

Chris von Gagnon

Traveling to the Caribbean

How contact with other cultures is portrayed in
travel descriptions

Revised edition 2023

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Preface

Traveling to different parts of the world represents a spectacular phenomenon that embodies a piece of modern lifestyle. In the age of effortless transportation and global interconnectedness, the possibility of temporarily changing locations has become so natural that encountering different cultures no longer seems to be a problem. However, the apparent ease of traveling is primarily based on the widespread disregard of the foreigner's perspective by the travelers themselves. Wherever they go, they can rely on an "international standard" that has become the worldwide measure of civilization according to the European model. Since the privilege of enjoying unrestricted global mobility mainly falls to carriers of Western culture, cultural homogenization becomes a facilitation for the mobile individuals, while the established norm becomes a requirement for the geographically bound inhabitants of different cultures who must meet it through adaptation. In the exchange between the cultures of the "developed" and the "underdeveloped" – the "civilized" and the "primitive," as they were previously called – a significant asymmetry becomes evident, even regarding travel, which dictates the conditions for the visited from the visitors themselves. The form of travel, like many other things, has evolved over the course of European expansion overseas into the phenomenon it represents today in its various facets. During the triumphant colonial conquest of the unknown, clear structures for dealing with representatives of other cultures emerged, which continue to shape the attitude of travelers towards the exotic. Those who venture into unknown lands unconsciously walk in the footsteps of explorers.

The abundance of enthusiastic self-testimonies from travelers reveals how a European self-perception consolidates itself in the confrontation with the foreign, asserting its civilization mission over other cultures. As inspiring as the freedom of travel may be, the gained understanding of culturally foreign remains limited, despite all claims to the contrary. Ironically, travelers scarcely feel the need to get to know representatives of other ways of life more deeply, despite their enthusiastic visits to their countries. Nevertheless, fixed and generalized notions prevail about them. While adventure in foreign lands is now paved with many paths, the chance to triumph over the challenge of the exotic increases, without becoming more intimately familiar with it. Along with the advantages of superior civilization, travelers also assume a handicap that persistently hinders their understanding of

the foreign. Different ways of life can only be understood if we adapt and do not consider our own as the only authoritative one. Until visitors overcome their superior self-perception and genuinely engage with the cultural peculiarities of the visited, we cannot assume that travel fosters cross-cultural understanding.

In attempting to shed light on the mindset of travelers to the Caribbean, as evident from the broad spectrum of European travel documentation, I hope to inspire a level of self-reflection that is largely missing from these texts. The way we appropriate the world significantly shapes our horizon of experience. Recognizing the characteristic limitations that persist in exchanging with non-Europeans could contribute, I believe, to reevaluating entrenched patterns of thinking and acting. Because it is not the "Others" who are primitive, but rather the trivial mindset about other cultures that reflects a profound lack of understanding for everything foreign.

As the work on this project turned out to be more time-consuming than anticipated and did not always unfold under the easiest conditions, I would like to express particular gratitude to those who significantly contributed to its completion with their support: Prof. Ronald Daus for encouragement and support during critical phases, my parents Christiana and Jürgen for the necessary financial assistance, and Tina for her patience with a life partner perpetually lost in silent contemplations.

(October 1992)

Preface to the New Edition

Since the original manuscript was not yet digitized and still seems to be relevant upon reexamination, I have carefully digitized it and converted the annotations for each chapter into footnotes to facilitate reference checking. However, I have not updated the orthography, leaving it as it was at the time of its creation, regardless of subsequent German spelling reforms. Additionally, the illustrations included in the previous version, all of which were taken from primary literary texts, have been placed as chapter dividers before each respective chapter this time. Only the contemporary map of the Caribbean before the introduction has been updated, depicting a corresponding excerpt from the satellite view of Apple Maps.

With the new edition published by Book on Demand, Norderstedt, the book is once again available and is intended to remain so for the time being, together with the subsequent complementary literary investigation, "Ernüchterndes Europa" (Disillusioned by Europe).

(September 2023)

Chris von Gagern

Introduction

In the present study, the question of how travelers cope with changed living conditions elsewhere will be examined. Examples of Europeans traveling to the Caribbean will be considered, and how they deal with the different reality they encounter there. The focus is not on the attitude of the individuals towards unfamiliar natural conditions, but rather on their encounter with the unfamiliar way of life of the local residents. It is about experiencing the Other in its cultural form and the problem of reconciling different cultural patterns: how different ideas and behaviors are harmonized, what adaptability travelers demonstrate when they venture beyond the familiar, what conflicts arise from questioning the established order of things, and what intellectual stimuli they receive from their extraordinary experiences.

The literary testimonies of travelers form the basis for the encounters in this study of the European-overseas form. By comparing the diverse descriptions of stays in the Caribbean, common features can be identified in the authors' attitudes towards different circumstances. These similarities reveal characteristic forms of encounters and allow for the abstraction of overarching regularities. The aim of the study is to identify foreseeable and ongoing tendencies and to reconsider the current impact of the interaction between Europeans and other cultures over five centuries.

The term "travel" evokes various associations. In its basic meaning, it is nothing more than a temporary change of location, a circular movement of departure and return undertaken for various reasons and on one's own initiative. Only various meanings reveal that there is more to it than a harmless excursion. Travel goes beyond reaching specific destinations. With the familiar living environment, the boundaries of experience are also exceeded. Venturing into the unknown promises both uncertainty and risks, as well as special freedoms and attractions. On one hand, distance frees one from everyday obligations and constraints, while on the other hand, the freedom gained from close social ties also leaves one vulnerable. The traveler is exposed to new experiences. Wonders and terrors excite them. Spatial movement entails changes that need to be adapted to. Complications arise because not every change is a welcome diversion. Hardships must be endured. Intentions and existing conditions cannot be easily reconciled. The journey's course is determined by the unforeseen. The traveler is not only moving, but is also moved by variable forces. The variability of the situation requires learning and adaptability. The traveler's spatial

movement corresponds to an inner process of transformation. One cannot expect to return unchanged after exposing oneself to the unfamiliar. Being on the move contradicts a state of stable equilibrium and questions the familiar form of existence. Those who take the risk also make their desire for the renewal of the familiar clear. Traveling presents a challenge of extraordinary experiences or adventures and is considered a source of life experience in itself. Life itself is often compared to a journey. In long-distance travel, such as to overseas destinations, the aspect of surpassing the known realm of experience becomes particularly prominent. Connections to other continents are established, oceans are crossed. Distinctly separate entities come into relation. The areas are not only geographically disconnected, but also socially disconnected. Visitors and hosts do not have established neighborly relationships. They are particularly foreign to each other. Coping with the unforeseen, surprising, and different plays at least as important a role as achieving goals or enforcing preconceived intentions.

Travel has changed in many ways over the period under consideration. These innovations are also reflected in a certain change in terminology. Until about 200 years ago, travel was primarily associated with hardships and risks, but today, more appealing promises are evoked. Travel is seen as a pleasure. Transportation routes span the globe, and bases are established everywhere. Distances hardly matter anymore, and every destination is reachable. While it was once difficult to imagine traveling abroad without compelling reasons, nowadays hardly anyone would hesitate to travel if given the opportunity. Travel is also celebrated as an expression of individual freedom of movement. Worldly experience is considered a social value and is closely associated with personal development. While venturing into the wilderness beyond the known social order used to be seen as a challenging test of character, wilderness tours are now seen as entertaining pastimes. The fear of the unknown has largely given way to the desire to enjoy exotic charms. The wilderness has shrunk into enclaves in a globally managed world. Experiencing something other than the familiar must be considered a privilege. This changed understanding is evident in the number of travelers. The wave of travel has become a mass movement that extends across all continents. There is an enthusiastic and steadily growing desire to explore distant places. This reflects both the urgency of attempting to surpass the accepted realm of experience and the fact that tourism has become a thriving industry. Traveling is offered and consumed as a commodity, diminishing the significance of the "inner journey." The opportunity for revolutionary renewal of one's own life plan associated with venturing into

the unknown has diminished. Even long-distance travel hardly poses a challenge to reconsideration and increasingly becomes a harmless excursion.

In the context of this study, the term "travel" is understood in a broader sense. In order to capture a wide spectrum of travel experiences with the documented examples, journeys are included that stretch the concept in terms of duration of stay or external determination. The duration of stays varies from a few days in some cases to several years in others. Some of those who set out originally had no intention of returning but then felt compelled to do so, while others are held overseas indefinitely without considering themselves as emigrants. This is mainly related to the Europeans' efforts to take possession of the areas they traveled to. They not only act as visitors but also as occupiers and are often entrusted with tasks that extend their journey within the framework of colonization. Not all examples fit the criterion that travel is undertaken voluntarily. In some cases, travelers feel compelled to embark on their journey, whether they are obliged to do so by higher authorities, fleeing overseas, or being deported there against their will. The travel traffic to the Caribbean is initiated and significantly influenced in many ways by the project of colonization. The act of taking possession binds them into a network of connections with Europe. There is constant exchange. Even journeys that do not make an official contribution to colonization benefit from it. The resulting spectrum of collected examples includes explorers, conquerors, state and church officials in the exercise of their duties, researchers, adventurers, refugees, captives, journalists, invited guests, and tourists.

The Caribbean as a travel destination is not only a restriction of the investigation to a specific geographical area, but since its discovery by Columbus until today, it embodies the epitome of a dream destination that attracts travelers and represents others in this sense as well. The mere mention is capable of arousing a longing for exotic charms. However, the particular attractiveness associated with it has undergone significant changes over time. It has been perceived as an untouched tropical paradise, where the Fountain of Youth and the golden land of "El Dorado" were believed to be located, a gateway to the New World through which the explorers of the Americas and their plundered riches passed, a garden of inexhaustible fertility where plantation agriculture and slavery flourished. The islands served as pirate hideouts where an unbound and lawless existence was possible, the cradle of several colonial empires, and a hub of the slave trade. They were considered model colonies that produced immense wealth with sugar, objects of dispute fiercely fought over by almost

all European nations, social and economic experimental fields where after the whip for the enslaved, the "carrot of free labor" was also tested, and are now regarded as pleasure paradises lined with beaches under palm trees and southern sun, colored by an exotic mix of population. The meaning of the islands has changed in many ways, but the influx of travelers has remained. Their allure has been constantly renewed. Various contents blend into a dazzling image, whose common denominator is that it is always the interests of outsiders that give the region significance.

The Caribbean is rarely associated with its own cultural significance. Although the Caribs lend their name to the region as its original inhabitants, they no longer have a cultural imprint since their takeover by the Europeans. In terms of unifying aspects, the designation is rather misleading. The memory of the Caribs, who were by no means the only inhabitants of the islands, has a rhetorical character; because what was associated with them was primarily cannibalism, a term derived from a distortion of their name by Spanish conquerors. Stamped as islands of cannibals, the deliberate eradication of independent cultural characteristics was justified. The peaceful Arawaks, who appeared to Columbus as if before the Fall, did not leave a lasting impression beyond their extermination. The fact that the region cannot be associated with a distinct self-conception shared by its inhabitants makes it a mysterious island world that appears to be primarily determined by the diversity of nature. As such, it becomes a projection surface for outsiders who imagine they can discover their ideal world there. Its peripheral location, scattered across the Caribbean Sea, makes every journey there a long-distance trip. Even visitors from the American mainland perceive it as exotic.

Travel to the Caribbean has become a determining factor for the region since its discovery by Europeans, which they continuously expanded from the European side. The fact that it was the discovery of the New World, with which no prior relationships had been established, meant that the explorers did not need to consider the inhabitants. They saw their discoveries as a free space for the powerful, smashing existing cultures as unwanted competition and seizing the region, including the forced labor of the locals. The Caribbean is forcibly integrated into the exchange with Europe. It is the region that has been most subjected to European colonization efforts. It is where the first bases of the explorers are located, the oldest colonies in the New World. After the Spaniards, the English and the French also establish their colonial empires with Caribbean possessions. With the establishment of plantation agriculture, the islands, despite their limited size, become the most valuable

colonies. After the economic decline and dissolution of the colonial empires, they become a gathering point for international tourism. The face of the Caribbean is radically transformed multiple times, with land and people rigorously adapted to the respective external requirements. This even includes the exchange of the population. The indigenous population is decimated and mostly replaced by Africans. But even they are not left as they are, but transformed under European supervision. Here, more effectively and sustainably than in other colonies, any independence is suppressed. The islands remain appendages of their European mother countries, long after almost all colonies on the American continent have gained independence, and are only released from this dependence when they become a burden. Exploitation and transformation in the interest of foreigners shape the development of the islands beyond the granted self-determination. They are repeatedly subjected to the possession of European arrivals. The appropriation is renewed under changing aspects. The Caribbean embodies the history of European overseas travel and is itself an artifice according to the respective desires of travelers. Almost all forms of contact with the foreign have been played out here. Trends are set here that are still in the future for other travel destinations.

Unlike the mobile Europeans who repeatedly see the Caribbean shores as a paradise where their dreams can come true, the predominantly non-European residents see it more as a place of exile. Both parties are in the same place but constantly in different worlds. For non-Europeans, the possibilities of development are limited by European claims of dominance. As slaves, they have no share in the legendary wealth of the European masters. Their resistance to exploitation and oppression culminates in numerous uprisings. Only in exceptional cases do they achieve success: in the Maroon War in Jamaica, escaped slaves fought for certain self-determination in granted enclaves in 1739, the French Revolution in Haiti triggered a slave revolution that led to independence in 1804, and in Suriname, slaves who managed to escape into the jungle forced an agreement in 1825 that granted them freedom, including the preservation of African culture. Society becomes an enclosed caste system through the contrast between masters and slaves, where constant repression allows little change. Compared to the innovations brought about by the Industrial Revolution in Europe, the Caribbean gradually sinks into backwardness. Since it primarily serves Europeans as a springboard for social advancement, the establishment of social service systems is neglected. Exploitation depletes natural resources; the yields of sugar monoculture decrease if new fields are not constantly cleared. When, as part of the

modernization of production at the instigation of England, the international slave trade was first outlawed in 1807 and then gradually slavery was abolished from 1838, the rights of the freed slaves, such as land ownership and migration, remained restricted to force them into plantation work on a wage basis. The tendency of refusal leads to the importation of labor from India, Java, and China from the mid-19th century onwards. However, this ultimately cannot stop the economic decline, but the racial conflict is enriched by the competition of Asians, especially in Trinidad and the Guianas, where Indians make up a large proportion of the population. The United States opens up the neglected colonies to their interests, supervises the region, and intervenes in times of crisis. Along with the economic penetration by Americans, tourism is established. The first cruises take place in the last third of the 19th century. While foreigners invade paradise anew, locals seek to escape from it. Emigration to American and European metropolises begins. In the 1930s, movements against colonial rule form. Gradual decolonization allows a native leadership elite to take over. With the release by the colonial powers, the territories disintegrate into island-sized nations. Formal freedom does not yet solve the problems associated with the colonial legacy. Social disparities and a hierarchically steep social framework persist. As participants in a system of international relations, they continue to form subsystems of foreign interests. Their economy is poorly adapted to the needs of the population; society produces what it does not need and consumes what it does not produce. Tourism, as a disproportionately growing economic factor, raises hopes but also fears. Some support tourism as a means to promote independent development, while others see it as perpetuating existing dependence.¹ Travel to the Caribbean creates not only a state of tension for visitors but also for the visited.

Rather than a spatial unit, the Caribbean forms an indistinct intermediate space, a crossroads of influences from Europe, Africa, and both parts of the Americas. In the examination of internal relations, inconsistencies are more apparent than commonalities. As a multitude of islands, they are geographically fragmented. The population exhibits extreme ethnic diversity with European, African, Indigenous, and Asian population components.

¹ See Caribbean Regional Centre for Advanced Studies in Youth Work, *Tourism and its Effects*; Caribbean Tourism Research and Development Centre, *Proceedings of the Regional Conference on the Socio-Cultural and Environmental Impact of Tourism on Caribbean Societies*; Herbert Hiller, "Escapism, Penetration, and Response: Industrial Tourism and the Caribbean" in *Caribbean Studies*, Nr. 2, 1976; Jean Holder, *The Role of Tourism in Caribbean Development or Buying Time with Tourism*.

The linguistic diversity is no less, although the language boundaries do not correspond to the ethnic differences. Different names for the region and different concepts of its delimitation compete. Names like "Las Indias," "West Indies," and "Antilles" coincide with the usage of conquerors from various European nations, but also from different eras, and primarily refer to the respective extent of the political possessions of those designating them. Taken together, they allude to the misconception of the explorers who believed they were on the pre-islands of Asia. Only the recently internationally disseminated term "Caribbean" suggests both a spatial concept and a cultural identity, even though it is not that of the Caribs.

Geographically, it refers to the islands located in front of the Americas, surrounded by the Caribbean Sea, the Greater and Lesser Antilles, the Bahamas, Caymans, and scattered smaller islands that do not belong to any of the larger groupings. A concept of cultural spatial delimitation also includes coastal areas of the American mainland around the Caribbean Sea, such as Guiana, Belize, and others, under the criterion that plantation economy and African population characterize them.² A region dominated by Euro-African cultural elements is thus demarcated from the Euro-Indigenous influenced areas of the continent.

As obvious as a cultural spatial delimitation appears for the study, the criteria for it only emerged during the period under consideration. At the time of discovery, there is no mention of plantations and African population, only of the indigenous population. A concept of the Caribbean region, which is intended to underlie the selection of texts from different periods of origin, must allow for some flexibility. In addition to the islands, coastal regions along the Caribbean Sea are also considered as travel destinations, even if the journeys took place at a time when they strictly speaking could not yet be considered Caribbean. - Travelers are also not necessarily limited to Caribbean destinations. Occasionally, travel to the Caribbean also includes those that go beyond.

In a narrower sense, the term "culture" is associated with a particularly refined area of social life, the cultivation of creative activities that serve the perfection of intellectual life, and is

² See Gerhard Sandner, "Antillen – Westindien – Karibischer Raum: Begriffe, Abgrenzungen, inhaltliche Definition" in *Der karibische Raum: Selbstbestimmung und Außenabhängigkeit* (Ed. W. Grenz & M. Rauls, Hg. Institut für Iberoamerika-Kunde), 47-48.

thus associated with creations that embody mental efforts in pure form. On closer inspection, the detachment of a purely intellectual sphere of life from practical social processes proves to be arbitrary. In a broader sense, everything that is cultivated and transmitted by a society can also be seen as a result of mental efforts. All organized activities of a society require specific knowledge that must be acquired, and their creations thus embody knowledge. The intellectual superstructure of a society is based on a material foundation. Both sectors are mutually connected.³

An expanded understanding in this sense leads to a concept of culture that encompasses the entirety of the organized activities of a society. It takes into account the insight that individual social phenomena can only be understood in the context of others in the same society. Technology, economy, politics, philosophy, art, religion, etc. are interconnected. Under a holistic perspective, cultural characteristic is seen as a product of a specific way of life, as is characteristic for ethnologists, for example. Accordingly, every people practice, even if their organization of social life appears simple, a unique social order, their own culture. Depending on the particular experiences in the group's interaction with the environment from which they derive the necessities of life, an intellectual and artistic creation develops, as well as an economic and political institution. Society and culture are correlative quantities: "A society is a group of individuals whose overall organized activities suffice to ensure the satisfaction of each individual's material and psychological needs and who consider themselves a unit with precisely defined boundaries. A culture is a complex whole of material objects, behaviors, and ideas that are acquired to a particular extent by each member of a determined society. A society could not exist without a culture, that collective heritage that is passed down from generation to generation, freeing descendants from having to rediscover all solutions to the questions of their existence themselves. A culture presupposes the existence of a group that slowly creates it, lives it, and communicates it."⁴

Culture is not a concrete object but an abstraction, a way of looking at diverse phenomena and connections, for which the term "system" is applicable in a double sense. From one perspective, it is a complex whole that functions as a unit and produces stable characteristics. Viewing it as a holistic context of coordinated interrelationships between

³ Jacques Maquet & H. Ganslmayer, *Die Afrikaner*, 22-23.

⁴ Jacques Maquet & H. Ganslmayer, *Die Afrikaner*, 13-14.

numerous, far-reaching subsystems that encompass all organized activities of a society reveals a characteristic relationship between its parts, a specific cultural trait. From another perspective, it is a piece of information, collective knowledge that must be conveyed to every member of the society - not in all details, but to a certain degree. Considered as a system of rules, its knowledge can be acquired, thus enabling the individual to adapt to the corresponding social and natural environment.

Culture in its latter form serves as a guide to a process that repeatedly creates, ensures, and renews the coordinated interaction of social activities. It not only varies from society to society but is also changeable and capable of development itself. While its characteristics may appear relatively stable, the equilibrium of the underlying interrelationships is fluid. A culture adapts to changing circumstances and new influences. The transmitted information is subject to change, current information can be assimilated, outdated information can be erased. When details of the system change, the culture as a whole also transforms. Impulses for such changes usually originate from external influences, such as changes in the environment or confrontations with another society and its culture. However, impulses for renewal can also come from within the society, such as inventions that represent technological progress, intellectual creations that revolutionize the world view, or the deliberate search for challenges, as embodied by travelers who surpass the boundaries of the culture to which they are accustomed.

Despite the dynamic qualities, the culture of a society is not arbitrarily changeable. The balance may be fluid, but it is also fragile and vulnerable. A culture can be destroyed, just like the environmental conditions on which it is based or the people who create it. Cultures perish when the process of social renewal fails. They are affected by conflicts between peoples, deformed by the domination of one society over another, and eradicated in a peaceful manner by intermingling societies and unifying cultural differences.

The confrontation with different circumstances presents a challenge for both visitors and those being visited because different cultures are not easily reconciled. Many things are incomprehensible or contradictory to a way of life whose rules have not been learned. What works within one framework often fails within another. Difficulties arise because the foreign language is not understood. Furthermore, certain moral rules and practical procedures often deviate from the familiar, ideological concepts and value standards differ, and social institutions and structures vary. A partially different social organization brings about an overall different way of life and worldview. The resulting disorientation, because existing

knowledge is incompatible with changed circumstances, requires adaptation on one side or the other. If the rules of one culture were learnable, so are those of another, similar to learning a foreign language. Cultural contacts can, however, be both constructive and destructive. Multilingualism is widespread. In other respects as well, foreign cultural patterns are seen as an opportunity for learning. Musicians expand their skills by incorporating foreign sound patterns, artists and artisans adopt foreign techniques and forms of expression, thinkers adopt different ideas, and even idle travelers sometimes adapt to the way of life practiced elsewhere. However, cultural differences are often understood as a cause for bitter conflicts.

The successful expansion of European colonial powers has forced geographically disconnected territories with their culturally diverse populations into vast colonial empires and has also produced a system of international interdependence that no society can escape. Contacts between peoples have become global. The exchange and the associated stimulation for cultural innovation are generally considered positive by the initiators. However, what represents a gain for some is often a loss for others because the contact does not prove equally stimulating as a developmental impulse for everyone but also destroys the foundations of many traditional ways of life. This text will specifically address the question of the quality of the relationship between European travelers and non-Europeans. It is less important which cultures they come into contact with individually than how they behave in a situation of personal contact with representatives of another way of life and in what relationship the exchange takes place.

Travelers rarely make sharp distinctions between the different areas from which exotic phenomena arise. They usually try to categorize them collectively into a single context. Particularly race and culture are erroneously and persistently associated in the European observer's imagination. Racial terms rarely refer only to biological differences; they also imply an exotic foreignness that stands in contrast to their own cultural order. Socially acquired characteristics and the cultural imprinting of social relations are often attributed to a biologically fixed "nature" of Negroes, Indians, or Chinese. However, racial characteristics have no social significance and are not to be understood as products of social interactions. "A group of people is not more likely to have a peasant-like rather than an industrial technique, an authoritarian rather than a democratic political organization, or an expressionistic rather than a realistic art because of belonging to a certain race. Race and

culture are two independent variables."⁵ If the term "Others" is used in the following sense of racial and cultural differentiation, it is because it corresponds to the terminology of the texts being examined.

The uniqueness of Caribbean conditions is their cultural diversity. Although the Europeans who took control of the islands attempted to showcase their own culture and adapt the foreign culture to their own standards, they continuously imported new and different cultural elements through the influx of African and later Asian laborers, which, while partially blending, could not be completely unified. The society remains ethnically heterogeneous, although different cultural developments are politically suppressed. Various cultures overlap, giving rise to new variations. Even European traditions are not exempt from changes. It is not always clear to which cultural context individual practices belong. Racial discrimination replaces cultural distinction and shapes colonial society. The desired simplification of the complex situation through a rigid hierarchical structure based on racist concepts hinders the interaction between cultures. Several parallel processes of cultural renewal compete with each other. None of them can exclusively claim to ensure the adaptation of the society, in which distinct population groups are forcibly brought together, to the Caribbean environment. Natives frequently respond to the complex and tense situation with multiple cultural adaptations, while European newcomers tend to be doubly unsettled.

Travel provides proverbial material for stories: When someone goes on a journey, he will have stories to tell... This folk wisdom is also confirmed in relation to written testimonies. Travels are extensively described. The fact that they are also given a lot of literary space may be due to the increased intensity of experiences on the way. Travelers involuntarily become special carriers of information. The news is intended to be conveyed to those who have stayed at home and want to be informed, but the inevitable complications that the individuals experience beyond the familiar and the accustomed also inspire some to write about the events, not necessarily with the intention of publication; because the organized composition of the experiences also facilitates the psychological coping with the extraordinary. It is not for nothing that travel diaries are kept.

Descriptions of travel to the Caribbean form a continuous discourse. They refer to each other, complement each other, correct each other, and update the state of information. The

⁵ Jaques Maquet & H. Ganslmayer, *Die Afrikaner*, 35.

sensational discovery of America naturally generated a strong interest in detailed reporting. It was mandatory for each of the expeditions organized as state undertakings. Despite censorship and limited publication opportunities, ways of dissemination were found. Travel reports were highly regarded, and the interest in them has not diminished to this day. Even though the discoveries have already been described many times, the number of publications continues to increase over time. The popularity of the genre is evident not only in monographs, but also in newspapers and magazines reporting on travel and destinations. Specialized travel magazines have established themselves. In addition to literary descriptions, film and television also play a role. Through the number of successive descriptions and the different perspectives, a cohesive and dynamic image of the Caribbean and the journeys to the region is formed.

Among the selected texts of travelers about the Caribbean, there are travel reports that document the course of an expedition in a factual manner, travel diaries with dated entries of special events, treatises that treat the subject of experience in a generalized form, letters to specific addressees, detailed travel narratives that also emphasize the reflection of the experiences, travel reports that present experiences from current perspectives, and travel novels that prioritize the composition of the experiences over their documentation.

Already from this spectrum of text genres, it becomes clear that in the representation of travels, documentation and fiction merge into one another. Although the character of documentation is the focus in the texts - the descriptions are based on actual journeys, and the representation of the experiences deliberately conveys the impression of absolute fidelity to reality - the different styles of presentation allow for a wide range of choices in terms of what is considered worth reporting. Reception expectations and the chosen genre indirectly shape the subject of the description.

It is not necessarily the case that an emphasized factual presentation also exhibits the highest degree of fidelity to reality. The factual nature of travel records, in particular, is based on strict selection of the reported events and distorts the subject by reducing it to foregrounded and clearly comprehensible aspects. In apparent precision, a fictional impression is created, more or less intentionally. Even treatises can be deceptive in this regard, as the processing of perceived information for informative purposes often relies on preconceived organizational concepts. The foreign appears plausible because it fits existing concepts, which may not do justice to the described reality as much as to one's own beliefs. Texts that closely adhere to the perceptions of their authors, such as diaries and letters, are also not always free from

fictional elements. There are fictional diaries whose dated entries deliberately evoke the impression of authenticity, and letters that are never sent but are initially conceived as collections or published as open letters in newspapers.

In texts where travels are presented in an elaborate form, the emphasis on the composition of the experiences towards a story already indicates fictional elements. Travel narratives and adaptations in the form of novels often reveal the intention to entertain rather than document, and even in reports, where fidelity to reality is claimed, this goal is not always far away. However, among the more poetically than factually shaped descriptions, there are also those whose credibility is not diminished but enhanced by the style of presentation, and which come closer to the goal of documentation than most factual representations precisely because the authors do not strictly assert the truth of what is reported, but rather reflect on themselves within the text and subject their perspective of the Other to debate. Narration occasionally consciously replaces factual discourse. Descriptions of this kind have also been seen in the field of ethnography in recent times, for example.⁶ In the search for appropriate forms of documenting the extraordinary, different styles of presentation are being explored, genres overlap and mix, without fictional elements that bend the desired objectivity of representation and alienate "reality" being fundamentally avoidable.

The manner in which experiences are shaped also varies over time. In the course of the discourse throughout the epochs, periodic focuses can be identified. Up until the 17th century, the focus was on acquiring factual information. Reports on the progress of expeditions and cosmographic treatises predominated, attempting to place the discovered within an existing body of knowledge. The descriptions were more broadly surveyed and heavily generalized rather than detailed. Apart from documented activities of Europeans overseas, there were speculations rather than reflections regarding the Other. Only from the end of the 18th century, when the islands were firmly in European hands, did a targeted engagement with details begin. A second discovery took place from a scientific perspective. The foreign was classified and measured. The interest focused on phenomena in the natural realm but also included "native peoples". The descriptions also clearly reveal personal initiative and the authors' perspectives. Since the beginning of the 19th century, waves of increased interest in journalistic description have swept across the Caribbean, each triggered by current political events: the independence of Haiti, the abolition of slavery, the economic

⁶ See Hans- Jürgen Heinrichs, "Ethnopoese – wissenschaftliche und poetische Schreibweise" in *Mythen der Neuen Welt: Zur Entdeckungsgeschichte Lateinamerikas*.

decline of the colonies, the release into independence, the revolution in Cuba. Since the beginning of the 20th century, descriptions from private perspectives, particularly personal enjoyment, have come to the forefront. Apart from temporal trends, which are also evident in specific ways of perception and description, scattered and evenly distributed throughout the epochs are accounts from individuals professionally stationed in the Caribbean, adventurers, those who have been stranded there, and visitors who maintain existing contacts. Their style of presentation is shaped more by their specific intentions than by temporal trends.

Generalizing, several tendencies of diachronic change in discourse can be observed. The addressees of the texts change. Originally, they were typically directed at superiors and members of the upper echelons of society, such as regional and church leaders, to whom the authors were accountable. Over time, they turn to a broader public, voluntarily and uninvitedly sharing their experiences with them. Reporting in the national interest gives way to reporting that branches out into various fields of interest, increasingly represented by private individuals. Factual information is supplemented by subjective perceptions and the authors' own reflections. The narrator also appears as a protagonist. The act of discovery increasingly becomes a self-discovery.

Linguistically, the initially predominantly Spanish reporting significantly diversifies with the colonial involvement of England, France, and Holland in the Caribbean. From the 17th century onwards, it is increasingly replaced by predominantly English texts. This reflects the colonial predominance of the English in America, which is also increasingly reflected in travel descriptions. The reporting in English gains additional weight through the descriptions of travelers from the independent USA, for whom the Caribbean is not only in a neighboring context but also increasingly part of an expanding sphere of interest. Descriptions from English-speaking America outweigh those from Spanish-speaking visitors. With the economic decline of the colonies, the linguistic spectrum of the descriptions expands once again, as visitors now also come from nations such as Germany, which compete with the respective colonial powers, to the quasi-ownerless possessions.

Linguistic diversity - even if it increases over time - is characteristic of the discourse from the beginning. The project of colonization has been a European endeavor from the beginning, in which not only Portuguese and Spanish initiators but also representatives of other European nations are significantly involved. The discoverer of America, for example, comes from Genoa and initially works for the Portuguese, then the Spanish. He writes his

reports in a foreign language. The namesake Amerigo Vespucci from Florence, as a cosmographer, alternately serves in Spanish and Portuguese services, but writes his famous letters in Italian or Latin.

Authors of travel descriptions do not necessarily emerge as writers in other contexts. In addition to cosmographers and official reporters, journalists, scientists, and travel writers also feel called to do so, as well as those whose undertakings are attributed public interest or who record their travel impressions in a private setting and believe they can convey a personal knowledge advantage due to their special world experience. Convinced of their own importance, travelers of all kinds build on the tradition of explorers and profile themselves with the publication of their personal experiences. The increasing number of travelers brings a veritable flood of descriptions that can be understood in an extended sense as contributions to exploration. Their authors come from a broad social spectrum. Among them are leaders of expeditions, but occasionally also members of the crew who are entrusted with the description, officers stationed in the colonies, officials, missionaries, scientists from different disciplines who undertake research trips. But representatives of middle and lower classes also have their say, who are on the road as adventurers, refugees, or tourists. Over the course of the discourse, one can observe the tendency that travelers who emerge as authors increasingly represent the general public and no longer just the sovereigns. This also reflects a process of gradual democratization of travel.

Some of the texts selected are to be understood as travel descriptions only in an extended sense. Borderline cases are treatises on Caribbean conditions at the time of the discoveries, in which the person of the author and the presentation of his journey are abstracted and experience is presented in factually processed form.⁷ At the time of their creation, an impersonal description of events is also the norm in texts that adhere to the course of the journey. And the fact that travel experiences are organized in a factual manner is also a common pattern of description. As texts that make a significant contribution to the discourse - many of the later authors refer to them and their characteristic position - they should be considered here as travel descriptions. Recently, there have been borderline cases of texts where it is not clear whether they are to be understood as documentation or fiction.

⁷ Among the texts presented those of the authors: B. de las Casas, *Apologética Historia de las Indias*; G. Fernández de Oviedo, *Sumario de la Natural Historia de las Indias*; J. du Tertre, *Histoire Générale des Antilles habitées par les Français*.

Travel accounts are sometimes labeled as novels,⁸ and occasionally the author also distances himself from his protagonist by reporting about him in an impersonal form, as if he were another person.⁹ Fictional elements are not uncommon in the texts. Imagined and alienated elements are often presented as documentation, and conversely, signs of the author's distancing from what is being reported do not necessarily have to be interpreted as limited credibility. They can also be stylistic devices to document events truthfully without compromising oneself as an author.

Not all authors are Europeans in the strict sense, if one were to base it on origin or descent. The criterion is meant in terms of cultural imprinting, which necessitates viewing Caribbean conditions with a European perspective and perceiving cultural phenomena that do not correspond to Western tradition as foreign in the sense of exotic. This criterion also applies to non-Europeans such as Americans, who position themselves within European cultural tradition. Individual colored authors who originally come from or were abducted to the Caribbean, are domiciled in Europe, and describe travels to the Caribbean form borderline cases.¹⁰ Their perspective serves as a counter-test to the attempt to reconcile culture and race.

The wealth of candid self-testimonies about contact with other cultures in the Caribbean in the form of travel descriptions provides abundant material for understanding how Europeans shape their relationship with the culturally different. On the one hand, they document their own behavior in encountering it, and on the other hand, they compose the experienced with a specific intention to convey in their text. They not only faithfully depict lived reality, but also reconstruct it from specific perspectives, model and provide a targeted representation of it to shape the understanding of reality for their readers. Travel accounts are essentially utilitarian literature, associated with specific intentions in their composition. They shape their communications as useful, instructive, or entertaining for their readers from current perspectives. Beyond declared intentions, their authors implicitly, but certainly not entirely unintentionally, create ways of thinking about other peoples. Their descriptions

⁸ Among the texts presented those of the authors: Rudolf Jacobs, *Sonne über Haiti*; Peter Zingler, *Tod in Kingston*.

⁹ Solveig Ockenfuß, "Von einer, die auszog, das Fürchten zu lernen"; Peter Zingler, *Tod in Kingston*.

¹⁰ Olaudah Equiano, *Equiano's Travels*; Vidia S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*; Edgar Mittelholzer, *With a Carib Eye*.

include assessments, opinions, examples of behavior, instructions for action, critical reflections, etc., and thus embody ideological notions. In the self-representations of travelers in foreign lands, a personal relationship to the local reality is reflected, and inevitably, a generally propagated one as well. Both are closely connected. This process of ideological formation should be critically reflected upon. The texts cannot be exhaustively treated and evaluated individually, but relationships should be made between them through a comparison of many descriptions: significant similarities, descriptive stereotypes, developmental tendencies, and structures.

Travelers loudly enthuse about the opportunity to wander into the distance. One would assume that from their accounts, much could be learned about the otherness they encounter and about how they learn to adapt and cooperate with it. Considering the complications they face, it would be expected that they are also inwardly moved by them. However, the authors surprisingly make it very easy for themselves to understand the other. While they declare the purest motives in connection with their intentions: unbiased curiosity, service to the common good and humanity, exchange and understanding between peoples, expansion of the intellectual horizon, idealistic world improvement, and self-improvement. From the connections they help establish, they see good emerging in every respect with hopeful eyes, and proudly align themselves with the chain of pioneers. But the content deviates significantly from their declarations. They limit themselves to a defensive attitude. They rarely express that a new understanding is revealed to them, but more often how the circumstances resist their preconceptions. Instead of expanding their understanding, they restrict the other culture in words and actions. They make their appearances conform to their own ideas and give the impression of emerging from the confrontation triumphant and unchanged. European authors perceive foreign lands as spaces where their own culture – their abilities, knowledge, organization, equipment, and ideology – are put to the test. Contentious, they open up the foreign to their interests and insist on their own self-perception and traditional way of life. They carry their culture with them and stage it on-site. Differences are hardly ever seen as stimuli for their own adaptation, but rather as points of contention. Convinced of the correctness of their own approach, they deem the others in the wrong and treat them as adversaries. If superiority in relation to them does not appear guaranteed, they anxiously avoid any contact. Only when cornered and dependent on foreign support do they show willingness to negotiate, and if it benefits them, also to

cooperate. Clear conditions in the sense of subordination of the others or distance from them are preferred over mutual obligations. There is a pronounced intolerance towards the overlap of different ways of life and the associated ambiguity without prior clarification of hierarchy. Other cultures appear as hostile or irrational counter-worlds.

From the experience of foreign culture, hardly any innovative impulses result, but rather they confirm the superiority of their own culture in confrontation. The described success of their journey consists precisely in the fact that they do not really have to adapt to other cultures, but that what they have learned also proves itself abroad. Faced with the apparent inadequacy of other cultures compared to the superficial superiority of European culture, they express their disappointment and satisfaction at the same time. The exotic is overcome by demystifying it and gradually denying its charms. The more the other culture loses, the more their own culture, which they wanted to go beyond, gains. The change of the other according to their own ideas is propagated.

Contrary to their self-assessment, European travelers rarely appear as cosmopolitan border crossers between cultures. However successful their ventures may be, their inner journey cannot keep pace with the variables of cultural reality. Regardless of the different cultures they encounter, they perceive their differing organization as disorder, as chaos, to which they can only reluctantly adjust. Critical self-reflection, which would make them aware of the limitations of their own understanding, is largely lacking. The liberation from the constraints of their own culture fails, with few exceptions. Travel proves to be a system of European self-realization that successfully overcomes questioning by other cultures.

The study is based on 100 texts that were created in the past five centuries. The oldest document is Columbus' ship's diary from his voyage in 1492, during which he landed in the Caribbean as an explorer in the service of Spain, and the most recent is a publication of travel impressions from 1985. Almost half of the texts come from the 20th century. Their length varies from a few pages, as is characteristic of letters or non-independent contributions in magazines or anthologies, to several volumes. The majority are independent publications ranging from 200 to 300 pages in length.

For comparison, the texts are organized according to the motives of their authors for the journey, which can be summarized under the headings "discovery and conquest", "professional or religious mission", "research and education", "adventure and proof", "escape or abduction", "current information gathering", "invitation to visit or travel companion", "recreation and pleasure". The motives for a journey are not necessarily clear-cut. Often, several motives can be inferred from the context of the text. This results in overlaps in the classification of the texts. The same author can be relevant with their description from different perspectives and can also be used multiple times to illustrate a particular attitude. Transitions also emerge within the spectrum of abstractable variants. - Certain motives accumulate at certain times, while others occur over long periods of time. With the selection of the texts, a temporal framework is also established. As a result of the examination of the individual motives, time currents emerge that alternate or overlap. The order of the chapters from conquerors to pleasure travelers also illustrates the diachronic variability of the discourse.