

TOMMY WIERINGA "THE DEATH OF MURAT IDRISI" 2017

"DE DOOD VAN MURAT IDRISI"

Translated from the dutch by Sam Garrett

"A savagely effective little novel... A nasty masterpiece of narrative tension; it's brutally spare."
Anthony Cummins, *Evening Standard*

Epigraph : Song of solomon 1 : 15 - 17

Song sung by Cheb Khaled "aicha", p.50 -51

As if I didn't exist , she passed by me ...

I will go where your breath leads us in the countries of ivory and ebony ...

I will erase your tears , and your sorrows ...

Two venturesome women Ilham Assouline and her friend Thouraya are on a journey through the land of their fathers and mothers. A wrong turn. A bad decision.

The book begins with a brief and graceful meditation on the history of Gibraltar from the time of tectonic plates shifting to form the Mediterranean sea to the present, where such an event can take place. In the grand, uncaring sweep of history, this little microcosm of refugee suffering is but a small thing. And yet, this poignant tale of one young man looking for a better life than the grinding poverty he has known and the immigrant experience of the two girls who are now neither Dutch nor Moroccan, is universal.

The girls had no idea, when they arrived in Morocco, that their usual freedoms as young European women would not be available .

So, when the conniving Saleh Benkassem presents himself as their guide and savior, they embrace his offer.

He extracts them from a tight space, only to lead them inexorably into an even tighter one: and from this far darker space there is no exit.

Their tale of confinement and escape is as old as the landscapes and cultures so vividly depicted in this story of where Europe and Africa come closest to meeting, even if they never quite touch.

“Thouraya’s hair was blowing wildly in the wind. They smoked one cigarette after the other, in silence. Ilham admired her, her independence and her fearlessness – she took what was coming to her, she was bellicose, in everything, including her desires. Thouraya – and this was what she admired most – had tamed the beast of shame.”

Ilham Assouline and her friend, Thouraya are on the ferry to Spain, headed back home to Rotterdam from their impulsive, and rather ill-fated Moroccan summer vacation. There on deck with them are three young men: Saleh, whose company became welcome when they ran into difficulties, and his two friends.

Ilham is uneasy, because she’s been talked into doing something against her better judgment.

The two Dutch Moroccan girls are persuaded to smuggle a poor Moroccan boy into Europe. As the ferry nears Spain they return to the car and check the boot, where the boy Murat is lying in the spare tyre well. He is dead.

When they dock at Algeciras, a quick check of the car’s trunk reveals things have gone dreadfully wrong.

Saleh, who is the fixer, grabs his bag and shoots through with the money. The girls struggle with their fear, their lack of money and the ever increasing stench of the body.

And now the two young women, of Moroccan immigrant parents, but raised in the Netherlands, are on their own with very little money, not enough petrol to get home, and the remains of Murat Idrissi.

Is how they react a product of their upbringing or their environment? Or both?

When does fear and the need for self-preservation overwhelm the respect and responsibility a person has been taught?

Are eroded values contagious?

While the underdeveloped character of Murat functions primarily as a political symbol, the women’s ill-fated journey leads to an emotionally complex and ultimately chilling psychological transformation.

“He possessed no firm core, only other people’s melodies, to which he danced in step. Her irritation had vanished; now there was only a harmless sort of contempt. She was proud of her own insight into human character.”

contemporary thriller of multiple exploitations... The full mercilessness of the migrant dilemma is confronted here to devastating effect."