

## SHALL WE DANCE OR TAKE REVENGE ?

Losing Magic, Losing Faith, Migration

Maartje NEVEJAN

The last six years I have been working with a group of non-Western immigrants kids who now live in Holland. I went with them through their stories of integration and naturalization while at the same time they were going through the transformation from children to young adults.

I made two TV-series about them: **Couscous and Cola I and II**

In the first series, which was made in 2004 and broadcasted worldwide on *Al Jazeera* in the spring of 2007, the kids sang and debated with each other and with American kids, both in the hiphop-world in New York, as well as with kids from the Bush-country.

Also in 2007, we went back to Africa, to Morocco and Ghana.

Now we wanted to talk and dance with the African kids who always lived in Africa.

Of my group of 14 kids, two were born in Holland from African parents.

The other 12 kids lived in Africa the first ten years of their lives.

Most of them with their mothers, while the fathers worked in Europe.

When they reached puberty they were sent to their fathers in Holland whom they hardly knew, with or without their mothers. Growing up in a community of mothers they were sent to the world of the fathers in Holland.

Some kids were left behind by the parents with their uncles and aunts, at the age of three or four. Money was sent to Africa but in lots of cases not spent on the kids themselves but on nephews and nieces.

When the kids reached puberty they were brought as well to Holland and had to trust parents they did not even remember. But what they did remember was their being abandoned. The depth of this trauma only slowly became clear to me.

And reaching the West, they had to obey the strict rules of the fathers put on them in order to survive in the western world, filled with temptations and forbidden fruits. In this way the falling out of childhood corresponded with leaving Africa and coming to the West. Their real trip

from Africa and the Middle East to the West symbolized in this way a rite-of passage: leaving the country of innocence and freedom for a country where they have to struggle for sexual maturity, religious responsibility and the full rights of the adult: the age of reason. In psychological terms, this fall out of paradise means to leave the magical world of childhood, gain knowledge and to enter the cognitive world of symbols.

The Couscous-kids, now living with their fathers, soon found out that their independent life of Africa, where a ten year old has already lots of responsibility was over. Their parents, full of fear for the dangers and decadences of the West, locked them up and disciplined them, again, as little children. A reason for much anger and shame. The second shock was the awareness that the West very much believes in the brains, the sciences, in education and the freedom that comes with it.

### **My 'West'**

Since the 1960ties the West entered a new area.

People stopped believing in God and the authority of religious leaders, we invested in a just society where equality and emancipation were main issues. We became strong individualist. Taboos were broken, science influenced our lives more and more, tv and computer brought us closer to the rest of the world. I remember my grandmother saying: Nothing is holy anymore nowadays. She was not talking about religion only, but about lost of things in daily life: less rituals, less family- and community activities. We became more rich and more healthy, so it worked.

Now what I see in the West is that, deep down, there is sadness about our saying goodbye to the magic potential and spirituality of the universe. " We gave up the magic, we declared God dead, stepped out of the suffocating ties of community life. We know we are alone in the world, there is no comfort any more in a higher power who knows best for us and love us always. No life after death, no mystery! ". Citaat van wie?

But that deep sadness leads, in my opinion to revenge. It is as if the West also wants to rob other cultures from its magic dimensions. We dare to say that religion is something backward, God and Allah delusions and a sign of retardation. We look down on especially women and their spiritual life and call Africa a lost continent.

As a teenager I used to hate those Dutch, white, middle-aged men, working as journalists, scientists, cynical, nihilistic, hedonistic, mocking

at everything that could be valuable or give you a good feeling. Try living in an honest way, they seemed to say, face the emptiness of life.

Being an adult looked like a nightmare to me. Being a woman, even worse. As a woman I also felt a sort of stubbornness about being faithful to my heritage as a magical female warrior. Going to the theatre-school became a perfect antidote for me. Theatre is magic.

The last few years I see the intellectuals in the West becoming even sharper against people who believe. The West is radicalizing at fast rate. Being religious is like being retarded and backward.

Not surprisingly the believers get very angry and radicalize as well.

### **The wound**

The Couscous-kids were fifteen years in the first series and only a few years in the West. We could see the transformation taking place in them. Coming from countries, where Christian and Moslim alike are drenched in religion and faith, they were now in a place where people ridiculed the religion, the values of the motherland and their mothers in Africa or the Middle East. It felt as if they had to denounce their life of the first ten years in order to get accepted here. They showed openly the wound.

The wound we all have to go through in a sense, but not in such a negative context.

We tell the kids they have to forget about their heritage and integrate in our system with big rewards.

I have seen kids, who slowly take over the values of the West and start condemning their background at the cost of a growing self-hatred and the loss of the magical world inside them.

Other kids feel a renewed loyalty to their heritage, the magical world, their religion and in the end their mothers. They radicalize in a rapid pace. More religious then ever, they condemn the West for taking away the magic of their childhood, losing it in a double way during the transition to the West: the magic world of their youth turning into the adult pragmatics of their new homeland.

And they blame the West for this loss of paradise, and not as an inevitable process, the natural way of life.

This is the ground on which my series take place. I have been wondering why the kids developed such a hate towards the West. How it was possible, that they were constantly offended by things, we thought funny or concepts we defended as a freedom we had obtained. In the series we see all the doubts, fears and tears, and the loyalty of these teenagers, trying to create their own life in between those two realms.

And one of the reasons that the series about the Dutch non-western immigrant-teenagers were recognized worldwide, is, I guess, that we all

live between these two realms or, have to live in both realms. They show us our own pain and we witness their courage in finding their way to integrate the two worlds.

### **Dreams**

The process is internal, psychic and external in the world.

Globalization does not mean a molding of all diversity into one form, one content, one cultural perspective or one ideology. Not just the West and the Rest. Like we have to embody both the magical feminine and the cognitive masculine in ourselves, we also have to accept the diversity in cultures and countries.

Let us not lose the dreams of the magical child. Let us dance together and remember Shakespeare:

*We are such stuff*

*As dreams are made off*

*And our little life*

*Is rounded with a sleep.*