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

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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 athomeness," 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.