



University of Venda

Travel Narratives: Examining selected Southern African texts

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## Abstract

This study analyses the representation of African landscapes and communities in selected pre/colonial and contemporary travel narratives that focus on South Africa. The study also focuses on exploring evident convergences and divergences in pre/colonial and contemporary post-colonial travel narratives in representing South African landscapes and communities. My study utilizes travel writing theories, post-colonial theories such as Said's Orientalism to examine the selected narratives' representation of southern African, landscapes and communities and to explore claims and counter claims about pre/colonial imperialist continuities and/or discontinuities in the thematic concerns and representational strategies employed by contemporary post-colonial travel writers. The study argues that in pre/colonial travel narratives, the African landscapes and communities are invariably depicted in negative and condescending stereotypes. In Ridder Haggard's pre-colonial fictional travel narrative, *King Solomon's Mines*, the narrative voice bears an undisguised encouragement of European and specifically British imperialism in Africa. The European civilization is portrayed as vastly superior and potentially beneficial to the African one which is depicted as inferior, barbaric and in need of improvement by European way of life. The colonial fictional travel narrative of Buchan, *Prester John* suggests that the African landscapes and communities must remain under European colonial control despite the restiveness of the Africans. My study subsequently foregrounds how contemporary travel narratives by William Dickey, Justin Fox and Sihle Khumalo also represent the South African and African landscapes and communities in their post-apartheid travel narratives which seem focused on the search for the individual authors' identities and the South African national identities. Despite the evident reliance on the pre/colonial traditions of travel writing,

contemporary or post-colonial/post-apartheid travel narratives analysed in this study indicate a desperate desire by their writers to depart from the pre/colonial negative stereotypical representations of African landscapes and communities.

**Key words:** Colonial travel narratives, contemporary post-colonial travel narratives, representation, identities, colonialism, indigenous communities, continuities and discontinuities, indigenous landscapes