

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.