AFRICAN TRAVEL WRITING
by Marion Frank-Wilson
Main Library E 660, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405
<mfrankwi@indiana.edu>

The genre of travel writing and, more specifically, travel writing about Africa, has recently received renewed attention from critics and readers. Several new anthologies have been published, some of the major presses have commissioned works about the genre, and there are numerous monographs by individual authors. Those publications deal with travel writing from various perspectives: some are accounts by missionaries recounting their experiences in an African country (Grah, Journal of a missionary tour to the Labaya; Shullenberger, Africa time, etc.); others have a feminist approach and are either written by female travellers (e.g. McAllister, A lone woman in Africa; Brom, A woman in Africa), or anthologies of works by female travellers of the past (e.g., Romero ed.), Women’s voices on Africa: a century of travel writing), or secondary literature about Victorian women travellers (e.g., Stevenson, Victorian women travel writers in Africa; Blunt, Travel, gender, and imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa, etc.); many books have been written by authors with environmentalist/wildlife concerns, as for example Rick Ridgeway’s The shadow of Kilimanjaro: on foot across East Africa which has made the bestseller lists; still other authors travel to Africa in a quest for their identity and write about their individual developments (e.g. Ketscher, Africa solo: a journey across the Sahara, etc.). And, lastly, there are the professional travel writers, such as Pico Iyer, the late Bruce Chatwin, Ryazid Kapuscinski, et al., who make their living writing about their travels.

All of these works are writings by Western travellers (Americans, Europeans) about their experiences in other cultures. This focus in fact is summarised very succinctly by the title of a recent microform compilation by Adam Matthew Publishers: “Africa through Western eyes”. So far little attention has been given to writings by Africans who travelled abroad and wrote about their encounters with Western cultures. Even the journal of African travel writing deals mostly with Western accounts. Whereas there are numerous works that give access to travel literature by Western writers, bibliographic research into the topic of African travellers produced no bibliographies. Secondary literature on the topic exists, but not in abundance. Yet, like Europeans and Americans, Africans travel, and written accounts of their travels exist going back at least as early as the 14th century. Several literary scholars have pointed to oral tradition as providing roots for the travel motif in African literature which is, in fact, very similar to the development of European travel writing from oral narrative and folktale.1 In her book on Journeys through the French African novel, Mildred Mortimer points out that “to the extent that the slave trade, military conscription, and work and study in African and European cities have caused African migrations at different historical
As with Western travel writing about Africa, travel writing by Africans falls into several categories, which correspond to those of Western travellers: early accounts by Africans travelling to Europe or other parts of Africa, leaving their country, or even the African continent for the first time in their lives (e.g., Ham Mukasa, *Sir Apolo Kagwa discovers Britain*; Emily Ruete, *Memoirs of an Arabian princess from Zanzibar* et al.), African missionaries travelling to other African countries (e.g. "The life and travels of Dorugu", translated by P. Newman), African slaves who had crossed the Atlantic on slave ships (e.g. Equiano's travels), and, more recently since independence in the 1960s, fictionalised and autobiographical accounts of Africans travelling to Europe or the United States to pursue their studies (e.g., Dipoko, *Overseas*; Clark, *America, their America*, et al.), and, within that category, African women and their encounters with Western cultures (most notably Emecheta, *Second class citizen*; Aidoo, *Our sister Kilijoy*, et al.).

Corresponding to those categories, several literary scholars have identified the following motivations for departure: the call for adventure, conflict in familial relationships, the quest for something of value, the search for education, cultural alienation, and involuntary exile. To this list can be added involuntary travel as a result of the slave trade, and African soldiers serving in Europe during the two world wars. Even though there is a considerable body of travel writing by Africans, it takes extensive bibliographic research to find it. The main reason for the poor accessibility of the genre is that there are no bibliographies or anthologies on the topic. The shorter texts are hidden away in journals. The longer ones are published as novels or historical, anthropological, or missionary accounts and are catalogued under different, fairly general subject headings, such as the various subject headings for "missionaries - Africa", "Africa - fiction", "Africa - history", to name just a few. A subject or keyword search for travel and Africa/Africans or "Africa - description" etc. will not retrieve many of those books.

For the purpose of this bibliography, travel writing is defined as including all of the categories described above. Since so little literature exists on this topic, this article is intended to give an overview of the genre thereby providing access to this body of literature. "Travel" accordingly is defined in the broadest sense and is understood to include travel within Africa (including North Africa) and to Europe and/or the United States. It also encompasses travel at different times in history and for all its various reasons, ranging from involuntary travel (as slaves or soldiers) to trips undertaken out of curiosity, a sense of adventure, or for education, etc. This bibliography will also be inclusive of different kinds of genres within the genre of travel writing. For example, during both world wars, thousands of African soldiers served in colonial armies. Most of these soldiers were non-literate and there are very few first-hand records of their experiences. However, by using oral sources, soldiers' letters and official reports, there is access to their accounts, and these will be included here. Similarly, both works of fiction and non-fiction are represented in this bibliography. Particularly among the group of writers who came to Europe and/or the U.S. for education, there are numerous accounts in the form of fiction. However, it is clear that they contain autobiographical elements, as for example in the case of Bakary Diallo who has given his own name to his novel's protagonist. The inclusion of both forms of literature also takes into account the realisation among anthropologists that 'facts' are 'made' and 'produced', and that therefore every ethnographic text has an element of fiction. In an article on ethnography and literature, Inge Brinkman in fact discusses the relationship between literature and society. She summarises the two main approaches, i.e., one that treats literature as a separate aesthetic form, and the other one which interprets literature as closely connected to society, as "ethnography from within". Brinkman points out that recently some scholars have been advocating an approach that combines these two movements - an approach that takes into account the artistic elements of a literary work while at the same time acknowledging its interpretative element. With this discussion in mind, and in the context of this bibliography, the boundaries between the genres are sufficiently fuzzy to justify including both fiction and non-fiction with equal weight. This section is distinguished from a category of documentary accounts which are purely travel descriptions. Whereas this bibliography is all-inclusive of various forms within the travel literature genre, as well as various kinds and motivations of travel, it focuses on the 'outer journey', or physical travel, rather than the 'inner journey', or journey to self-understanding. Of course, most physical journeys contain some element of increased self-understanding, either of the travelling individual, or of the community as a result of the return of the traveller, and those journeys are included. However, literary scholar Mildred Mortimer in her book *Journey through the West African novel* talks about other forms of inner journeys in connection with travelling women. She explores the questions of how women compensate for the restrictions upon travel, and whether traditional restrictions have a positive value and result in a rich inner life. In her chapters on women travellers, she focuses on women's experience of enclosure and escape, "showing that just as the outer journey leads the travelling hero or heroine to lucidity and self-understanding, the inner journey - which includes personal thoughts, past memories, or the collective experience of the family or the clan - helps the African female protagonist..."
develop the inner strength necessary in a twofold struggle..." This is a fascinating topic large enough to deserve its own bibliography, but which is beyond the scope of this present compilation.

This bibliography, with its focus on African writers and their experiences travelling to other countries and cultures, has to be seen within the larger context of African Studies to give more weight to the African perspective. Examples of this resolve are two conferences in Germany on this topic: "Indigene afrikanische Ethnographien" in June 1996 in Cologne and "Lokale Historiographien" in October 1997 in Berlin. In the introduction to the published conference proceedings of the first conference, entitled Afrikaner schreiben zurueck, German anthropologist and editor of the volume, Heike Behrend, quotes Michael Leiris who in 1950 demanded that the "objects" of Western Anthropology, the African people, should "write back" and thus counterbalance the Western viewpoint. Behrend points out that Leiris was apparently unaware of the fact that there have always been ethnographies produced by Africans, but they have never received the same kind of status as those produced by Western scholars. In fact, on the African side, there have been a wide variety of texts which experimented with various genres, oral and literate forms, written by collective as well as individual authors. These texts receive more attention with the recent, new approaches in various disciplines. The conference "Indigene afrikanische Ethnographien" and the resulting publication of its proceedings is an attempt to give equal weight to the African voice of ethnologists. Similar attempts have been made by other anthropologists, literary scholars, art historians, et al. The increased interest in life histories, for example, can be seen in this connection, as can the recent exhibition at the National Museum of African Art in Washington of "In and out of focus: images from Central Africa, 1885-1960", which was intended to explore the role Africans played in photographic encounters between Europe and Africa. This bibliography on travel writing by African authors will contribute to this effort.

One purpose of this bibliography is to provide access to major works of travel writing by Africans. Another is to give a picture of the wide and varied field of African travel writing. It is not intended to be comprehensive, nor could it be, given the problems locating the materials as outlined above. It was compiled using a variety of electronic databases, as well as print bibliographies. Most of the sources I found by following up references in the literature. The African language texts I found in Daniel Kunene's article "Journey as metaphor in African literature". Where possible, I personally checked and read many of the works. Because of linguistic limitations, I did not read the African language texts. They are nevertheless included here for a more complete picture. Doubtless there are more texts with the travel motif, both in African and European languages. This bibliography, incomplete as it is, is intended as a first step in a series of bibliographies on the topic. I hope to continue my bibliographic research on travel writing and compile more extensive and detailed bibliographies on each of the sub-categories of the present listing. A more immediate goal is to publish an anthology to provide access to some of the texts and thus counterbalance the literature from the Western point-of-view.

The bibliography is arranged according to the different kinds of travels as outlined above: Early accounts of African travellers, fiction (sub-divided into male and female writers), non-fiction/documentaries, accounts by African soldiers, and African language texts. These categories were developed to reflect the wide spectrum of African travel writing. It is acknowledged that they are problematic in some cases, e.g., a work of fiction may arguably fit into the documentary category, as discussed above. The time frame under the category "Early Travellers" was determined arbitrarily to end in 1950. This date was chosen to distinguish works in this category from contemporary fiction writers. Again, it overlaps with certain other categories, such as African soldiers whose accounts, one might argue, could have been included under the "Early Travellers" category. For those books with multiple editions, as for example the books by Ibn Battuta and Leo Africanus, an attempt was made to cite editions which seem most commonly cited in the literature, based on the value of their translations and annotations.

In the "Fiction" section an attempt was made to cite the earliest edition, and, in the case of francophone works, to cite the original title rather than the translation.

Bibliography

Early accounts

Fiction and autobiography

Male writers

Female writers

African soldiers' accounts

Documentary accounts

From South Africa

African language texts

Early Accounts


Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, 1996.


**Female writers**


Emecheta, Buchi. *Adah’s Story*. London, Allison & Busby, 1983. (Includes *Second class citizen* and *In the ditch*).


**African soldiers’ accounts**


**Documentary Accounts**


Santioh, Osman Alamny. *Hybrid eyes: an African in Europe*; abridged for the


From South Africa


Oberholzer, O. Beyond Bugamoyo: journey from Cape to Cairo. Cape Town, Hotazel, 1996.


African Language Texts

Dazana, S. Ukufika kuka Madodana. APB, 1957. (Xhosa)

Dhlomo, R.R.R. Indlela ka Tshaka. Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1946. (Zulu)


Jordan, A.C. Ingqumbo Yeminyanya. Lovedale, Lovedale Press, 1940 (Xhosa)


Moaielo, Thomas. Moeti na Bechabelo. Morija, 1907. (Southern Sotho)

Moaielo, Thomas. Pitseeng. Morija, 1910. (Southern Sotho)


Nhonku, Albert. Arvo Nnheng na Maburu. Mazenod, Mazenod Book Centre, 1942. (Southern Sotho)


References


2 Mildred Mortimer, pp. 4/5.


4 David Killingray, “African voices from two World Wars,” Historical research, 74 (186) 2001, 425-443. Many of the sources listed in the bibliography under the heading ‘African soldiers’ were found in David Killingray’s article.

5 Poetry is not included.
6 Mortimer, p. 9.


9 I. Brinkman, p. 275; see also Karen Barber, I could speak until tomorrow: Oríkì, women, and the past in Yoruba Town, Edinburgh, 1991.

10 Mildred Mortimer, p. 12.

11 “Indigenous African Ethnographies”, my translation

12 “Local Historiographies”, my translation

13 Africans Write Back, my translation

14 Heike Behrend, p. 2.


16 South Africa has experienced an increase in contact with the rest of the African continent since the end of apartheid: there has been an upsurge in migration to South Africa, and, on the other hand, South Africans travel north. One of the results of this renewed interest in Africa is “the emergence of a new stream of travel writings.” (Jonathan Crush, Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie, vol 91, no. 4, 2000, p. 438). One of the characteristics of this new kind of South African travel writing is that its authors seek to explain and represent the African continent to their fellow South Africans. This distinguishes it from travel writing from other parts of Africa, and it consequently is listed under a separate heading.

17 These sources were located in an article by Daniel Kunene which discusses the travel motif in African literature. The language for each of the texts is indicated in parentheses. See Daniel Kunene, “Journey as metaphor in African literature,” in African literature studies: the present state/l’état present, ed. Stephen Arnold, Washington, DC, Three Continents Press, c1985.