

Three possible dreams for Europe

1.

There are too many countries in Europe, too many national kitchens too, too many former capitals of colonial empires, too many woman sitting in the metro dreaming of a hanged man, too many Tintoretos, too many philosophers, too many ideas, too many wars, too many conservatives, too many coffee machines, too many taxidriviers from Bangladesh, too many dead bodies in the closet, too many love affairs, too many bookshops, too many metaphors, too many butterflies, too many mountain peaks, too many back alleys, too many rivulets, too many je ne sais quoi, too many paroles paroles, too many frontiers, too many seas, too many rivers, too many ex-housewives, too many ex-convicts, too many of too many. There is too much of you. Europe. We love you. But can we still love your too muchness in a time when a love for crowded places is discouraged?

2.

Let us imagine we are pregnant with a beautiful baby. We want her to become strong. We want her to be forgiving. But not proud like the Americans. Always so proud of themselves. Always number one. Our child should win through creativity. Not with power. That's what we wish.

We want our child to be imaginative. No, we demand our child to be imaginative! And that she has the natural talent to forgive and settle old scores forever. We hope our child is confident enough to not let old matters dictate new realities.

We made love, one night, and three days later she told me: I am pregnant. Waiting time: nine months.

And we called the baby Europe. We taught her to walk, and we hoped she would show the courage to control her aggression. She went to school where she learned about herself. School taught her about herself. School also told her an impossible lie: it's not about money it's about knowing many different words for telephone.

And she graduated with the highest score. Is she happy?

Europe adopted me as her father. My name is Abdelkader Benali.

She chose me by saying: 'Now it's your turn to take care of us.'

'Who is us, my daughter?'

'Me.' And she smiled.

I met my daughter in Naples on her way to the train; she had got off a boat

from Sicily. 'I sat with a man from Kurdistan. He asked me to call his uncle and tell him he was all right. He gave me money but I refused.'

'What did you do in Sicily?'

'I visited my ex-boyfriend. He has a sickness of the heart. A kind of melancholy. But the whole affair turned out to be rather sordid. The whole town of Palermo was in fear of the newcomers.'

'And your ex-boyfriend?'

'He said that no matter how many people come to his town, his feeling of loss will never change.'

'What's his name?'

'Homer.'

3.

The polarbears were crying. The sun of Athens hid behind a trafficsign. The old streets of Europe cannot be widened. The streets of Europa are the frames that capture its citizens. In Los Angeles the Mexican maid cried: 'All these highways, mucho mucho highways...'

My daughter visited a sorceress near Stalingrad, in Paris, not in the former Soviet Union.

'Tell me about my past,' Europe asked and opened her palm to the sorceress. The name of the sorceress was Mademoiselle Andalus.

'Your past,' the sorceress said, 'will never come back. For some, the past is a dream; for you it's your makeup. It's your mascara. Reflecting your mood, my dear Europe. You are pretty. What's your secret?'

'Tell me about my future,' Europe demanded.

'Your future, why do you want to know your future?'

'Because I deserve a future.'

The sorceress smiled. 'It's interesting. For the first time my girl is becoming interested in the future. But do you know what that means?'

'No.'

'You will have to live with fear, because any possible outcome you imagine for yourself, my Europe, can change. Do you want to live with change?'

'Yes.'

'Then forget about the future, think about today. About this.' She closed the hand of Europe. 'Living in the now will be difficult for you. Living now, is difficult for everybody.' Europe paid the sorceress and left.

Abdelkader Benali



*ABDELKADER BENALI has been described as one of Netherland's leading writers. His debut novel *Bruiloft aan zee* (Wedding at Sea, 1996), which was translated into many languages, was a huge critical and commercial success. He received the prestigious Libris prize for literature for his second novel, *De Langverwachte* (The Long-Awaited, 2002). Besides novels and plays, Benali has published essays and reviews in respected Dutch newspapers and magazines, including *De Volkskrant*, *Vrij Nederland* and *De Groene Amsterdammer*.*