

No Better Place to Meet Yourself by Moussa Ag Assarid

Moussa Ag Assarid (MAA): I don't know my age. I was born in the Sahara desert, with no papers. I was born in a nomadic camp of Touaregs, between Timbuktu and Gao, in the north of Mali. [...]

J: What do they do for a living?

MAA: We shepherd camels, goats, sheep, cows and donkeys in a kingdom of infinite and of silence...

J: Is the desert really so silent?

(MAA): If you are on your own in that silence you hear your heart beat. There is no better place to meet yourself.

J: What memories do you have of your childhood in the desert?

MAA: I wake up with the Sun. The goats of my father are there. They give us milk and meat, and we take them where there is water and grass. My great-grandfather did it, and my grandfather, and my father, and me. There was nothing else in the world than that, and I was very happy!

J: Really? It doesn't sound very exciting.

MAA: It is. At the age of seven you can go alone away from the camp, and for this you are taught the important things—to smell the air, to listen, to see carefully, to orient with the Sun and the stars...and to be guided by the camel if you get lost. He will take you where there is water.

J: To know that is valuable, no doubt.

MAA: Everything is simple and profound there. There are very few things, and each one has enormous value.

J: So that world and this one are very different.

MAA: There, every little thing gives happiness. Every touch is valuable. We feel great joy just by touching each other, being together. There, nobody dreams of becoming, because everybody already is.

J: What shocked you most on your first trip to Europe?

MAA: I saw people running in the airport. In the desert you only run if a sandstorm is approaching! It scared me, of course.

J: They were going after their baggage, ha ha.

MAA: Yes, that was it. [...]

J: What do you dislike the most here?

MAA: Many people here have everything, and it is still not enough for them. They complain. In [the modern world] many people complain all the time! They chain themselves to a bank; many people are anxious to have things, to have possessions. People are in a rush. In the desert there are no traffic jams, and do you know why? Because there nobody is interested in getting ahead of other people!

J: Tell me about a moment of deep happiness for you in the desert.

MAA: It happens every day, two hours before sunset. The heat decreases, there is still no cold air, and men and animals slowly return to the camp, and their profiles are painted against a sky that is pink, blue, red, yellow, green.

J: That sounds fascinating.

MAA: It's a magical moment... We all get into the tents and we boil tea. Sitting in silence we listen to the sound of the boiling water... We all are immersed in calmness: with the heartbeats tuned to the rhythm of the boiling water, potta potta potta...

J: How peaceful.

MAA: Yes...here you have watches; there, we have time.