The Physical Return and the Myth of Elsewhere: Identity Crisis in Eddy L. Harris's *Native Stranger: A Black American Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992)

العودة الجسدية وأسطورة المكان الآخر: أزمة الهوية في غريب من السكان الأصليين : رحلة أمريكية سوداء إلى قلب إفريقيا (1992) لإيدي إل هاريس

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of black travel to Africa through the lens of the traveler-writer, whose narrative is an account of his personal journey and experience. Eddy L. Harris's *Native Stranger: A Black American Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992) as a contemporary autobiographical black travel narrative emulates the Black Diaspora's preeminent interest in Africa. Questions alluding to cultural identity, home and belonging in relation to Africa are not investigated imaginatively but are probed to spatial locations. The physical journey and narratives are interpreted as an interior journey: a journey to Africa and an exploration of the self. This self-understanding develops while traveling to Africa and writing about the experience.
Keywords: Black travel narrative, Physical journey, Cultural identity, Home, Belonging.

الملخص : تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل ظاهرة سفر السود إلى إفريقيا من خلال عدسة الكاتب المسافر و الذي سرد تجربته و رحلته الشخصية غريب من السكان الأصليين : رحلة أمريكية سوداء إلى قلب إفريقيا (1992) لإيدي إل هاريس ، كسرد سيرة ذاتية معاصرة للسفر الأسود الذي يحاكي اهتمام الشتات الأسود البارز بإفريقيا . لا يتم البحث في الأسئلة التي تشير إلى الهوية الثقافية ، الموطن والانتماء فيما يتعلق بإفريقيا لا بشكل خيالي ولكن يتم التحقيق فيها في المواقع المكانية . يتم تفسير الرحلة الجسدية والروايات في رحلة داخلية : رحلة إلى إفريقيا واستكشاف الذات. يتطور هذا الفهم الذاتي أثناء السفر إلى إفريقيا والكتابة عن التجربة

الكلمات المفتاحية: سرد السفر الأسود، الرحلة المادية، الهوية الثقافية، المنزل، الانتماء.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first enslaved Africans who were fiercely uprooted and transported from their native land four hundred years ago across the Atlantic Ocean in North America were sold to the British colonists of Virginia. Ghana commemorated this historical moment and declared 2019 as the Year of Return. It invited African-descended people from around the world to visit Ghana to celebrate the cumulative resilience of all the victims of the Slave Trade who were scattered far and wide. Ghana and other African countries have long been the prime destinations for black travelers who have an interest in the history of slavery and the idea of returning to an ancestral homeland. For many black travelers, the journey to Africa is often a strikingly emotive experience that evokes tangled and ambivalent feelings. African American novelists address many of the prevalent themes and concerns, including questions of race, cultural heritage, identity, home and belonging. For travelers, a journey to Africa instigates an exploration of their personal connections to the continent and a better self-understanding.

These facts foment a set of interesting questions that are salient to this study: How do travel narratives explore issues of identity, origin, belonging and home? And what is the significance of Africa for African American travelers or authors? To answer these questions, the present study investigates travel narrative as a key genre in the African American literature in the area of post-colonial studies. Eddy L. Harris's *Native Stranger: A Black American Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992), which constitute the corpus of this study, is usually labeled as an autobiography. It illustrates how this narrative can fruitfully understand the self in relation to black travel writing, cultural context and specific geographies.

2. Travelogue Routes to the African Continent and Views of Self

The journey to Africa in an effort to understand oneself is not just a twentieth and twenty-first century phenomenon. Inquests for identity, home and belonging such as those speculated by many contemporary African American authors have preoccupied blacks since they were uprooted from Africa and treated as slaves in North America. Black people returned to the continent from diverse parts of the world to seek its significance on the self and reestablish ancestral ties.

The increasing concern in post-colonialism in American literary theory during the twentieth century helped impel a renovated interest in the works of African-American authors that question the ingrained ideologies of racial

prejudice. In *Black Folk Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* (2016), De William Edward Burghardt Du Bois states that "we are the history of the darker part of the human family …. which nevertheless forms, as a mass, a series of social groups more or less distinct in history, appearance and in cultural gifts and accomplishment" (p. 1). Along the same lines, Andrew Hacker (1992) claims that "America is inherently a "white" country: in character, in structure, in culture" (p. 4). Incontestably, Black Africans as a people in the West face barriers and restrictions set by the mainstream American white community and try to erect lives of their own. Many authors wrote texts portraying African Americans longing for Africa and its heritage as an ancestral home. Charles E. Bressler (2011) affirms that "what these authors gave to America were personal portraits of what it meant to be a black writer struggling with personal, cultural and national identity" (p. 126) .

One of the most eminent and influential contemporary African American theorists is Henry Louis Gates, Jr. In his texts *The Signifying Monkey* (1988) and *Figures in Black, Signs, and the "Radical" Self* (1987), Gates states that the double-voicedness of African American literature draws on two voices and cultures: the white and the black. It is the mingling of these two aspects which makes the African American literature distinct. Eddy L. Harris's *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992) examines what it symbolizes to be black, native and rejected as a son in the United States. He tries to investigate his sense of identity in the African continent, displaying how his black Americanness identifies him as a "stranger" in a country where, because of blackness, he is ostensibly "native."

The narrator's text is emblematic of black Americans' shifting emotions towards Africa. It discloses an alternate understanding of black American identity. The most discernible of these spurns blackness and "Africanness" as key determinants. *Native Stranger* questions the alleged nexus between black American identity and Africa. Conspicuously, it implies that Harris has an enigmatic relationship with the continent. He uses his narrative to display his psychological distance from Africa and favor a black American identity that is not rooted in the African cultural tradition when he writes: "Africa is not our home….We will have no place but the United States" (p. 311). Harris utilized his account to free himself of any liability toward the continent. He is more equivocal about his identity, perceiving his blackness in Africa as either advantage or disadvantage depending on the circumstance.

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The narrative examines Harris's shifting ideas about Pan-Africanism as well as an understanding of the new image of black American identity due to black Americans' position in the West at the turn of the twenty-first century. While many dreamt of full participation in the American community during the Civil Rights, Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist Movements, others longed for Africa; the place that they always call home because they felt oppressed and subjugated throughout the world. In his book *Speaking Truth to Power: Essays on Race, Resistance, and Radicalism* (1996), Manning Marable states that:

> Our forced dispersal through the transatlantic slave trade, our common oppression under colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean, and under Jim Crow segregation in the United States, through the exploitation of our labor power under capitalism, and the denial of political rights, had created parallel contours for struggle (p. 206)

In a similar vein, Ralph Ellison (1972) argues that "we share a hatred for the alienation forced upon us by Europeans during the process of colonization and empire and we are bound by our common suffering more than by our pigmentation. (p. 263). People of African origin who are spread all over the world share a common black cultural identity which was denied by the racist white community.

After the realizations of the Civil Rights Movement, Harris's account displays a lesser Pan-African feeling and a blurred interest in commitment with Africa. As a Westerner, he could not be identified as a black nationalist at all. In *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (1998), Tunde Adeleke contends that the historic notions of Black Nationalism are illusory and asserts that "black Americans combined a strong affection for Africa with an equally strong, perhaps even stronger commitment to becoming fully and beneficially American. Black American nationalism was thus characterized by a dual national consciousness, by ambivalence on the question of identity" (p. 6)

This shift between demands for American and African nationalities evoked dispute among theorists on the real nature of Black Nationalism. Throughout the book, the author delves into the paradoxical nature of black nationalists who adopted Eurocentric ideals which "ultimately destroyed African sovereignty'" (p. 152). Adeleke's work is an in-depth scrutiny of the overlooked concern surrounding the discrepancies of African American nationalism. He urges Africans throughout the diaspora to address serious and common issues.

Adeleke claims that Harris's examination of Africa and black American identity fall in line with the ideas of black nationalists. Despite displaying discrepancy about his relation to Africa, Harris is fully engaged to his identity as an American obviously looking for admission from the mainstream American white society. His accounts of Black Nationalism inevitably circumscribed not only his double consciousness as a hyphenated American, but his unusual state of being as well and claims that "Africa is a myriad of people and ways. And Africa is more than that. Africa is change. Africa is contradiction. And Africa brings out the contradictions in the traveler" (p. 312)

Native Stranger documents Eddy L. Harris's journey from Paris to Africa throughout more than twenty countries in Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. There, he witnessed firsthand abject wretched poverty, government corruption, deteriorating foundations and the enduring effects of colonialism. As he tried to analyze Africa's intricacies and discrepancies, he became more aware of the nuances of his own sense of identity. Like many of his black descendants, Harris believed that he was more American than African, and that his connections to Africa were more sketchy than real when he claims that "I refused to see Africa as my homeland" (p. 214). This conviction serves as the impetus for his narrative, in which he underplays his Africanness in order to extol an idiosyncratic black American identity. The narrator struggles hard to distance himself from any prejudiced impressions that the reader may have about his reasons for visiting Africa and discretions that his narrative might be constructed around African cultural heritage or racial monotony. He argues that "because my skin is black you will say I traveled Africa to find the roots of my race. I did not — unless that race is the human race, for except in the color of my skin, I am not African. If I didn't know it then, I know it now. I am a product of the culture that raised me" (p. 13)

Though Harris rejects the seemingly jaundiced belief that he travels to Africa to discern his racial roots, he not only reintroduces race as a significant notion, but also seems to approve the reader's preconceived assumption about his intentions for going to Africa and argues that "In the mind and perhaps dreams of every person with black skin, the specter of Africa looms like the shadow of a genie …. Africa as motherland. Africa as a source of black pride, a place of black dignity" (p. 13). Though Harris believes that he is "not African" and the dissimilarities between himself and Africans "are more than apparent, the similarities only slight and superficial" (p. 21), he recognizes that "somewhere deep in the hidden reaches of [his] being, Africa beats in [his] blood" (p. 27) and contends that:

> Although I am not African, there is a line that connects that place with this one, the place we come from and the place we find ourselves, those lives and our lives. And I longed to follow that line. But what if those old promises of Africa were only lies? What if I hated the place? Only in traveling there could I discover the truth (p. 14)

Harris presents the issue of race and belonging through the metaphor of the "line" that connects one place with another. His decision to visit the continent is based on what Africa means to him as a black American, a query that might be answered at a later point in the narrative.

At the very beginning of the narrative, Harris speaks about a visit he made as a child with his father to the St. Louis neighborhood. While he enjoys this glance into the past, it is not obvious where he belongs and asserts the right to interpret the relevance of the past in the present. He states that "My time and place are elsewhere. I have a sense of who I am and where I belong, but I do struggle with the knowledge that I would not be who I am if all the pieces had not come into place as they did" (p. 28). Shortly after the extract about his journey to the neighborhood where his father grew up, Harris believes that "perhaps, then, by going to Africa I could see the past and then get rid of it, shed myself of this roots business once and for all, those invisible shackles that chain us too often to the past" (p. 28). The history of slavery not only grounds the African American identity in the past, but it also reviews the weary load that the past can be on the self.

Though it has always been claimed that in African American travel literature, the concurrent emotional assertion and denial of kinship between the writer and Africa often takes the form of disappointment, Harris inaugurates his memoir by both romantically affirming a connection to Africa and repudiating this belief. He argues that he has:

> An eerie feeling Africa could teach me about life and what it means to be human, deepen my appreciation for all that I am and all that I have, help me to find, perhaps, the face of God, perhaps even my own face, help me to step out of my cozy little world, out of myself so that I could see myself better and better define myself (p. 27)

Accepting the fact that Africa will change him in one way or another, Harris lies awake at night. He was afraid, couldn't sleep and thinks of Africa as "unknown

and mysterious" (p. 26). Even before he sets about his trip, the monolithic account that surrounds the image of Africa seems to grab his imagination and start to drug him in varied routes. He contends that "but there was another vision of Africa that nagged at me: the vision of Africa as homeland" (p. 27). This state of being ambushed between two visions helps build up a burden and a sense of dispersal in the narrative that can only be settled through Harris's quest for identity.

3. Toward an Understanding of the Self: Complexities of Identity and the Discourses of Othering

Harris believes that each person has a true self that exists beyond cultural identities and others' prejudiced judgments. The real self is not just granted by birth, but can be shaped under distinct circumstances. He asserts that Africa "was a voyage of discovery …. [which] leads to a better understanding of place and self". He "wanted to be African for a while" (p. 35) to "shed [his] former self as if it were a snakeskin and see life, if possible, from a new point of view" (p. 35) and affirms the fact that he might look African, but like Alfa's daughter he is "Half one thing and half another. Searching to discover who I am" (p. 35). In her notable work *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Julia Kristiva argues that "In France, at the end of the twentieth century, each is fated to remain the same and the other-without forgetting his original culture but putting it in perspective to the extent of having it not only exist side by side but also alternate with others' culture" (p. 194).

This otherness is due to the fact that people tend to characterize the person they see by the color of one's skin. Therefore, Harris feels the person he is recognized to be, and the person he actually is. In *The location of culture* (1997), Homi Bhabha asserts that the formation of identity is developed on the presumption of two modes; self and others and states that the ""beyond" is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past . . . . we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (p. 1). At the beginning of his journey, Harris wishes to find a real self, if not in Africa, then deep within himself.

Originally coined within the post-colonial theory and in bringing what many literary theorists label othering, Harris places himself between two contrasting orbs, that of prejudice and that of the abused because "The realm of the paradoxical . . . . belongs neither to the one nor the Other. It is an interstitial realm of the in-between—a space and time of 'thirdness'' (Bhabha, 2011, p. 6). The "Other" voice is a form of rejection invoked by an in-group on an out-group.

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In *"Orientalism"* (2003), Edward W. Said describes otherization as a simplistic mechanism and states that "the construction of identity …. involves establishing opposites and "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from "us". Each age and society recreate its "Others"" (p. 332) .

     "Otherization" has become a critical issue of the twentieth century since it is associated with group-based identities, disparities, cultural and geographical foundations. It highlights the differences that people make between themselves and others. For some scholars, such differences are based on religion, sex and gender, for Said they are based on race and ethnicity. A specific or a well-known group considers itself superior to the other and refers to its own group as the origin and the other as the periphery. Jean-Francois Staszak (2009) argues that "The asymmetry in power relationships is central to the construction of otherness …. Therefore, if the Other of Man is Woman, and if the Other of the White Man is the Black Man, the opposite is not true" (p. 43).

     Harris soon realizes that there are barriers to how much the journey can change his sense of identity as a black American because his position as a Westerner determines how he can see himself and how he is seen by the others**.** This study investigates how Eddy L. Harris's skin color differs from that of the prevailing group in the United States, oscillates between the already determined world and the world yet to be experienced. Staszak interpreted this communal and digressive construct as follows: "The creation of otherness (also called 'othering') consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: them and us…. Otherness and identity are two inseparable sides of the same coin. The Other only exists relative to the Self, and vice versa" (2009, p. 43)

4. The Jeoparady of Du Boisian Double Consciousness and the Spirit of the Divided Self

     Harris is at the center of a constant conflict between the self and history, being black and American with no hyphenation. This sense of an internal breaking of identity is an exemplary of the notion of double consciousness notably elucidated by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Initially, Du Bois refers to the Negro as "a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world" (p. 2): a world which does not bring forth a true self-consciousness, but rather allows him see himself

through the lens of others. It is an idiosyncratic impression: "this double-consciousness ...... that one ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 2) .

An exhausting splitting of the self into "two unreconciled strivings" limits one's ability to determine one's own self perception. Harris likewise sees this twoness as arising from the world around the self. He thus approves Tim Youngs's (2010) vision that the motif of travel in Black American literature brings double consciousness to the surface of the text (p. 79). From the same perspective, Paul Gilroy argues that "the book (*The Souls of Black Folks*) remains notorious for its elegant, understated insistence that the problem of this century was the problem of "the color-line." This too raises the relationship between nationality and transnational political solidarity" (1993, p. 127)

Du Bois asserts the tension raised from the conflicting notions of race, nation, culture and community that he evokes in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) in which he revealed the deep and complex framework of its rationale. Double consciousness was mainly used to identify the major difficulties arising from black internalization of an American identity. Du Bois's philosophical and psychological concerns not just express the idiosyncratic beliefs of black Americans but also highlight the experience of post-slave populations and a worldwide partnership among people of color. This belief in ethnocentric interests and Pan-African dream conclusively found its fullest interpretation in some of his novels. In *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), Du Bois concedes that Africa is his fatherland. Though his father and his father's father never saw Africa or cared much for it, his attachment to it is strong because his ancestors shared the common social heritage of slavery which binds together people of African descent worldwide.

The duality which Du Bois placed at its intellectual and poetic core was particularly significant in widening the impact of *The Souls*. Its effects spread out across the Black Atlantic world to, directly and indirectly, inspire and influence many more literally and scholarly figures. Paul Gilroy argues that "Double consciousness emerges from the unhappy symbiosis between three modes of thinking, being, and seeing. The first is racially particularistic, the second nationalistic …. The third is diasporic or hemispheric …. This trio was woven into some unlikely but exquisite patterns in Du Bois's thinking" (1993, p. 41). This quandary which Gilroy enunciates frequently is ubiquitous in *Native Stranger* when Harris recites Thomas Wolfe's words: "going home again is like stepping into a river. You cannot step into the same river twice; you cannot go home again. After a very long time away, you will not find the same home you

left behind. It will be different, and so will you." (p. 137). The narrator uncovers the inward thoughts of his mind and soul. This conflict between past and present, the in and out groups demonstrates Harris's physical journey to Africa:

> Those were the two extremes between which I was trapped.... I did not feel African, but was beginning to feel not wholly American anymore either. I felt like an orphan, a waif without a home..... The thought of running into someone who looked like a relative terrified me ….. My Africanism was abstract and I wanted it to remain so. (pp. 137-138)

As he claims his Africanism is abstract, the "Other" is both inside and outside of him. This cultural hybridity is driven by an ostensible "Other".

Although he is black and racially analogous to Africans, Harris questions beliefs about his sense of identity and confirms they are culturally distinct. Recurrently citing that he was "not African," Harris claims that "the differences are more than apparent, the similarities only slight and superficial" (p. 21). Instead, he maintains his cultural sameness to white Americans and other Western travelers stating "My skin is black, my culture is not" (p. 31l). With such judgments, Harris questions the notion of racial bond between black Americans and Africans. Yet, his emotions about Africa remained conflicting, the narrator was not only interested in Africa's economic and political relationships with the West, but he was equally concerned about the entangled connections that black Americans had with Africa. Though he declares that he was "not African", he acknowledges "but somewhere deep in the hidden reaches of my being, Africa beats in my blood and shows itself in my hair, my skin, and my eyes. Africa's rhythms are somehow my rhythms, and Africa speaks to me in its languages of love and laughter" (p. 27).

Native Stranger places special emphasis on questions of identity in relation to place. The enigmatic and oxymoronic title pictures the narrator's ambivalence toward Africa and foregrounds his conflicting feelings of familiarity and foreignness. As the title implies, Harris usually feels as both a "native" and a "stranger" in Africa since his views change as often as he sojourns distinct places and communicates with varied people. Many of these interactions underline the importance of the role that race played in his evaluation of his travel experiences. While he denied Africa as his homeland and needed to reject a racial relation to it, Harris still invokes a sense of racial unity with Africans.

Goreé, as an eminent region for the Afro-Atlantic diaspora, attracts and receives thousands of black descendants each year who travel to this cultural heritage region to restore the transatlantic slave trade memory. This journey symbolizes a homecoming, a long-awaited spiritual, if not a physical return to the land of the ancestors. Through this act of kinship, diasporic travelers delve to assert their cultural affiliation identified by slavery, as well as their belonging to the Pan-African group. The discrepancies ingrained in Harris's travelogue of self-exploration and understanding as well as in his portrayal of Africa are represented in his visit to Goreé Island, which served as one of the first pilgrimage destinations of black diasporic roots seekers. Overall, Harris's journey presents an account which is "rife with contradictions [and] demonstrates the narrator's ambivalence" (Bennet, 2006, p. 13). The significance of Goreé as the most substantial symbolic place of return and point of departure for African Americans in the diaspora is devaluated because it dismantles the myth of homecoming which does not stimulate striking emotions -such as loss, reconciliation and healing- in the narrator.

Tore up by the island's history about slavery, Harris describes Goreé stating that "There is no fresh water on the island, nothing but a trickle from a spring and a few spent wells, but there is a river of blood. A river of tears. A river of history. Goreé Island was an important slave station" (p. 123) for **"**The challenge for black Americans at the beginning of the new century was therefore to grasp the continuities that linked their present predicament with the special horrors of their past and to connect their contemporary sufferings with the racial subordination inflicted on other people of color by a common foe" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 127). Being aware of these memories symbolizes the narrator's longing to develop and maintain a black racial and national identity. In *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel* (2007), Edward M. Bruner describes the diasporic pilgrimage to Africa's monuments to the slave trade as "a quest for their roots, to experience one of the very sites from which their ancestors may have begun the torturous journey to the New World" (p. 103).

This sense of Black Nationalism and consciousness which emerged among people of African descent worldwide grew out of the belief in common cultural heritage and identity shared by Africa and its diaspora. In *The Continent of Black Consciousness* (2003), Erna Brodber argues that "by the early twentieth century, Africa became firmly established as a point in the continent of black sentiment and became bound in a new way to its diaspora. It had become an alternative home of choice" (pp. 93-94). This idea of an "alternative home" or second home free from the pest of American racism trapped the black imagination and,

therefore, exercised a powerful influence on this excursive tradition of Pan-Africanism.

Harris's memoir discloses not only his cultural distinctions, but also the peculiarity of his racial experience in both Africa and America. From this overview, he attempts to define a black American identity that would be rooted not in their African cultural heritage, but in their unique historical experiences in the West. He recognizes that racial discrepancies gave black citizens a unique position among Americans and asserts the fact that black Americans were "native strangers" both in the United States and in Africa. His Western self-determination made him a "native" in the United States, but his blackness rendered him a "stranger." He portrays his identity along these lines: "I am American. And I am black. I live and travel with two cultural passports …. to a land we might call home but that we blacks do not know, and most have never seen Africa" (p. 28)

Harris believes that "blackness", rather than Africanness, is one of the two fundamental constituents of his identity. Although he refers to the African continent as the place of origin, Harris uses his narrative to affirm black Americans' lack of knowledge about their ancestral home and their consequent cultural dissimilarity and distance from it. He associates black Americans' ideological distance from Africa to their American socialization and affirms the fact that "Africa is far away and expensive to reach. More than that, our education tends to be as European as the education of any white kid. We do not know about Africa, only learn about it in geography class" (p. 28) and "So how does a Black American travel to Africa? Certainly not as an African, for that I am not. Nor as a cultural European, for I am more than merely that. And more, too, than hybrid. Another race, perhaps, newborn and distinct (pp. 28-29). Repeatedly, Harris demonstrates that he is not actually and culturally African. According to his 1992 *New York Times Book Review*, Kwame Anthony Appiah claims that:

> Mr. Harris is sure from the start that he is not African. He says so in the second sentence of the book and says again pages later and again on the next page, and so he tells us in direct and in-direct ways again and again … Mr. Harris begins by rejecting the racial fiction and ends up having to fend off the possibility that he is more African than he thought (p. 18)

In his *Black Enterprise review* (1992), Herb Boyd portrays Harris as having an identity crisis that he fails to fix, attributing the narrator's discrepancies to his struggle "to bridge a cultural chasm, to overcome the anxiety of being of African descent but alienated from Africa. It is a crisis of identity he never resolves" (p. 14). In *New York Times Magazine*, Gloria Naylor pointed out this internal conflict and depicted him as "…another African American coming to terms with the meaning of that hyphen—the bittersweetness of connection/disconnection—as he straddled horses to ride across the Sahara" (p. 12).

Harris believes that his identity as an American makes it difficult for him to completely engage with the view of Africa and the nuance it could add to his understanding and quest for a true self. Thus, his identity as an American restricts the number of routes his self-exploration could take. However, Harris's Americanness is not ideological but concrete: he is used to certain rights as an American and has a hard time accepting the powerlessness and difficulties that he experiences at the airport in Casablanca to get a package sent to him. Resigned, he goes to a bar and drinks three bottles of Pepsi, which he feels taste "like home" (p. 84). "Africa frightened me. And I frightened myself as well. Would I not be able to rid myself of my American sensibilities even for the short time of this voyage?"(p. 84) he says, and "Africa frightened me for what I might find out about myself, and for how I might feel about this motherland" (p. 85**).** Harris's Americanness is contradictory and displays a mode of internal paradox because as an American he has a limited set of privileges that white Americans to a larger extent possess.

4. CONCLUSION

Native Stranger is as much about Harris's own convoluted cultural identity as it is about Africa. As an experienced traveler, he contends that knowing about one's ancestral home place in the world was both a necessity and an aftereffect of travel and asserts the belief that travel narratives often unfold more about the traveler than the place about which he is writing. Harris is more self-aware and easily concedes that Africa brought to light the contradictions in the traveler and used his narrative to ponder the paradox in his own identity uncovered by his travel experience: those of being black and American in the United States, as well as while traveling to Africa.

The narrator used his memoir to scrutinize it and to uphold the particularity of black American identity. By echoing his un-Africanness when he claims that he does not feel a part of this place, nor a part of these people simply because of an accident of birth and by denying the belief of Africa as a

homeland, Harris argues that only the most minor connection existed between himself and Africa. As many other Black Americans, he wanted to break the chain connecting him with Africa.

The discrepancy between Harris's denial to support narratives of racial monotony and his dubious feelings of being somehow connected to the continent illustrates the symbolic return of many travel authors from America to Africa in the latter half of the twentieth century. African American travel literature was generally influenced by the Afrocentric ideas of back-to-Africa movement and imagined continent as a homeland of freedom and self-determination. It became common for travelers to assert how little they really felt they shared with the Africans they met on their journeys. Harris is excited to explore his own Africanness, but finally concludes that he is not African in any significant sense and that he is unable to bridge the cultural gaps that exist between him, the West and people he meets in Africa.

Harris does not just mirror the contradictions that arise from edgy and suspicious discussions of sameness and difference, kinship and alienation. He uses these discrepancies to oscillate between different positions and views of the world and to investigate the conditions and limitations of self- understanding. The major question of Harris's book - who am I?- generates another subtextual question which is always about Africa and racial heritage. Harris finds himself "trapped" between "two extremes" when traveling in West Africa. One is the idea that Africa is not an emblematic racial homeland to which he can return. The other is the thought of running into someone who looked like a relative, which makes him suspicious of how such a connection would affect his sense of self.

Over the course of Harris's travelogue, the narrator demystifies notions of return and belonging which he scrutinized with agnosticism from the beginning. He interprets his frustration and his disenchantment by affirming that he has come too close to Africa that led to his disillusionment and estrangement from African people, heeding again that he has more in common with white Americans than with the Africans. Harris conclusively rejects whatever beliefs of Africa as a mythical homeland that infiltrated his attitude toward the continent. *Native Stranger* exemplifies some of the most constant and deep-rooted motifs used in black travel-writer's inability to escape the prefigured visions of Africa. Moreover, it highlights the allegation that Africa serves as a terrain upon which black travelers confer their identity in relation to both continents: Harris is an

archetype of a traveler who maintains his American national identity by defining himself in opposition to Africa.

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