Sometimes legacies are the product of chance – people pick up things from us that we would never expect to share, and yet they become ‘a gift’ to those who come after. At other times we are aware that our actions, ideas, beliefs have a meaning that we want to pass on, as a kind of offering, because they are part of our project of being in the world.

What follows explores an example of this kind of ‘conscious’ legacy through a reading of *African Journey* by Eslanda Goode Robeson. In 1936 Robeson set out on her first trip to the ‘Dark Continent’ – a three-month journey that took her from Cape Town to Cairo with her eight-year-old son. At the time she was forty, and a postgraduate student at the London School of Economics, specializing in anthropology with a focus on the colonized black people of the world. She had already published *Paul Robeson, Negro* (1930), a biography of her husband, the well-known actor, singer, and political activist.1 The notes and photographs she took during her African experience became a book (with a rather exotic cover; see Fig. 1 overleaf) published by John Day in 1945 as a diary-formatted chronicle of the visit. It received mixed reviews, but it certainly had a strong impact on the American reading public, as one of the first portraits of Africa by an African-American woman who had travelled in the continent, and managed to combine a critique of European colonialism and racism with lively human portraits and an appreciation of the cultural achievements of African peoples.2

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1 Of the numerous biographical studies of Robeson, see, for example, Martin Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (London: Bodley Head, 1989), and Barbara Ransby, *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs Paul Robeson* (New Haven CT & London: Yale UP, 2014).

I first heard of Eslanda Robeson’s *African Journey* in 1985 through the South African scholar Tim Couzens, who briefly refers to Robeson’s book as “one of the small gems of South African literature.”³ Couzens kept me wondering what gem of this literature could ever come from the African-American wife of Paul Robeson. It was only recently, and from within a specific interest in the connections between South Africa and the black Atlantic, that I got hold of a copy of the first edition of *African Journey*, and could see for myself what kind of jewel it is.

The book is about a journey that embraces the whole of Africa in its wide sweep, with stops in South Africa (where Robeson spends a couple of weeks), Uganda, and the Congo (where she works for a month). It is not ‘strictly’ about South Africa; it is, rather, the story of a grand personal, political, and epistemological adventure, aimed at exploring her own and her black son’s African connections, and filling in a knowledge-gap about Africa. What is interesting is that, for Eslanda, the discovery of South Africa becomes an act of appropriation of local stories and individual connections that allow her to build a cross-cultural narrative of belonging.

The account of this African adventure (Fig. 2 above) partakes of a tradition in African-American women’s autobiography, in which travel and the travel narrative have never been used or considered as an expression of a private or personal experience, as is often the case in the European tradition. In slave narra-

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