

Introduction: Dispatches from Africa

Some years ago the African-American writer Eddy Harris travelled to Africa in order that he might discover the extent to which being an African-American meant that he had some natural affinity with the continent of his ancestors. He wrote a book about his travels entitled *Native Stranger*. Once on African soil, Harris's journey can be divided into four parts. First, he finds himself in Islamic Africa, north of the Sahara, which he describes as a 'Desert awakening'. Here the Middle East seems to have bled across the waters. It is a land of Ramadan, of excessive heat, of Berbers and thinly veiled racism towards people, like him, of a darker hue. He is among Africans who have over the years systematically enslaved their 'brothers' to the south.

The second part of Harris's journey takes him to sub-Saharan Africa. As he enters Senegal, something stirs in his soul. His chapter is headed 'The Beginnings of Brotherhood'. But sadly he could not be further from the truth. He is deported from Mauritania, cheated in Senegal, arrested in Liberia; he is appalled by African hygiene, poverty and corruption. At every turn he is reminded, in both small and large ways, that he is not of this place. By the time Harris embarks upon the third stage of his journey in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Zaire and half a dozen other countries – a stage that he calls 'At the Mercy of Gods and Men' – he is almost a broken traveller. His health is beginning to collapse and eventually his body gives way to malaria. When he recovers he meets white American Peace Corps workers and European and Australian travellers. Although ambivalent about sharing their company