of America's soil," to abandon the search for alternative homelands and roots in Africa and instead focus their attention on the United States: "Far better that we all put our energies into making America work better, into realizing the dream of a multiracial society, than clinging to the myth that we belong anyplace else" (237). The fact that Denver, a majority White city, elected a Black mayor while Africa continues to struggle with the corrosive influence of tribalism, is proof for Richburg that "there's a chance that the old dream of a multiracial, color-blind society is slowly being realized. It had better be, because I've been there and seen the alternative" (242). The fact that African Americans are no longer barred from positions of political power is used as indisputable evidence for how much the country has progressed. Therefore, *Out of America* reveals Richburg's belief in a narrative of historical progress and discards the idea that the present is influenced by the past—a viewpoint heavily disputed by Black studies scholars such as Saidiya Hartman (see ch. IV, sec. 4.2).

In this regard, the foreword to the 2009 edition of his travel narrative is a timely addition to the original text and serves to underscore Richburg's earlier conviction. In the original text, written twelve years earlier, he already anticipated social and political progress and predicted a promising future for Black people in the United States. The election of President Obama confirmed his assumption. When *Out of America* was republished in the first year of the Obama presidency, Richburg uses the elation surrounding the election of the first Black president as an argument that further supports his assessment of the United States as a nation full of possibilities for people of color. The election of Obama underlined Richburg's faith in a nation "where even for a black man, a descendant of slaves, anything and everything was possible"

(xiv). For him a Black president is proof that "the faith [he] put in this country has been more than vindicated" (xviii). In a similar vein, he also supports his earlier assessment of Africa by enclosing a summary of current developments on the continent that functions as evidence of the persistent problems, thus lending weight to his previous observations.

The end of the narrative mirrors its beginning: As Richburg prepares for his departure, he passes his job on to a successor who, like Richburg when he first set foot in Kenya, is depicted as a young Black reporter from New York beaming with energy and anticipation. By mirroring Richburg's arrival in Kenya, the scene supports the assumption that the young reporter will follow a similar fate as the narrator and his predecessor. Tellingly, Richburg does not end his story on African ground but with him leaving the place he has come to despise. The closing scene shows the narrator on a plane taking off from Nairobi, eager to leave everything behind, and heading back to the United States—"out of Africa, home" (*Out of America* 246). Aboard the plane, looking out the window, the narrator observes how "Africa recedes further and further away into the distance, further into [his] mind" until it is merely a "dark spot on the globe" (247). The increasing physical distance between the narrator and Africa symbolizes his growing emotional detachment and indifference, which is underscored by declarations such as "I don't care anymore," "none of it affects me," "I feel no attachment to the place or the people" (247). Announcing that he feels no sympathy for the people and that he no longer cares about Africa's fate, Richburg turns his back on Africa. He reflects the same ignorance and indifference of which he had accused the West and the international media when the crisis in Somalia began to unfold. Proclaiming to feel no attachment or responsibility anymore, one is left to wonder, however, whether this may be a strategic move to incite readerly objection and urge readers to care.

While Africa dwindles into a dark spot, Richburg further demonstrates his indifference to the continent by switching the channel on the television screen to the music station when a BBC news report about Rwanda comes on. Turning one last time directly to the reader, the narrator ends his account with the following words:

> So am I a coldhearted cynic? An Africa hater? A racist, maybe, or perhaps a lost and lonely self-hating black man who has forgotten his African roots? Maybe I am, all that and more. But by an accident of my birth, I am a black man born in America, and everything I am today—my culture and attitudes,

> my sensibilities, loves, and desires—derives from that one simple and irrefutable truth. (*Out of America* 248)

The last sentence functions to affirm once more the narrator's US-American identity and to claim his place in a society that marginalizes and excludes Black Americans. Returning to the title of the travelogue, *Out of America* can therefore also be read as Richburg's endorsement that he is essentially out of—meaning 'from'—America. Richburg disputes the idea of an African heritage that informs his sense of self. Instead, like Harris, Richburg employs the African continent as a terrain upon which he strengthens his selfhood as a Black American as he decenters the pertinence of Africa and counters claims of race-based affiliations between Black people in the United States and Africa. However, whereas Harris retains a notion of international political solidarity and empathy when he departs from Africa, Richburg's experiences cause him to completely reject any kind of further engagement with Africa.

Scrutinizing narratives of travel to Africa by Black American authors, Youngs identifies a tendency of traveler-writers "to examine their own identity in relationship to either side of the Atlantic. Such trips tend either to ease a sense of fracture or to affirm a feeling of estrangement. The latter often results in an uncomfortable recognition that their authors' home really is in the United States" ("African American Travel" 119). Clearly, the above-discussed travelogues show how the writers use their texts to stress their distance from Africa and endorse the centrality of the United States for their conception of self. *Native Stranger* and *Out of America* differ greatly in style and content; one chronicling the leisurely, self-determined journey across Africa by a professional writer, the other a journalistic account of events and personal experiences rendered in a straight-forward, unpoetic manner. However, despite their differences, the texts share key concerns: Both travel narratives demystify Africa and disenchant the idea of diasporic return and the notion of Africa as a homeland. In the end, both narrators leave Africa disappointed and disillusioned. Richburg explains, "I've been here too long" (*Out of America* 242) and "I had seen too much" (221), suggesting that if one stays in Africa for a longer period of time, one inevitably sees nothing but despair. His assertion that one must discard feelings of attachment if one takes a closer look at Africa is in line with Harris's finding that if one comes too close to Africa, it loses its magic (*Native Stranger* 266). Harris argues that when relinquishing the distance and seeing Africa up close, the unfolding contradictions are

too numerous and the differences too large to be overcome. As a result, he concludes that Africa can only be embraced from a distance. Both narrators also remark that Africa imprints nightmarish images into their consciousness that haunt them in their dreams—as Harris emphasizes, the experiences leave "scars that will mark my soul and my memory for as long as memory lasts" (285). Importantly, for Harris and Richburg, Africa serves as a contrastive foil. Emphatically, they reaffirm their Americanness and deemphasize the role of Africa as a reference point for Black American subjectivity.

I want to conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of another journalistic account of Africa that can be read as a response to both *Native Stranger* and *Out of America*. This response comes from African American journalist Lynne Duke who, like Richburg, worked as a foreign correspondent for *The Washington Post*. She was stationed in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 1994 to 1999. Duke's *Mandela, Mobutu, and Me: A Newswoman's African Journey* (2003) is the record of her experiences in Africa. The fall of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, the advent of Nelson Mandela's presidency, and Mobutu Sese Seko's reign in Zaire are among the major foci of her book. Although Duke's journey can likewise be described as one of disillusionment that challenges idealized visions of return trips to the ancestral homeland, it nevertheless articulates a perception of Africa that is quite different from those of Harris and Richburg. While she shares many of the experiences of her predecessors, she arrives at different conclusions concerning the significance of the continent for her life. Importantly, her recognition that "Africa at times could be profoundly brutal and maddeningly dysfunctional" (*Mandela* 11) and the fact that the suffering she witnesses brings her to the edge of what she can bear, does not result in her condemnation or wholesale rejection of the continent and its people. Duke emphasizes her American sense of self while simultaneously affirming a cultural connection to Africa. In contrast to the unmistakably bleak conceptions and clichéd images of Africa employed in the travel narratives by Harris and Richburg, Duke's narrative takes into account the rich variety of contemporary African cultures, thus presenting an antipode to the reductionist depictions of the continent that were proliferating in the media at the time of her writing.

Duke's narrative demonstrates that she is acutely aware of her role as a journalist and her work's impact in shaping Western images of Africa. Struggling with the question of what stories should be told—those of the wars and crises she witnessed, which would perpetuate the image of the 'dark continent,' or stories of prosperity and beauty, which would bear the risk of ro-

manticizing Africa and ignoring its contemporary challenges—she opts for an approach that neither simply reiterates narratives of suffering nor glosses them over. Defying easy generalizations and undermining pessimistic and monolithic narratives of Africa, her narrative aims to present a nuanced depiction of the contemporary political and social conditions and developments of different African nations. This goal is reflected in the way Duke criticizes and counters the simplistic media characterizations of Mandela, "the messiah of the liberation movement" (*Mandela* 16), and Mobutu Sese Seko, "the venal dictator" (9). As a result, her characterizations and description are complex and multifaceted, as is her own relationship with Africa. In contrast to Harris's failed attempt to approach Africa free from preconceived images and Richburg's unwillingness to critically scrutinize his own underlying ideologies, attitudes, and assumptions, in *Mandela, Mobutu, and Me*, Duke self-reflexively examines her subject position as a Black woman and privileged Western traveler and considers the impact of her writing about African on mainstream American opinion (173).[12]

Duke seeks out stories that represent "Africa's normality and humanity," which she discovers in a small village in Namibia where she listens to the people's stories, encountering "the poetry of ordinary Africa" (*Mandela* 176). Without falling into the trap of romanticizing Africa, the narrative documents the multifarious stories of ordinary people whose voices have been silenced. The narrative thus opposes the bleak stories of Africa, while not denying the existence of suffering and pain. Duke's appreciation of ordinary African life and her acceptance of its contradictions allow her to claim her very own, personal connection to the continent. In a chapter tellingly titled "An African American Woman," the narrator asserts her connection to Africa as "a genealogic fact" that compels her to embrace the continent: "In all its splendor, its struggle, its

---

12 For example, Duke's self-awareness is reflected in the way she approaches the problem of corruption, a topic also discussed by Richburg. While Richburg suggests that this is a cultural problem when he wonders if "there is something in the nature of Africans that makes them more prone to corruption" (*Out of America* 175), Duke scrutinizes her own complicity in the cultural dynamics at work: After bribing a health examiner to give her a stamped and signed health certificate, she feels remorseful and admits, "I felt guilty. In the blink of an eye, I'd become complicit in a practice that was eating away at African society. Sure, it's not a purely African phenomenon" (*Mandela* 56). Her comments illustrate that she aligns herself with the common people who are caught in the mechanisms of corruption, unable to escape. Instead of only judging people, she holds herself responsible for participating in the system.

horror, Africa is in me. [...] I could say that the ties that once bound black people in Africa and the Americans have been severed by time and mean nothing now. Others have made that case. That is not where I stand" (245-46). In contrast to Richburg who cannot bring himself to write "African American" (227), Duke confirms her heritage and genealogical connection to Africa by calling herself an African American.

Mandela, Mobutu, and Me can be read as a counter-narrative to the accounts by Harris and Richburg. In a passage toward the end of her narrative, Duke directly refers to other Black American travelers whose experiences in Africa have caused them to reject the continent and with it their 'Africanness' altogether:

> Others, who perhaps know more of Africa, have been so repulsed by Africa's starving children, its murderous mobs, and its thieving dictators that they have decided they simply cannot claim the African part of their identity. Whole books have been written on the subject, mostly built on the false notion that Americanness and Africanness are somehow mutually exclusive, as if we have a choice. For me, it is not that complicated. My people became American because of what was done to Africa. The histories of both lands inhabit my consciousness and course through my veins. (*Mandela* 246)

Forcefully criticizing literary works about Africa such as those of her male contemporaries, who employ their travelogues and depictions of Africa to endorse their disconnection from the continent, Duke acknowledges the significance of Africa in all its different facets for her diasporic subjectivity. Her travelogue counters the predominantly negative depictions of Africa that are produced in Western media and cultural and literary productions that foreground political conflicts, ethnic wars, and corrupt governance structures. She does so, however, without evoking a mythical homeland or depicting romanticized images of Africa. Claiming Africa as part of her identity is also a political act for Duke and a way to express solidarity with Black people's struggle against racism and oppression in Africa. For this reason, she can accept a "composite identity" stemming from the "inheritance of the Middle Passage" (257). Contrary to the accounts by Harris and Richburg, Duke does not allow the disheartening stories of violence and despair to overwrite her positive and encouraging experiences, the stories full of hope, humanity, and empathy. As a result, her travel narrative represents Africa and her relationship with it in a more nuanced fashion that leaves room for envisioning a future of diasporic solidarity.

3. Searching for Home

> Home, the place you know, the place that knows you, the place you leave, the place to which you return, that place filled with memories and dreams, a place of ties and connections, that special hearth.
> —*Charlotte Williams, Sugar and Slate*

Black travel writing has traditionally been a genre used to explore personal conflicts and deeply personal questions of home, belonging, and displacement. The previous chapter demonstrated that travel abroad yields reflections on the place called 'home.' For Harris and Richburg, there is no doubt that their home is the United States, both as a material and symbolic space, to which they gladly return once their time in Africa comes to an end. In *Native Stranger* and *Out of America*, therefore, home and abroad are easily distinguished. Likewise, traditional travel accounts by White European or Western travelers conceptualize the journey in opposition to home, the point of origin. However, in many Black travel narratives, the boundaries or binary spatial divisions between home/familiar and away/foreign are fluid, often disrupting the spatial encoding of home and abroad that underpins much travel writing. Arguably, the destabilization of a sense of home that is tied to a particular place, a stable point of reference, is something that is found in a wide range of modern and postmodern travel narratives. It results from that fact that, as Thompson aptly remarks, "[w]e live, after all, in an era of increasing globalisation, in which mobility, travel and cross-cultural contact are facts of life, and an everyday reality, for many people" (*Travel Writing* 2).[13] The conception of home as a fixed, private, and safe place, as well as a shelter and refuge to which the traveling subject can always return, has not only been called into question but has been deemed illusory when considering how many present-day lives are shaped by migration, exile, dislocation, and displacement.[14] As Elizabeth Houston Jones asserts in *Spaces of Belonging* (2007), "Interlinked with

---

13 Despite the emphasis on the increasing global interconnectedness and the heightened global mobility that is said to characterize the contemporary era, it has to be acknowledged that nationalizing forces continue to persist and even increase.

14 The notion of home as stable, safe, and secure reveals specific cultural and historical assumptions and values that have long been contested, especially in feminist scholarship, which has countered positive ascriptions to home and instead conceptualized it as a site of patriarchal oppression, confinement, abuse, and violence (Blunt and Dowling 14-21).

this search for a personal space of emotional investment that can be labelled 'home' is often a desire to establish a sense of belonging in cultural or national space" (56-57) that is informed by nostalgic ideas of cultural homogeneity (58). Such stable or naturalized notions of home and belonging may only, if at all, apply to a privileged minority (56).

"Home is *both* a place/physical location *and* a set of feelings" (Blunt and Dowling 22), and therefore must be understood in literal as well as metaphorical terms. Because feelings of home and belonging are highly personalized, home is "difficult to define, let alone theorize, *precisely because it is so very specific*, so subjective and contextual" (Graulund 118). The contestation that home is elusive, complex, ambiguous, and therefore difficult to define pertains to diasporic populations in particular. For diasporic subjects, home can be a distant, unknown place such as Africa, which figures as the originary homeland in the Black cultural imagination (see ch. II, sec. 2). However, it also refers to the place that travelers leave behind, namely their country of birth and residency. Contemporary Black travel writing, like other diasporic and migrant literatures, reveals a preoccupation with questions of home and belonging. Pettinger observes that while "'[h]ome' rarely features in conventional travel writing, for its certainties (safe but boring) can usually be taken for granted" ("Introduction" xvii), it is much more difficult for Black travel writers to locate and define it. Therefore, home "is the subject of a much wider range of emotions—nostalgia, indifference, exasperation, perplexity, embarrassment" (xvii). The desire to make sense of these emotions and the longing for an understanding of where or what home is are among the prevalent concerns of many Black travel narratives, especially those focused on the journey of a postcolonial subject. As Korte underscores, "To many postcolonial travellers, then, the question of defining one's home still seems to be more urgent than for other travellers, and the search for a home may even be their primary motive for travel" (170). This certainly holds true for a number of works by British writers of Caribbean descent, such as Ferdinand Dennis, V. S. Naipaul, Caryl Phillips, and Charlotte Williams, to name but a few. A potent example is Williams's 2003 travel narrative *Sugar and Slate* that examines and negotiates the narrators varying attachment to her native Wales, her father's country of birth, Guyana, and the symbolic connection she has to Africa as a diasporic subject. In the preface to *Sugar and Slate*, Williams explains that "what began as an account of a journey became an account of a confrontation with myself and with the idea of Wales and Welshness."

The two travel narratives on which this chapter focuses—Ekow Eshun's *Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in Africa and Beyond* (2005) and Emily Raboteau's *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora* (2013)—signal already in the titles that home, or more precisely the search for home, is a central theme of the texts. For both travelers, an uneasy relationship with and estrangement from their 'home country,' Britain and the United States, respectively, incite their journeys: Eshun, a British-born journalist, author, broadcaster, and former director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, travels across his parents' native Ghana in the hope of finding an alternative home that frees him from the confinements of racism and discrimination he experiences in London. For Raboteau, a professor of creative writing, it is her biracial ancestry and the rootlessness that arises as a result of her family's history of displacement that prompt her search for a home, inciting her exploration of the idea of a Promised Land and the exodus movements throughout the African diaspora. In *Black Gold of the Sun* and *Searching for Zion* the individual journey of the narrator and the search for home are related to other people's quests, both historical and contemporary. What further characterizes the travelogues is the high degree of introspection and the focus on the travel writers' personal lives unraveling against the backdrop of the journey. Travel abroad thus encourages the narrators to rethink their previous conceptions of home and belonging.

3.1 Ekow Eshun's *Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in Africa and Beyond* (2005)

The question "Where are you from?" (1) opens *Black Gold of the Sun*.[15] On a British Airways flight from London to Accra, the question is fired at Eshun by his seatmate, a businessman from Ghana. Eshun responds with "the usual line," informing him that his parents are Ghanaian but that he was born in Britain (2). "Then you are coming home, my brother," "Akwaba," "Welcome home" (2), exclaims his seatmate. The address of welcome that is extended

15 It should be mentioned that the book was initially published with a slightly different subtitle, namely 'Searching for Home in England and Africa.' What inspired the title change from 'England and Africa' to 'Africa and Beyond' for later editions of the book is not addressed in the text and leaves room for interpretation. Read as a travel narrative that places its subject within a transnational context of Black travel and travel writing, the more capacious title of later editions seems well fitted.

to Eshun elicits notions of homecoming that are immediately countered by the narrator's evocative reflections on home and belonging that follow in the form of an internal dialogue:

> As we drained the whisky I thought of all the other ways I could have answered his question.
> Where are you from?
> I don't know.
> That's why I'm on this plane.
> That's why I'm going to Ghana.
> Because I have no home. (*Black Gold* 2)

The question, 'Where are you from?,' has followed Eshun since his childhood and it reappears throughout the narrative, retaining a sense of urgency.[16] This vexed question and Eshun's inability to respond with an adequate answer—one that encompasses the full complexity of his life—confronts the narrator with his feelings of homelessness and displacement: "I have no home" (2). As this passage shows, homelessness and the search for home in Ghana are the key themes of the travel narrative.[17] The quest motif is fittingly underscored by the highly symbolic setting in which this opening scene takes place—on the airplane in motion, suspended between continents and detached from a fixed point of reference. This setting not only evokes the key locations in Eshun's life, namely Britain and Ghana, between which the story alternates. It also affords the narrator a vantage point from which he surveys the ocean beneath him and introduces the other central topics of the

---

16 For instance, the narrator recalls a conversation he had with the mother of his schoolmate: "'And what tribe are you from, dear?' 'I live on Beverly Drive, Mrs O'Rourke.' 'Yes, dear, but where are you *really* from?'" (*Black Gold* 65-66).

17 An astonishingly similar incident is narrated in Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*: While on the plane from London to Accra, Phillips is asked where he is from by the Ghanaian businessman sitting next to him. The narrator contemplates, "*The* question. The problem question for those of us who have grown up in societies which define themselves by excluding others. Usually us. A coded question. Are you one of us? Are you one of ours? Where are you from? Where are you *really* from? [...] Does he mean, who am I? Does he mean, do I belong? I make the familiar flustered attempt to answer *the* question" (*Atlantic Sound* 98). In contrast to Eshun's very personal response to the question, Phillips's contemplation refers to a larger context and suggests that feelings of unbelonging are a consequence of the Black diaspora's history of movement and migration that is characterized by displacement and exclusion.

text. Looking out the window at the Atlantic, he imagines the paths of ships that have once crossed the sea, connecting Africa, Europe, America, and the Caribbean, thereby conjuring a Black Atlantic imagery: "It was impossible to tell where the connections began or ended. The shape of the continents themselves seemed to blur, as a result of centuries of commerce and migration, both voluntary and forced. [...] The past is not history [...]. It beats against the present like the tide" (*Black Gold* 7). In this passage, the narrative's concern with the history of the Black diaspora and the slave trade are anticipated and connected to personal explorations of the traveling and writing self, on which my analysis focuses.

This short episode placed at the very beginning of this richly layered narrative serves to frame *Black Gold of the Sun* as a quest narrative that foregrounds the narrator's preoccupation with questions of belonging and his desire to find a place he can call home. The search for home is not simply a quest for home in the material sense but involves Eshun's longing for a place where he is not made to feel like an outsider. Having grown up in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, Eshun found himself subject to pervasive racism and prejudice. "Even though my roots were in Britain it was a white country, and I'd felt like an outsider there all my life" (*Black Gold* 5), writes the narrator. He desperately hopes that "[i]n Ghana [he]'d be another face in the crowd. Anonymity meant the freedom to be yourself, not the product of someone else's prejudice" (5). The belief that Ghana will allow him to truly be who he is without the societal confinements and limited conceptions of self that are available for a Black person in Britain echoes the sentiment of earlier travelers. Many hoped to discover themselves anew in a place where their appearance would not make them outsiders. The hope of finding the freedom to be himself in Ghana points to Eshun's desire to discover who he is and who he can be without the limitations imposed on him in Britain. Thus, the narrator's forceful declaration that he wants to claim Africa as his home—"I wanted to discover the whole country. I wanted to call it home" (5)—introduces another purpose of his journey, which he recognizes only much later: That the search for "[h]ome was only part of it. [...] I was also searching for me" (128-29). In this regard, *Black Gold of the Sun* addresses the prevailing themes that characterize much Black travel writing, including the exploration of the Black mobile subject, the marginalization in the country of birth, and the (re)turn to Africa in search of an alternative homeland.

It has already been emphasized that a truism of travel writing is that it interweaves the traveler's literal journey with an interior exploration (see, for

example, Birkett and Wheeler viii). This 'inner journey' is prominently foregrounded in *Black Gold of the Sun* and highlights how travel writing "involve[s] a dimension of 'life writing' (that is, a form of autobiographical and/or biographical writing)" (Cooke 15).[18] Eshun's journey to Ghana and his search for home are inextricably intertwined with the writing of his own life story. The narrative is composed of alternating sections—one focuses on the actual journey and the other on a symbolic journey into the narrator's past. The two major narrative threads, the journey across Ghana and the story of Eshun's coming-of-age, are interwoven, making the narrative structure more complex compared with those of the previously analyzed works. In the narrative, travel does not merely figure at a thematic level and as a driving force of the story; the journey motif also functions as the organizing principle of the text. The narrative's very composition, its aesthetic, is structured as a form of travel that generates an ongoing passing between times and locations.

The narrative thread focusing on Eshun's journey develops chronologically, beginning with the narrator's flight to Accra, followed by his travels along the Atlantic coast and to Kumasi and Bolgatanga in the sub-Saharan North of Ghana, and finally ends with his return to London. The journey through Ghana follows the planned itinerary that the narrator spells out before his arrival in Accra:

> I'd spend the first two [weeks] exploring Accra, the capital. After that I'd travel west along the shoreline of Elmina, the town where Europeans first settled on African land in 1482. Then I could visit the neighbouring town of Cape Coast, Ghana's former capital, where my parents grew up. […] I'd go to Kumasi, capital of the old Asante empire, in Ghana's central region. Then I'd keep going all the way through the arid northern plains until I reached the border with Burkina Faso. (*Black Gold* 5)

Eshun travels to various locations and cultural sites that are imbued with historical significance—such as Elmina Castle, a slave camp in Bolgatanga, and the former home of Du Bois in Accra, now turned into a museum—and associated with the history of Ghana, especially the history of the slave trade.

---

18 Seealso Youngs's *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, especially chapter 7 titled "Inner Journeys." He argues that in twentieth- and twenty-first-century British travel writing, self-investigation and introspection, which are mediated through the inner journey, are responses to "modern political and cultural developments" connected to the end of formal empire and Britain's post-imperial role (103).

That the narrative is not confined to Eshun's personal journey but also involves a journey into the collective past becomes apparent in his outlining of the planned itinerary. Thus, embedded within this narrative thread are accounts of Ghanaian history, in particular the history of the trading of enslaved Africans, the "Black gold," to which the title refers. The description further signals the importance of personal and collective memory that is bound to place. As I will show, the journey unearths not only Eshun's personal memory of his childhood and young adulthood years that he has tried to forget but also stories of the Eshun family (for example, his parents' story is reimagined and retold), as well as cultural memories of the slave trade and more recent Ghanaian history. Through the braided structure of the narrative, the personal and historical are interwoven with the purpose of recovering suppressed memories and silenced stories of the past and exploring the effects of political and economic exploitation and oppression.

The autobiographical thread bears resemblance to a coming-of-age story but does not unfold in a strictly chronological fashion. Rather, the structure affords an arrangement and rearrangement of key moments and turning points in Eshun's life: his painful experiences with racism, the resulting psychological crisis with which he struggled, as well as the displacement of the Eshun family during Ghana's 1979 coup. Because Eshun's father worked as a Ghanaian diplomate, holding a post at the Ghana High Commission in London, the family temporarily resided in England but was unable to return to their home country once the previous regime in Ghana was overthrown. While the coup is only briefly addressed in the narrative, its impact and dire consequences are powerfully described as the moment when Eshun's "childhood ended" and family photo albums "go blank" (*Black Gold* 71). This event, which turned the family's temporary stay in Britain into a permanent one, substantially influenced them by transforming them first into exiles and later into immigrants. The repression of the memories of the coup, the family's detainment in London, and the narrator's experiences of racism, all of which are imbricated with feelings "of shame and anger and regret" (124), is Eshun's response to this personal trauma. His journey to Ghana, then, becomes a way of excavating the memories of his past and working through them. By integrating these painful memories into the larger story of self-discovery, travel writing evolves into a means of working through personal trauma and conflict. Together with the explorations of Ghana's past, the book maps an internal journey of coming to terms with traumatic histories, both personal and collective.

The piecing together of Eshun's life story is introduced with the following words:

> My name is Ekow Eshun. That's a story in itself.
> Ekow means 'born on a Thursday'. The Ghanaian pronunciation of it is *Eh-kor* and that would be fine if I'd grown up there instead of London where, to the ears of friends, Ehkor became Echo. Throughout my childhood I was pestered by schoolyard wags who thought it hilarious to call after me in descending volume: 'Echo, echo, echo.' It was my first lesson in duality. Who you are is determined by *where* you are. (*Black Gold* 3)

As the quote demonstrates, reflections on identity, the significance of place and social context, marginalization, and racism are central concerns of the narrative. Through Eshun's coming-of-age story, the narrative illustrates the difficulties of growing up Black in Britain during a time when the term 'Black British' had only started to be actively sought out as a category for a distinct political, cultural, or ethnic identity (see S. Hall, "Old" and "Frontlines").[19] Eshun's duality arises from simultaneously being inside and outside British society. His outsider status stems from the position ascribed to him by his predominantly White friends at school, for whom Eshun's appearance presented a source of curiosity and fascination that had to be examined and tested: "They patted my hair for springiness," "fingers pinched at my arms to see if I carried an extra layer of fat," and speculated that "[o]nly my eyes and teeth would be visible in the dark" (*Black Gold* 65). Subject to derogatory and racist verbal abuses, Eshun witnessed similar degradation in distorted representations of Blackness in popular media. By exposing the racism Eshun encountered, the narrative draws attention to the social climate in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s when the words 'Black' and 'British' appeared somewhat irreconcilable. Whiteness was a defining attribute of Britishness, and a national identity was predicated on the exclusion of those who were not perceived as British (see Gilroy, *There*).

What is referred to as "duality" in the narrative resonates strongly with the Du Boisian concept of double consciousness, which is not only implied in the above passage but also explicitly discussed in a later part of the text when Eshun visits Du Bois's former home in Ghana: "To be black in America meant always being a stranger—even in your home town" (*Black Gold* 214),

---

19 Stuart Hall describes the formation of a new Black British identity in the 2000 article "Frontlines/Backyards."

notes Eshun when reflecting on Du Bois's experiences with racism that are delineated in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Eshun aligns himself with African Americans and expresses his solidarity with their struggle for equality. In doing so, the narrative emphasizes commonalities in the experiences of Black subjects who live in societies where they are marginalized, instead of focusing on the differences that stem from disparate historical and national particularities. In trying to understand Eshun's feelings of homelessness and notions of unbelonging in a hostile society by considering the Black American experience, *Black Gold of the Sun* adopts Du Bois's double consciousness into a British context. Eshun parallels his experiences of racism with those made by Du Bois and draws on the rhetoric of American racial oppression to make sense of the lived conditions of Blackness in Britain.

In contrast to most of the other travelers of this study (with the exception of Obama), Eshun's personal story does not lead into an anonymous past of slavery because his family story is rooted in Ghana. His notions of displacement are not connected to a distant moment in history but to a comparatively recent experience of migration, the "toing and froing" (*Black Gold* 5) between London and Accra. Although Eshun's connection to Ghana is arguably more tangible than those of other Black travelers, the narrative frames his journey as a continuation of the tradition of Black diasporic travel to Africa and the search for roots and home. His journey, as well as the record thereof, is connected by way of reference to that of Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, Du Bois, and Richard Wright. This underscores the impact and formative power of earlier travelers and their literary texts on contemporary traveler-writers.

Eshun's uneasy relationship with Britain drives the narrator's search for a home. In contrast to the travel narratives that have been examined thus far, Eshun's narrative differs in its critical reflection on the narrator's country of residence. London and its people are branded as particularly hostile and racist, causing anxiety in the narrator: "The bigotries of the city weighed down on me. I saw condescension in the eyes of bank clerks and malign intent in the store detectives watching me from the end of an aisle. Lynch mobs chased me through my dreams" (*Black Gold* 4-5). The trauma inflicted by racist encounters with schoolmates as well as the distorted and degrading depictions of Blackness in popular culture, especially in television shows, culminates in the narrator's "fantasiz[ing] about taking a machine gun to the streets" (5). *Black Gold of the Sun* illustrates the workings of racism in the daily lives of Black people and problematizes Eshun's sense of unbelonging and his coming to terms with being Black in a predominantly White society, employing duality as a

recurring motif to describe the tension of being both inside and outside of British society. The effects of the endemic anti-Black racism have left psychological marks, expressed in nightmares and violent phantasies of vengeance (4-5, 175). Seeking a respite from the racism that he experiences in Britain, Eshun hopes that Ghana, as "an antidote to London" (6), could become home for him.

However, instead of an antidote to London, Ghana is described as an unwelcoming place and Eshun's position as the perpetual outsider is further manifested. Considering that Eshun had briefly lived in Ghana with his family and thus has memories of the place, which for his parents remains home even while they continuously live in London, the journey might have been an easy homecoming. However, the narrative disappoints such expectations. Eshun's arrival in Accra is marked by the absence of feelings of attachment to and familiarity with the place. The Accra he encounters is a city with modern technology that has few things in common with the images of the city he carried with him, the "mental picture of Ghana frozen in the early 1970s" (*Black Gold* 16). Ghana presents itself to Eshun as wholly transformed, a foreign and unfamiliar place, betraying his memories. The vision of Ghana that figured in his imagination as a place of the past exposes the nostalgic emotions that are often tied to the idea of home and return. But home, the narrative suggests, cannot be found in a place that is confined to the past and preserved in the imagination. The inability to return to the Ghana he remembered forces the narrator to admit that "[t]he transformation made my memories seem false. I felt like an interloper" (17). In contrast to his parents, who kept Ghana alive by cultivating Ghanaian traditions in London and who "knew where they were from" (64), Ghana is unavailable to Eshun as a site for identification and belonging. Having been born and raised in Britain, Eshun has not inherited his parents' connection to Ghana. Countering diasporic discourses of idyllic returns to an imagined homeland, the travelogue defies the possibility of an easy, unproblematic homecoming for the narrator. In this regard, *Black Gold of the Sun* accords with Avtar Brah's suggestive notion of home that is outlined in the influential book *Cartographies of Diaspora*. She contends that for diasporic people "'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'" (188).

That Eshun returns to Ghana as a stranger, a mere tourist, and a temporary visitor, is underscored by his limited ability to communicate in Fante with the people of the neighborhood where he stays. Far from being bid welcome,

people speculate about his identity, eliciting again the narrator's reflection about his sense of self: "I was an African-American tourist; Mrs Hagan's retarded grandson; a Ghanaian who'd been to Abora Kyir (England) and come back with a swelled head and a phony accent. And who was I really? Even if I'd been able to answer in Fante, what would I have said?" (*Black Gold* 26). Contrary to the belief voiced prior to his arrival that he would be just another face in the crowd, Eshun is now seen as a *Burenyi*, a White man (27, 28). His cultural background, economic standing, and his communication difficulties create a division between him and the Ghanaians. This fixates him permanently in the position of the outsider and, like so many Black travelers before him, Eshun finds himself "alone in a strange country" (28)—a feeling that chimes with how he is perceived in England. By presenting Eshun's journey to Ghana as a travel experience in an unfamiliar country and not as a 'return' to a former home, the narrative reveals the author's skepticism toward an ideology of return.

Ghana presents itself to the narrator as a contradictory and illegible place that he attempts to decipher and understand. In the course of Eshun's journey across the country, the narrator's effort to make sense of Ghana and understand his relationship to his parents' home is reflected both in his exploration of the physical landscape and his attempt to familiarize himself with Ghanaian history. Accordingly, by visiting various places—the city of Accra, the infamous Elmina Castle with its Door of No Return, a slave camp in the North of Ghana—and studying the guidebook that he carries with him, Eshun acquires new knowledge about Ghana's slave past and its more recent history. The interdependence of history, narrative, place, and experience is particularly palpable in Eshun's account of his visit to Elmina Castle and the slave dungeon, which differs decisively from the visits to Gorée Island recounted, for example, by Harris and Richburg. Whereas Harris and Richburg present accounts of their visits to the slave forts in a detached manner, for Eshun this experience is highly emotional as he attempts to reimagine the experience of the captives: "Alone in the cell I felt the air press upon me like a physical weight. I pictured what it was like for a slave to be herded into the courtyard after spending months in the dungeon" (*Black Gold* 108). Leaving the dungeon, "gulping air, until the weight of the dungeon had left [his] shoulders" (109), Eshun has to recover from this experience that affects him on a corporeal level. The narrator evokes the conditions of the Middle Passage by rewriting a short, intimate account of cruelties that he imagined the captives must have suffered as they were loaded onto the slave ships, thereby retracing their paths both textually and metaphorically, as well as by actually stepping through the

Door of No Return "as the slaves had done, to the shoreline and the waves" (110). In this sense, the narrator physically and imaginatively travels to the place that marks the beginning of Black diasporic history. Although Eshun's personal history does not lead into the anonymous history of enslavement and dispossession, like that of many other Black travelers, his feelings of displacement and marginalization, which result from his experiences as a Black man in a society informed by histories of colonization, are aligned with those of post-slavery subjects.

Eshun discovers that Ghana is a place with a complex and complicated history that does not yield easy interpretations. Moreover, he states, "Every time I thought I had Ghana figured out I discovered another contradiction" (*Black Gold* 187). For instance, learning that domestic slavery had existed in Africa before the arrival of Europeans and that Africans were also complicit in the transatlantic slave trade, his certainties are thrown into question: "Before going to Ghana, I was sure the story of the slave trade was one of white brutality and African victimhood" (140). However, the new knowledge he acquires undermines the simplistic narrative. The feelings of confusion, alienation, and disorientation culminate when Eshun discovers that his ancestor participated in the slave trade. Specifically, he learns that his mother's family line is connected to the slave trade because his great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, Joseph Degraft, a White man from Holland, came to Ghana in the mid-eighteenth century to trade enslaved Africans (132-133). The realization that his ancestors were complicit in the slave trade shakes the foundation of his beliefs: "You imagine that the events of history take place in some nebulous 'other time' unrelated to your own life. Yet I feel the consequences of Joseph's actions every day in Britain. It was partly because of the pervasiveness of racism there that I'd come to Ghana—only to find my ancestor had collaborated in establishing its tenets" (141). The legacies of this past are felt by the narrator in contemporary Britain.[20] The text illuminates how individual and collective pasts are inextricably linked and explores the legacies of the

20 The pervasiveness of slavery's remnants is described by Eshun as follows: "It is present in galleries such as Tate Britain and in Bristol's Theatre Royal, both of which were built from Caribbean sugar money. It is remembered in the streets of Liverpool named after eighteenth-century plantation aristocrats, such as Earle Street, Cunliffe Street and Bold Street. And it lives in the collective memory of the black people who have arrived in Britain since the mass immigrations of the 1950s" (*Black Gold* 147).

slave past on Eshun's life. The weight and effects of the new insights are strikingly manifested in his bodily reaction to the information as a lump under his eyelid appears. Eshun interprets this partial loss of vision as his body's "protest at the dualities [he]'d found in Ghana" (147).

In an effort to come to terms with, if not resolve, the contradictions and "dualities" that inform Eshun's sense of self and the way he sees Ghana, the narrator turns to the stories and perspectives of other transnational travelers, both historical and contemporary, including, for instance, the stories of his parents, well-known Black intellectuals and writers, an English-educated Ghanaian lawyer of the twentieth century, and a Ghanaian-born Dutch Christian minister. These shorter narratives are interspersed throughout the book and are not limited to the events of Eshun's life but venture beyond the immediate experience of the narrator. Some of the stories are pieces drawn together from historical records and Eshun's imagination. While the stories are set apart by time and space and may seem unconnected at first, they are linked by the themes they share, which are experiences of leaving and returning home, the negotiation of different cultures, the meaning of Blackness, marginalization, exile, and dislocation. In all of these stories, the theme of the journey serves as the element that interlinks them. The stories function in the narrative as a supplement to Eshun's own quest as they parallel, echo, undermine, and contradict his journey, as I will show in the following.

One such story is that of William Essuman-Gwira Sekyi, a nationalist lawyer, politician, and writer, about whom Eshun first learned from his grandfather. Born in Ghana in 1892, Sekyi attended university in England and returned to Ghana in 1915 to become a lawyer. The short, three-page account of Sekyi's life presented by the narrator goes beyond a mere recital of biographical information. In fact, the story of Sekyi is reimagined in *Black Gold of the Sun* not so much, as I argue, for the purpose of preserving and creating a historical record of a man whose astonishing life, political career, and literary works are relatively unknown. Rather, the story of Sekyi—the Ghanaian with the "[a]nglicized name of William Sackey" who "wore a high collar and frock coat" (*Black Gold* 21) but who came to reject the name William Sackey and refrained from speaking English in public after his experiences in London (23)—serves as a means for the narrator to reflect upon issues of identity and notions of belonging. Eshun imposes his own feelings onto the character of Sekyi and interprets and rewrites his story. Switching from the first-person narration of his travel account to third-person narration, the narrator envisions Sekyi's excitement and anticipation when first traveling to

London: "He imagined his journey as a royal progress, the land itself bowing in his presence" (22). Later, Sekyi became aware of the racist attitudes people in England displayed toward him, and Eshun imagines that "with rising horror Sekyi was also realizing how England saw him" (22). After Sekyi's return to Ghana, he discarded what connected him to England, his Anglicized name, the English language, and dress. However, the narrator notes that for Sekyi, "embracing Africa didn't necessarily mean rejecting the West. At home Sekyi could be found with a cigar and a glass of wine listening to Wagner on his phonograph. His critics were perplexed by this apparent dichotomy" (24). Apparently, this "dichotomy" was only perceived by others. For Eshun, the historical figure serves as a contrastive foil. While having similar experiences of racism in London, in contrast to Eshun, Sekyi did not seem to be at odds with his duality and the contradictions he supposedly embodied. Instead of presenting an "example of a tragic and unresolved conflict" (24), as his critics proclaimed, the narrative suggests that Sekyi himself embraced an identity free from rigid understandings of cultural and national categories. The retelling of this story opens up a possibility for the narrator to seize an alternative perspective on the politics of identity. He concludes, "Identity, [Sekyi] believed, was fluid not fixed, and I can see his shadow on men such as my grandfather and my cousin Kobby, both of whom understand Ghana to be a place of shifting possibilities" (24).

Employing a similar narrative strategy to examine ideas of home, homelessness, and homecoming, the narrative recounts the story of Jacobus Capitein, a Ghanaian boy who was abducted by slave traders at the age of eight in 1725 and later adopted by a Dutch official of the West India Company who took him to Holland. Capitein received a degree in theology and gained public attention when he published a thesis that argued in defense of slavery. Eventually he, too, returned to Ghana as the vicar of Elmina Castle where he, ostracized by the European workers at the castle and crestfallen by the disinterest of the local people, accumulated debt that led him to participate in the slave trade. Capitein died in 1747 and the narrator speculates that he committed suicide (*Black Gold* 110-13). Capitein's story is placed in the narrative immediately after Eshun has stepped through the Door of No Return of Elmina Castle, a site that epitomizes the finality of leaving home. At the same time, the Door of No Return has developed into an important site of pilgrimage for people from the African diaspora who come to the place to emphasize indeed the possibility of return and, in this sense, to perform a symbolic homecoming. The brief account of Capitein's life evokes

similarities to Eshun's own: Both men lived in Ghana for only a short period of time; according to the narrator, Capitein "insisted he had no memory of his early childhood" (112) and similarly, Eshun concedes at a different point in the narrative, "I used to say I couldn't remember my childhood. It was a surprisingly convincing lie. I even believed it myself" (124). The question that arises from both Eshun's and Capitein's stories is why they returned to Ghana. Eshun connects Capitein's story to his own when he states the following:

> Leaning beside the Door of No Return, the memory of Capitein prompted me to ask why *I'd* returned to Ghana. If I was looking for somewhere I belonged, why come to a country where I'd lived for only a few years as a kid? Perhaps because the truth of a place doesn't lie in the minutiae of childhood so much as in understanding the hold that the past maintains over the present. *Going* home is easy. The hard part is what happens after you arrive. (117)

Interweaving yet another memory into his meditations on home and return, Eshun remembers how he paid the former home of his family in Kingsbury a visit after years of absence. He did not recognize much of what had once been his home, and his visit did not stir his emotions, causing Eshun to suggest that "the act of departure affects the nature of the place you leave behind. Between leaving and coming back, you change. And because you don't stay the same, neither does the place to which you return" (114). Through the example of Capitein's return to Ghana as a stranger who was met with hostility from both the local Africans and Europeans, and Eshun's visit to the Door of No Return and his unsentimental recognition that home and the self continuously transform so that one is never able to return to the same place, the narrative endorses what has already been anticipated at the very beginning—that return to a place fixated in the past and in the imagination is impossible.

The precarious consequences of holding on to the idea of an idealized place that is home, are made tangible by the incorporation of another story of diasporic return. Richard Wright's travelogue *Black Power* appears as an intertext that bears similarities to Eshun's narrative in some respects. Eshun parallels his own journey to Ghana and his motivation to that of Wright when he notes, "The search for a place beyond discrimination led Wright to Ghana. I formed the same goal the morning I woke up and found I'd shot myself dead in a dream" (*Black Gold* 176). The narrator endorses that he, like Wright, suffered from "spiritual exhaustion" (174) due to the racism they both experienced in their home countries. Moreover, Eshun is empathetic to Wright's

portrayal of his Ghanaian journey, which is characterized by disillusionment and disappointment. Eshun interprets Wright's disillusionment with Ghana and his disappointed hopes in the nation as a place where he could belong as the reason for Wright's death, which occurred seven years after his journey. He reads Wright's death from heart failure as a metaphor for a broken heart, assuming that "[t]he Gold Coast was not the idyll he'd imagined, and perhaps on returning to Paris he abandoned any hope of paradise. [...] Stripped of hope after returning from Ghana, did his heart give out having endured all it could bear?" (174-75). The insertion of Wright's story, as well as Eshun's interpretation of it, serves as a warning for the narrator not to give in to despair as his own journey to Ghana has turned out differently than he had hoped.

By recounting and rewriting the stories of other Black travelers such as Sekyi, Capitein, and Wright, the narrative frames Eshun's travel story and his feelings of homelessness, unbelonging, and exclusion as characteristics of the condition of Black diasporic subjects. Moreover, the narrative reveals the complex experiences of transnational mobile subjects with diverse cultural affiliations. Eshun traces the unexpected links between people across different centuries and locations and carves out how experiences that have been engendered by a history of slavery and its aftermath are connected. The narrator claims these stories and imposes his experiences onto the historical figures, trying to reimagine what they have felt, with the purpose of understanding his own quest. In this way, Eshun places his journey within the larger context of the diasporic search for home and identity when he states,

> By coming to Ghana I'd hoped to find something of myself that was lost. How was I different from Capitein or Richard Wright or any of the other travellers who arrived seeking certainties only to discover more questions? Instead of a singular place I'd discovered a country making and remaking itself under the gaze of its elective gods. (*Black Gold* 200)

Eshun's journey is placed within a tradition of Black diasporic travel and travel writing. This is further underscored by the references to African American writers and intellectuals that permeate Eshun's travel narrative. These references also function to inscribe Eshun in a community of transnational Black travelers who have spent time in Africa, connecting his journey to those of Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, Du Bois, and Wright. These travelers and writers examined their relationship to the continent intellectually, and they are counted among the preeminent authors of African American autobiographies dealing with racial (in)justice and the formation and affirmation of the sub-

ject amidst dehumanization. Displaying the author's intimate knowledge of what can be described as African American literary, rhetorical, and intellectual traditions, *Black Gold of the Sun* forges thematic and narrative continuities with the travel narratives of said authors, most obviously through references to and engagement with the intellectuals and writers Du Bois and Wright, and also through his exploration of the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and their effects on contemporary lives.

These transatlantic linkages reveal the continuities between Black travel writers from US-American and British backgrounds and show that transnational and diasporic influences may be equally—if not more—important to their writing. Eshun's travel narrative engages with distinct national discourses of racism and marginalization, while simultaneously reaching far beyond the British national context for its thematic and literary inspiration. It comes as no surprise, then, that *Black Gold of the Sun* complies with many of the characteristics that Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger ascribes to contemporary US-American diasporic return narratives. She expounds that these return narratives

> are both spatial and temporal journeys. In all of them, narrating return to the country of origin involves narrating a return to the past and to the impact of historical events that caused exile, migration, and a diasporic consciousness marked by exclusion here and there, as well as by the often conflictive relationship between the receiving country and the country left behind. [...] Their accounts dramatize the desire to find a lost home as well as the realization that return is a painful encounter with the memories of the living and the dead, and a failed attempt at the reconstruction of wholeness and coherence. (8-9)

Eshun's journey to Ghana is accompanied by his textual travel, a revelatory introspective process, into his own past and a way of understanding and working through the painful memories he had buried. This also entails an exploration of the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its consequences on the contemporary lives of diasporic people.

Eshun recognizes the impossibility of reclaiming Ghana as home and admits that "I'd crossed the whole of Ghana and I still couldn't say where I was from" (*Black Gold* 205). Having reached the end of his journey, and with this the end of his narrative, Eshun returns to London with a renewed attention to the place. His experiences in Ghana have ostensibly refigured his view of Britain. Whereas Britain had initially been associated with racism, hostility, and his

sense of unbelonging, at the end of the narrative, Eshun foregrounds a modified image of Britain, acknowledging the transformations that have taken place in British culture and society. He attests that over the past decades, Britain had changed to become "more open and less fearful of change. Each person of colour living there had helped to create that shift. By doing nothing more nor less than being ourselves each of us had altered the nature of Britain" (197). Tentatively, Eshun formulates a new sense of belonging that is tied to the place where he spent most of his life. As he returns to his apartment in London, he thinks about the slave camp he visited in Bolgatanga, a place that for Eshun encapsulates both a history of abject terror and dehumanization as well as a history of resistance, dignity, and perseverance:[21]

> In their sudden emptiness, the streets made me think of the slave camp in Bolgatanga. What did it take to survive in a place like that? Maybe nothing more than ordinary will. The same spirit that enabled the descendants of slaves to build a future for themselves in the New World. In both cases the refusal to believe you were anything less than human. (225)

In this passage, an associative connection between the slave camp in Bolgatanga and the streets of London is established. Britain can be read as the "New World" in which Eshun finds himself, a seemingly unwelcome, foreign, and hostile place. Yet, like the descendants of enslaved and displaced Africans who built a future for themselves in the West, forging their roots into the foreign ground to make the place their home, Eshun, it is suggested, will also survive in Britain as long as he defies the denial of his humanity. Eshun understands that he has to claim Britain and make it his home to further the transformation of the country that people of color have initiated.[22] In this sense, Eshun inscribes himself in the history of the Black diaspora and its ongoing struggle against oppression, marginalization, and dehumanization.

---

21 Eshun notes that "[l]ike the dungeons of Elmina castle, this camp was a factory for the braking of the soul. Yet the evidence of resistance was scratched into its rocks. Each time they sang the slaves asserted their freedom. Every time they shared food they held on to their humanity" (*Black Gold* 209).

22 This idea is also articulated in the narrative through the figure of Eshun's brother Kodwo who tells him: "I'm not interested in trying to reclaim some idea of the past. Africa's not this idyllic place. It's a mistake to assume that you can go back to some kind of motherland. That doesn't exist. The only thing is to *create a place of your own where you feel at home*" (*Black Gold* 220; emphasis added).

3.2 Emily Raboteau's *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora* (2013)

> And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.
>
> —*The Bible, Exodus*

> Exodus, the Promised Land, and Canaan were inextricably linked in the slaves' minds with the idea of freedom. Canaan referred not only to the condition of freedom but also to the territory of freedom—the North or Canada.
>
> —*Albert J. Raboteau, "African-Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel"*

Emily Raboteau's travelogue *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora* records the writer's multiple journeys to various locations around the globe. These decade-long travels represent Raboteau's quest to find a place to belong. Like Eshun's journey to Ghana in *Black Gold of the Sun*, Raboteau's extensive travels are propelled by her estrangement and alienation from her native country. As the daughter of a White mother and an African American professor of religious history, Albert J. Raboteau, whose work on slave religion noticeably influences Raboteau's writing, she feels a distance from the United States—a nation that remains strictly divided along racial lines (*Searching* 6). At the center of *Searching for Zion*, therefore, is the exploration of the meaning of home. The narrator's journey as well as her narrative testify to the prevailing longing for a home free from discrimination, which pervades much of Black travel writing. That the concept of home is difficult to grasp is anticipated by the epigraph that frames the travelogue: "you don't have a home until you leave it…" Taken from James Baldwin's landmark text *Giovanni's Room* (1956), this quote speaks to the conundrum and elusiveness of home while simultaneously invoking notions of exile. Examining the desire for a place to belong and contemplating the nature of home, the travel narrative ventures beyond Raboteau's personal quest and scrutinizes diasporic people's attempts at finding and creating a home for themselves. In particular, it connects the narrator's search with the Black diaspora's historical search for the Promised Land.

The Black diaspora's desire for a homeland is expressed in the faith in a mythical Zion, the Promised Land, which has long played a central role in the Black imagination. As the title announces, *Searching for Zion* explores the idea of Zion, tracing it back to its emergence in the era of slavery when Black Christians discovered hope and meaning in the story of Exodus. Exodus became an allegory for the displacement of African-descended people in the diaspora and Zion became the symbolic homeland, a metaphor for liberation and freedom. Thus, Raboteau's travel narrative frames her journeys and quest for home as part of a long tradition of a Black diasporic longing for home. Exploring her own feelings of homelessness and displacement in relation to her African American heritage, Raboteau is preoccupied with the following questions: Is Zion a physical place and, if so, where is it located? Have those who left their home nation and created places for themselves in foreign countries found the Zion they desired and dreamed of? What happens after their arrival in the Promised Land? As my analysis illustrates, *Searching for Zion* critically scrutinizes the Black diaspora's vision of a Promised Land as well as Raboteau's own. It examines the underlying ideologies that have led people to claim territory and establish communities far from their native countries and interrogates them on the terms and costs of belonging. The book, I argue, draws attention to the conflicting impulses that inform many Black travel narratives, that is, the persistent yearning for an elsewhere—a better place—and the realization that this place is not just there to be recovered but has to be made.

Structured along the narrator's multiple travel destinations, the travel narrative is split into five parts, with each focusing on a specific locale, namely Israel, Jamaica, Ethiopia, Ghana, and the Black Belt of the American South, and reflects the narrative's coverage of an expansive geographical and thematic terrain. Against the backdrop of Raboteau's journeys and the visits she pays to various Black communities in each locale, the narrative contextualizes peoples' past and contemporary attempts to establish their home in the Promised Land with historical writing. Raboteau's travels and her writing trace the paths of people who claim to have returned to their homeland, the mythical Zion; among them are two groups of Black Jews in Israel, Rastafarians in Ethiopia, and African American expatriates in Ghana. Foregrounding different forms of dispersal, displacement, and dispossession that characterize Black diasporic communities around the world, the narrative presents a collection of intimate portraits of people and communities. Their perspectives on home and belonging supplement Raboteau's meditations on the questions

of home, exile, and the mysteries surrounding return to an ancestral homeland that she tries to unravel. Combining personal narration, memoir writing, anthropological observations, cultural criticism, and historical writing, *Searching for Zion* captures an array of personal stories of people in various locales who reinvented themselves as they created new homes for themselves. The polyphony of voices and perspectives that the narrative assembles accounts for the diverse and intricate experiences of mobility and placemaking of Black diasporic communities.

The narrator's actual and literary journey is inscribed in the century-long tradition of traveling in search for a Promised Land and is linked to the journeys of other travelers both historical and contemporary. For example, the narrator aligns her journey with those of the people she visits, noting that "[i]t wasn't unlike the quests that had Ethiopian Jews and African Hebrew Israelites making their exoduses to Israel, and Rastas trying to get 'home' to Africa" (*Searching* 67). The boldness of those who sought to alter their realities and to find a new home in a foreign place provides inspiration for Raboteau's quest. By providing historical sketches of her Zion-seeking predecessors and Black emigrationists (such as Paul Cuffee and Martin Delany) and by incorporating intertextual references to other narratives of travel to Africa (for example, Obama's *Dreams from My Father* and Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*), the narrative stresses that Raboteau's quest is not singular but exemplary for Black diasporic subjects' search for a place to belong.

Both Raboteau's journey and her travel narrative begin at Newark Airport, where she is about to board a plane to Jerusalem to visit her childhood friend. But instead of opening the narrative with an image of mobility and of the traveling subject in motion, *Searching for Zion* relates how Raboteau is stopped and vigorously questioned by the security personnel of El Al Airlines who misidentify her as Arab. Similar to the opening scene in *Black Gold of the Sun* where the narrator is confronted with the loathed question 'Where are you from?,' with which he has persistently struggled, Raboteau is confronted with the insulting and offensive question, "What are you?" (*Searching* 3). Raboteau, too, relates that this question has followed her all her life. She notes, "I was prepared for the initial question, 'What are you?,' which I've been asked my entire life, and, though it chafed me, I knew the canned answer that would satisfy. 'I look the way I do because my mother is white and my father is black'" (3). This time, however, the reply she has prepared does not satisfy the security guards. The ensuing dialogue between them and Raboteau, the reiteration of the question of what her origins are, and finally her irritated answer "[a]

sperm and an egg" (5) are rendered as a tragic yet comic scene. As a result of her resistance to provide easy answers to her interrogators, she is eventually taken to the basement and strip-searched.

On one side, the incident points to the discriminatory practices of racial profiling and the humiliating procedures of airport security that circumscribe Black mobility. On the other side, it draws attention to the narrator's apparent indeterminate status as a biracial, diasporic subject, whose body is perceived as illegible and threatening by the security personnel. The narrator contends, "There was no place for me inside their rhetoric. I didn't have the right vocabulary. I didn't have the right pedigree. My mixed race had made me a perpetual unanswered question. The Atlantic slave trade had made me a mongrel and a threat" (*Searching* 5). The narrative represents Raboteau as a mobile diasporic subject, foregrounding "her racial ambiguity and her inability to make herself understood—her linguistic and linguistically constituted position" (Stamant 125). The detainment and inspection of the narrator's naked body by the security force represents an attempt to classify, contain, and fix her identity (127). Right from the beginning, the narrative centers on Raboteau's feelings of unbelonging, homelessness, and alienation that result from the collective displacement of people caused by the transatlantic slave trade. Her distinct sense of unbelonging is further underscored by the security staff's disbelief that she is an American citizen. Naked, vulnerable, and fully exposed, the narrator reveals that the security personnel's inquisition "shoved my face into my own rootlessness," which is a consequence of growing up "half black" and "half white in a nation divided along racial lines" (*Searching* 6). As a self-identified (biracial) African American whose outer appearance does not fit in the binary racial categories, she feels disconnected from the United States, so much so that she does not openly identify as an American, but as a New Yorker instead (21).

The narrative evokes the classic scripts of Black identity by, for example, drawing on the well-known literary trope of the "tragic mulatto/a," a mixed-race character who suffers under their racial ambiguity and whose life comes to a tragic end, that evolved in nineteenth-century American literature (see Sollors 220-45). Although the narrator rejects this role, she struggles against it nevertheless.[23] Moreover, through intertextual references to Ralph Ellison's

23 Raboteau writes that "I didn't think of myself as the 'tragic mulatto,' straight out of central casting. The role was an embarrassing cliché from a dusty, bygone era, but I struggled against it all the same" (*Searching* 69).

acclaimed *Invisible Man* (1952), the narrative presents a gendered variation of the trope of the invisible Black subject when the narrator writes, "I was an invisible woman" (*Searching* 19). Adopting the metaphor of invisibility, Raboteau highlights the misrecognition of Black subjects and their marginalization in the dominant society. Simultaneously, her account of being racially profiled at the airport underscores the hypervisibility of the Black body that is criminalized and perceived as a suspect and potential threat in White or racialized spaces.[24] The incident at the airport, where the narrator is misidentified, temporarily detained, and immobilized, also foregrounds "how her subject position is frequently defined by external forces" and demonstrates "that this is not an uncommon situation" for Black subjects (Stamant 126). However, Raboteau's narrative shows how she struggles against the imposition of identity categories and racial stereotypes and challenges attempts that try to label and fix her in place.

Connecting her alienation to the condition of African-descended people in America and the legacies of slavery, she expounds, "I inherited my sense of displacement from my father. It had something to do with the legacy of our slave past. [...] [T]he general Kunta Kinte rap of the uprooted" (*Searching* 6). Gesturing to Haley's triumphal historical journey and discovery of his ancestor, Raboteau frames her own journey as part of the Black diasporic (literary) tradition of the quest for identity and home. Her sense of displacement and homelessness is both personal and historical; it is the consequence of her father's experience of losing home and it is connected to histories of forced and involuntary movement, migration, and dislocation of African-descended people. In particular, her paternal family line is tied to the history of slavery as well as to the history of migration within the United States. The murder of Raboteau's grandfather by a White man in 1943 caused her grandmother to abandon the family home in Mississippi and flee with her children to the North, the Promised Land, where they hoped to find refuge from the racism and violence of the South. This forced migration greatly impacted her father, who bequeathed a history of loss, displacement, and exile to his daughter (6). The displacement and homelessness experienced by the Raboteau family is

24 For illuminating studies on invisibility/hypervisibility and Blackness, see, for example, Linda Martín Alcoff's *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (2006), Lena Hill's *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition* (2014), and Françoise Král's *Social Invisibility and Diasporas in Anglophone Literature and Culture: The Fractal Gaze* (2014).

a consequence of "the psychic trauma of racism throughout American history—the 'emotional toll' along with its financial, social, and geographic consequences" (Stamant 135). As *Searching for Zion* demonstrates, it is this trauma that sustains the persistent yearning for a homeland free from oppression and discrimination. In an evocative passage, which is rendered in the latter part of the narrative when Raboteau visits a slave fort in Ghana, the narrator elucidates the origins of the trauma that incites the Black diaspora's longing for an elsewhere:

> You passed through it [the door of the slave dungeon] and onto a ship for Suriname or Curaçao, or through similar doorways for Cuba or Jamaica, Savanna or New Orleans. You passed through it, lost everything, and became something else. [...] You were a slave. Your children inherited your condition. You lost your children. You lost your gods, as you had known them. You slaved. You suffered, like Christ, the new God you learned of. You learned of the Hebrew slaves of old. In the field, you sang about Moses and Pharaoh. You built a church, different from your masters'. You prayed for freedom. You wondered about the Promised Land, where the place might be. (*Searching* 227)

The passage powerfully narrates the experience of enslavement: the dislocation from Africa and the ensuing transformation from people into enslaved subjects who passed their status on to their children together with the longing for and belief in a Promised Land. Rooted in the historical displacement from Africa and the trauma of slavery, the search for a Promised Land persists as Black diasporic people continue to experience oppression, exclusion, and discrimination. Having inherited the histories and experiences of unbelonging, the narrator's body figures as a site that contains the displacement caused by slavery (Stamant 126).

Raboteau's sense of homelessness becomes even more pronounced during her journey to Jerusalem, where she reconnects with her childhood friend Tamar, a Jewish American woman who has left the United States and claimed her birthright to move to Israel. The narrator's feelings of displacement and unbelonging stand in contrast to the apparent ease with which Tamar has settled into Jerusalem. Envying her friend who has found a home in a country that welcomed her, the narrator remarks, "While I continued to feel unsettled, Tamar now had a divine Promised Land, a place to belong, and a people who embraced her. [...] [S]he was in Zion" (*Searching* 13). Driven by her friend's migration to the Promised Land, Raboteau begins her own search for Zion.

Within the course of her journey, she explores different notions of home—material and spiritual. Noting how home materializes into a geographical place for Jews and is connected to the northern states of the US, Canada, and Africa in the Black cultural imagination, she also points to the spiritual home invoked in the songs sung by enslaved people, in the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., and in the Reggae music of Bob Marley. While her personal experience has proven the assertion wrong that Zion is located in the North, she wonders what has happened to all those who left their native countries for the Promised Land. In reference to early Black freedom seekers, she asks what happened "once they had reached the North, realized its shortcoming, rubbed their eyes, and asked each other, 'Where de milk an' honey at? An' de streets all paved wit gold?" (13). And what happens, she wonders, if the Promised Land does not live up to the dreams of the diasporic returnees?

To find answers to her questions, Raboteau embarks on a journey that leads her from New York to Israel, Jamaica, Ethiopia, and Ghana to speak with Black communities about their visions of Zion. The journeys to different countries reveal the narrator's efforts to arrive at a better understanding of her own as well as of others' experiences of displacement. Scrutinizing the efforts of Black communities to create a home in a foreign land, the narrative reflects her criticism of the idea of return and the way that this effort may lead to exclusion, separation, and intolerance. For instance, Raboteau visits Ethiopian Jews, the Beta Israelites, who immigrated to Israel under the Right of Return, in an Absorption Center in the city of Haifa. In the cramped and crowded space of the temporary housing arrangements, the newly arrived Beta Israelites receive lessons in Orthodox Judaism so as to facilitate their integration into Israeli society and obtain Israeli citizenship. Forced to leave their former cultural and religious identities behind, the narrative highlights how their right to belong is predicated on assimilation. The location and the center resonate with feelings of separation, exclusion, disorientation, and disillusionment that present a stark contrast to the idea of Zion that the migrants must have envisioned prior to their departure from Ethiopia. Highlighting the elusive nature of Zion, the narrator remarks, "'The Promised Land.' It seems always out of reach, somewhere on the other side of the planet" (*Searching* 33).

Moving from one disheartened attempt to find the Promised Land to the next, Raboteau registers a similar sense of placelessness and exclusion when she visits the desert settlement of the Black Hebrew Israelites, an Afrocentrist community of Black Americans who created a home and spiritual oasis in the Negev desert. Like the Beta Israelites in the Absorption Center, the

community exists at the fringes of society. Believing to have returned to the homeland of their biblical ancestors, they understand themselves to be original Jews, though they are not perceived as such by Israeli society. The narrator approaches the Hebrew Israelites with skepticism, doubting their claims that they live free from social and medical ills—including diabetes, cancer, and depression—that characterize the life in Babylon from which they fled (*Searching* 50-51). As the narrator remarks, "Where the Beta Israel represent the bitterness, disorientation, and disillusionment of Zionism's dream deferred, members of the African Hebrew Israelite community believe, or are indoctrinated to believe, that they have fully arrived in Canaan" (52). However, from Raboteau's perspective, the settlement looks nothing like home; a shantytown settlement in the desert near a nuclear reactor, where the state of Israel tolerates them but does not extend the rights of citizenship to them, they have settled in a hostile and unwelcoming space. The narrative points to the limitations of creating a viable diasporic community and incisively illustrates the underlying difficulties and problems of such a community, which rests on separation and exclusion.

Tracing the routes of Rastafarians from Jamaica to Ethiopia, Raboteau visits Jamaica Town, a settlement created by Jamaican transplants in Shashemene, south of the nation's capital Addis Ababa. Haile Selassie, the controversial Emperor of Ethiopia, had once issued a repatriation invitation to Black people of the West and offered them land; many devoted Rastas accepted. The narrator's personal observations and encounters in Jamaica Town are interspersed with an examination of the centrality of Ethiopia in the Black cultural imagination and diasporic engagement with the nation. The expatriate Rastafarians built a community there, worshipping their leader Selassie. This community is mostly separated from the Ethiopians. And while the Rastas understand their repatriation to Ethiopia as a return of the Ethiopian diaspora to their African homeland, Ethiopians, on the other side, view them as privileged and well-situated migrants who take away their land. Accordingly, the place is described as dispiriting: "The relentless rain combined with the obvious poverty made this Zion appear despairing." Her observations leave the narrator musing, "*This* was the Promised Land the Rastas dreamed of?" (*Searching* 118). Shashemene is represented as a divided space with comparatively well-situated Jamaican Rastas who dwell there seemingly without a sense of purpose. They do not appear to be integrated in the community, nor do they help to develop the country, as the narrator learns from an Ethiopian schoolteacher (170-71), for whom the Rastas rep-

resent “an invading poison,” claiming land they do not own (172). Separated from the Ethiopians who live there, Jamaican migrants are seen as intruders. Raboteau draws connections between the Rastas’ appropriative claim to the place and another seeker, Rita Marley, whom she meets later during her trip to Ghana. The widow of Bob Marley thinks of herself as “a true African child” (236) and therefore feels entitled to settle anywhere in Africa. According to the narrator, such forms of appropriation resonate with British colonialists speaking of the Gold Coast, with pioneers speaking of the American West, or with right-wing Israelis speaking of Palestine (236). Raboteau’s investigation of the community of Rastas in Ethiopia illuminates that when the newcomers ‘return’ to the Promised Land, they fail to take into consideration the people who already live there. By settling on land that does not belong to them and refusing to integrate with the Ethiopian people, they are unable to create the foundations necessary for unity. Notably, the narrative reflects a critical stance toward return, contemplates questions of privilege, and observes how the creation of home in an imagined Zion is a practice that includes placemaking and dispossession.

Throughout her journey, she finds that Zion is neither a nation, a geographical locale, nor a religion or ideology. Wherever she travels, the returnees and seekers who have supposedly reached their Zion are imbued with a persistent yearning and confronted with questions of belonging—who belongs to which place or community and who has the right to return? Still, Raboteau continues her exploration of the Black diasporic communities who see Africa as a spiritual home, a place to which they are destined to return. Aware of the difficulties inherent in her endeavor to find the Promised Land, she wonders, “How many times had people tried to find Zion in Africa and failed? I was almost afraid to look back in black history and count” (*Searching* 145). Yet, she does look back into history, considers the motivations of Black emigrationists, and insists on highlighting the frequently failed attempts to return, the disappointed hopes, and the unrealized dreams of diasporic seekers. Raboteau’s narrative thus reflects both the desire to find the Promised Land as well as the knowledge that it may not be found in Africa or any other geographical or material location. Instead, she discovers that “Zion is within” (291)—a spiritual and psychic realm.

When Eshun travels to Ghana, he initially has the hope of finding a home and a place where he feels like he belongs; however, Raboteau’s journey to Ghana—her “vexed pilgrimage” (*Searching* 208)—is not framed as a homecoming or return. Visiting Elmina and the slave dungeon, she does not feel

overly emotional and she cannot cry because the history of slavery in this place remains abstract. Without the names of the captives or marks that were left, without any maps to explain where they were from or personal accounts of the prisoners, there is nothing that she can mourn (228). Countering the stereotype of the Black diasporic returnee who cries upon return to the ancestral homeland, Raboteau notes instead, "I wanted to cry but I could not. I couldn't buy the idea that we had closed some broken circle by returning" (229). Raboteau does not give in to nostalgic feelings of diasporic return and rejects the notion that Ghana could be home for her. The previous encounters with the different Black communities have proven to her that there is no unity based solely on a shared past and experience of displacement. When warned by Black American friends who had traveled to Ghana and were called *obruni*, denoting something close to the term "*falasha*: stranger, outsider, foreigner" (183), the narrator remarks,

> I wouldn't have minded being called by that name. If I'd left Jamaica with any lingering sense of belonging to a black family unified by the memory of slavery, then East Africa had knocked it out of me for good. I was white in Jamaica, *farengi* in Ethiopia, and *obruni* here. How could I claim to be of a place I had never been? (194-95)

Rather than exploring her own abstract connection to Ghana, the narrator seeks out African Americans who have repatriated to the country.

Raboteau is curious to talk to American expatriates, those "African diasporans drawn back to Ghana by the myth of return" (*Searching* 189) who are enticed by the Right of Abode. She meets with Black Americans who expatriated to Ghana in the 1960s when an invitation was issued by Nkrumah, inviting skilled expatriates to come to the newly independent nation. These were the golden years of the 1950s and 1960s, when Ghana, with its Black leadership, "appeared to be a black Utopia, a New Jerusalem" (199). If she had a gleam of hope to feel that Ghana could be Black Americans' Zion, the emigrés Mary Ellen and John Ray, who have lived there since 1976, surely convince her of the contrary. The Rays' house, as she remarks, feels "claustrophobic" (210), "like a tomb" (213). Mary Ellen Ray tells her that "Ghana attracts a lot of dreamers. Funny thing, since this country is so inhospitable to dreams" (208). After so many years of living in the Promised Land, Mary Ellen states that her hope of finding family in Ghana has been disappointed and that she no longer calls herself African American (208). She notes that "I realized I'm not African. Four hundred years made me something else. I'm black. My neighbors here

don't think of me as family at all" (209). The reality of living in Ghana does not match the dreams harbored by so many Black Americans seeking to repatriate. Mary Ellen concedes that "for the last twenty years I've had strong urgings tugging at me saying, 'Go Home,' but where was home?" (205). Expressing the wish to return to the United States, she senses a "shapeless, persistent, intrusive longing..." (206). As the narrative exposes, the seekers of Zion, those who returned to and are now dwelling in their lands of promise, often feel an overwhelming sense of homelessness and exclusion in the places they have settled. Even after their arrival in the Promised Land, they find that they still do not belong.

In a similar vein, a Rasta woman who migrated to Ghana from Paris tells Raboteau about the disillusionment she sometimes feels: "It was a milk and honey vision. I don't see no honey and milk when I land at the airport. No milk coming from the tap. It's not like that sweet dream. On bad days really and truly it's not easy living here" (*Searching* 242). Raboteau addresses the Black emigrés' realization that they remain outsiders in Ghana, that hopes of kinship are most often disappointed, and that economic differences between Ghanaians and Black returnees complicate their relationship, revealing their disconnection. Many of the repatriates she meets appear disillusioned, tired, and frustrated. These observations together with the narrator's realization that contemporary forms of slavery exist in Ghana—a fact that alters the image of the country as a symbol of Black freedom and home—undermine the utopian vision of Ghana as a homeland for the Black diaspora.

Raboteau realizes that in each locale she has visited there are different forms of discrimination, racism, and exclusion similar to what she has experienced in the United States. This realization prompts the narrator to turn her critical gaze back to the country she left. Over the time span of a decade, Raboteau records political changes occurring in the United States as the first Black president is elected. Simultaneously, she registers changes within herself, namely the wish to settle down. Therefore, at the end of her stay in Ghana, the narrator resolves that she is ready to return to her partner, her family, and her country:

> The United States had an unexpected present and a mysterious future that I increasingly wanted to be part of. Most of the pilgrims I'd met on my travels through Israel, Jamaica, Ethiopia, and Ghana seemed as focused on the past as on the present. Very rarely on the future. They were shackled by the old

> stories, as if there weren't any others to tell. I was ready to go back to America, my nation. (*Searching* 246)

Having departed on her quest when she was in her early twenties, Raboteau's extensive travels span through the Bush presidency and into the Obama era, chronicling social and political changes within the United States. In particular, *Searching for Zion* is clearly a product of the Obama era. In the run-up to the 2008 election, the public discourse on the significance and meaning of a Black president for the United States comprised notions of a post-racial America. The election of President Obama was perceived as a transformative moment in (African) American history and, according to Gates, represented "the symbolic culmination of the black freedom struggle, the grand achievement of a great, collective dream" ("In Our Lifetime"). However, it has been pointed out that the belief that the election of President Obama signified a "triumph over race" is gravely misleading (Alexander 14). Nothing revealed more clearly that the vision of a post-racial America was a myth than the election of Donald J. Trump. Still, written and published during the Obama years, *Searching for Zion* reflects the optimism that characterized this period. The above-cited passage resonates with the tentative hope regarding the future of the United States. It also highlights a shift in the narrator's relation to the nation with which she once refused to identify but that she now claims. The appropriative claim "my nation" in the above passage signals that the narrator envisions a life that is entangled with the future of the country—an assumption that is also underscored by the fact that Raboteau is expecting a child at the end of the book. Although this reflects her faith in the future, she is far more skeptical about the possibility of change than, for example, Richburg, who perceived the election of the first Black president as the ultimate proof of a colorblind society.

The last part of *Searching for Zion* is set in the United States, where Raboteau continues her journeying. She takes a Civil Rights Tour through the American South and visits her extended relatives in Atlanta who fled from Mississippi when their homes were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Raboteau's trips to the South are framed by her delving into the more recent history of African Americans in the United States. This demonstrates that travels to the South signify for many Black Americans a return to "the earth and to roots, to a 'homeland' and to a past. These roots are merged in various pasts which connect individuals to Africa; the South is the home of the ancestors, immediate (parents and grandparents) and remote (African

slaves)" (Cohn qtd. in Commander 190). Like Africa, the American South figures as a symbolic homeland for Black Americans, whether they have a direct connection to the region or not (Commander 193). Raboteau's journeys to the South thus can be read as her return to the symbolic homeland of Black Americans whose histories are ingrained in its landscape. At the same time, the journey represents a homecoming to family and community. The narrator explains her connection to the South when she writes:

> I am drawn to this place because my father is. It is our Africa, our Israel, the home that never was, the Zion that never will be, a dream place. It is also our Egypt, our Dixie, our black bottom, the land where we were beaten, the place we were delivered, a nightmare place. We cleave to it. (*Searching* 290)

The American South, Raboteau's symbolic home, is endowed with conflicting significations, figuring both as a site of violence and oppression that is connected to slavery and segregation and as a site of resistance and perseverance. Coming home, therefore, is always ambiguous and never easy.

Portraying several trips to the South, Raboteau incorporates into her story the trajectory of what Stepto has called the narrative of immersion. It is one of two narrative patterns he identifies in Black writing, both of which require physical and spiritual movement and mobility. One is the narrative of ascent that figures a questing protagonist who transcends the confines of slavery and racism by acquiring literacy and progressing toward freedom (the slave narrative represents an example of this pattern). This progression is mirrored in the spatial structure, the ascent from the South to the North. While the narrative of ascent entails a possible loss of cultural identity, the narrative of immersion, in contrast, depicts a narrator who returns to and integrates with the Black community, reconnecting with their cultural roots. In the process, the protagonist obtains "tribal literacy" and a group identity. Typically, this trajectory is mirrored in the narrator's journey into the South (167). The 'journey of immersion' traveled by Raboteau leads her not just to her family but also to a better understanding of who she is. As she visits her relatives, she encounters yet another story of displacement, but also one of survival and persistence. Resolving to document the story of her family members, who think of themselves as survivors and transplants rather than victims and refugees (*Searching* 279), Raboteau finds her purpose in life and her place in the family: she is the 'scribe.' As such, she records the family's story of displacement and hope and by extension also memorializes the Black southern experience. By discovering her purpose and her destiny as a writer and keeper of stories, she

is able to define herself and finds an answer to the question thrown at her at the beginning of the book: "What are you?" (284). Instead of identifying in ethnic or national terms, the narrator chooses to represent herself as a writer and locates home not just in geographical terms but in terms of having found a purpose.

The return journey is accompanied by the narrator's realization that for her Zion is not a physical location she can recover and claim, but that it is an emotional state. The realization does not come unexpectedly but is anticipated throughout the narrative. It is an idea already introduced in the beginning by her father, who reminded her of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s understanding of Zion as a state of mind, not a place (*Searching* 65). However, whether one thinks of Zion as the former or the latter, the narrative stresses that it remains a utopia, something that one never fully reaches. Therefore, Raboteau concludes, "The Promised Land is never arrived at. A black president is not the end of race. One man does not rule a nation. No country is what it should be, just as no man is perfect" (292). The remark complicates notions of an easy homecoming that resolves the narrator's quest journey and it challenges the belief in a future in which race will no longer matter. The end of *Searching for Zion*, however, conveys tentative optimism regarding the narrator's future and that of the nation. Together with her father, the narrator travels to Bay St. Louis for another family gathering. Raboteau remarks the following about the imminent arrival: "We don't know what we'll find at the homecoming. We'll be there soon. / We're not there yet" (294). The ambiguous statement can be interpreted as the narrator's journeying toward an uncertain, yet hopeful future as a mother-to-be. Ending on the road, the last image offered by the travel narrative is of the narrator in a car. This image of mobility presents a powerful contrast to the image of immobility evoked in the opening scene of the book when the narrator was detained and confined to a room in the airport's basement. Defying external efforts to define and label her (as the security staff has tried), her mobility demonstrates a refusal to be fixed. Over the course of the (narrative) journey, then, the narrator has become increasingly mobile, both literally through her travels and also figuratively, in the sense that she is able to articulate a new subjectivity and refuse to adhere to identity categories that would immobilize her.

Searching for Zion and *Black Gold of the Sun* reflect a preoccupation with the issues of home and homelessness that are key themes in contemporary Black travel narratives. Both narrators investigate their notions of unbelonging and

estrangement that result from the denial of full equality and acceptance as well as the continuing discrimination of people of color in their native countries. While writers such as Harris and Richburg rather uncritically embrace the United States as their home, Eshun and Raboteau resume a more critical stance toward Britain and the United States, respectively. During their journeys, both narrators turn their gaze back to the countries from which they departed, discovering that in other locales they feel similar notions of unbelonging. The journeys depicted in the travel narratives end with the writers' return to their home countries; a return that entails the narrators' realization that home is not a mythical place located far away. Instead, it can be created, and it can be discovered in human relationships and community. The writers' change of attitude toward Britain and the United States illustrates how their explorations of different places are used to rethink the ever-evolving nature of home. By going away and exploring alternative homes in different locales, both are able to reimagine and reenvision the places they left behind as home.

The idea that being away from home can offer new perspectives on the place left behind, is central to a host of literary productions by Black writers. Already early Black travel narratives written by nineteenth-century activists and intellectuals underscore that traveling abroad provides new vantage points from which to reflect on the situation at home (see ch. III, sec. 1). The travel narratives by Eshun and Raboteau echo the sentiment that travel facilitates a better understanding of home—a belief that was also articulated by one of the most famous Black expatriates of the twentieth century: James Baldwin. In the 1970 film *James Baldwin: From Another Place*, he states in reference to the United States, "One sees it better from a distance… from another place, from another country" (qtd. in Field 13).

4. Tracing Routes

The last analysis chapter focuses on the travel narratives by Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman who retrace the historical and current paths of different people, including the trails of captives in West Africa, the travels of African-descended migrants, and the journeys of Black people who sought to return to the homeland of their ancestors. In *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) and *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007), both writers travel in search of stories of the past that have been silenced and ignored and to examine the legacies of the past in different localities. In particular, the narratives are concerned with the histories and experiences of displacement of the Black diaspora as well as with the cultural memory of the transatlantic slave trade, revealing that "'[t]ravelling in pursuit of traces' always involves tapping into the archives of cultural memory" (Pfister, "Travellers" 8). The narratives exemplify what Huggan describes as an important aspect of the genre, namely that it "mediates the dialectical relationship between memory and geography, as well as that between memory and history" (136).

The Atlantic Sound and *Lose Your Mother* are skillfully written, thought-provoking meditations on the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and the condition of the Black diaspora. They invoke past traumas of displacement and chart their aftermath and consequences in the present. Key concerns in both narratives are the cultural memory of slavery, the different histories, and competing interpretations of the past. Notably, they synthesize many of the themes addressed in the previously analyzed travel narratives, for example, they scrutinize issues of identity, race, belonging, home and homelessness, history, and memory. What sets these texts apart from the others is their generic mobility and their critical and self-reflexive engagement with the genre of travel writing. Both narratives can therefore be understood as innovative contemporary travel writing, which the editors of *Mobility at Large* define as "travel texts that are self-reflexive about the genre's historical grounding in colonizing rhetoric and are informed by postcolonial agendas" and that merge innovative textual forms "with a political project of resistance, providing a useful critical tool for thinking through the constructions of knowledge in articulations of identity, nationhood, gender, race and ethnicity in the context of travel" (Edwards and Graulund 200). Retracing the footsteps of their literary forebears, they reflect on the history and tradition of travel writing. Like other writers of innovative travel narratives, Phillips and Hartman expose the problematic nature of the genre and of the social and cultural practice of trav-

eling. Journeying and writing as Black mobile subjects, the travel narratives reveal that the authors "struggle with ways to inscribe themselves (and their voices) in representations of travel" (200). Resisting categorizations, Phillips and Hartman demonstrate the creative potential of innovative travel writing and deliberately create generic hybrids by combining fiction and non-fiction writing, essay, autobiography, memoir writing, travel writing, and historical writing. They thus evince a refusal to be fixed as both subject and text remain in motion (201).

4.1 Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* (2000)

Saint Kitts-born, Leeds-raised, and long-time resident in the United States, Caryl Phillips's biographical routes and his ambiguous national affiliations evince once again that the imposition of national categories upon authors and their literary productions is often artificial and arbitrary. The author's life as well as his work certainly defy neat categorizations according to place and nationality. A distinguished novelist, playwright, and essayist who has received several awards, Phillips's thematic interest in his work revolves around topics such as the cultural history of the Black diaspora, colonization, the memory of slavery, and migrant experiences in various locations across the Atlantic world. Like Ekow Eshun's *Black Gold of the Sun* and the works of contemporary authors who are likewise defined as Black British, Phillips's writing demonstrates his effort to reach beyond particular national histories and his focus on transnational and diasporic themes.

Phillips's travel narrative *The Atlantic Sound* is no exception. It maps the writer's journeys to different locations, among them places that were key sites in the transatlantic slave trade—Liverpool, Accra, and Charleston. The triangular geography between Europe, Africa, and America resonates with Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic and signals the narrative's preoccupation with the history of the Black diaspora. In this way, Phillips physically and intellectually traverses a Black Atlantic geography, exploring the physical spaces and delving into their respective histories, both past and present. Phillips addresses many of the already familiar topics that preoccupy Black travelers, including, for example, ambiguities of home and belonging, diasporic returns, and experiences of migration, displacement, and exile. The analysis that follows focuses on the narrator's retracing of various routes, physically, historically, and textually, and illustrates how such a 'traveling in traces' serves as a way to illuminate the hidden and silenced stories connected to the history of slavery

and colonization and to examine its aftermaths and consequences on diasporic lives. Phillips's journeys are framed as an interrogation into the history and current condition of the African diaspora. The analysis further illustrates how travel writing is employed to retrieve, rewrite, and revise stories of the past to critically interrogate and reflect on processes of forgetting and remembering history.

The Atlantic Sound represents the narrator's geographical travels and the text's thematic journey across a Black Atlantic terrain. The travelogue is divided into three main chapters, each revolving around Phillips's visit to a specific location: In Liverpool, the narrator searches for historical remains of the city's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade; in Accra, he participates in the Panafest, a cultural event celebrating Pan-African unity; and in Charleston, he explores the legacies of a White federal judge who worked to ensure Black voting rights during the nascent Civil Rights Movement. The main part of the narrative is framed by a prologue ("Atlantic Crossing") that recounts the narrator's ship voyage from the Caribbean across the Atlantic to England and an epilogue ("Exodus") relating his visit to an African American community that has settled in the Negev desert in Israel. While each of the five parts could be read independently from one another, they are connected by the structural element of the narrator's journeys and, crucially, by the multitude of diasporic experiences. These experiences are reflected in the stories of historical and contemporary figures that are interspersed throughout the narrative. They include, for example, a nineteenth-century trader from the Gold Coast who travels to Liverpool for business matters; a young Black Liverpudlian with a passion for Black history who acts as Phillips's guide when he visits the city; a Ghanaian immigrant who was deported from Britain and who longs to leave Ghana for the United States; an Anglican missionary from the Gold Coast who, after being schooled in London, returned to his homeland to promote the Anglican faith among the local people; and an African American from Mount Vernon living in Ghana who supports other diasporic returnees to resettle in the motherland. Notions of displacement, dislocation, and fragmentation resound in all of the stories told in Phillips's travel narrative and "inevitably point to the fact that homelessness and (un)belonging are a painfully complex experience for the descendants of the African diaspora" (Pulitano 86). The range of themes, biographical sketches, and historical accounts presented in the travelogue makes *The Atlantic Sound* a rich and complex work that sets itself apart from conventional forms of travel writing.

Phillips's travels are presented as a retracing of personal and collective routes that allow the narrator to examine the consequences of past movements, both coerced and voluntary, on individuals and societies. The narrator's Atlantic crossing, which is recounted in the prologue, serves as a preeminent example: Boarding a banana boat that takes him and a few other passengers from the French-Caribbean island of Guadeloupe across the Atlantic to England, the narrator reenacts an earlier journey undertaken by his parents and many other postwar immigrants from the West Indies, known as the *Windrush* generation. They came to Britain under the British Nationality Act of 1948, which granted them national citizenship. As the son of immigrants, Phillips traveled this route as an infant in his mother's arms in the late 1950s. During his second transatlantic voyage onboard the banana boat, Phillips goes through a range of emotions—feeling anxiety, boredom, depression, and joy. Apparently, this voyage is one of many bouts of discomfort, self-imposed isolation, and loneliness that bears similarities to that of the earlier travelers: "I now know how [my mother] and all the other emigrants felt as they crossed the Atlantic; they felt lonely" (*Atlantic Sound* 20), writes the narrator. Retracing the routes of Caribbean migrants, he addresses the effects of this historical event that "would change the nature of British society" (7). He notes that the initial hopefulness of the people was disappointed shortly after their arrival in Britain when "they discovered that the mother country had little, if any, desire to embrace her colonial offspring" (21). The narrator gestures to the racism and exclusion that these migrants would experience in Britain, resulting in feelings of unbelonging and homelessness that characterize diasporic experiences.

During his sea voyage, Phillips isolates and distances himself from his fellow passengers. His experiences aboard the ship suggest that the experiences of the traveler, as well as of the migrant and displaced subject, are characterized by isolation. Elena Machado Sáez argues that Phillips's "observations point to isolation as a principal facet of migration" and that the poignant descriptions of "the atmosphere of despair that pervades the boat" underscore his assertion "that this shared experience could never lead to the development of any kind of migrant kinship" (20). She goes on saying, "The concept of community via migration" is revealed to be a myth that the narrator "seeks to demystify in his text" (19). His rejection of communal feelings based on the historical experience of displacement resurface throughout the narrative when he examines various groups and their efforts to create and sustain communal bonds.

Significantly, Phillips's Atlantic crossing is informed by the memory of his parents' experience, by the stories of Black migrants, but also by the 'initial' journey of the Black diaspora signified by the Middle Passage.[25] The transatlantic slave trade that forced millions of Africans across the Atlantic and into enslavement is not openly addressed in this first section of the narrative, but invocations of the Middle Passage appear throughout the portrayal of Phillips's sea voyage. For instance, attention is repeatedly drawn to the narrator's unlikely choice of transportation. Considering that the banana boat is a vessel designed to carry goods and produce, not tourists, Phillips and the other passengers are objectified and presented as human 'cargo.' Moreover, although his voyage does by no means come close to the terrifying conditions that African captives had to live through, Phillips evokes a sense of anguish and despair when he describes the monotony of his days at sea: "as I witness the sun rising on the vast unresponsive expanse of sea and sky, the bleak sight only serves to remind me that there is no prospect of land for days, that there is only the prospect of another day, and the undoubted difficulty of trying to endure another night" (*Atlantic Sound* 16). In addition, the image of Phillips's self-chosen confinement to a small cabin onboard the ship whose captain "introduces himself as the 'master'" (7) and whose crew of Burmese workers "appear to be treated as slaves" (8), as a fellow traveler comments, powerfully alludes to the slave vessels that set out toward the 'New World' with captives crammed in their holds. The allusion to the slave trade as well as the narrator's itinerary—which leads to England where the main European slaving ports were located—signal the narrative's preoccupation with this topic. Moreover, the evocation of the Middle Passage in the text demonstrates that the memory of this violent journey is a constant reference in Black travel writing. Already within this first part of the narrative, then, one can trace the discursive and thematic links that are established between diasporic experiences of dislocation, dispossession, marginality, exile, and labor exploitation—of isolated Caribbean migrants, African captives forced into slavery, Burmese workers on a cargo ship—that were generated by European colonialism and the global trade in human beings. Throughout the travelogue, connections between the

25 Phillips has commented on how his voyage aboard the banana boat relates to a host of other journeys. He explained in an interview, "I spent nights on deck, feeling the vastness and loneliness of the ocean, trying to relive not just my parents' voyage but Columbus's, the slave ships', and the Irish and Russian flotsam migrating to the New World" (Jaggi).

past and the present, the personal and the collective, as well as the local and the transnational are aesthetically foregrounded.

As the narrator retraces the routes of the triangular slave trade, his first destination is Liverpool, where he searches for historical remains of the city's involvement in the trade. Phillips's visit to the city is prefigured by the journey of a nineteenth-century African trader named John Emmanuel Ocansey, a historical figure around whom *The Atlantic Sound* creates a fictionalized travelogue. Switching from first- to third-person narration, the narrator creatively reimagines and rewrites the story of John, the son of a well-established businessman from the Gold Coast who travels to Liverpool in 1881 to take care of his father's business matters. While John's sea voyage recalls Phillips's Atlantic crossing in that he is similarly isolated, alone, and unable to make acquaintances, John's impressions of Liverpool differ from Phillips's. The focalization on John allows the reader to see Liverpool through the eyes of a nineteenth-century African traveler. This literary strategy "engenders a discursive reversal in which England is seen as an exotic location—a place that is as 'incomprehensible' for [John Emmanuel] Ocansey as the Congo is for a Victorian traveller" (Edwards and Graulund, *Mobility at Large* 66). From the perspective of John the city of Liverpool and its people and customs appear unfathomable and strange. By rewriting a historic account of an African businessman traveling to Liverpool, the narrative reverses the "hierarchies of traveller/native" (66); that is, of the European traveler and the African travelee.[26] Accordingly, *The Atlantic Sound* can be read as a "countertravel" narrative, which is defined by Holland and Huggan as a travelogue that articulates a counternarrative that undermines and opposes dominant discourses and stereotypes of Eurocentric travel writing (47-65). As "highly politicized forms of travel writing, which interrogate both the history of the genre they are employing and the underlying attitudes" (21), countertravel narratives can be understood as a discursive resistance to traditional or dominant perspectives, histories, ideologies, and systems of representation. Phillips inverts conventional trajectories of Western travel writing that depict Africa as a foreign, exotic, and unknown territory by recounting the story of a Black traveler from the Gold Coast who

26 The term "travelee" was introduced by Pratt who explains in *Imperial Eyes* that "[t]his clumsy term is coined on analogy with the term 'addressee.' As the latter means the person addressed by a speaker, 'travelee' means persons traveled to (or not) by a traveler, receptors of travel" (242).

visits Liverpool. Rewriting the account of a nineteenth-century African traveler in Liverpool, *The Atlantic Sound* facilitates a shift of narrative perspective that foregrounds the experience and consciousness of a subject who has been silenced and marginalized in traditional (White, Western) travel writing. The reversal of perspective, therefore, represents a commentary on the genre's problematic nature, its creation and perpetuation of discourses of othering that portray the Western traveler as superior to non-Western people and cultures.

The fictional account of John's journey is just one example of the various voices and narratives that are integrated into Phillips's travelogue and that illustrate its embrace of multiple, complex, and competing historical voices and interpretations of the past. Through a mixture of poems, for example, by Langston Hughes and Michael Harper, quotes by W. E. B. Du Bois and Fredrick Douglass, excerpts from Richard Wright's *Black Power*, snippets from *The New York Post*, epigrammatic quotations, eulogies, and conversations and interviews with different people, Phillips incorporates a variety of perspectives and voices in his travel narrative that comment on the condition of the African diaspora as well as on the legacy of colonialism and the implications of slavery throughout the Atlantic world. The richness of the material included in *The Atlantic Sound* distinguishes it from other, more conventional forms of travel writing. Phillips makes use of the elusiveness and flexibility of the genre and creates room for different and sometimes opposing views and opinions. Through these accounts, diverse perspectives are expressed and articulated that add different layers of complexity to his narrative. Through fictionalized accounts of historical events and subjects, historiography, and travel writing, Phillips creates links between different contexts and people and brings into consideration the complex range of experiences of migrant and diasporic subjects. In her discussion of the literary strategies that are employed in *The Atlantic Sound*, Rae Ann Meriwether comments on how the narrative joins a postmodern form, poetic language, and historical content (86). She reads this combination "of seemingly incompatible discourses to write history" as a "politicized refusal to submit to history's hegemony and [the author's] attempt to create non-generalizing ways of narrating the past—uncertain and difficult—by blending, blurring, and ironizing both events and contemporary understandings of those" (87).

More than a century after John Emmanuel Ocansey traveled to Liverpool, Phillips retraces his path. John's narrative is one of those hidden stories of Black presences in Liverpool that Phillips seeks to uncover as he visits the city.

His visit is introduced by an epigrammatic quotation from Wright's travelogue *Black Power*, an intertext that anticipates Phillips's own attitude toward the city and his agitation with the historical amnesia of its citizens:[27] "Yet, how calm, innocent, how staid Liverpool looked in the June sunshine! What massive and solidly built buildings! [...] Along the sidewalks men and women moved unhurriedly. Did they ever think of their city's history?" (*Atlantic Sound* 93-94). Apparently, Wright's question occupies the narrator as he wanders through Liverpool. Despite the significance of the slave trade in the history of Liverpool, Phillips discovers that historical markers drawing attention to this essential chapter in the city's history are virtually absent. Liverpool appears to have forgotten its past and erased all ties connecting the city to the trade.[28] The realization greatly unnerves and disturbs the narrator—"It is disquieting to be in a place where history is so physically present, yet so glaringly absent from people's consciousness" (117)—whose attitude toward Liverpool finds expression in his descriptions of it: Arriving by train, he first notes Lime Street Station's "satanic quality" (94). Moreover, he contends that "the past casts a deep shadow" (116) over the city whose inhabitants seem "clinically depressed" (107). Liverpool's bleak atmosphere elicits memories of a racist encounter he had during a football game when he was young, which caused him to feel that "there was something disturbing about Liverpool" (95). For Phillips "Liverpool was a place to be avoided. A dangerous place" (96). Even many years later, Liverpool still figures as a disquieting place where he feels anxious and uneasy.

Phillips's visit to Liverpool is driven by his attempt to uncover the forgotten and repressed memories of the slave trade in the historical remnants, the landmark monuments of Liverpool. Examining the Cunard building, he notes that the names of major ports, with which the shipping company conducted business, are carved into the building's façade: "The word 'Africa' leaps out at me. Ships to Africa. The multiple ports of this huge continent are represented

27 Stuart Hall draws attention to the connection of racism and the repressing of history when he argues that "the development of an indigenous British racism in the postwar period *begins* with the profound historical forgetfulness—what I want to call the loss of historical memory, a kind of historical amnesia, a decisive mental repression—which has overtaken the British people about race and empire since the 1950s. [...] [T]he native, homegrown variety of racism begins with this attempt to wipe out and efface every trace of the colonial and imperial past" ("Racism" 25).

28 It should be pointed out here that when Phillips traveled to Liverpool in the late 1990s, the International Slavery Museum was not yet established.

by this one word. [...] Behind me the Mersey lies *silent*" (*Atlantic Sound* 101; emphasis added). The obvious material presence of the past, which is reflected by the word "Africa" that is carved into the façade, presents a conspicuous contrast to the erasure and silencing of history and Liverpool's connection to the slave trade that is insinuated by the "silent" Mersey River. It is this contrast, this imbalance, that defines Liverpool in the narrative. Phillips's account of the city, then, works to redress the apparent ignorance and amnesia surrounding the history and memory of the slave trade. In this regard, travel writing functions as a vehicle for criticism and a corrective to the dominant narrative of Liverpool, and by extension Britain, from which slavery has largely been written out.

Early in the narrative, it crystalizes that the narrator Phillips assumes a variety of roles and subject positions from which he addresses his topics. Shifting between privileged Western traveler, historian, anthropological observer, creative writer, and postcolonial subject, the roles he takes on lend Phillips a certain narrative authority.[29] Consequently, the narrator "splits his eye/I (i.e. his narrative gaze and his authorial subjectivity), thereby positioning himself in different temporal frames and even ideological positions and changing tense to announce perspectival shifts" (Miller Powell 96). For instance, he positions himself in opposition to the tourists—he travels not only in the opposite direction of the cruise ship passengers in the Caribbean but also intentionally chooses different means of transportation—and takes on the role of the distant observer. During his sea voyage, "Phillips shuttles between the roles of insider and outsider, between the sensitized son of Caribbean immigrants and the educated British scholar" (López Ropero 56). At times, he presents himself as a cultural insider who is, due to his heritage, a native both in England and the Caribbean. His privileged background as an independent Western traveler comes to the fore when he complains about the inconveniences of the ship; then "the travelling persona that Phillips projects [...] seems aloof and elitist, slipping into gestures that we may associate with what David Spurr identifies as tropes of colonial discourse" (56). As a historian and anthropological observer, he recovers hidden stories of the past and examines the consequences

29 Commenting on postcolonial travel narratives, Paul Smethurst remarks that "narrative authority is linked to [the writers'] postcolonial experience and heritage and to strategies of self-authentication [...]. Indeed, postcoloniality becomes a condition of possibility for their textualities and a source of narrative authority" (12).

of slavery and forced migration on the lives of individuals. His narrative accounts are rendered in a controlled, detached, guarded, and sometimes ironic voice; his commentary, however, leaves no doubt about his personal opinion.

In contrast to the other travel narratives that are discussed in this study, *The Atlantic Sound* does not foreground an interior journey. Although one learns about Phillips's parents' story of migration, his experience with racism in Britain, and his current residency in the United States, there are otherwise comparatively few references to his personal background and his motive for traveling. However, considering that he represents himself as a postcolonial subject, it is clear that questions of home and belonging are of concern to him, inciting his journeys and writing. This preoccupation with questions of home, homelessness, and belonging is reflected in the book's thematic concerns (particularly its focus on the consequences of diasporic displacement) but also in the chapter titles. The titles of the three main chapters—"Leaving Home," "Homeward Bound," "Home"—emphasize Phillips's engagement with the topic but also his frustration with easy invocations of home and belonging. Giving the contents of the chapters, these titles seem rather ironic. The elusive nature of home as well as the author's skepticism surrounding the concept are made visible by the narrator's frequent use of quotation marks around the word home. Zara Bennett observes that rather than outlining an itinerary and directing the reader, the chapter titles of *The Atlantic Sound* can cause confusion and disorientation. Pointing to Phillips's play with the myth of return through the chapter titles, she also notes that "[h]ome does not provide a fixed point of reference because there are several 'homes' being bandied about here. [...] For Phillips, home is not a place of origins in the Pan-African sense, or even a fixed geographical location" (11).

The prevailing historical amnesia that characterizes Liverpool's relationship with its past is juxtaposed with the way history is treated in Ghana, Phillips's next travel destination. In Ghana, Phillips explores how a particular history is employed for the purpose of identification and unity. In contrast to what the title of the second chapter, "Homeward Bound," suggests, Phillips's journey to Ghana is not spurred by the idea of an African homeland—which is also underscored by the narrator's repeated statement: "No, I am not going home" (*Atlantic Sound* 125, 128). Rather, he critically reflects on the practice of diasporic tourism and the ways in which history is commodified by the Panafest, a biannual cultural event that encourages Black people from the diaspora to visit Ghana and celebrate their African heritage and Pan-African unity. As Phillips discerns from the publication material, it is "the biggest

gathering of the African family to celebrate our cultural unity" (143). Although Phillips takes part in several Panafest events, he does so only reluctantly. Assuming the position of a detached and distant observer who witnesses and comments on the spectacle that unfolds before his eyes, he critically examines the identity politics behind the proclamations of Pan-African unity. The descriptions of the festival and its diasporic attendees leave no doubt that for the narrator these gestures and the beliefs that inform them are shallow, embarrassing, and often outright absurd. With biting irony he describes the poorly organized performance of a "royal procession" that is led by "'warriors,' who appear to be badly dressed unemployed youth and old men." "[T]he chaotic sound of drums, whistles, cowbells and the random firing of rifles" (172) adds to the impression of chaos, disharmony, and utter randomness that undermines any notion of cultural authenticity. Phillips mockingly describes the African American tourists who wear "costumes" and shirts that announce "Africa. Our Aim Unity" (172) and who worry about not having the right currency to buy a can of Coca-Cola. He mischievously notes the distress of "the animal-loving American cousins of the diaspora" as a ram is sacrificed "to the ancestors who shed their blood in the cause of slavery" (173). The apparent indifference and a lack of sobriety of the Ghanaian performers and organizers clash with the overly emotional diasporic tourists. These satirical descriptions of the Panafest proceedings reflect the narrator's perception of the event as a caricature of diasporic celebration. The demonstrations of Afrocentric pride exhaust the narrator who finally proclaims, "This continual rush to overstatement is causing me to suffer from diasporan fatigue" (186). Obviously, the heritage tourism that Phillips witnesses in Ghana appears hollow. It exposes the tourists' superficial engagement with history and their belief in a progressive narrative of Black diasporic history that allows them to stage their journey to Africa as a recuperative homecoming.

Phillips criticizes the idea of diasporic return and draws attention to the way history is sanitized and commercialized for the tourists who are eager to claim their African roots (for example, the involvement of Africans in the slave trade is ignored to facilitate feelings of kinship and unity). Phillips's narrative counters and supplements such simplistic representations of the past and singular narratives of progress and redemption that are created by the tourist industry and embraced by the diasporic visitors. It does so by interweaving multiple other voices into the text, exhibiting a complex intertwinement and layering of narratives; for example, a biographical sketch of Philip Quaque, an African priest, missionary, and educator who worked at Cape Coast Cas-

tle, the principal British trade fort on the coast of West Africa, but who appears to have been indifferent or ignorant to "the indignities that were being visited upon his fellow Africans" (*Atlantic Sound* 180) in the dungeon of the castle underneath his feet. This narrative is complemented by a historical account detailing the building of the slave fort in Elmina and an outlining of how the trade between Africans and Europeans developed. Bringing these different narratives together, Phillips exposes the ironies and contradictions of history. Such historical complexities, however, are disregarded during the Panafest celebrations, where a sense of home and belonging is commodified and 'sold' to the African American and Jamaican returnees.

Reflecting on the problematic nature of diasporic return and the absurdity of claiming a cultural identity through the homecoming practices that Phillips witnesses in Ghana, he writes,

> People of the diaspora who expect the continent to solve whatever psychological problems they possess. People of the diaspora who dress the part, have their hair done, buy beads, and fill their spiritual 'fuel tank' in preparation for the return journey to 'Babylon'. They have deep wounds that need to be healed, but if 'their' Africa fails them in any way. If 'their' Africa disappoints, then they will immediately accuse 'these Africans' of catering to the white man. […] Do they not understand? Africa cannot cure. Africa cannot make anybody feel whole. Africa is not a psychiatrist. (*Atlantic Sound* 215-16)

It is clear, then, that for the narrator a journey to Africa can never heal the wounds created by forced displacement and dispossession and is certainly not the cure for the diasporic subject's feelings of unbelonging. He dismisses the way diasporic tourists project their dreams of a homeland onto Ghana and appropriate the material and historical spaces that it provides. Instead of unity, Phillips observes a social distance between returnees and Ghanaians. Although the visitors proclaim their kinship with the local Ghanaians, they remain oblivious to the contemporary problems and challenges that the people in Ghana face. While diasporic travelers are desperate to return to Africa, the Promised Land, many Ghanaians seek to leave their country for the United States, believing that it does not hold a future for them. As Phillips's Ghanaian guide and driver explains, "The only way up in Ghana is out" (197). Therefore, pointing to the divide between Africa and the Black diaspora that manifests in economic and cultural differences, the narrative deconstructs notions of unity and exposes the tourists' shallow claims to kinship.

The differences between Black visitors and Ghanaians also extend to their disparate perceptions of the history of the slave trade and its implications for the Black diaspora. The diverging attitudes become apparent in the debates over the preservation of the slave forts: For diasporic tourists they are important historical markers and sites of memory and mourning; for Ghanaians they are reminders of a history they would rather forget, but also something that can be turned into economic profit. Like the Panafest celebration, the crumbling slave forts are part of a tourist industry driven by profit. The Ghanaian playwright and renowned Pan-Africanist Dr. Ben Abdallah tells Phillips that it should be the Black diaspora's responsibility to take care of the forts and pay for their restoration, noting, "For us, they do not mean the same thing as they do for you people" (*Atlantic Sound* 149). Abdallah's remark certainly compromises the belief in unity that lies at the heart of Pan-African ideology. The narrative further demystifies the idealistic notion of family by including a quotation by Frederick Douglass who, commenting on the nineteenth-century repatriation schemes of African Americans, points to the African complicity in the slave trade when he writes that "the savage chiefs on the western coast of Africa, who for ages have been accustomed to selling their captives into bondage, and pocketing the ready cash for them, will not more readily see and accept our moral and economical ideas, than the slave-traders of Maryland and Virginia" (143). The pairing of Phillips's observations of diasporic tourism with Douglass's statement clearly reflects a pessimistic picture of return that deconstructs the myth of Africa as homeland and exposes the hypocrisy inherent in homecoming celebrations; and it also demonstrates a refusal to consider more satisfying and encouraging aspects of the experience of return.

The idea of diasporic return is further explored in a brief epilogue, entitled "Exodus," in which Phillips relates his visit to a Hebrew Israelite community in the Negev desert of Israel—the same community to which Emily Raboteau traveled several years later. The so-called African Hebrew Israelites are an isolated community of over two thousand African Americans who believe "that they are descendants of Hebrew Israelites driven into African exile from Jerusalem in AD 70" (*Atlantic Sound* 210). They have "left the land of great captivity" (268) and 'returned' from places such as Chicago and Washington, DC, to settle in the Negev desert where they established a community built on biblically inspired beliefs. They represent themselves as a utopian community, free of violence, racism, homelessness, and other ills, social and otherwise, including homosexuality, AIDS, and cancer, which leaves the narrator

in utter disbelief: "Are they serious?" (213), he asks. The narrator expresses his skepticism and complete bewilderment regarding their attempt to create a viable diasporic community—a community that seems to be built on exclusionary notions of identity and on the controversial idea of reversing the exodus. Notably, irony pervades the descriptions of the community as Phillips observes the people of this self-isolated and "closed society" (275) who wander around in "strange brightly coloured costumes" (268). Phillips wonders, "Circus clowns? Uniforms?," and contends that "[t]his is not African dress; this is not local dress; this is the costume of a culture I do not understand" (268). To the narrator the people and their beliefs seem alien. Pointing to their isolation and statelessness, Phillips remarks, "They tell me they have come home. To a world that does not recognize them" (270). Their 'home,' as he notes, appears to be merely a crowded makeshift settlement of small tents in an inhospitable desert environment that is also "[a] military zone" with "[j]ets flying overhead" (270). The description of the settlement conjures an image of an isolated and crammed gathering of people who are disconnected from the outside world and the lived experiences of Black people in the present. The hostile and sinister landscape disrupts any purported claims and notions of home as a comfortable, inclusive, and secure space. Phillips's visit to the Hebrew Israelites prefigures that of Raboteau, but his observations are far more skeptical and critical than those of his successor.

For Phillips the establishment of a secluded community in the desert and the attempt to create a new culture based on the belief that the exodus has been reversed are misled efforts to expunge the complex history of the slave trade and enslavement in the Americas: "There were no round-trip tickets in your part of the ship. Exodus. It is futile to walk in the face of history. As futile to keep the dust from one's eyes in the desert" (*Atlantic Sound* 275). His comment suggests that "[m]etaphorically, walking into the face of history manifests the refusal to recognize history's multiplicity, instability, and continual presence in the present" (R. A. Meriwether 91). The community's engagement with history is, according to the narrator, a flawed attempt to revise history and to return to a point of origin. While the Hebrew Israelites seek to sever ties with the United States, leaving behind their former lives and thereby dissociating the past from the present, Phillips counters that "the past surges like a mighty river [...]. It empties into the present" (*Atlantic Sound* 275). The image of water as a symbol for pluralist personal and collective histories and diverse Black cultural memories presents a stark contrast to the "[t]hirsty landscape" (267) of the dry, dusty Negev desert the Hebrew Israelites inhabit. Notably,

the absence of historical complexity is symbolized by the lack of water and leaves the narrator constantly thirsty and longing for it—“I am thirsty. I need to drink” (275). The narrator sees in the community’s engagement with history a conscious erasure and ignorance of the complex and varied histories of the Black diaspora. Their creation of a narrative of triumphal return to the ancient homeland—as well as the proclamation of a reversal of the Middle Passage—is a misled effort to expunge the denigration of colonialism and enslavement and an attempt to distance themselves from the past. However, despite the community’s effort to distance themselves from their former lives in the United States, reverse history, and ‘return home’ to an imagined ancient past, they carry their cultural baggage with them. This comes to the fore through their language as well as through their inherited sense of dislocation: “The United States in the blood of the elders. Confusion in the blood of the children. [...] Burdensome cultural baggage” (275). The narrator thus concludes, “There is no closure. There will be no closure” (275).

“Home” is the title of the last chapter of *The Atlantic Sound*, which relates Phillips’s trip to Charleston, South Carolina, where the narrator traces the obliterated history of the city as well as the story of one of its (in)famous citizens, the late Julius Waites Waring, a White judge who sought to secure voting rights for African Americans in the 1940s and 1950s. Phillips pieces together the story of Judge Waring and his second wife Elizabeth Waring by talking to their former acquaintances, among them a Black Charlestonian who was friends with the Warings, and physically tracing their path to the place where both were laid to rest, the Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston. Interwoven within the accounts of the Warings are excerpts of legal documents, *New York Post* articles, letters, and poems that supplement their story, which is a story of displacement, social alienation, and the loss of home. The Warings were ostracized by the White conservative elite of Charleston for their progressive ideals, their outspokenness, and their friendship with a Black woman. Eventually, the hostility and harassment they experienced caused them to leave their home for New York—“their ‘exile’” (*Atlantic Sound* 263). As the narrator remarks, “It was simply too burdensome to be among those who openly hated you in a place you called ‘home’” (255). Even the location of their grave, which is positioned at the fringe of the cemetery, points to their position as outcasts and exiles (262).

Phillips’s retracing of the Warings’s family history and their path into exile is paired with his search for another story that resonates with the themes of home and exile, namely the silenced history of African captives who, upon

arriving in Charleston, were quarantined in so-called "pest houses" located on Sullivan's Island before being brought to the mainland and sold at the slave marts (*Atlantic Sound* 232). Phillips wanders around the island and notes the following: "Sullivan's Island is an eerie and troubled place. Flat, marsh, grassland. An arrival in America. Having crossed the Atlantic in the belly of the ship. An arrival. Here, in America. [...] Farewell Africa. Welcome to America" (257-58). In contrast to Ghana where the slave forts on the coast represent the point of departure of African captives, Charleston has no historical markers that commemorate the arrival of the enslaved Africans regardless of the fact that it is "one of the most significant sites in the United States: the place where over 30 per cent of the African population first landed in the North American world" (257). Despite the importance of the place as "[t]he black Ellis Island," "nobody has thought it necessary at least to speculate and mark a place with a monument or plaque" (257). Charleston appears akin to Liverpool in that the city ignores its past. Although material markers that point to the arrival of Africans at American shores are missing, Phillips discovers a different form of remembrance when he watches a group of young Black women dance at the Charleston Festival of African and Caribbean Art:

> Here, in the city which 'processed' nearly one-third of the African population which arrived in the United States, a population who were encouraged to forget Africa, to forget their language, to forget their families, to forget their culture, to forget their dance, five young black women try to remember. [...] Their sinewy bodies weave invisible threads that connect them to the imagined old life. (264)

The women's dance suggests an act of remembrance that counters the pervasiveness of forgetting and the historical amnesia that Phillips notices in the city. The dance is a response to the enforced forgetting of home, family, language, and culture to which the narrator refers in his evocative account of the arrival of Africans in Charleston. The image of the dancing women—their bodies weaving invisible threads that connect them to the past—can be linked to the image of weaving sweetgrass, which is invoked earlier in the chapter when Phillips watches women selling sweetgrass baskets in the streets of Charleston (228). Commonly found in the South Carolina Lowcountry, the art of basket weaving is practiced by the descendants of enslaved people from West Africa and is among the oldest African American art forms in the United States (see Marshall 35-38). The technique of weaving is passed down through generations, resembling a connection to African cultural heritage and the

memory of slavery. Both basket weaving and dancing are dynamic ways to remember and engage with the past that differ decisively from the static and fixed nature of commemorative plaques and monuments. The narrative suggests that these alternative ways of remembering the past are possibly the most productive forms of acknowledging it.

Taking the title of Phillips's travelogue as a point of departure for a literary analysis of the book, as some scholars have done (see, for example, Ledent, "Ambiguous Visions" 201), one can draw a connection between the 'Atlantic sound' and the literary strategy of polyphony and intertextuality, which is employed in the narrative to reflect the diversity of themes and ideas that we 'hear' in the narrative. As Bennet puts it, "The open-endedness of the title invites the reader to sound the depths of the Atlantic's history and to listen for the resonance of the past in the present" (11). *The Atlantic Sound*'s inclusion of diverse perspectives—represented by the great variety of (inter)texts in the form of multifaceted literary and historical narratives, poems, legal texts, letters, and speeches—alludes to the "polyphony of voices that account for the intricate experience of the African diaspora" (Pulitano 80). The sound of the Atlantic—the roaring and rumbling of the waves as well as the silent and calming sounds of the sea—evokes the many stories, memories, and experiences of diasporic people who populate the geographical and historical terrain of the Black Atlantic and are presented in Phillips's travel narrative. Giving voice to stories that are often unheard, to those excluded from historical records, the narrative "revises and refashions established perspectives and allows the author to sound/speak forcibly his opinions and perspectives; it sounds/tests/probes his connectedness and in all of this allows him to 'sound'/pronounce that, even in the face of history, the world is still not sound/right" (Miller Powell 99). Presenting diverse and often conflicting perspectives, opinions, attitudes, and versions of history, Phillips's travelogue rejects a singular, authoritative narrative of the history of the African diaspora. Instead of speaking with one authoritative voice and from one position, the narrative gives room to include multiple and opposing perspectives by integrating the opinions of fellow travelers, interviewees, travel guides, as well as historical.

In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips travels in the material and textual traces of historical and contemporary diasporic subjects to recover stories of the past in different locations, make history tangible, and counter the forgetting of the cultural memory of the slave trade. By exploring the legacies of enslavement and colonialism on contemporary diasporic lives, he establishes novel links

between the past and the present, the personal and the collective, and the local and the transnational and thus incites us to critically examine how history is remembered or forgotten. Phillips retrieves, rewrites, and revises simplistic narratives of the past. He allows those who are elided from historical accounts to speak and underscores that there is no singular historical narrative but instead plural, contradicting versions of the past. Moreover, *The Atlantic Sound* points to an ethical, social, and political responsibility to remember the past and understand the implications of displacement and the legacies of the slave trade and colonialism. Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*, the travelogue I turn to next, reflects similar concerns.

4.2 Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007)

Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*, which historian Robin D. Kelley calls a "landmark text" in his praise for the book, is a multi-layered travel narrative that skillfully interweaves the author's personal account of travel with autobiographical writing, historiography, critical theory, and fiction to examine the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies in the United States and Ghana. Appropriately enough, Hartman's travelogue was published in 2007, the year that marked the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade throughout the British Empire. An African American literary scholar, writer, and cultural historian, Hartman has extensively researched and written on the topic of slavery. *Lose Your Mother* is based on Hartman's year-long stay in Ghana as a Fulbright Scholar in the late 1990s, where she conducted research on the memory of slavery. The narrative recounts her visits to sites of memory, places associated with the slave trade, such as the slave forts with their dungeons and prisons on the Ghanaian coast, and the slave markets and villages in Ghana's hinterland. Against the backdrop of her journey, the narrative offers Hartman's meditations on the historical atrocities of the slave trade, its legacies, and the effects on the present-day lives of Black people.

Hartman's 'journey along the Atlantic slave route,' as I illustrate in my analysis of the travelogue, represents a retracing of historical routes. The narrator's interrogation of historically significant sites is coupled with her inquiry into the silenced and forgotten histories of the slave trade as well as with an examination of conflicting cultural memories of slavery in Ghana and the United States. Her journey and her writing are a means to reconstruct the experiences of enslaved Africans, the strangers, whose traces have mostly van-

ished and whose names and stories have been lost to history. Traveling across Ghana, the narrator seeks to retrace their paths from Africa to the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean, hoping to find remnants of the past in the slave forts and dungeons, so as to recover and recreate the lost stories and "to represent the lives of those deemed unworthy of remembering" (*Lose* 16). Hartman's writing shows that she does so in a self-critical manner, displaying a high level of introspection and self-reflexivity throughout her narrative.

Like Phillips's journey in *The Atlantic Sound*, which follows the paths of displaced people across a Black Atlantic geography to capture the multifaceted experiences and histories of diasporic people, Hartman's journey to Ghana is her effort to literally and symbolically retrace the historical slave routes that traverse the country: the paths of Africans who were captured by slave raiders and led from the Ghanaian hinterland to the Atlantic coast to be sold off and shipped away. In the prologue titled "The Path of Strangers," she relates that by following the routes that thousands of enslaved Africans were forced to walk, she sought "to reclaim the dead, […] to reckon with the lives undone and obliterated in the making of human commodities" (*Lose* 6). This effort, however, was complicated by the fact that the traces she tried to follow had largely vanished. In the narrative, she thus travels to excavate the stories of the unknown and dispossessed, who were violently uprooted from their native land and who are forgotten and largely absent from the historical archives because they "left behind no traces" (15). Enslavement, Hartman contends, turned people into strangers whose social ties were broken apart. She expounds that "[t]he most universal definition of the slave is a stranger. Torn from kin and community, exiled from one's country, dishonored and violated, the slave defines the position of the outsider. She is the perpetual outcast, the coerced migrant, the foreigner, the shameful child in the lineage" (5). The loss of kin, community, and home—the 'mother loss' to which the title points—continues to haunt the Black diaspora.

Hartman approaches the subject of slavery from the perspective of an academic, which is reflected in the meticulously researched accounts she provides as well as in the incorporation of references and secondary literature. But she also reveals her personal investment with the subject matter that incites her travel to Ghana and her research: Positioning herself as a "slave baby" (*Lose* 4), a descendant of enslaved Africans whose personal story is entangled with the larger history of enslavement and dispossession in the United States, her journey to Ghana is a very personal one. Her desire to recover the traces and stories of the captives is connected to her own history because her fam-

ily trail leads into the anonymous history of slavery and disappears. Since there are no distant relatives she can hope to find in Ghana, the possibility of searching for roots and family genealogies is foreclosed. These genealogical voids are paralleled with the absence of histories of the slave trade in Ghana. Hartman's quest for the lost and forgotten memories of strangers, therefore, is also a symbolical inquiry into her own history. Moreover, the desire to excavate stories of the past derives from the narrator's feelings of statelessness, dispossession, and unbelonging. As a descendant of enslaved Africans, she has inherited the status of the stranger and outsider that produces notions of alienation and exclusion. In Ghana, her outer appearance, including the way she walks, talks, and dresses, marks her as "*Obruni*. A stranger. A foreigner from across the sea" (3). She feels a sense of exclusion that is similar to her experience of estrangement and alienation in the United States, her home country. Casting herself as the perennial stranger, the narrator discloses, "I didn't belong anyplace. [...] I was born in another country, where I also felt like an alien and which in part determined why I had come to Ghana. I had grown weary of being stateless. Secretly I wanted to belong somewhere" (4). Significantly, her journey testifies to her desire to find an alternative place of belonging, notwithstanding the fact that she forcefully rejects the notion of Africa as a homeland.

Lose Your Mother reveals contrasting impulses that are characteristic of Black travel writing about Africa: On the one hand, Hartman's journey to Ghana reflects her wish to discover Africa as "a world less racist than the one from which [she] came" (*Lose* 56) and her yearning "for a country in which [her] inheritance would amount to more than dispossession and in which [she] would no longer feel like a problem" (57). On the other hand, she acknowledges that this desire for Africa stems from the diasporic vision of the continent as an imagined homeland for African-descended people. It is a utopian vision—an "Afrotopia," as the title of the chapter suggests in which she critically engages with the tradition of Black American travel to Ghana in the post-independence period. Scrutinizing earlier travelers' attempt to find in Africa a "Promised Land," "a place where the color line didn't exist" (39), Hartman admits, "the dreams of the émigrés were part of my inheritance, which I couldn't entirely shake loose, no matter how hard I tried" (46). Notably, Hartman's contemplations recall Raboteau's motivation for traveling in *Searching for Zion*. Raboteau's journeys are fueled by her search for a Promised Land despite her realization that the idea of Zion is elusive and that it is not to be found in a physical locale. While Hartman situates her journey as well as her writing

within the tradition of African American engagement with Ghana—after all, her trip to Ghana represents a traveling in the traces of the Black émigrés and sojourners who came before her—she also writes against this tradition. She arrives in Ghana in "an age not of dreaming but disenchantment" (38), knowing that "[u]topias always have entailed disappointments and failures" (46). It is precisely the utopian vision of Africa, prone to disillusionment, that Hartman discards. For her, the idea of gaining freedom and finding a homeland in Africa cannot be sustained. In this regard, the title of the book can be read as an imperative phrase directed at her African diasporic readers that urges them to "lose your mother"—that is, "to abandon the notion of return to an African motherland, to give up on artificially constructed memories and invented rituals of recovery" (Newman 1).

The desire to find in Africa a place to belong is juxtaposed with the narrator's realization that "Black life was even more expendable in Africa than in the United States" and that she continues to be perceived as a stranger, unable to lose herself "in the sea of black faces and experienc[e] the intimacy of anonymity of the crowd" (*Lose* 57). The criticism Hartman voices with regard to the utopian visions of a Black homeland and the desire to return to Africa accords with that of Phillips's in *The Atlantic Sound*. Both writers caution against such ideologies of return that are based upon a singular version of the past. They shed light on the dreams of diasporic returnees and Black émigrés and their engagement with only one historical narrative, which offers little ground for solidarity and a sustained connection between Africans and African-descended people. As *Lose Your Mother* delineates, diasporic returnees' embrace of 'Mother Africa' in the mid-twentieth century was based on a flawed perspective on history. They crafted a revisionist narrative that aimed to restore dignity and provide a remedy to the divestment of the dispossessed: "In trying to reverse the course of history, eradicate the degradation of slavery and colonialism, vindicate the race, they looked to the great civilizations of ancient Africa" (40). Preferring the romance of diaspora to the tragedy of slavery, they imagined a noble African past and chose to believe in a fantasy of return that came at the expense of acknowledging the past in its full breadth. Hartman points to Maya Angelou's travel narrative *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* as an example of how diasporic returnees could only embrace Africa as a homeland by avoiding engagement with the complex history of the slave trade. In her 1986 account of her stay in Ghana during the Nkrumah era, Angelou confesses that she initially refused to visit the slave forts on the West African coast, deliberately ignoring the fact that Africans

were complicit in the trade. As Hartman notes, “eluding the slave past was the prerequisite to belonging” (42). In contrast to Angelou, who could only feel a sense of belonging in Africa by clinging to an idealized image of the continent and by disregarding African involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, Hartman condemns Black returnees’ desire to belong that is predicated on ignoring the complexities of history.

Therefore, Hartman’s engagement with the history of slavery and the Black diaspora differs decisively from the dominant vision of many Black travelers who came to Ghana before her. Whereas they “desired a monumental history and hungered for a grand narrative” (*Lose* 40), a trope that one can trace in Isaiah Washington’s narrative and his engagement with his African heritage (especially his claim that he is a descendant of the courageous Sengbe Pieh, the leader of the *Amistad* rebellion), Hartman seeks to uncover a different narrative of the past. Consciously positioning her work in opposition to Haley’s *Roots*, she does not come to Africa to search for her African *roots* but for the *routes* of African captives. Moreover, she also defies the idea of returning to an ancestral village (as Haley did) and instead visits the barracoons, slave dungeons, and prisons:

> Unlike Alex Haley, who embraced the sprawling clans of Juffure as his own, grafted his family into the community’s genealogy, and was feted as the lost son returned, I traveled to Ghana in search of the expandable and the defeated. I had not come to marvel at the wonders of African civilization or to be made proud by the royal court of Asante [...] I was not wistful for aristocratic origins. Instead I would seek the commoners, the unwilling and coerced migrants who created a new culture in the hostile world of the Americas and who fashioned themselves again, making possibility out of dispossession. (*Lose* 7)

Hartman’s travelogue counters the triumphant and redemptive story that works such as *Roots* offer. While Haley conjured a mythical African past in his narrative, “the Africa of royals and great states” (30) that many Black travelers were eager to claim, Hartman rejects such a redemptive story. Instead of clinging to an ancient royal past or trying to escape “the ghosts of slavery” (42), as Angelou attempted, Hartman seeks to disinter these ghosts. Her aim is to listen to their silenced voices and to trace the routes of “the expandable and the defeated,” “the commoners, the unwilling and coerced migrants” (7) to unearth the remnants of slavery. Crucially, positioning her project in contrast to Haley’s, Hartman explained in a conversation with Nancy K.

Miller that her text is “an anti-*Roots* narrative” (“Memoirs” 112). However, she also discloses, “Like every oppositional narrative, *Lose Your Mother* is haunted by the thing it writes against—the desire for home” (113). Her statement points to an important characteristic of many Black travel narratives, namely the paradox, or tension, that arises from a desire for roots, return, and home (that is often the primary reason for journeying to Africa) and the realization that this desire cannot be satisfied, that return does not yield closure.

The journey to Ghana and Hartman’s search for ‘strangers’ is a way to examine the imbrications of the past and the present as well as the contemporary racism she experiences and witnesses. Inhabiting the position of the perennial outsider whose sense of disconnection and exclusion is an inheritance of the legacy of slavery, she writes, “Being a stranger concerns not only matters of familiarity, belonging, and exclusion but as well involves a particular relation to the past” (*Lose* 17). The narrative underscores her intimate relation to the past by representing her mobile Black body as the symbolical bridge between the past and the present. Through her body, upon which the slave past is written (“Old and new worlds stamped my face, a blend of peoples and nations and masters and slaves long forgotten,” 3-4), she makes the pertinence of the past in the present palpable. In an interview, the author expounded that “the journey through time and space is a device, a vehicle, a formal means to exist in the physical landscape of slavery and to embody that history and to carry it” (Saunders 9). The narrator uses her corporality to project onto it a history of loss and dispossession; her body is a living human remnant of the history of slavery, a “vehicle” and “host of history” (5) that many have tried to forget: “If the past is another country, then I am its citizen. I am the relic of an experience most preferred not to remember […]. I am a reminder that twelve million crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the past is not yet over,” writes the narrator (*Lose* 17-18). Representing herself as the living testimony of the slave past, the embodiment of a history that has been silenced, Hartman highlights the proximity of past and present and, importantly, foregrounds slavery as a crucial, present-day political issue, not something of the past.

To expose the enduring impact of the past on the current historical moment and incite reflections of its consequences, Hartman employs the phrase “the afterlife of slavery” (*Lose* 6), which refers to legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and enslavement, in particular their effects on present-day Black lives. In an oft-cited passage, she explains,

> If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery. (6)

The conceptualization of slavery's afterlife offers an opportunity to understand and rethink the persistent impact of the slave past that characterizes the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Hartman dispels the myth of a post-racial or colorblind society, endorsing that the systems and dynamics installed during slavery continue to inform the present moment. For this reason, she argues that it is impossible to understand the precarious condition of Black life in the United States today without considering the history of slavery and its legacy. In line with contemporary Black studies scholarship, Hartman counters the simplified linearity that frames narratives of historical progress—rejecting the redemptive slavery-to-freedom narrative and instead presenting herself as a witness to the continuing forms of oppression.

Notably, Hartman's engagement with the past and the history of slavery serves a particular purpose: It is neither an attempt to claim African roots nor the result of "an antiquarian obsession with bygone days," as she remarks in the above quote. Instead, her scholarly journey into the past as well as her research and writing have a political dimension. "To what end," Hartman asks, "does one conjure the ghost of slavery, if not to incite the hopes of transforming the present?" (*Lose* 170). She calls for societal transformation and emphasizes the need to investigate the past in order to create a vision for a future and a more just society. Exposing the devastating consequences of enslavement, segregation, and racism and highlighting the ongoing struggle against oppression, Hartman articulates "[t]he demands of the slave on the present;" these demands "have everything to do with making good the promise of abolition, and this entails much more than the end of property in slaves. It requires the *reconstruction of society*, which is the only way to honor our debt to the dead" (170; emphasis added). Calling for a joint political commitment to eradicate continuing forms of slavery, *Lose Your Mother* continues the tradition of Black travel writing as a means to intervene in the discourses of racism, exploitation, and oppression—an aspect of travel writing that Arana identifies as a "revolutionary act" ("A Kaleidoscopic Genre" 1). Seen in this way, Hartman's

travel writing serves to express radical social criticism and to promote societal change. Her travelogue, therefore, "emerges as a protest narrative that centralizes the unfulfilled dream of black emancipation and liberation" as it turns "to the past of loss and despair in order to reflect on the present" (Nehl 90-91).

Driven by the wish to recover the slave past and to incite change and transformation in the present, Hartman ventures on a journey that is at once physical and historical. That this is not an easy task is made clear from the very beginning. Self-reflexively, the narrative problematizes her "quixotic mission" (*Lose* 17), that is, the search for records of African captives who left no traces. From the very beginning of her time in Ghana, the narrator remains acutely aware of the limitations and the potential failure of her project to excavate the stories of strangers and "reclaim the dead" (6). Drawing attention to the elusive nature of her goals, she wonders, "how does one write a story about an encounter with nothing?" (16). Connecting this project to her unsuccessful attempt to reconstruct the lives of her ancestors when she was young, she notes that even then she was forced to recognize that "fill[ing] in the blank spaces of the story" is a problematic endeavor (12). Indeed, "[t]he gaps and silences of [her] family were not unusual: slavery made the past a mystery, unknown and unspeakable" (13-14). Her efforts to learn more about her own past are thwarted by members of her family who abstain from talking about the past and "erected a wall of half-truths and silences between themselves and the past" (15). Similarly, the people she meets in Ghana either avoid the subject of slavery or present a sanitized version of the past with the purpose of turning it into a tourist attraction and a lucrative business: "Every town or village had an atrocity to promote—a mass grave, an auction block, a slave river, a massacre" (163). In this regard, "'Remembering slavery' became potent means of silencing the past in the very guise of preserving it" because the singular narrative told about the past "effectively curbed all discussion of African slavery and its entailments—class exploitation, gender inequality, ethnic clashes, and regional conflict" (164). The Ghanaians' engagement with history presents a sharp contrast to her attempt to gain a fuller understanding of it. Their tendency to forget slavery complicates Hartman's mission.

Hartman's desire to excavate the stories of "people who left behind no traces" (*Lose* 15) and to search for "the remnants of those who had vanished" (17) results from the lack of historical evidence in the archival records. In most accounts of the slave trade, Black people exist only in or merely as statistics. Hartman continuously draws attention to the limitations of the official histor-

ical archive of slavery: "The archive contained what you would expect: the manifests of slavers; ledger books of trade goods; inventories of foodstuffs; bills of sale; itemized lists of bodies alive, infirm, and dead; captains' logs; planters' diaries" (17). These material archives, Hartman shows, are not comprehensive repositories but rather reveal further silences and blank slates. Due to the limits of the archive, Hartman registers and critiques the preoccupation of academics and scholars with the calculation and estimation of the numerical aspects of the slave trade. The quantitative evidence and the "algebraic formulas," however, "obscured the disaster: Deck Area = Constant X (Tonnage) 2/3" (32). This kind of record yields no insights into the individual stories of the captives and neither does it restore their humanity. Instead, the quantitative data buries the names and stories of people and thereby dehumanizes them. Reimagining the experiences of the people who were rendered silent is Hartman's attempt to counter the "violence of abstraction" (Saunders 5), that is, the destructive and dehumanizing effects of transforming human life into statistical ciphers.[30]

Longing to hear the stories of captives, the narrator immerses herself in the physical sites of memory. However, not only the archives and historical records of slavery are devoid of the stories of enslaved people but also the sites Hartman visits. In the dungeon of Cape Coast Castle, she discovers that "there were remains but no stories that could resurrect the dead except the stories [she] invented" (*Lose* 116). In the dungeon, she tries to listen for the "groans and cries [...] but the space was mute" (116). Neither listening nor touching the physical remains reveals any stories: "My hand glided over the walls, as though the rough surfaces were a script that I could read through my dull fingers. But the brush of my hands against the stone offered no hint or clue" (119). The silence in the dungeon points to her complicated mission to conjure into existence the nameless and faceless people from the findings that

30 For the past decades, historians have sought to write a subjective human history of the slave trade by focusing on personal stories of the lives of African captives. This is an attempt to counter the violence of abstraction produced by the quantitative evidence that risks to further dehumanize the enslaved people. Reflecting this shift in perspective, works such as Marcus Rediker's *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (2007) and Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (2007) revise the dominant discourse on slavery that too often measures the gravity of the slave trade in terms of quantifiable data. Hartman's narrative also addresses the need to supplement the quantitative evidence with personal stories of people to account for and comprehend the enormity of the loss created by the slave trade.

are accessible in slavery's material archive. In a similar vein, she also recognizes that even the museum of the castle does not provide insights into the enslaved Africans' lives: "Even in the museum, the slaves were missing. None of their belongings were arranged nicely in well-lit glass cases. [...] None of their sayings were quoted on placards throughout the hall" (116).

Hartman's journey and her literary record thereof can therefore be understood as a response to the silence of the dungeon, the blankness of the documents in the archive, the silences in her family's past, and the omission of more complex narratives about slavery in Ghana. According to the narrator, the voids of the archive of slavery produce the need for reimagining and reinventing stories. The absence of records of the experiences of the enslaved incites the narrator's reimagining of what is left out. On various occasions in the book, Hartman reimagines the stories of enslaved people in an attempt to invoke the dead. Thus, her project is not limited by the aim to retrieve and preserve forgotten stories of the past. Rather, in an effort to counter the erasure and the silences, she creatively rewrites and reconstructs such stories.

One such story is that of an enslaved young woman murdered aboard the British slave ship *Recovery*—one of the many silenced voices of marginalized and oppressed people who were elided from history. The chapter titled "The Dead Book" (a reference to a journal that was used to keep record of the captives who died on board the slave ship) is placed at the center of Hartman's travel narrative and presents a multi-perspective account of the story of the unnamed young woman (see also Nehl 104-07). Split into different sections, each of which focalizes a different historical actor, the chapter produces a speculative account of the events that took place aboard the *Recovery* and that led to the woman's death. Drawing on her imagination and the historical records, namely the transcript of a trial held against the captain of the slave ship, John Kimber, in 1792 and a speech given by abolitionist William Wilberforce who accused Kimber of murder, Hartman reconstructs and rewrites the woman's story. This story is, in the broadest sense, a fictionalized travel narrative that is told from different perspectives, including that of Captain Kimber, the third mate, and the ship's surgeon. But while the testimonies of the captain, the surgeon, and the abolitionist in the trial transcript represent the only record of the woman's existence, their words, as Hartman stresses, "killed her a second time and consigned her to the bottom of the Atlantic" (*Lose* 138). She therefore devotes the last part of the narrative to the woman, endowing her account with significance and subverting earlier versions of the incident.

Hartman's fictionalized account thus serves as a counter-narrative that challenges the White male perspectives.

The chapter "The Dead Book" presents a complex intertwinement of different narrative voices and perspectives and transgresses the boundaries between fictional and factual historical accounts. In her article "Venus in Two Acts" (2008), Hartman expounds on her method of rewriting the stories of enslaved people: She employs the term "critical fabulation" to describe her writing practice, which is a narrative and aesthetic strategy that merges historical writing, archival research, and fictional narratives to address and redress the gaps and silences of the archive (Hartman, "Venus" 11-12). Contemplating the engagement of scholars with the archive of slavery and the challenges resulting from the absence of records, the authors of *The Silence of the Archive* (2017) write the following:

> How have researchers responded to the absence or inaccessibility of the archives? [...] Some have simply imagined the missing records, while others have gone further and fictionalized them, producing novelistic accounts or even virtual-reality versions of what might have existed. Writers of the slave trade who suffer from an almost total lack of written sources about individual slaves are well known as users of these approaches. (Thomas et al. 117)

The questions that arise from these statements refer to the (im)possibilities of countering the silences of the archive by reimagining, recreating, and representing the records that were lost or never existed in the first place. Notably, *Lose Your Mother* is concerned with these very questions.

The fictionalized account portrays the nameless woman as a strong and determined character despite the violence inflicted upon her body and soul. Asserting control over her body, she refuses to eat and speak and finally resolves to die. Evoking the legend of the flying African, Hartman imagines that the woman "had discovered a way off the ship" and was "on her way home" (*Lose* 152). The woman's return to her home, however, is only possible in the imagination—in Hartman's speculative account. Accordingly, the chapter's closing paragraph defies hopeful notions of redemption and closure:

> If the story ended there, I could feel a small measure of comfort. I could hold on to this instant of possibility. I could find a salutary lesson in the girl's suffering and pretend a story was enough to save her from oblivion. I could sigh

> with relief and say, 'It all happened so long ago.' Then I could wade into the Atlantic and not think of the *dead book*. (153)

The use of the conditional tense in the paragraph signals the impossibility of recovering the dead and finding closure. The narrative dramatizes the delusion and failure inherent in Hartman's project of reconstructing and reimagining the lives of those who were silenced and invisibilized, thus suggesting that there is no working through or overcoming the trauma created by enslavement. Hartman's reconstructed account of the anonymous woman's story is an attempt "to remedy the slave's oblivion" (135), but it cannot repair the loss or heal the trauma. Rejecting the idea of "the slave girl's 'resurrection' through revisionist narratives that would utilize her as a teachable moment for present-day aims" (Woodard 5), Hartman suggests that the wounds inflicted by slavery cannot be healed.

Leaving the question of representability unanswered, Hartman is critical of her own wish to give a voice to the voiceless and to represent that which seems irrepresentable. Representational practices, she posits, can be responsible for producing and reproducing Black suffering and death. Therefore, the question that concerns Hartman is whether it is possible or desirable to represent the experiences of the enslaved and how such accounts can be reimagined from the vantage point of the twenty-first century. She self-reflexively explores the risks that such a reappropriation of stories and lives entails and draws attention to the conceptual, aesthetic, and ethical challenges in representing slavery.[31] In doing so, she scrutinizes the implications of representing the past and the linguistic limitations. Thereby, *Lose Your Mother* invokes a question posed in Toni Morrison's classic neo-slave narrative *Beloved*: "how can I say things that are pictures" (248). Hartman likewise asks how the woman's

31 Writers of fiction, in particular authors of neo-slave narratives, are confronted with the question of representation. Literary scholar Yogita Goyal explains that "the subject of slavery forces a confrontation with key literary questions: how to write absence into presence, how to attain the semblance of historical truth in light of the silences of the archive, and how to transforms loss into neither survival nor transcendence, but a reckoning" (148). These narratives creatively negotiate the question of representation and stress "the impossibility of ever being able to know the truth of slavery" (148). For an insightful analysis of the risks inherent in representing slavery in contemporary Black literature, see also Markus Nehl's *Transnational Black Dialogues: Re-Imagining Slavery in the Twenty-First Century* (2016).

story can be represented without transforming her death into a story of survival that caters to the naive wish to overcome and heal the wounds of slavery. The problems that such a project entails, she remarks, are those of repeating the objectification, suffering, and humiliation that Black people have experienced.[32] In self-reflexively fashion, Hartman reckons with her personal and scholarly desire to research and engage with the history of enslavement; she also demonstrates her awareness that filling in the blank spaces in the archive of slavery is a difficult project that risks committing further acts of violence. She illustrates the limits of her writerly project and addresses the problematic attempt to rewrite and reimage the enslaved people's lives and their voices. Hartman leaves open whether trauma can or should be represented, but she makes clear that it cannot be given closure and it cannot bring healing or reconciliation.

Throughout the narrative, Hartman displays a highly critical stance regarding her own limited and even compromised perspective as a traveler, researcher, and writer. She employs the metaphor of blindness to address her lack of critical insight and to scrutinize her assumptions and projections. In her astute analysis of *Lose Your Mother*, Tisha M. Brooks draws attention to the critical vision that Hartman exhibits throughout her narrative, contending that Hartman uses "tropes of blindness and sight in order to challenge traditional Western conceptions of vision, as well as conceptions of light and dark" (63). Darkness—often used in Western travel writing as a metaphor for the alleged irrationality, backwardness, and savagery of African populations that is presented as an antithesis to the 'enlightened' West—is introduced as a reality in the text: In the chapter "The Dark Days," Hartman relates her nightly wanderings through her neighborhood in Accra when the electricity

32 In her acclaimed book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997), Hartman addresses the dangers inherent in reproducing the "terrible spectacles" in the literature of slavery, such as the beating of Aunt Hester in Douglass's 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. She points out that "[r]ather than inciting indignation, too often they immure us to pain by virtue of their familiarity […] and especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering" (3). Hartman therefore refrains from representing the "terrible spectacles," making it her task "to look elsewhere and consider those scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned" (for example, the dances performed by enslaved people in their quarters) in order "to illuminate the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle" (4).

was turned off. Here, the darkness becomes a way for her to be more attentive to the things around her. She explores the neighborhood, now conscious of the people who populate it but whom she failed to notice during the day, such as the beggars, street children, refugees, soldiers, derelicts, and sleepwalkers (*Lose* 176). The darkness does indeed offer new possibilities for seeing the world around her and introduces her "to the multitude outside the circle of light" (176-77). Significantly, the trope of 'dark Africa' is subverted as she embraces the darkness caused by the blackout. Countering perceptions that Accra is dangerous and unsafe at night, she compares her comfort walking around the city with her fear of being robbed or assaulted in the streets of New York or Oakland (174). Hartman acknowledges her initial failure to see and notice things and draws attention to her flawed and limited perception: "I lived in darkness, not the darkness of African inscrutability or the gloomy cast of a benighted landscape but rather in a blind alley of my own making, in the deep hole of my ignorance" (174). Importantly, Accra's darkness is transformed into a metaphor for her shortsightedness and her compromised perception of Africa at large.

Hartman's exploration of the dark neighborhood functions to scrutinize her position as traveler, researcher, and writer. The narrative points to the fact that her journey is, at least to some extent, a continuation of Western (colonial) travel to Africa and that she follows in the footsteps of explorers of the nineteenth century: "I was self-conscious about my flashlight and feared it was the equivalent of the pith helmet worn by colonial administrators. Illuminating the world seemed like an act of violence, when everyone else was willing to fare in darkness" (*Lose* 174). Evoking the physical and symbolic violence that defined the traveling practice of colonial explorers and missionaries who set out to bring 'light' to 'dark Africa,' Hartman observes how her flashlight "stabbed through darkness and haphazardly entered intimate spaces" (175). Being aware that she is a participant in the tradition of Western travel to Africa and writing about the continent, Hartman subverts and challenges the position of the traveler-writer who claims knowledge and authority based on their ability to see. Writing back to colonial travel narratives, she unmasks the connection between sight/vision and discourses of power, knowledge, and appropriation in representations of travel.[33] She challenges the privileging of sight when she notes,

33 For a concise account of the privileging of sight in representations of travel and its implication with discourses of power, see Topping 283-85.

> In Western philosophy, knowledge has been conceived of primarily as an ocular function. To know is to see and to see is the inception of thought. [...] Not being able to see clearly is tantamount to ignorance, and since early modernity the ignorance of the West had been projected onto Africa—the *heart of darkness*, the dark continent, the blighted territory.
>
> *But I knew better.* My flashlight was a defense not against dark, dark Africa but against my own compromised sight, my own thickheadedness. I had been in Ghana nearly half a year and I barely understood the world around me. [...] I had found no stories. (174-75; emphasis added)

Importantly, as Brooks points out, Hartman "knows better" than "to project her own blindness onto Africa" and critically turns her gaze "inward to expose her own interior failings, flaws, and limitations" (66). By disassociating the sense of vision from the notion of objectivity, knowledge, and truth, the travelogue subverts traditional perceptions of the traveler. Hartman's critical engagement with the genre's history and conventions—in particular, the representation of the traveler as authoritative and knowledgeable, travel writing's claim to authenticity, and the 'dark continent' rhetoric that has defined discourses on Africa—demonstrate her struggle to inscribe herself in representations of travel. Hartman points to an understanding of seeing and perceiving as dependent on the individual's perspective and critically reflects on her viewing practice. Aware of the history and tradition of travel writing, Hartman—like Phillips and other authors of innovative travel narratives—transforms the genre as she carves out new forms of representing her experience in Africa. She recognizes the "need to be sensitive to multiple points of view, polyphonic voices, fluid conceptions of language and nuanced relationships to place while still allowing these perspectives to defy authority and remain tentative, in motion" (Edwards and Graulund, *Mobility at Large* 200). Hartman, therefore, "embraces multiplicity, complexity, and even contradiction over the ease of simplistic binaries at the heart of singular narratives" (Brooks 65) and explores the different and often conflicting narratives of the slave trade in the United States and Ghana. Throughout the journey, the narrator discovers that slavery is remembered differently by the people she encounters and in the places she visits, thereby drawing attention to the diverse cultural memories of slavery.

The journey along the slave routes leads Hartman to Gwolu, a village in the Ghanaian hinterland—"the heartland of slavery" (*Lose* 232)—that is the last stop on her tour and recounted at the end of the narrative. Delving into the

history of the village, the narrative relates the story of the people of Gwolu, the descendants of warriors and refugees, who successfully defended themselves against the slave raids. Hartman notes in surprise that "[t]heir story of slavery was a narrative of victory, a tale of resistance and overcoming" (233). In Gwolu, refugees from different regions who fled the slave raiders came together and became known as "the Sisala, which means 'to come together, to become together, to weave together'" (225). Although they came from different cultures, spoke different languages, and had different histories, they were bound together by their struggle to survive. Together, they created a future for themselves, establishing new traditions and building a community based on solidarity and freedom, not predicated on ethnicity: "'We' was the collectivity they built from the ground up, not one they had inherited, not one that others had imposed" (225). The story of the Sisala is a coming together of strangers—an embrace of differences and a creation of unity that derived from the common struggle for freedom and the fight against predators. While for Hartman, a descendant of enslaved Africans, the story of slavery is connected to subjugation, disinheritance, displacement, and oppression, the narratives revolving around slavery present a different picture for many of those who stayed behind. Discovering different legacies of the slave trade, she notes that for the descendants of Africans who had survived the slave raids, capture, and deportation, the memories and stories of the trade were decisively different than those told by the descendants of survivors in the Americas: "those who stayed behind told different stories than the children of the captives dragged across the sea. Theirs wasn't a memory of loss or of captivity, but of survival and good fortune" (232).

In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman undermines her assumption—and that of her readers—that the story of slavery revolves only around the people who were captured, sold, and carried across the Atlantic. While she expected to find another story of dispossession and defeat, she discovers a story of freedom, survival, and triumph in Gwolu instead. The history of the Sisala is a "narrative of liberation" (*Lose* 232) that presents an antithesis to the "history of defeat" (233) that the narrator had internalized. Recounting the Sisala's narrative of triumph and perseverance, Hartman subverts the hegemony of the American story of slavery that centers on the captives who were violently uprooted and forced to leave their homes and that ignores the narratives of the ones who stayed behind. Consequently, she incorporates the story of liberation into the narrative of the slave trade thereby complicates her own understanding of the past and the cultural memory of slavery. Signaling a shift

in perspective, the narrator discloses, "I had been waiting to hear the story with which I was already familiar," but "in listening to my story I had almost missed theirs" (233). Recognizing the different stories that comprise the history of the slave trade, *Lose Your Mother* problematizes singular narratives of the past and acknowledges that different contexts and perspectives shape the visions and versions of this history.

Importantly, Hartman creates a vision for future diasporic engagement with Africa based on this realization. Her ability to envision diasporic engagement distinguishes her from many of the other travelers whose narratives are discussed in this study. Africa, for Hartman, is not something that only defined and shaped her past; rather, it is part of her future: "At the end of my journey, I knew that Africa wasn't dead to me, nor was it just a grave. My future was entangled with it, just as it was entangled with every other place on the globe where people were struggling to live and hoping to thrive" (*Lose* 233). Crucially, the engagement she envisions is not rooted in a shared history, an ancient African past, or the idea of Africa as home. Knowing that the past is remembered differently in Africa and America, she asserts that the history of slavery "provided little ground for solidarity" (165) between Black people from different sides of the Atlantic Ocean. What defines Black peoples' relations and also their communities are heterogeneity and difference; for this reason, she argues that kinship and solidarity do not derive from a shared past. Instead, she finds inspiration in the narrative of the Sisala and understands that transnational diasporic connections stem from the shared fight for freedom. Her vision of future diasporic relations is thus informed by the "ongoing struggle to escape, to stand down, and defeat slavery in all of its myriad forms" (234). Hartman articulates a political project of resistance to ongoing forms of oppression that is built on solidarity. Her affiliation with Africa is thus productively oriented toward the future.

Lose Your Mother belongs to a strand of Black travel writing that Commander defines as post-civil-rights Black American literature about homeland returns, that is, "experimental texts whose methodology relies on fragmentation and uncertainty to portray the diasporan condition" (54.) Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* likewise fits this strand of writing. The two travel narratives by Hartman and Phillips demonstrate the fruitfulness of exploring the narrow and diffuse space that divides factual and fictional travel writing to talk about the Black diaspora. Their works display an intensive engagement with the past and its effects on contemporary Black lives. Tracing the geographical and historical routes of enslaved Africans, migrants, exiles, emigrationists, and diasporic

returnees, the writers use their travel narratives to explore the current condition of the African diaspora. Furthermore, both narratives are concerned with recovering the voices silenced by history and offering multifaceted stories of the past that challenge monolithic historical narratives. They do so using a variety of narrative strategies—merging, for example, fictional and non-fictional accounts, autobiographical and memoir writing, and historical scholarship—and thereby stretch the generic boundaries of travel writing.

V Conclusion: Ambiguous Arrivals

> The Promised Land is never arrived at. […] No country is what it should be, just as no man is perfect.
>
> —*Emily Raboteau, Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora*

The goal of this study was to examine the phenomenon of diasporic travel to Africa through the lens of travel writing and to analyze contemporary autobiographical travel narratives by Black writers from the United States in Britain. It sought to make a distinct contribution to the scholarship on Black travel writing, first, by outlining the genre of transnational Black travel writing and tracing its development and trajectories, and second, by reading eight contemporary travel narratives with a focus on the meaning of the journey and the traveler-writer's engagement with the African continent. In light of the long tradition of Black travel to Africa—beginning with the return journeys of free and formerly enslaved Africans, Black emigrationists, colonists, and missionaries—it is central to situate contemporary journeys and literary representations thereof within the wider cultural and historical context, as this study has done. This yields important insights into the various forms of Black diasporic engagement with the continent and its "abiding presence in black political, intellectual, and imaginative life" (Campbell xxiii). Moreover, my focus on travel or, as a matter of fact, mobility and movement in the history and experience of the Black diaspora underscores the diverse meanings and significations attached to the practice of traveling; for example, the liberatory potential of travel and its connection to resistance and defiance.

Based on these considerations and the finding that, despite the centrality of travel for the diaspora, the research on Black travel writing remains surprisingly scarce, the study set itself the task to sketch the genre of Black travel writing. It outlined the emergence of the rich and multifaceted genre and

traced its origins back to the slave narratives, which it conceptualizes as travel writing that took shape in the Atlantic world in the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries. Scrutinizing the formal and thematic characteristics of the slave narrative and paying attention to the crucial role of literal and figurative movement in the texts, the study exemplified that these early forms of travel writing constitute literary templates for the works that followed. Although there is no fixed set of traits that unites all forms of Black travel writing, there are several thematic and narrative consistencies. Offering an exploratory discussion and survey of Black travel narratives, the study has registered several key elements that permeate much Black travel writing. Among them are the following: the creation of an authoritative literary voice and the function of travel writing to articulate critique and call for political and societal transformation; the powerful and empowering effects of travel and travel writing and the possibility to challenge racial and social boundaries; the change of perspective and critical reflection incited by travel; the transformative potential of journeying abroad that entails a textual creation or redefinition of the subject's identity; the use of the journey motive as a means of self-exploration; the emphasis on the Black subject's physical and intellectual mobility; the engagement with Africa and its employment as a terrain upon which questions of identity, nation, and race are examined.

The analyses of contemporary Black travel narratives about journeys to Africa underscore the multifarious engagements of travel writers with the continent. Each of the works analyzed reflects in unique ways the meaning and significance of travel to Africa for the individual. What pertains to travel writing in general and holds true for Black travel writing about Africa in particular is that these works tell us less about the current condition of the African continent and more about the traveler who experiences and writes about the journey. In the travel narratives, Africa figures as a terrain upon which intimate questions of self and identity, belonging, and cultural origin are negotiated. The physical journeys and their literary representations are ways for the writers to explore their connection or disconnection to 'Africa,' their sense of self as mobile Black subjects in a globalized world, the cultural memories of historical displacement, and the legacies of slavery that influence the lived realities of Black people in the contemporary moment. Moreover, it incites contemplations about the places that are temporarily left behind, the countries from which the writers embarked. In this sense, the travel narratives exemplify what has been said about travel writing more generally, namely "that the writer's inner journey is the most important part—and

certainly the most interesting part—of any travel book. It doesn't make any difference where you go; it's your interpretation of it that matters" (Birkett and Wheeler viii).

As the analyses in Chapter IV have illustrated, for some travelers, the journey to Africa and its literary representation serve to construct and strengthen ties to the ancestral homeland. For Obama and Washington, their travel experiences represent identity constituting moments that bring closure to their narrative quests, both on the level of form and content. By contrast, other travelers reject the idea of having a connection to the continent or a cultural link with Africans. Travelers such as Harris and Richburg employ their descriptions of Africa and their characterizations of African people to define themselves in opposition to a cultural 'other' and thereby show how profoundly American they are. Their narratives disenchant the continent and deconstruct the myth of Africa as a homeland for Black diasporic people. Other travel narratives, such as those written by Eshun and Raboteau, focus on the meaning and location of home. Their journeys are incited by their desire for home and their feelings of alienation, estrangement, and disconnection from their home societies, which they critically examine from abroad. However, as they travel to Africa, these traveler-writers are able to reimagine the places they left behind as home. Still others are preoccupied with the history of the Black diaspora, the cultural memory of slavery, and the legacies of the past. Travelogues such as those by Phillips and Hartman demonstrate their critical engagement with the histories of the places they visit. Moreover, their texts are examples of a particularly innovative strand of contemporary travel writing that reflects on the problematic nature of the genre and searches for new forms of expressing and representing (Black) travel, thus pushing against the traditional generic borders. The analyzed travel narratives differ in content and form, but they also reveal narrative and thematic consistencies. Much of Black contemporary travel writing about Africa is characterized by conflicting impulses, that is, the desire to return to and reconnect with an imagined African homeland and the realization that Africa is not an alternative home. Therefore, their arrivals are often ambiguous, both in terms of their actual arrival in Africa as well as with regard to the conclusions at which they arrive in their narratives.

The focus of this study rested on the traveler-writers' engagement with Africa. In this regard, it accounts only partially for the variety, heterogeneity, and richness of Black travel writing, which represents an abundance of journeys to different locales and articulates a range of travel experiences. Black

travelers have been around the world and their literary records of these experiences comprise a rich source for study. An inquiry into these texts broadens our understanding of the genre. It also brings the manifold forms of travel experiences to the fore and thereby challenges prevailing assumptions of Black travel tied to certain geographies and imbricated with particular concerns and forms of mobility. Therefore, journeys to places and continents other than Africa have yet to be investigated in more detail. Furthermore, travel narratives by authors from outside the United States and Britain and in languages other than English provide a rich reservoir of sources. An analysis of diverse journeying should not be restricted to autobiographical travel narratives but can take fictional representations of travel into account, thus pushing scholarship into new directions. Focusing on Black travel writing in all its myriad forms helps to decolonize the genre and "untie travel writing from its Western moorings" (Ní Loingsigh 3); a necessary and overdue task that requires updating the canon, modifying theoretical and critical approaches, and broadening the definition of travel and travel writing to include those authors, texts, and journeys that do not adhere to the conventional understandings both of the genre and the practice of travel. Doing so can further open up the research area in travel writing to the exploration of past and contemporary texts that have not been recognized as travel writing thus far. One can be optimistic about future developments in the field if one trusts Youngs and Forsdick's assertion that, "[l]ike the literary form that they take as their object of enquiry, travel writing studies are continually evolving" (13).

For none of the Black travelers in the narratives analyzed in this study, Africa is more than a travel destination or temporary dwelling place; they all eventually return to the places from which they departed. However, their travels and literary engagement with Africa are expressions of the continuing interest in gaining an understanding of their relationship to the continent. For the Black diaspora, travels to Africa continue to be of importance and serve as a way to discover a sense of belonging, to explore their personal and collective histories, and to escape, if only temporarily, from the racism they experience in their home countries. Recently, return trips, pilgrimage journeys, as well as emigration to Africa have gained momentum. Travel agencies catering specifically to Black travelers, such as the Atlanta-based company Black and Abroad, promote travel to Africa. Black and Abroad has launched a Pan-African tourism campaign that encourages African Americans to visit Africa, appropriating the initially racist phrase "go back to Africa"—which has been

used as an insult against Black people living in a non-African country—to reframe the narrative and propel literal travel to Africa ("Go Back"). As this example illustrates, the desire to journey to Africa and the idea of Black repatriation to the continent remain alive. Although scholars maintain that "Africa has not emerged as an alternative in the discourse of Black Americans as they face new challenges in this century," the fact that African diasporic people "continue to settle in Africa in small numbers" shows that the continent retains its pertinence (Blyden 209). In this regard, Kelley draws attention to African Americans' persistent wish to "pack up and leave" and argues that, while "the story of Noah's ark from Genesis might have overtook the Book of Exodus as the more common analogy of flight" (30), the idea of leaving the United States remains vital. He continues that "the dream of Exodus still lives in those of us not satisfied with the world as we know it" (35).

Surely, the dream of Exodus also plays a role in the recent call for a "Blaxit," a joining of the words "Black" and "exit" that denotes the migration or repatriation of Black people from the West to Africa in an effort to escape anti-Black racism (Springer; see also Carter 70). According to an article in *The Atlantic*, search requests for the term "Blaxit" spiked dramatically around the US presidential election of 2016 and again at the inauguration of the new president (Springer). It seems that because of the rise of nationalist sentiment and White supremacist ideologies, which have been articulated more loudly and forcefully in the past years, some Black Americans entertain the thought of relocating. Those thinking about emigrating often identify the persistent racism and violence against Black people as reasons for their wish to move abroad (Springer). As Kelley's statement signals, the dissatisfaction with the current political, racial, and social climate in the United States will likely fuel future travel. We can thus expect that the Black diaspora's interest in the African continent will persist, at least in the near future. Likewise, we can expect that travel accounts will be written by those who make the journey. These travel narratives will provide further insights into the writers' personal meditations and intimate questions of home, belonging, identity, and the meaning of history. This certainly demonstrates that Black travel writing constitutes a fruitful field for research for literary and cultural studies, thus offering multiple new research paths to travel. The study at hand, therefore, provides a point of departure for further inquiries into the genre of travel writing.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Angelou, Maya. *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*. 1986. Vintage Books, 1991.

Brown, William Wells. *The American Fugitive in Europe: Sketches of Places and People Abroad*. John P. Jewett, 1855.

Cullen, Countee. "Heritage." *Color*, Harper & Brothers, 1925, pp. 36-41.

Douglass, Frederick. *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History*. *Written by Himself.* 1892. Introduction by Rayford W. Logan. Courier, 2012.

—. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself.* 1845. Introduction by Robert B. Stepto, Belknap Press, 2009.

Duke, Lynne. *Mandela, Mobutu, and Me: A Newswoman's African Journey*. Doubleday, 2003.

Eshun, Ekow. *Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in Africa and Beyond*. 2005. Vintage Books, 2007.

Haley, Alex. *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. 1976. Vintage Books, 1991.

Harris, Eddie L. *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa*. 1992. Vintage Books, 1993.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. Farrah, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

Lazard, Dorothy. "Finding Myself in the World." *Go Girl! The Black Woman's Book of Travel and Adventure*, edited by Elaine Lee, The Eighth Mountain Press, 1997, pp. 221-25.

McElroy, Colleen J. *A Long Way from St. Louie: Travel Memoirs*. Coffee House Press, 1997.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. Vintage Books, 2005.

Obama, Barack. *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. 1995. Canongate, 2008.

Phillips, Caryl. *The Atlantic Sound*. 2000. Vintage Books, 2001.

Prince, Mary. *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave: Related by Herself.* U of North Carolina P, 2017.

Raboteau, Emily. *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora*. Grove Press, 2013.

Richburg, Keith. *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa*. 1997. Basic Books, 2009.

—. *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa*. 1997. Harcourt, 1998.

Washington, Isaiah with Lavaille Lavette. *A Man from Another Land: How Finding My Roots Changed My Life*. Center Street, 2011.

Wells, Ida B. *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. Edited by Alfreda M. Duster. U of Chicago Press, 1970.

Williams, Charlotte. *Sugar and Slate*. Planet, 2002.

Wright, Richard. "Black Power: Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos." *Black Power: Three Books from Exile*. Kindle ed., HarperCollins e-books, 2008.

Secondary Sources

Adamu, Zaina. "How Ghana's Historic Homecoming Is Changing Africa." *CNN Travel*, 13 Jan. 2020, www.edition.cnn.com/travel/article/ghana-historic-homecoming-intl/index.html. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Alcoff, Linda Martín. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self.* Oxford UP, 2006.

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. 10th anniversary ed., The New Press, 2020.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 1983.

Antz, Elisa. "Roots, Seduction and Mestiçagem in José Eduardo Agualusa's *My Father's Wives*." *Turning Points: Concepts and Narratives of Change in Literature and Other Media*, edited by Ansgar Nünning and Kai Marcel Sicks, De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 269-83.

Arana, R. Victoria, editor. "Black Travel Writing, a Kaleidoscopic Genre." Introduction. *Black Travel Writing*, special issue of *BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, fall 2003, pp. 1-7.

—. "Black Travel Writing: The Invisible Genre." *African Diaspora Tourism*, 9 Jan. 2019, www.africandiasporatourism.com/2019/01/09/black-travel-writing-the-invisible-genre/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Asante, Molefi. K. *Erasing Racism: The Survival of the American Nation*. Prometheus Books, 2003.

Baillie, Justine. "From Margin to Centre: Postcolonial Identities and Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*." *Life Writing*, vol. 8, no. 3, Sept. 2011, pp. 217-329.

Ball, Erica L., and Kellie Carter Jackson, editors. *Reconsidering Roots. Race, Politics, and Memory*. U of Georgia P, 2017.

Baraw, Charles. "William Wells Brown, *Three Years in Europe*, and Fugitive Tourism." *African American Review*, vol. 44, no. 3, fall 2011, pp. 453-70.

Basseler, Michael, et al., editors. *The Cultural Dynamics of Generic Change in Contemporary Fiction: Theoretical Frameworks, Genres and Model Interpretations*. WVT, 2013.

Bay, Mia. *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance*. Kindle ed., Harvard UP, 2021.

—. "Traveling Black/Buying Black: Retail and Roadside Accommodations during the Segregation Era." *Race and Retail: Consumption Across the Color Line*, edited by Mia Bay and Ann Fabian, Rutgers UP, 2015, pp. 15-33.

Bennett, Zara. "Going Home? The Failed Myth of Return in Eddy L. Harris's *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa* and Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*." *Paroles Gelées*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2006, pp. 7-18.

Berghahn, Marion. *The Image of Africa in Black American Literature*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1977.

Berlin, Ira. *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations*. Viking, 2010.

Birkett, Dea, and Sara Wheeler, editors. Introduction. *Amazonian: The Penguin Book of Women's New Travel Writing*. Penguin, 1998, pp. vii-xiii.

Blunt, Alison, and Robyn Dowling. *Home*. Routledge, 2006.

Blyden, Nemata Amelia I. *African Americans and Africa: A New History*. Yale UP, 2019.

Bohls, Elizabeth A. *Slavery and the Politics of Place: Representing the Colonial Caribbean, 1770-1833*. Cambridge UP, 2014.

Bond, Emma. *Writing Migration Through the Body*. Springer International Publishing, 2018.

Borm, Jan. "Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology." *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, edited by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 13-26.

Borman, David. "'A Reach Across the Void': Reconstructing the African Family in Barack Obama and Aminatta Forna." *Barack Obama's Literary Legacy*, edited by Richard Purcell and Henry Veggian, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 101-18.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. 1996. Taylor & Francis, 2005.

Brooks, Tisha M. "Searching for 'Free Territory' in Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 50, no. 2, fall 2017, pp. 57-83.

Browne, Simone. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke UP, 2015.

Bruner, Jerome. "The Narrative Construction of Reality." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1991, pp. 1-21.

Camp, Stephanie M. H. *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*. U of North Carolina P, 2004.

Campbell, James T. *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005*. Penguin, 2006.

Carretta, Vincent. "Back to the Future: Eighteenth-Century Transatlantic Black Authors." *A Companion to African American Literature*, edited by Gene Andrew Jarrett, Wiley, 2010. 11-24.

—. *Equiano the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man*. U of Georgia P, 2005.

—. Introduction. *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, by Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, Penguin Books, 1999, pp. ix-xxviii.

Carretta, Vincent, and Philip Gould, editors. Introduction. *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic*. UP of Kentucky, 2014, pp. 1-13.

Carter, Niambi Michele. *American While Black: African Americans, Immigration, and the Limits of Citizenship*. Oxford UP, 2019.

Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall, U of California P, 1984.

Clare, Rod. "The Black Lives Matter Movement in the National Museum of African American History and Culture." *Transfers*, vol. 6, no. 1, spring 2016, pp. 122-25.

Clarke, George Elliott. "'This Is No Hearsay': Reading the Canadian Slave Narratives." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*, vol. 43, no. 1, spring 2005, pp. 7-32.

Clarke, Robert, editor. "Toward a Genealogy of Postcolonial Travel Writing. An Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Travel Writing*. Cambridge UP, 2018, pp 1-15.

Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Harvard UP, 1997.

Cohen, Ralph. "History and Genre." *New Literary History*, vol. 17, no. 2, winter 1986, pp. 203-18.

Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008.

Coles, Robert. *Black Writers Abroad: A Study of Black American Writers in Europe and Africa*. Garland, 1999.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 1991.

Commander, Michelle D. *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic*. Duke UP, 2017.

Cooke, Simon. "Inner Journeys. Travel Writing as Life Writing." *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Carl Thompson, Routledge, 2016, pp. 15-24.

Couser, G. Thomas. "Filiation in Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*." *Life Writing*, vol. 9, no. 3, Sept. 2012, pp. 259-67.

Cox, John David. *Traveling South: Travel Narratives and the Construction of American Identity*. U of Georgia P, 2005.

Cresswell, Tim. "Black Moves: Moments in the History of African-American Masculine Mobilities." *Transfers*, vol. 6, no. 1, spring 2016, pp. 12-25.

—. *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. Routledge, 2006.

—. "Towards a Politics of Mobility." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 28, no. 1, Feb. 2010, pp. 17-31.

Davis, Angela J. "Race, Cops, and Traffic Stops." *University of Miami Law Review*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1997, pp. 425-43.

Davis, Charles T., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., editors. "Introduction: The Language of Slavery." *The Slave's Narrative*. Oxford UP, 1985, pp. xi-xxxiv.

Diawara, Manthia. *In Search of Africa*. Harvard UP, 1998.

Dillette, Alana. "Roots Tourism: A Second Wave of Double Consciousness for African Americans." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 2020, pp. 1-16.

Dodson, Howard, and Sylviane A. Diouf, editors. *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience*. National Geographic Society, 2004.

Du Bois, W. E. B. "The Souls of Black Folk." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. 2nd ed., edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, W.W. Norton, 2004, pp. 692-766.

Dubey, Madhu, and Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg. "New Frontiers, Cross-Currents and Convergences: Emerging Cultural Paradigms." *The Cam-*

bridge History of African American Literature, edited by Maryemma Graham and Jerry W. Ward, Jr., Cambridge UP, 2011, pp. 566-617.

Duignan, Brian. "Plessy v. Ferguson." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 9 Mar. 2020, www.britannica.com/event/Plessy-v-Ferguson-1896. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Edwards, Justin D., and Rune Graulund, editors. "Introduction: Reading Postcolonial Travel Writing." *Postcolonial Travel Writing: Critical Explorations*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 1-16.

—. *Mobility at Large: Globalization, Textuality and Innovative Travel Writing*. Liverpool UP, 2012.

Eltis, David. *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*. Cambridge UP, 2000.

Essi, Cedric. "Transnational Affiliations in the Mixed Race Memoir: Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*." *American Lives*, edited by Alfred Hornung, Winter, 2013, pp. 261-82.

Fabian, Steven. "Journey out of Darkness? Images of Africa in American Travelogues at the Turn of the Millennium." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2013, pp. 93-109.

Fabre, Michel. *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980*. U of Illinois P, 1993.

Field, Douglas. *James Baldwin*. Northcote House, 2011.

Fisch, Audrey A., editor. Introduction. *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*. Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 1-8.

Fish, Cheryl J. *Black and White Women's Travel Narratives: Antebellum Explorations*. UP of Florida, 2004.

Forsdick, Charles, et al. *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French: Genre, History, Theory*. Peter Lang, 2006.

Fowler, Alastair. *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. Clarendon Press, 1982.

Fowler, Corinne. "Travel Writing and Ethics." *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Carl Thompson, Routledge, 2016, pp. 57-67.

Franey, Laura E. "Sub-Saharan Africa." *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Carl Thompson, Routledge, 2016, pp. 415-42.

Gaines, Kevin Kelley. *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*. U of North Carolina P, 2006.

—. "Black Americans' Racial Uplift Ideology as 'Civilizing Mission': Pauline E. Hopkins on Race and Imperialism." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, Duke UP, 1993, pp. 433-55.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. Foreword. *Reconsidering Roots: Race, Politics, and Memory*, edited by Erica L. Ball and Kellie Carter Jackson, U of Georgia P, 2017, pp. xi-xv.

—. "In Our Lifetime." *The Root*, 5 Nov. 2008, www.theroot.com/in-our-lifetime-1790900330. Accessed 1 June 2021.

—. *In Search of Our Roots: How 19 Extraordinary African Americans Reclaimed Their Past*. Crown Publishers, 2009.

—, editor. Introduction. *The Classic Slave Narrative*. Penguin Books, 1987, pp. ix-xviii.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Harvard UP, 1993.

—. "Driving While Black." *Car Cultures*, edited by Daniel Miller, Bloomsbury Academic, 2001, pp. 81-104.

—. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. 1987. Routledge, 2013.

"Go Back to Africa." *Black and Abroad*, gobacktoafrica.com. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Goodman, Nelson. *Ways of Worldmaking*. Hackett, 1978.

Gould, Philip. "The Rise, Development, and Circulation of the Salve Narrative." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by Audrey A. Fisch, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 11-27.

Goyal, Yogita. "Black Diaspora Literature and the Question of Slavery." *Edinburgh Companion to Atlantic Literary Studies*, edited by Leslie Elizabeth Eckel and Clare Frances Elliott, Edinburgh UP, 2016, pp. 146-60.

Graulund, Rune. "Home." *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies: A Critical Glossary*, edited by Charles Forsdick et al., Anthem Press, 2019, pp. 117-18.

Griffin, Farah Jasmine, and Cheryl J. Fish, editors. Introduction. *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing*. Beacon Press, 1998, pp. xiii-xvii.

Gruesser, John Cullen. "Afro-American Travel Literature and Africanist Discourse." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 24, no.1, spring 1990, pp. 5-20.

—. *Black on Black: Twentieth-Century African American Writing About Africa*. UP of Kentucky, 2000.

—. *Confluences: Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic*. U of Georgia P, 2005.

—. *White on Black: Contemporary Literature About Africa*. U of Illinois P, 1992.

Guasco, Michael. "The Misguided Focus on 1619 as the Beginning of Slavery in the U.S. Damages Our Understanding of American History." *Smithsonian*

Magazine, 13 Sept. 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/misguided-focus-1619-beginning-slavery-us-damages-our-understanding-american-history-180964873/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Hall, Michael Ra-shon. "The Prominence of the Railroad in the African American Imagination: Mobile Men, Gendered Mobility and the Poetry of Sterling A. Brown." *Travel and Imagination*, edited by Garth Lean et al., Ashgate, 2014, pp. 89-102.

Hall, Stuart. "Frontlines/Backyards." *Black British Culture and Society*, edited by Kwesi Owusu, Routledge, 2000, pp. 127-30.

—. "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities." *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, edited by Les Back and John Solomos, Routledge, 2000, pp. 144-53.

—. "Racism and Reaction." *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain: Talks on Race Relations Broadcast by BBC TV*, Commission for Racial Equality, 1978.

Hållén, Nicklas. "A Personal Quest: Travel Writing as Self-Exploration in Eddy L. Harris's *Native Stranger: A Blackamerican's Journey into the Heart of Africa*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2016, pp. 1-16.

Hallet, Wolfgang. "Close Reading and Wide Reading: Teaching Literature and Cultural History in a Unit on Philip K. Dick's 'Minority Report.'" *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2007, pp. 381-97.

Hamera, Judith, and Alfred Bendixen, editors. "Introduction: New Worlds and Old Lands—the Travel Book and the Construction of American Identity." *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*. Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 1-9.

Harris, Eddy L. Review: "Africa Betrayed: Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa. By Keith B. Richburg." *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Feb. 1997, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-02-23-bk-31454-story.html. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Harris, Trudier. "What is Africa to African American Women Writers?" *Contemporary Literature in the African Diaspora*, edited by Olga Barrios and Bernard W. Bell, Departamento de Filología Inglesa, Universidad de Salamanca, 1997, pp. 25-32.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford UP, 1997.

—. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe*, vol. 12, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 1-14.

Hartman, Saidiya, et al. "Memoirs of Return: Saidiya Hartman, Eva Hoffman, and Daniel Mendelsohn in Conversation with Nancy K. Miller." *Rites of*

Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory, edited by Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, Columbia UP, 2011, pp. 107-23.

Hill, Lena. *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition*. Cambridge UP, 2014.

Hirsch, Marianne, and Nancy K. Miller, editors. Introduction. *Rites of Return: Diaspora and the Politics of Memory*. Columbia UP, 2011, pp. 1-20.

Hogan, Jackie. *Roots Quest: Inside America's Genealogy Boom*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

Holland, Patrick, and Graham Huggan. *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. U of Michigan P, 1998.

Holsey, Bayo. "Embodying Africa: Roots-Seekers and the Politics of Blackness." *The Trouble with Post-Blackness*, edited by Houston A. Baker Jr. and K. Merinda Simmons, Columbia UP, 2015, pp. 144-61.

hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. South End Press, 1992.

Hornung, Alfred, and Nina Morgan. "Introduction: Recognizing Transnational American Studies." *The Routledge Companion to Transnational American Studies*, edited by Nina Morgan et al., Routledge, 2019, pp. 1-8.

Huggan, Graham. *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization*. U of Michigan P, 2009.

Hulme, Peter. "Patagonian Cases: Travel Writing, Fiction, History." *Seuils & Traverses: Enjeux de l"écriture du voyage*, vol. 2, edited by Jan Borm, Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique, 2002, pp. 223-37.

—. "Travelling to Write: 1940-2000." *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, Cambridge UP, 2002, pp. 87-101.

Hulme, Peter, and Tim Youngs, editors. Introduction. *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Cambridge UP, 2002, pp. 1-13.

Ivison, Douglas. "Travel Writing at the End of Empire: A Pom Named Bruce and the Mad White Giant." *English Studies in Canada*, vol. 29, no. 3-4, 2003, pp. 200-19.

Jaggi, Maya. "Rites of Passage." *The Guardian*. 3 Nov. 2001, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/nov/03/fiction.artsandhumanities. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Jones, Elizabeth Houston. *Spaces of Belonging: Home, Culture, and Identity in 20th Century French Autobiography*. Rodopi, 2007.

Kamali, Leila. *The Cultural Memory of Africa in African American and Black British Fiction, 1970–2000*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Kaplan, Caren. *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Duke UP, 1996.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Beacon, 2002.

Kinsley, Zoë. "Travellers and Tourists." *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Carl Thompson, Routledge, 2016, pp. 237-45.

Korte, Barbara. *English Travel Writing: From Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*. 1996. Translated by Catherine Matthias, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

Král, Françoise. *Social Invisibility and Diasporas in Anglophone Literature and Culture: The Fractal Gaze*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Kuehn, Julia, and Paul Smethurst, editors. Introduction. *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 1-13.

Kunow, Rüdiger. "From 'Roots' to 'Routes': Ethnic Fiction between Comfort Zones and Danger Zones." *Multiculturalism in Contemporary Societies: Perspectives on Difference and Transdifference*, edited by Helbrecht Breinig et al., Universitätsverbund Erlangen-Nürnberg e.V., 2002, pp. 195-228.

Lansing, Michael J. "An *American Daughter* in *Africa: Land of My Fathers*: Era Bell Thompson's Midwestern Vision of the African Diaspora." *Middle West Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, spring 2015, pp. 1-28.

Laws, Mike. "Why We Capitalize 'Black' (and Not 'White')." *Columbia Journalism Review*. 16 June 2020, https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Lazard, Dorothy. "Reading Caryl Phillips' *The European Tribe* as a Coming-of-Age Narrative." *Black Travel Writing*, special issue of *BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review*, edited by R. Victoria Arana, vol. 9, no. 1, fall 2003, pp. 179-90.

Leavenworth, Maria Lindgren. *The Second Journey: Travelling in Literary Footsteps*. 2nd ed., Umeå University, 2010.

Ledent, Bénédicte. "Ambiguous Visions of Home: The Paradoxes of Diasporic Belonging in Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*." *EnterText*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2000, pp. 198-211.

—. "Black British Literature." *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. 7th ed., edited by Dinah Birch, Oxford UP, 2009, pp. 16-22.

Lee, Elaine, editor. Introduction. *Go Girl! The Black Woman's Book of Travel and Adventure*. The Eighth Mountain Press, 1997, pp. 11-5.

Lejeune, Philippe. "The Autobiographical Pact." *On Autobiography*, edited by Paul John Eakin, translated by Katherine Leary, U of Minnesota P, 1989, pp. 3-30.

Levecq, Christine. "What Is Africa to Me Now? The Politics of Unhappy Returns." *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2015, pp. 79-100.

Logan, Rayford. *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901*. Dial Press, 1954.

Long, Lynellyn D., and Ellen Oxfeld, editors. "Introduction: An Ethnography of Return." *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2004, pp. 1-15.

López Ropero, María Lourdes. "Travel Writing and Postcoloniality: Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*." *Atlantis*, vol. 25, no. 1, June 2003, pp. 51-62.

Loveland, Maren E. "The Fluid Pastoral: African American Spiritual Waterways in the Urban Landscapes of Harlem Renaissance Poetry." *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2018, pp. 63-71.

Lucasi, Stephen. "William Wells Brown's 'Narrative' & Traveling Subjectivity." *African American Review*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2007, pp. 521-39.

Martin, Wendy. "North American Travel Writing." *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, edited by Nandini Das and Tim Youngs, Cambridge UP, 2019, pp. 252-66.

Mason, Mary G. "Travel as Metaphor and Reality in Afro-American Women's Autobiography, 1850-1972." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 24, no. 2, summer 1990, pp. 337-56.

Marshall, Howard W. "Basketmaking." *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 14: Folklife*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson, U of North Carolina P, 2009, pp. 35-38.

M'Baye, Babacar. "The Image of Africa in the Travel Narratives of W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr." *Black Travel Writing*, special issue of *BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review*, edited by R. Victoria Arana, vol. 9, no. 1, fall 2003, pp. 153-77.

McKay, Nellie Y. "The Narrative Self: Race, Politics, and Culture in Black American Women's Autobiography." *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, U of Wisconsin P, 1998, pp. 96-107.

Meriwether, James H. *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*. U of North Carolina P, 2009.

Meriwether, Rae Ann. "'Walking into the Face of History': Historical Difference and Diasporic Community in *The Atlantic Sound*." *Obsidian*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2011, pp. 79-93.

Miller Powell, Joan. "Hybrid Inventiveness: Caryl Phillips's Black-Atlantic Subjectivity—*The European Tribe* and *The Atlantic Sound*." *Caryl Phillips. Writing in the Key of Life*, edited by Bénédicte Ledent and Daria Tunca, Rodopi, 2012, pp. 87-105.

Nehl, Markus. *Transnational Black Dialogues: Re-Imagining Slavery in the Twenty-First Century*. Transcript, 2016.

Nelson, Alondra. "The Factness of Diaspora: The Social Sources of Genetic Genealogy." *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, edited by Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, Columbia UP, 2011, pp. 23-39.

—. *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation After the Genome*. Beacon Press, 2016.

Newman, Judie. "Round Table: Review of Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1-2.

Nguyễn, Ann Thúy, and Maya Pendleton. "Recognizing Race in Language: Why We Capitalize 'Black' and 'White.'" *Center for the Study of Social Policy*, 23 Mar. 2020, cssp.org/2020/03/recognizing-race-in-language-why-we-capitalize-black-and-white/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Ní Loingsigh, Aedín. *Postcolonial Eyes: Intercontinental Travel in Francophone African Literature*. Liverpool UP, 2009.

Nünning, Ansgar. "On the Manifold Prefiguration/Premediation of the Representation of Reality in the Travelogue: An Outline of a Narratological Theory, Typology and Poetics of Travel Writing." *Comunicação & Cultura*, no. 8, 2009, pp. 127-49.

Nünning, Ansgar, and Vera Nünning. "Ways of Worldmaking as a Model for the Study of Culture: Theoretical Frameworks, Epistemological Underpinnings, New Horizons." *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking: Media and Narratives*, edited by Vera Nünning et al., De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 1-25.

Nyong'o, Tavia. *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory*. U of Minnesota P, 2009.

Oliver-Rotger, Maria Antònia, editor. "Introduction: Roots and Routes in American Literature about Return." *Identity, Diaspora and Return in American Literature*. Routledge, 2015, pp. 1-21.

Olney, James. "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." *Callaloo*, no. 20, winter 1984, pp. 46-73.

Ortlepp, Anke. *Jim Crow Terminals: The Desegregation of American Airports*. U of Georgia P, 2017.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*. Oxford UP, 2006.

Palmer, Colin A. "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora." *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 85, no. 1/2, 2000, pp. 27-32.

Paul, Heike. *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*. Transcript, 2014.

Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Harvard UP, 1982.

Pedersen, Carl. "Middle Passages: Representations of the Slave Trade in Caribbean and African-American Literature." *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1993, pp. 225-38.

Pettinger, Alasdair. "African Americans on Africa: Colleen J. McElroy and the Rhetoric of Kinship." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2009, pp. 317-28.

—. "'At Least One Negro Everywhere': African American Travel Writing." *Beyond the Borders: American Literature and Post-Colonial Theory*, edited by Deborah L. Madsen, Pluto Press, 2003, pp. 77-91.

—, editor. Introduction. *Always Elsewhere: Travel of the Black Atlantic*. Cassell, 1998, pp. viii-xix.

—. "What a Difference a Border Makes." *Black Travel Writing*, special issue of *BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review*, edited by R. Victoria Arana, vol. 9, no. 1, fall 2003, pp. 137-52.

Pettinger, Alasdair, and Tim Youngs, editors. Introduction. *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*. Routledge, 2019, pp. 1-14.

Pfister, Manfred. "Intertextuelles Reisen, oder: Der Reisebericht als Intertext." *Tales and "Their Telling Difference": Zur Theorie und Geschichte der Narrativik*, edited by Herbert Foltinek et al., Winter, 1993, pp. 109-32.

—. "Travellers and Traces: The Quest for One's Self in Eighteenth- to Twentieth-Century Travel Writing." *Life Writing: Autobiography, Biography and Travel Writing in Contemporary Literature*, edited by Koray Melikoğlu, Ibidem, 2007, pp. 1-13.

Pratt, Mary Louise. Afterword. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Travel Writing*, edited by Robert Clarke, Cambridge UP, 2018, pp. 217-30.

—. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, 1992.

Pryor, Elizabeth Stordeur. *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War*. U of North Carolina P, 2016.

Pulitano, Elvira. *Transnational Narratives from the Caribbean: Diasporic Literature and the Human Experience*. Routledge, 2016.

Raboteau, Albert J. “African-Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel.” *African-American Christianity: Essays in History*, edited by Paul E. Johnson, U of California P, 1994, pp. 1-17.

Ramos, Maria Christina. *Mapping the World Differently: African American Travel Writing About Spain*. PUV, 2015.

Raphael-Hernandez, Heike. “New African Diaspora.” *Oxford Bibliographies*, African American Studies, 2016, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190280024/obo-9780190280024-0044.xml. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Rediker, Marcus. *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom*. Penguin Books, 2013.

—. *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. Viking, 2007.

Rediker, Marcus, et al., editors. Introduction. *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*. U of California P, 2007, pp. 1-19.

Reinhart, Werner. *Pikareske Romane der 80er Jahre: Ronald Reagan und die Renaissance des politischen Erzählens in den USA*. Gunter Narr, 2001.

Ricœur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 1, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, U of Chicago P, 1984.

Roberson, Susan L. “American Women and Travel Writing.” *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, edited by Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera, Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 214-27.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991*. Granta Books, 1991.

Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. *The Neo-Slave Narrative: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*. Oxford UP, 1999.

Sáez, Elena Machado. “Postcoloniality, Atlantic Orders, and the Migrant Male in the Writings of Caryl Phillips.” *Small Axe*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2005, pp. 17-39.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Book, 1978.

Saunders, Patricia J. “Fugitive Dreams of Diaspora: Conversations with Saidiya Hartman.” *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1-16.

Scheiding, Oliver, and Martin Seidl, editors. “Introduction: The Worlds of Short Narratives.” *Worlding America: A Transnational Anthology of Short Narratives before 1800*. Stanford UP, 2014, pp. 1-17.

Schmeller, Erik S. “William Wells Brown’s Travels: Race and National Identity.” *Black Travel Writing*, special issue of *BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review*, edited by R. Victoria Arana, vol. 9, no. 1, fall 2003, pp. 111-18.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library. "The Negro Motorist Green Book: 1948," *New York Public Library Digital Collections*, digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/6fa574f0-893f-0132-1035-58d385a7bbd0.

—. "The Negro Motorist Green Book: 1949," *New York Public Library Digital Collections*, digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/9dc3ff40-8df4-0132-fd57-58d385a7b928.

—. "The Negro Motorist Green Book: 1950," *New York Public Library Digital Collections*, digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/283a7180-87c6-0132-13e6-58d385a7b928.

Seiler, Cotten. "Racing Mobility, Excavating Modernity: A Comment." *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, spring 2016, pp. 98-102.

—. *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America*. U of Chicago P, 2008.

Shaw-Thornburg, Angela. "Problems of Genre and Genealogy in African-American Literature of Travel." *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing*, vol. 12, no, 1, 2011, pp. 46-62.

Sheller, Mimi. *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*. Verso, 2018.

—. "The New Mobilities Paradigm for a Live Sociology." *Current Sociology Review*, vol. 62, no. 6, 2014, pp. 789-811.

Shima, Alan. "The Fictive Force of Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*." *American Studies in Scandinavia*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2009, pp. 3-22.

Siemerling, Winfried. *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered: Black Canadian Writing, Cultural History, and the Presence of the Past*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2015.

Sinanan, Kerry. "The Slave Narrative and the Literature of Abolition." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by Audrey A. Fisch, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 61-80.

Smallwood, Stephanie. *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*. Harvard UP, 2007.

Smethurst, Paul. Introduction. *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, edited by Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, Routledge, 2009, pp. 1-18.

Smith, Sidonie. *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing*. U of Minnesota P, 2001.

Smith, Virginia Whatley. "African American Travel Literature." *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, edited by Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera, Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 197-213.

—, editor. *Richard Wright's Travel Writings: New Reflections*. UP of Mississippi, 2001.

Smithers, Gregory D. "Challenging a Pan-African Identity: The Autobiographical Writings of Maya Angelou, Barack Obama, and Caryl Phillips." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2011, pp. 483-502.

Snyder, Terri L. *The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America*. U of Chicago P, 2015.

Sollors, Werner. *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Oxford UP, 1997.

Sorin, Gretchen. *Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights*. Kindle ed., Liveright, 2020.

Springer, Kimberly. "The Tricky Allure of Becoming a Black American Expatriate." *The Atlantic*, 17 Oct. 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/10/being-black-american-expatriate-its-complicated/573211/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Duke University Press, 1993.

Stamant, Nicole. "Arrivals, Geographies, and 'The Usual Reply' in Emily Raboteau's *Searching for Zion*." *The Postcolonial Subject in Transit: Migration, Borders and Subjectivity in Contemporary African Diaspora Literature*, edited by Delphine Fongang, Lexington Books, 2018, pp. 125-38.

Stein, Daniel. "Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father* and African American Literature." *European Journal of American Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, spring 2011, pp. 1-16.

Stein, Mark. *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*. Ohio State UP, 2004.

Stepto, Robert B. *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*. 2nd ed., U of Illinois P, 1991.

Stowe, William W. *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. Princeton UP, 1994.

Straub, Julia, editor. "Introduction: Transatlantic North American Studies." *Handbook of Transatlantic North American Studies*. De Gruyter, 2016, pp. 1-17.

Taylor, Candacy. *Overground Railroad: The Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America*. Abrams, 2020.

—. "The Roots of Route 66," *The Atlantic*, 3 Nov. 2016, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/the-roots-of-route-66/506255/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Thomas, David, et al. *The Silence of the Archive*. Facet, 2017.

Thomas, Helen. "The Slave Narrative." *Handbook of Transatlantic North American Studies*, edited by Julia Straub, De Gruyter, 2016, pp. 373-90.

Thomas, Rhondda R. *Claiming Exodus: A Cultural History of Afro-Atlantic Identity, 1774-1903*. Baylor UP, 2013.

—. "Locating Slave Narratives." *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by John Ernest, Oxford UP, 2014, pp. 328-43.

Thompson, Carl. *Travel Writing*. Routledge, 2011.

—, editor. "Travel Writing Now, 1950 to the Present Day." *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. Routledge, 2016, pp. 196-213.

Topping, Margaret. "Vision." *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies: A Critical Glossary*, edited by Charles Forsdick et al., Anthem Press, 2019, pp. 283-85.

Totten, Gary. *African American Travel Narratives from Abroad: Mobility and Cultural Work in the Age of Jim Crow*. U of Massachusetts P, 2015.

Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. Sage, 1990.

Waldman, Katy. "Slave or Enslaved Person? It's Not Just an Academic Debate for Historians of American Slavery." *Slate*, 19 May 2015, slate.com/human-interest/2015/05/historians-debate-whether-to-use-the-term-slave-or-enslaved-person.html. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Williamson, Jenn. Summary. *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*. By Mary Prince. A DocSouth Books Edition, U of North Carolina P, 2017, pp. 4-6.

Wolff, Janet. "On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism." *Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1993, pp. 224-39.

Woodard, Helena. *Slave Sites on Display: Reflecting Slavery's Legacy through Contemporary 'Flash' Moments*. U of Mississippi P, 2019.

Woodson, Jacqueline. "Jacqueline Woodson on Africa, America and Slavery's Fierce Undertow." *The New York Times*, 9 Dec. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/12/09/travel/ghana-african-slave-trade-jacqueline-woodson.html. Accessed 1 June 2021.

"The Year of Return." *The Year of Return. Ghana 2019*, yearofreturn.visitghana.com/about/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Young, Harvey. *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body*. U of Michigan P, 2010.

Young, Jason R. "All God's Children Had Wings: The Flying African in History, Literature, and Lore." *Journal of Africana Religions*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2017, pp. 50-70.

Youngs, Tim. "African American Travel Writing." *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Travel Writing*, edited by Robert Clarke, Cambridge UP, 2018, pp. 109-23.

—. *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*. Cambridge UP, 2013.

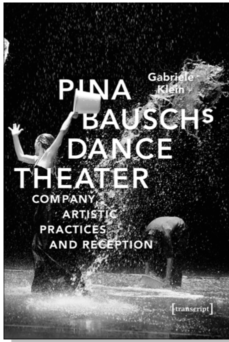
—. "'A Daughter Come Home?' The Travel Writings of Colleen J. McElroy." *New Literatures Review*, no. 42, 2004, pp. 57-74.

—. "Pushing against the Black/White Limits of Maps: African American Writings of Travel." *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2010, pp. 71-85.

—. *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850-1900*. Manchester UP, 1994

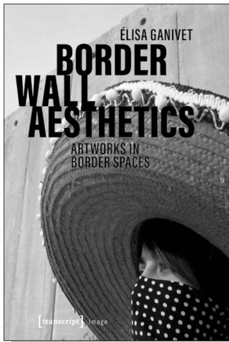
Youngs, Tim, and Charles Forsdick, editors. Introduction. *Travel Writing: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies, vol. I: The Production of Travel Writing*. Routledge, 2012, pp. 1-24.

Cultural Studies



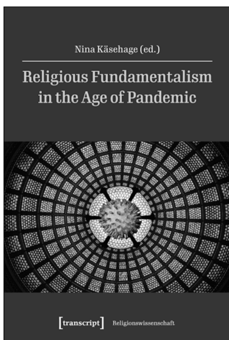
Gabriele Klein
Pina Bausch's Dance Theater
Company, Artistic Practices and Reception

2020, 440 p., pb., col. ill.
29,99 € (DE), 978-3-8376-5055-6
E-Book:
PDF: 29,99 € (DE), ISBN 978-3-8394-5055-0



Elisa Ganivet
Border Wall Aesthetics
Artworks in Border Spaces

2019, 250 p., hardcover, ill.
79,99 € (DE), 978-3-8376-4777-8
E-Book:
PDF: 79,99 € (DE), ISBN 978-3-8394-4777-2

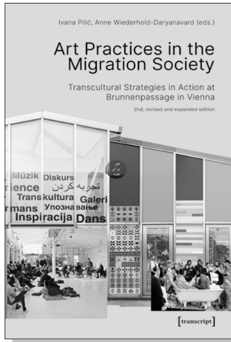


Nina Käsehage (ed.)
Religious Fundamentalism
in the Age of Pandemic

April 2021, 278 p., pb., col. ill.
37,00 € (DE), 978-3-8376-5485-1
E-Book: available as free open access publication
PDF: ISBN 978-3-8394-5485-5

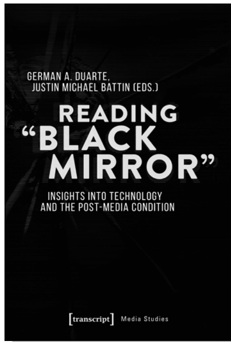
All print, e-book and open access versions of the titles in our list are available in our online shop www.transcript-publishing.com

Cultural Studies



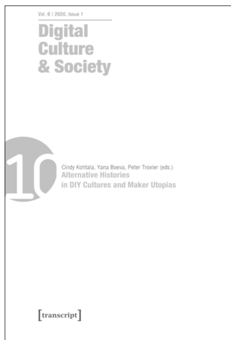
Ivana Pilic, Anne Wiederhold-Daryanavard (eds.)
Art Practices in the Migration Society
Transcultural Strategies in Action at Brunnenpassage in Vienna

March 2021, 244 p., pb.
29,00 € (DE), 978-3-8376-5620-6
E-Book:
PDF: 25,99 € (DE), ISBN 978-3-8394-5620-0



German A. Duarte, Justin Michael Battin (eds.)
Reading »Black Mirror«
Insights into Technology and the Post-Media Condition

January 2021, 334 p., pb.
32,00 € (DE), 978-3-8376-5232-1
E-Book:
PDF: 31,99 € (DE), ISBN 978-3-8394-5232-5



Cindy Kohtala, Yana Boeva, Peter Troxler (eds.)
Digital Culture & Society (DCS)
Vol. 6, Issue 1/2020 – Alternative Histories in DIY Cultures and Maker Utopias

February 2021, 214 p., pb., ill.
29,99 € (DE), 978-3-8376-4955-0
E-Book:
PDF: 29,99 € (DE), ISBN 978-3-8394-4955-4

All print, e-book and open access versions of the titles in our list are available in our online shop www.transcript-publishing.com