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The Postcolonial Subject in Transit

Migration, Borders, and Subjectivity in Contemporary African Diaspora Literature

Edited by
Delphine Fongang

Foreword by
Toyin Falola

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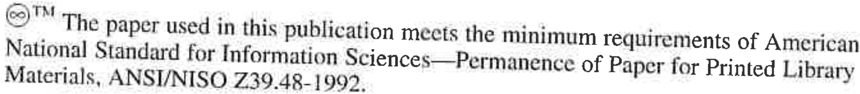

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To Remi, Abigael, and Benn, for your unwavering love and support.

Chapter 9

Arrivals, Geographies, and "The Usual Reply" in Emily Raboteau's *Searching for Zion*

Nicole Stamant

Emily Raboteau's *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora* (2013) begins with an encounter at Newark International Airport, when Emily attempts to board an airplane heading to Israel to visit a friend. (In line with conventions of life writing scholarship and in order to distinguish between author and protagonist, I use "Emily" to indicate the participant within the memoir and "Raboteau" for the authorial position.) "The security personnel of El Al Airlines descended on me like a flock of vultures," she writes. "I was prepared for the initial question, 'What are you?,' which I've been asked my entire life, and, though it chafed me, I knew the canned answer that would satisfy: 'I look the way I do because my mother is white and my father is black'" (Raboteau 2013, 3). This "usual reply" does not prove sufficient, though, and Raboteau describes the "interrogation" which follows: before they "grabbed [her] luggage, whisked [her] to the basement, stripped off [her] clothes, and probed every inch of [her] body for explosives, inside and out," the security officers wanted to know why she's going to visit Israel, where her father is from, where her "*people*" are from, why her surname is French, what her middle name, Ishem, means, and what her "origins" are (Raboteau 2013, 3–5, italics original). She provides answers that range from irreverent to angry and writes: "There was no place for me inside their rhetoric. I didn't have the right vocabulary. I didn't have the right pedigree. My mixed race had made me a perpetual unanswered question. The Atlantic slave trade had made me a mongrel and a threat" (Raboteau 2013, 5). The security force's tactics during Raboteau's detention place her racial ambiguity and her inability to make herself understood—her linguistic and linguistically constituted position—at the fore of a narrative in which she travels the globe searching for Zion, the Promised Land, throughout the African diaspora. From New Jersey to Jerusalem and on through Jamaica, Ethiopia,

Ghana, and, finally, to the American South, Raboteau presents her raced and gendered body as a site that contains the "displacement" of enslavement (Raboteau 2013, 6), of intimate geographies, and of lived experience. She is a diasporic subject, unfixed, unidentifiable, and in transit.

Raboteau uses her particularly contested embodied position from which to challenge assumptions about unified subjectivity and complete belongingness, prompting readers to rethink what they expect from narratives that place race and racial identification at the center. She quotes from an unpublished op-ed for the *New York Times*, written by her father, who describes her as African American. She responds, noting her pleasure that "He asserted first and foremost that I was African American. I'd always felt that I was, or a subset of that, since African Americans were a mixed race anyway, but didn't my scramble of features cancel each other out?" (Raboteau 2013, 19). Investigating the difficulties inherent to constructing identities through and beyond established racialized boundaries, her experiences as a mixed-race African American, racially indeterminate and unrecognizable to others but not to herself, both allow her access to spaces that might be prohibited otherwise and enhance her feelings of exile. Her search for home, for a Zion, demonstrates this paradoxical mobility. Beginning her memoir with a scene of detention and cultural disconnect, Raboteau reminds readers that her body is read as unknowable and illegitimate—therefore threatening—*and* that it is mobile and seemingly rootless. Her rootlessness seems culturally specific, evidenced when the El Al security personnel does not know in what context her body should be read as they try to ascertain her origins, but in her memoir, she suggests that her body should be contextualized with the bodies of her forebears. In particular, she posits that the bodies of African Americans since the transatlantic slave trade, constituted geographically and linguistically, have always inhabited such a paradoxical position. The perspective Raboteau provides readers in her memoir is subject to varying national customs, difficult to ascertain, and unapologetic in its negotiation of diaspora.

Raboteau locates her challenge to the notion that we have somehow arrived in a "post-racial" moment through containment and hospitality as she negotiates sites throughout the African diaspora. Beginning with an incident of detention allows Raboteau to demonstrate how her subject position is frequently defined by external forces and to call attention to the fact that this is not an uncommon situation: subjects are frequently detained, defined, and dis- or misplaced. Cultural geographer Alison Mountz and her collaborators suggest that, while detaining a subject helps to contain it, detention "simultaneously also produces new, highly mobile identities" (Mountz et al. 2012, 527). Mobility through detention seems unlikely, and yet it is the fact of detention that demonstrates Emily's "unclassificability" (Khosravi, qtd in Mountz et al. 2012, 256). Because Emily's "pedigree" is unknown, because she is a subject that falls outside of easy bounds of classification—true within an American context and, especially, outside of it—she taps into a particular fear of the unknown. Further, while she underscores the fact that she is unclassifiable by the security forces of El Al Airlines in the memoir's opening scene, the book is a meditation on the manifestations and ramifications of such "unclassificability." Mountz et al explain that detention "is often rationalized through a fear of the unknown," that, quoting Shaharam Khosravi, citizens could be in danger because of the subject's "unclassificability" and who, with unknown identities, "could 'be anyone' and 'do anything'" (Mountz et al. 2012, 526). Detention is, then, an attempt to "contain and fix" identities, and yet, in the process, detention ironically removes subjects from the contexts in which "they could be identifiable" (Mountz et al. 2012, 526). For Raboteau, those contexts are, generally, "the Atlantic slave trade," and, specifically, the histories of African Americans of the American South.

Reading Raboteau—and others who inhabit similar positions—as a displaced person, as a doubly- or multiply-diasporic subject, makes sense, especially in light of the recent report published by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) on racial terror (2015). This report documents several hundred more lynchings of African Americans than preceding comprehensive studies: between 1877 and 1950, they place the number at 3, 959–700 more than previously reported ("Lynching" 2015, 5). Importantly, this report distinguishes between the "hangings and mob violence that followed some criminal trial process or that were committed against non-minorities *without* the threat of terror" from what they describe as "racial terror lynchings" ("Lynching" 2015, 4, emphasis mine). They continue: "The lynchings we document were acts of terrorism because these murders were carried out with impunity, sometimes in broad daylight [. . .]. Terror lynchings were horrific acts of violence whose perpetrators were never held accountable" ("Lynching" 2015, 5). Reminding readers that many of the victims of terror lynchings "were killed for minor social transgressions," they argue that racial terror lynching enforced Jim Crow systems and that such terror lynching "played a key role in the forced migration of millions of black Americans out of the South" ("Lynching" 2015, 6).

Such forced migration because of terror is central for Emily's self-understanding. As she tries to come to terms with her anger at the situation with the El Al security staff, she rests on the fact that the officers had "shoved [her] face into [her] own rootlessness" (Raboteau 2013, 6). She explains:

> I inherited my sense of displacement from my father. It had something to do with the legacy of our slave past. [...] But it had even more to do with the particular circumstances of my grandfather's death. He was murdered in the state of Mississippi in 1943. Afterward, my grandmother, Mabel, fled north with her

> children, in search, like so many blacks who left the South, of the Promised Land. It was as if my father, whose father had been ripped from him, had been exiled. My father's feelings of homelessness, which I took on like a gene for being left handed, were therefore historical and personal. (Raboteau 2013, 6–7)

While her sense of rootlessness and unbelonging "had something to do" with the legacies of enslavement, it has "*even more to do* with" the more recent murder of her grandfather (emphasis mine). Part of the larger African diaspora, the family also becomes members of the diaspora of African Americans from the South, exiled once again from a land that supported their ancestors. The EJI notes that "Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana had the highest statewide rates of lynching in the United States. Georgia and Mississippi had the highest number of lynchings," 586 and 576, between 1877 and 1950, respectively ("Lynching" 2015, 5, 16), central to Raboteau's family's story. Reading Raboteau's familial history as a response to racial terror and, accordingly, reading her family's departure from Mississippi in response to such violence, changes a seemingly-conventional story of the Great Migration to one in which her family can be read as refugees. Emily's grandfather was shot for defending a black woman to a white man (Raboteau 2013, 18–19), and his death provides a foundation for her exploration of what it means to be a part of diasporic cultures: it works like a prism through which she considers her experiences in searching for a home, for a community and a place to belong, and in which she chronicles her larger responses to life in a world still filled with terror and exile.

Emily finds herself confronting terror following the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center attacks in Manhattan. A self-proclaimed New Yorker, she is singled out, shortly after the attacks, by a drunk man who yells at her to "Go home!" and who throws a beer bottle at her head, wounding her and leaving a "sickle-shaped scar" behind her left ear (Raboteau 2013, 17–18). She writes that, although there were people around when this happened, "no one came to [her] aid," and this lack of support "had hurt [her] most" (Raboteau 2013, 19). Following this assault, and opposed to America's foreign and domestic policies under George W. Bush, Emily leaves the country she finds to be so inhospitable. She is a disaporic subject in transit: she travels to places like Brazil and Spain, returning to New York only when she runs out of money and in order to regroup before leaving again. Such movement demonstrates a kind of self-imposed exile; Emily because she feels that she is in danger, or feels that she could be, and she looks for other places across the world where she may not inhabit such a fraught or marginal space.

In this scene, Raboteau also confronts her privilege, since she knows that she is in a position different from many others. "What right did I have, with my light-skinned privileges, to make a stink when far worse indignities had

befallen others and [my father]?" she asks. "What did it matter that I felt unwelcome [in the United States] when my literature professor, a novelist from Kenya, had actually been exiled from his country for criticizing its politics? When my own grandfather had been shot dead in Mississippi for defending a black woman to a white man? I had risked nothing" (Raboteau 2013, 18–19). These questions—of privilege and loss, of welcome and exile, at once domestic and transnational—allow Raboteau to explore different kinds of communities whose members she suggests are, like her, hoping to find some version of the "Promised Land." She turns to Israel first before moving through various places within the African diaspora—Jamaica, Ethiopia, and Ghana—ultimately making her way to the American South. Such progression allows her to explore a variety of ways in which cultures understand and embrace beliefs about various Promised Lands as it also gives her the opportunity to navigate disputed and disparate spaces. She inhabits a body indeterminate and fluid enough to pass through a number of different borders, even as she is occasionally detained at them, and her memoir ultimately posits the roots of such subjectivity in the histories and legacies of diaspora. Such movement is not always easy, but it is presented here as essential to her analysis of what it means to be a subject whose "unclassificability" has the potential to be dangerous and which provides the foundations for her seeming rootlessness.

Just after September 11, Emily's friend, Tamar, the childhood friend she was on her way to visit in Israel when she is stopped by El Al security in her memoir's opening scene, visits New York. Tamar provides the kind of transnational perspective that is often absent from American narratives, especially stories or texts that reference the September 11 terrorist attacks. Raboteau recalls Tamar noting that, "in much of the world, this kind of thing goes on all the time," and Raboteau recognizes that Tamar "was right, of course" (Raboteau 2013, 20). Tamar "lived with the daily consequences of her nation's bullying; lived with the ruptures, the bombs, the protests and uprisings. She had to confront this strife and examine her place within it. Now I had to do the same" (Raboteau 20). Following this realization, Emily leaves the United States, traveling, trying to come to terms with "what people really thought of" Americans around the world (Raboteau 2013, 21).

Upon her return, she moves to Harlem in order to be close to her job, but remains ambivalent about her place in the world. Reflecting upon the gentrification of neighborhoods around hers, for example, Raboteau explains that she realizes that she is part of the neighborhood's shifting identity. "I couldn't pretend," she writes, "with my Ivy League degree, that I wasn't a member of this gentry," even if she "belonged halfway to the race being squeezed out" of Harlem (Raboteau 2013, 22). "I myself was not disinherited," she continues. "I began to feel my terrible whiteness, and I was ashamed" (Raboteau 2013, 22). This shame unhomes Emily who wants to participate in community, to be part

of the storied legacy of Harlem, and yet feels inadequate to inherit that tradition. While Harlem is an historically significant space for African Americans, Emily does not feel that she can belong to it. Imagining that she is destined to wander, Raboteau considers the long traditions of diasporic subjects in transit and negotiations of communities in flux. Her memoir asks readers to consider how we—and by extension, she—can understand her racial position if she is decontextualized from everything that assists us in categorizing race like family, history, language, or religion. Accordingly, I examine *Searching for Zion*'s American context and what it means for a postcolonial subject in transit to be homed and unhomed by the United States and its histories.

Such consideration of national negotiation of identity underscore Mountz' observation that detention happens because the body in question is "'unclassifi[able]'; without identities known to the state, they could 'be anyone' and 'do anything'" (Mountz et al. 2012, 526). Detention works to contain or fix the identity of the traveler, while, paradoxically, such detention disconnects the subject in transit—migrant, refugee, tourist—from the precise environment in which they could be identified (Mountz et al. 2012, 526). Geographers Karen Soldatic and Lucy Fiske "describe detention as a response to 'unruly,' 'suspicio[us]' bodies, bodies that apparently resist being identified or classified" (qtd in Mountz et al. 2012, 526), a very good description of Raboteau. It is "through becoming *knowable*" that citizens can "prove their innocence" (Mountz et al. 2012, 526, italics original), and it is worth considering that this desire to "becom[e] knowable" itself might be a central task of life writing—if only to be known to oneself in a new way. Emily's body rests at the crux of a paradox—black and white, diasporic and American—and *Searching* chronicles a series of attempts to make it legible or knowable to herself and to her audience, however fleeting.

After traveling to Israel, Emily returns to Harlem. In this section, she provides a conversation with her father in which he reminds her that "the modern nation-state is supposed to be synonymous with identity. When people ask us what we are, we're inclined to say we're Americans, or hyphenated Americans" (Raboteau 2013, 64). Emily reacts, saying, "People don't believe me" (Raboteau 2013, 64). Her father's response underscores the multivalent implications of hospitality. He explains:

> That's because your face shows racial mythology to be a lie. It confuses people. The state"—my father held up his right hand—"is a political entity. The nation"—he held up his left hand—"is a cultural entity." He clasped his hands together. "But when these two entities coincide in countries with histories of slavery or other systems of racial hierarchy, identity gets confused with race. If you do not easily belong to a race, then you cannot easily be an American. (Raboteau 2013, 64)

Emily's father positions identification as connected to the nation state, and the memoir, in many ways, takes his suggestion as a guiding premise: Emily travels to different countries to investigate how various people across the world reconcile potentially competing identities of various kinds—religious, ethnic, racial, cultural, musical, gendered, linguistic, and spiritual. For people who live in places where there is a history of enslavement or racial hierarchy, for members of the African diaspora, "identity gets confused with race" and the nation-as-home becomes unhomely. Emily's subsequent comment, "It's such a ridiculous cliché—the 'tragic mulatto' whining about not belonging. I don't want to be that person. 'That's not who I am'" (Raboteau 2013, 64), reinforces the foundational paradox of hospitality in that she both is at home in herself and is not. Because home is "a figure for identity or ipseity, the point of departure to which the subject must return in a dialectical recovery of identity," Tracy McNulty reminds us, "the failure to repossess this home or clear it of strangers can also result in a loss of identity. The home or dwelling can also become unhomely, *unheimlich*, estranged by the introduction of something foreign that threatens to dispossess it of its self-identity" (McNulty 2007, xiv, italics original). This threat resonates in particular ways in life writing, as self-representational texts negotiate the bounds of subjectivity and the fluidity of identity.

Raboteau expresses what Michelle Elam calls "a refusal of historical amnesia" (Elam 2011, 71), posing questions about social justice, citizenship, and hospitality. And, while the memoir is certainly about Raboteau's own investigations and charts her own embodied experiences as a postcolonial subject, it also demonstrates Raboteau's ability to share her narrative, to provide "strangers" access to her textual dwelling. Her affinity for those searching for forms of Zion, for exiled or rootless people, manifests in her ability to incorporate them into her memoir. Bearing the weight of these voices, these diasporic histories, Raboteau calls readers' attention to how hers is a relational story, rather than a conventional intergenerational relational narrative, relationality as Raboteau posits it, exists in the relationship of subjectivity to history, to tradition, to literature, or to ancestry more largely. David Parker explains that, while in a "narrative of autonomy," the author textually foregrounds the experiences of a parent, in a "relational narrative," the author suggests that "the forebears embody specific values that have been unrecognized or misrecognized by the dominant narratives of the culture" (Parker 2004, 142). He notes that these forebears have been allowed to "slip through the interstices of the available conventional languages" and that it is the writer's task to demonstrate why the forebears are "worthy of serious notice" (Parker 2004, 142). Raboteau argues that "the forebears" writ large have qualities—of nationalism, of hospitality, of survival, of negotiating constructions of raced or other marginalized identity positions—that are valuable and instructive, "worthy of serious notice."

Emily ultimately narrows her quest, turning her focus to her specific forebears and specifically examines the role of diaspora in her self-construction: what it means for her to identify as African American. "Are you the daughters of Obama?" (Raboteau 2013, 183) a woodworker in Ghana asks Emily and her friend. She writes that she is surprised by this question and that, in fact, she had been "warned" by black friends from the United States who, while in Ghana, "had all been called *obruni*" (Raboteau 2013, 183, italics original). *Obruni*, she explains, in the language of Twi "means more or less the same thing as *falasha*: stranger, outsider, foreigner. It also means 'white person'—a rude awakening for black folks who've come here in search of their roots"; "*obruni* is seldom meant maliciously, and can even be used as a term of endearment" (Raboteau 2013, 183, italics original). Finding oneself either welcomed into the discourse or challenged by it matters quite a lot. In Ghana, she speaks with Mary Ellen Ray, an American who has been living in Ghana since 1976: Mary Ellen tells Emily that she no longer calls herself African American because she realized she's "not African. Four hundred years away made me something else" and describes herself as "*misplaced*" rather than "*displaced*": "It was not so much that she lacked a home but that she'd been put in the wrong place and then forgotten" (Raboteau 2013, 208–210, italics original). Raboteau writes that she prefers misplaced to displaced because it is "more delicate" and because it also more adequately encapsulates some of the larger ideas that Raboteau tries to unravel.

For Emily's African American friends, who, like she, travel to Ghana on a kind of pilgrimage to a kind of "last resting place" of ancestors in Africa, as Jacques Derrida in *Of Hospitality* (2000) might put it, who visit castles on the coast where enslaved Africans were held and detained before boarding ships destined for the Americas, Ghana functions as a kind of general ancestral homeland, a surrogate space when specific ancestral sites are impossible to trace. This pilgrimage is not accidental: Ghana's government "has invested heavily in Cape Coast castle and similar sites largely in an effort to attract African American tourists to Ghana" (Holsey 2013, 505). Bayo Holsey explains: "Along with the preservation of these sites, the government has also developed a discourse around African Americans' ancestral connections to Ghana that has become the dominant state narrative about this group [...] elaborating their own conceptualization of a black cultural citizenship that recognizes a shared history" (Holsey 2013, 505).

Writing about how important Ghana is for African American tourists interested in heritage and genealogy, Raboteau acknowledges this shared history, noting that, "Yes, many of us are drawn by the nightmare of history to the coastal castles, through which our ancestors may have passed on the slave route across the Atlantic. And yes, I wanted to see the slave castles too—how could I not? [...] But more than all that, I wanted to talk to African disaporans drawn back to Ghana by the myth of return," also known as the "Right of Abode" (Raboteau 2013, 189). Importantly, the Right of Abode for "'Africans in the Diaspora who want to return to Ghana and set up home, business, etc' was granted in the new Immigration act, 573 of 1999" (Kleist 2013, 290). Raboteau connects the Right of Abode in Ghana to the Israeli Right of Return, linking these two diaspora as she does often; she points to African Americans' negotiation of language and geography as sites of connection. Ghana invites African Americans to visit and to thereby try and fill in absences and gaps of memory that are otherwise impossible. Raboteau's desire to see the slave castles and to talk to African disaporans who "return" to Ghana echoes her description of her own rootlessness at the beginning of the memoir, where she explains that her feelings of unbelonging "had something to do" with the legacies of enslavement, and "even more to do" with her grandfather's murder. Here, she writes that she, like "many" others, wanted to see the castles because they are a physical place of connection to the transatlantic slave trade, to the ancestors who "may have passed" through them, and yet, "more than all that," she wants to talk to people who are alive, who have negotiated some of these situations for themselves. Like her familial history, it is absolutely about the movement of enslaved peoples and the creation of diaspora, but, "more than that," she wants to know more about the recent past.

After returning to New York again, Emily learns about Creflo Dollar, a black televangelist whose sermons focus on the importance of capitalism. She attempts to get in touch with Dollar, to ask him questions about the difference between black churches of the civil rights era and now, about consumer culture, about liberation, but is unable to speak with him directly. She does attend a "seminar" at his church and, upon returning home, speaks with her father, who tells her he has cancer: "My heart speeds. My heart. My muse. My muse is dying, is going to die" (Raboteau 2013, 257). While her father tells her that his is not an aggressive form of cancer, he nonetheless withdraws from a trip chaperoning students across the Black Belt that connects to a course he is teaching on the Civil Rights Movement. Raboteau "immediately [...] volunteered to go in [his] place" (Raboteau 2013, 258). The trip begins on Palm Sunday, in Birmingham, and ends on Good Friday in Atlanta, "the birth and resting place of Martin Luther King; Atlanta, which, according to the last census, had surpassed Harlem as America's black Mecca; Atlanta, home of Creflo Dollar's mega-church and the city to which some of our relatives had fled after [Hurricane Katrina]" (Raboteau 2013, 259).

Atlanta, and the other places along the Black Belt that Emily travels, are significant to the history of civil rights, to African America, and to Emily. She traces her father's movements when, as a boy, he and his mother would drive to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, from Michigan, where they fled following his father's murder. She travels with college students, young people

who remind her that she is aging, and she realizes that she is "still on the road, still unfixed, still trying to enter Jerusalem, not teacher, not student, not mother, not black, not white—for now, not anything but [her] father's daughter" (Raboteau 2013, 261). She is on the road, like so many Americans before her, simultaneously moving and in one place, inhabiting an impossible liminality. Arriving in Atlanta, Emily finds her cousin, Tracy, who moved to the area after Hurricane Katrina, "one of sixty-six thousand people displaced from the state of Mississippi" (Raboteau 2013, 278). While a beautiful home, Raboteau observes that "the inside of the house told a complicated story" (Raboteau 2013, 278).

Inside, Emily sees a portrait of Tracy's mother, Paula Raboteau Belle, who had recently passed away. Tracy shares with Emily some ideas she has about what she'll do in the coming years, one of which is to "invent special holders for Georgia license plates belonging to drivers who moved here as a result of Katrina, a kind of frame imprinted with the name of the county they came from" (Raboteau 2013, 279). In this way, Tracy explains, they could find one another and bridge the separation or isolation that comes with being a "transplant" or a "survivor," words Tracy uses to describe the Katrina diaspora. "She strictly avoided the terms *victim* and *refugee*," Raboteau notes. "'How can I be a refugee in my country?' [Tracy] asked. 'I'm a survivor'" (Raboteau 2013, 279, italics original). Her distinction matters in the face of the kind of wandering to which she is subject, having a house in Decatur and yet feeling unhomed. Tracy longs for the community of family and friends who lived nearby, "where you could call out to your children from your porch at dusk and they would hear you, where jumbo shrimp could be had for four bucks a pound just across the bay in Pass Christian and where, in the summer, her kids could go to the same snowball stand beneath the giant oak tree at South Beach Boulevard and Washington Street that she'd gone to as a girl" (Raboteau 2013, 279). Tracy wants to recognize other members of the diaspora created by Katrina in order to recognize their humanity, to locate them as subjects, to contextualize them in the places and spaces of home, to provide roots and a history. This desire to recognize others is compounded by the fact that "home was no longer home now that [Tracy's] mother was gone" and since a number of people of Tracy's mother's generation had died following the storm, "from the physical and emotional toll" of surviving the storm (Raboteau 2013, 280).

Importantly, Emily is made privy to a conversation of relatives who compel Emily, and the reader, to consider more deeply the connections linking the historical with the contemporary: the storm and her father's illness, how African Americans have been unhomed through enslavement, segregation, and white supremacy, and of Emily's attempts to theorize home and displacement. The multiple diaspora through which Emily—and by extension, many

African Americans—move demonstrates the simultaneous feelings of home and homelessness in American society. That America was built on slave labor, by enslaved black people, directly influences how Emily negotiates her quest on American soil. As Karl Marx suggests in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847):

> Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that has given the colonies their value; it is the colonies that have created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance. [. . .] Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations.

Here, Marx observes that that "most progressive of countries," America, would never have been the power that it is—and was—without the labor of enslaved Africans; that not only did American capitalism rely on slavery in order to profit, cotton is of unique relevance to modern industry. It is because of the unpaid, enslaved labor of Africans in America, specifically the South, the ancestors of the members of the displaced post-Katrina diaspora, that America is the economic power that it is. Emily's quest is a complicated one, befitting complex positions of African Americans in the United States in the twenty-first century. Further, the psychic trauma of racism throughout American history—the "emotional toll" along with its financial, social, and geographic consequences—fosters this sense of displacement and homelessness Emily, her father, Tracy, and so many others experience. And, this trauma fuels the searches for connections with ancestors and with one another, from the slave castles along the Ivory Coast to Creflo Dollar's televangelism, whose financial approach to religion attracts so many. As Dollar's philosophy suggests: "We are in control of our destiny [. . .]. We are already in the Promised Land. This is our home. We built it. It is ours" (Raboteau 2013, 252). Although unconvinced by Dollar's kind of financial Zion, Emily is "already home." Her ability to recognize this fact and to resist lingering feelings of homelessness is revealed when Emily's extended family invites her to join them in Bay St. Louis for a party; she attends and brings her father.

Emily and her father travel to New Orleans the day after she finds out that she is pregnant. Bay St. Louis rests fifty miles away from New Orleans and, while her father grew up elsewhere because he was "spirited away for his own safety," he "continues to think of it as home" (Raboteau 2013, 290). "Strangely," she elaborates, "considering I can count the times I've traveled here on one hand, so do I. I am drawn to this place because my father is. It is our Africa, our Israel, the home that never was, the Zion that never will

be, a dream place. It is also our Egypt, our Dixie, our black bottom, the land where we were beaten, the place where we were delivered, a nightmare place. We cleave to it" (Raboteau 2013, 290). This is the homeland, the ancestral place, the "last resting place" in Derrida's formation of nostalgia in hospitality, a dream place and the place of nightmares, welcoming and impossible. When she asks her father what it meant that he had been taken away and that Katrina had washed so much away, she writes: "His answer was ambiguous. His anger was not. 'It was never my home,' he said. 'It was the only home I ever knew'" (Raboteau 2013, 291).

Raboteau comes home to language and, as scribe, and the family stories—those who have survived Katrina, who have survived Jim Crow—are included here as testimony. She and her father travel to her grandfather's grave and she describes a mural behind the altar of the church. Behind an image of a black Christ is painted a live oak tree, "its branches embellished with the names of the parishioners, including ours, Ishem, Raboteau, too many names to count, name after name, branch after branch, reaching to the roof beams, to indicate the mystery of suffering and salvation" (294). Emily makes sense here, surrounded by those who make her legible, those whose histories are hers and whose histories she transcribes. She inhabits a space shared by all of those who are exiles or rootless: their dead, their ancestors, in language, in her names: Ishem and Raboteau, which she can carry and pass on.

She is mobile and immobile, moving and static, diasporic and rooted. When she describes her sense of the word *diaspora*, she says that "it makes [her] visualize a disapore, the white Afro-puff of a dandelion being blown by [her] lips into a series of wishes [. . .]: to be known, to be loved, to belong" (Raboteau 2013, 8). Such an elegant description highlights the act of separation across space and the place from which all separates, contained and uncontainable, and its location. She recalls being at the slave castle in Elmina, wishing she had some kind of narrative of the slaves, but none exist. Speaking with her family in Atlanta, she asks her cousin if she can record the story of their displacement from Mississippi following Katrina. "[S]he said yes, of course, as if it was obvious all along that's what I was there to do," Raboteau writes. "*What are you?* the airline security had asked me on my first trip to Jerusalem. I didn't know the answer then, but I knew it now. I was the scribe" (Raboteau 2013, 284, italics original). Her body is suspicious and unruly, both domestically and internationally, but her memoir demonstrates how it is difficult to *know* a body, a history, even if it is yours. Instead, asking questions about stories—who are you?—may be a more useful way to make sense of postcolonial subjects and subjectivity. At stake in making space for these new iterations of racial identification is allowing individuals to write their own stories, to define their own bodies, to cross the permeable boundaries of race and geography, religion and color, in order to find a way to find

a connection—even if that connection is founded on the pain and anguish of homesickness, on the homed and the unhomed.

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