

Emily Raboteau, *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora*. New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2013, 320 pp., \$25.00 hb. (ISBN 978-0-8021-2003-8)

Near the end of Emily Raboteau's book *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora*, she describes a visit to her father's family in the Southern US city of Atlanta. Victimized by Hurricane Katrina, the family has migrated to Georgia from Mississippi. Her cousin Charles complains that in America, a black life is worth less than a white one. Cousin Tracy, by contrast, wants to focus on being a 'survivor', eschewing the terms 'victim' and 'refugee' to describe herself. Despite government neglect of the survivors, she insists that 'God provided' (281-289).

Throughout Raboteau's journey in search of an African Zion, she oscillates between these two competing perspectives: on the one hand, her anger at the persistence of racism in American politics and, on the other, the idea that 'Zion is within' (291) and is not something that any nation, region, religion or race can really provide. As the Katrina section of the book demonstrates, Raboteau's book traces the African response to diaspora and dispossession by exploring both the historical and the personal. Her journey is complemented by the stories and quests of many others of African heritage who have experienced the warring impulses of exodus and settledness. The strongest lesson she learns from the Pan-African searchers she encounters is that 'return' is never easy; it is complicated by the differing histories, cultures, religions, goals and racial contexts of the scattered.

That diversity is both tantalising to Raboteau and a source of friction. Raboteau's journey, beginning and ending in New York, moves through Israel, Jamaica, Ethiopia, Ghana, and the 'Black Belt' of the American South. An intrepid traveller dedicated to challenging Pan-Africanist hype even as she honours the ideals that have moved people to travel the earth in search of a dream, she records fascinating conversations with people as diverse as church leaders, activists, journalists, taxi drivers, Rastafarians and shop owners.

One of the book's richest sections is set in Israel. The complexity of racial affiliation is personified by Abate, an Ethiopian Jew who in the USA would be seen as black but who in Israel is an Israeli soldier and Zionist who forms part of the power structure. The differing definitions of Zion are exemplified by members of the African Hebrew Israelite community, who believe that they have reached Zion in Israel, and other African Jews, many of whom feel shut out of Israeli definitions of Jewish identity

because of religious, class and racial differences. As a Sudanese immigrant puts it, the government "think[s] Jewish means white" (45). Some disaffected Ethiopian teenagers look to American rap music or to Jamaican Rasta culture for Zion. Raboteau recognises, however, that identifying with Africans across oceans can be superficial, and thinking of blacks and other groups as 'black' because of their disenfranchisement has little merit, either. The Beta Israel, for example, think of themselves as red or brown, and historically, they 'distinguished themselves racially from their black African slaves' (34-35). Thus, even if members of the African diaspora share an experience of oppression, different communities' racial status varies wildly and complicates efforts to bond across difference and create a common Zion.

For academics, this book provides a rich collection of personal stories that tie directly into the social transformations of migration and racial identification, though at times the book's appeal to a general readership means that the analysis lacks sufficient depth. For instance, a strength of the book is that Raboteau's search is influenced by her biracial heritage. Pan-Africanism is experienced differently by someone who is both black and white. She muses on her drive to explore her African-American father's heritage over her Irish-American mother's, her frequent misrecognition as a white woman, and Bob Marley's relationship to his whiteness, for example. However, she uncritically accepts a journalist friend's narrative of the Irish having only been white for a "New York minute" (68), seemingly unaware of the extensive scholarship on the contextuality of white racial identification. Still, the appeal to academic readers lies with the experiences of her interviewees, all of whom have reinvented themselves by changing one home, one religion and perhaps even one race for another. These stories may add to, complicate and deepen academic theorisations of migration's impact on racial identity.

Raboteau recognises that her story has no real ending. 'The Promised Land is never arrived at', she says, and she ends her story 'on the road'. She and her father, however, are on a journey of 'homecoming', back to Mississippi, and she has her hand on her belly, thinking of her future son (292). One wonders what stories Raboteau will tell her son about his racial inheritance and where he will find his Zion.