V Conclusion: Ambiguous Arrivals

> The Promised Land is never arrived at. […] No country is what it should be, just as no man is perfect.
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> —*Emily Raboteau, Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora*

The goal of this study was to examine the phenomenon of diasporic travel to Africa through the lens of travel writing and to analyze contemporary autobiographical travel narratives by Black writers from the United States in Britain. It sought to make a distinct contribution to the scholarship on Black travel writing, first, by outlining the genre of transnational Black travel writing and tracing its development and trajectories, and second, by reading eight contemporary travel narratives with a focus on the meaning of the journey and the traveler-writer's engagement with the African continent. In light of the long tradition of Black travel to Africa—beginning with the return journeys of free and formerly enslaved Africans, Black emigrationists, colonists, and missionaries—it is central to situate contemporary journeys and literary representations thereof within the wider cultural and historical context, as this study has done. This yields important insights into the various forms of Black diasporic engagement with the continent and its "abiding presence in black political, intellectual, and imaginative life" (Campbell xxiii). Moreover, my focus on travel or, as a matter of fact, mobility and movement in the history and experience of the Black diaspora underscores the diverse meanings and significations attached to the practice of traveling; for example, the liberatory potential of travel and its connection to resistance and defiance.

Based on these considerations and the finding that, despite the centrality of travel for the diaspora, the research on Black travel writing remains surprisingly scarce, the study set itself the task to sketch the genre of Black travel writing. It outlined the emergence of the rich and multifaceted genre and

traced its origins back to the slave narratives, which it conceptualizes as travel writing that took shape in the Atlantic world in the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries. Scrutinizing the formal and thematic characteristics of the slave narrative and paying attention to the crucial role of literal and figurative movement in the texts, the study exemplified that these early forms of travel writing constitute literary templates for the works that followed. Although there is no fixed set of traits that unites all forms of Black travel writing, there are several thematic and narrative consistencies. Offering an exploratory discussion and survey of Black travel narratives, the study has registered several key elements that permeate much Black travel writing. Among them are the following: the creation of an authoritative literary voice and the function of travel writing to articulate critique and call for political and societal transformation; the powerful and empowering effects of travel and travel writing and the possibility to challenge racial and social boundaries; the change of perspective and critical reflection incited by travel; the transformative potential of journeying abroad that entails a textual creation or redefinition of the subject's identity; the use of the journey motive as a means of self-exploration; the emphasis on the Black subject's physical and intellectual mobility; the engagement with Africa and its employment as a terrain upon which questions of identity, nation, and race are examined.

The analyses of contemporary Black travel narratives about journeys to Africa underscore the multifarious engagements of travel writers with the continent. Each of the works analyzed reflects in unique ways the meaning and significance of travel to Africa for the individual. What pertains to travel writing in general and holds true for Black travel writing about Africa in particular is that these works tell us less about the current condition of the African continent and more about the traveler who experiences and writes about the journey. In the travel narratives, Africa figures as a terrain upon which intimate questions of self and identity, belonging, and cultural origin are negotiated. The physical journeys and their literary representations are ways for the writers to explore their connection or disconnection to 'Africa,' their sense of self as mobile Black subjects in a globalized world, the cultural memories of historical displacement, and the legacies of slavery that influence the lived realities of Black people in the contemporary moment. Moreover, it incites contemplations about the places that are temporarily left behind, the countries from which the writers embarked. In this sense, the travel narratives exemplify what has been said about travel writing more generally, namely "that the writer's inner journey is the most important part—and

certainly the most interesting part—of any travel book. It doesn't make any difference where you go; it's your interpretation of it that matters" (Birkett and Wheeler viii).

As the analyses in Chapter IV have illustrated, for some travelers, the journey to Africa and its literary representation serve to construct and strengthen ties to the ancestral homeland. For Obama and Washington, their travel experiences represent identity constituting moments that bring closure to their narrative quests, both on the level of form and content. By contrast, other travelers reject the idea of having a connection to the continent or a cultural link with Africans. Travelers such as Harris and Richburg employ their descriptions of Africa and their characterizations of African people to define themselves in opposition to a cultural 'other' and thereby show how profoundly American they are. Their narratives disenchant the continent and deconstruct the myth of Africa as a homeland for Black diasporic people. Other travel narratives, such as those written by Eshun and Raboteau, focus on the meaning and location of home. Their journeys are incited by their desire for home and their feelings of alienation, estrangement, and disconnection from their home societies, which they critically examine from abroad. However, as they travel to Africa, these traveler-writers are able to reimagine the places they left behind as home. Still others are preoccupied with the history of the Black diaspora, the cultural memory of slavery, and the legacies of the past. Travelogues such as those by Phillips and Hartman demonstrate their critical engagement with the histories of the places they visit. Moreover, their texts are examples of a particularly innovative strand of contemporary travel writing that reflects on the problematic nature of the genre and searches for new forms of expressing and representing (Black) travel, thus pushing against the traditional generic borders. The analyzed travel narratives differ in content and form, but they also reveal narrative and thematic consistencies. Much of Black contemporary travel writing about Africa is characterized by conflicting impulses, that is, the desire to return to and reconnect with an imagined African homeland and the realization that Africa is not an alternative home. Therefore, their arrivals are often ambiguous, both in terms of their actual arrival in Africa as well as with regard to the conclusions at which they arrive in their narratives.

The focus of this study rested on the traveler-writers' engagement with Africa. In this regard, it accounts only partially for the variety, heterogeneity, and richness of Black travel writing, which represents an abundance of journeys to different locales and articulates a range of travel experiences. Black

travelers have been around the world and their literary records of these experiences comprise a rich source for study. An inquiry into these texts broadens our understanding of the genre. It also brings the manifold forms of travel experiences to the fore and thereby challenges prevailing assumptions of Black travel tied to certain geographies and imbricated with particular concerns and forms of mobility. Therefore, journeys to places and continents other than Africa have yet to be investigated in more detail. Furthermore, travel narratives by authors from outside the United States and Britain and in languages other than English provide a rich reservoir of sources. An analysis of diverse journeying should not be restricted to autobiographical travel narratives but can take fictional representations of travel into account, thus pushing scholarship into new directions. Focusing on Black travel writing in all its myriad forms helps to decolonize the genre and "untie travel writing from its Western moorings" (Ní Loingsigh 3); a necessary and overdue task that requires updating the canon, modifying theoretical and critical approaches, and broadening the definition of travel and travel writing to include those authors, texts, and journeys that do not adhere to the conventional understandings both of the genre and the practice of travel. Doing so can further open up the research area in travel writing to the exploration of past and contemporary texts that have not been recognized as travel writing thus far. One can be optimistic about future developments in the field if one trusts Youngs and Forsdick's assertion that, "[l]ike the literary form that they take as their object of enquiry, travel writing studies are continually evolving" (13).

For none of the Black travelers in the narratives analyzed in this study, Africa is more than a travel destination or temporary dwelling place; they all eventually return to the places from which they departed. However, their travels and literary engagement with Africa are expressions of the continuing interest in gaining an understanding of their relationship to the continent. For the Black diaspora, travels to Africa continue to be of importance and serve as a way to discover a sense of belonging, to explore their personal and collective histories, and to escape, if only temporarily, from the racism they experience in their home countries. Recently, return trips, pilgrimage journeys, as well as emigration to Africa have gained momentum. Travel agencies catering specifically to Black travelers, such as the Atlanta-based company Black and Abroad, promote travel to Africa. Black and Abroad has launched a Pan-African tourism campaign that encourages African Americans to visit Africa, appropriating the initially racist phrase "go back to Africa"—which has been

used as an insult against Black people living in a non-African country—to reframe the narrative and propel literal travel to Africa ("Go Back"). As this example illustrates, the desire to journey to Africa and the idea of Black repatriation to the continent remain alive. Although scholars maintain that "Africa has not emerged as an alternative in the discourse of Black Americans as they face new challenges in this century," the fact that African diasporic people "continue to settle in Africa in small numbers" shows that the continent retains its pertinence (Blyden 209). In this regard, Kelley draws attention to African Americans' persistent wish to "pack up and leave" and argues that, while "the story of Noah's ark from Genesis might have overtook the Book of Exodus as the more common analogy of flight" (30), the idea of leaving the United States remains vital. He continues that "the dream of Exodus still lives in those of us not satisfied with the world as we know it" (35).

Surely, the dream of Exodus also plays a role in the recent call for a "Blaxit," a joining of the words "Black" and "exit" that denotes the migration or repatriation of Black people from the West to Africa in an effort to escape anti-Black racism (Springer; see also Carter 70). According to an article in *The Atlantic*, search requests for the term "Blaxit" spiked dramatically around the US presidential election of 2016 and again at the inauguration of the new president (Springer). It seems that because of the rise of nationalist sentiment and White supremacist ideologies, which have been articulated more loudly and forcefully in the past years, some Black Americans entertain the thought of relocating. Those thinking about emigrating often identify the persistent racism and violence against Black people as reasons for their wish to move abroad (Springer). As Kelley's statement signals, the dissatisfaction with the current political, racial, and social climate in the United States will likely fuel future travel. We can thus expect that the Black diaspora's interest in the African continent will persist, at least in the near future. Likewise, we can expect that travel accounts will be written by those who make the journey. These travel narratives will provide further insights into the writers' personal meditations and intimate questions of home, belonging, identity, and the meaning of history. This certainly demonstrates that Black travel writing constitutes a fruitful field for research for literary and cultural studies, thus offering multiple new research paths to travel. The study at hand, therefore, provides a point of departure for further inquiries into the genre of travel writing.