

4 Years On The Road ...

Travel Book

2nd Edition

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From the same author

Imani, La Vie de mon Village, Roman jeunesse, Terriciae 2012

TERRES & CULTURES D AFRIQUE : Sur les Routes de l'Ouest Cameroun, Documentary, Terriciae, 2014

Si loin de TOI, 1st Edition, Youth Novel, Terriciae, 2017

Les Marques du Temps / The Marks of times (Translated from French to English by Viviane Katesi), Short story, (In Recueil de nouvelles LES AFRIQUES), Métaillé, 2019

4 Années sur Les Routes, Carnet de voyages, thebookedition, 2021

*-To my unforgettable DADDY who left much too soon ..
For all these silences which slip with time...*

-To my incredible little brothers Florian & Aurel who had to go so far to become ...

PROLOGUE

One morning in June 2020, as I was coming out of 3 months of confinement and could finally reach my office on « Rue des Fleurettes », i listen to a loop of messages from my answering machine. Perched on the balcony of my 19th floor, I wonder about this world that has closed, about this health crisis, about how we should live from now on... Paris is gloomy and tumultuous at the same time...

In this same time, other questions do not leave me! I wonder where my colleagues are ... Where are their works since the world stopped ... I wonder what will become of our profession; we, who all year long must sometimes go to the end of the world to be able to do what we know how to do: WRITE !

While I am in these thousand thoughts, a message breaks my silence! This voice ... I recognize it! Still feverish, I recognize her among a thousand: Doryn!

I leave the balcony in disasters and return to the room ... I rewind ... It is 3 weeks old ...

It lasted 2 minutes 35 seconds! That voice on that answering machine was carrying a message I wasn't expecting, from one of those rare people you meet one day in your life and you don't come out unscathed from seeing them!

Immediately after listening to her, I could only make the call again. I had to know where she was since then! I had to let her know that my silence all this time had been due to my absence, that I had to let her know that there are messages that one cannot remain silent, voluntarily...

This phone call was then the first of a long chain! As the days, weeks and months went by, I accepted this beautiful mission, to work with her on the project of this novel, to make it more successful, to bring it out of this health crisis so that it embraces the world after ...

The story is simple! It comes out of Africa. It is a small novel filled with emotions, love, friendship, passion. It speaks of youth, human relations, traditional society, shocks created by globalization, travel ...

These are exciting topics that I share with Doryn, this young woman today who reminds me of the one I was 20 years ago, that I love to read, that I love to know to be writing...

4 years on the road, is not, as one could rush to think, the biography of the author who 4 years ago was consecrated great reporter of Travel by PAF, ...

It is a fiction, intended for a teenage readership ... A story that I could have written too, by setting the scene in Kabul, or in my native Beirut where the author played to bring her heroines, as a nod to my community ... This is the story of young teenagers who have made choices, traced roads, and who follow them against all odds ...

This story is just like the Doryn I know, the author, the novelist, the editor, the unconditional, the addict ...

I hope you will take as much pleasure in reading it, as I took pleasure in signing this preface!

Yours faithfully

Paris, the 27.03.2021

Maria-El-Moussara - *Writer - Great Reporter Specialist of the Near & Middle East*
@MariaElMoussara

« To write a story, you need:

*A pen, paper, characters, a plot, nostalgia, laughter, tears, abandonment, loneliness,
travel, a zeal of optimism ...*

*Then you have to pile it all up, put sounds and colors and then open your doors wide
and let it out ... »*

Dorin FOUALEM, London, 30 May 2021

CHAPTER 1 : *The Embarrassment of Others ...*

Thursday 13 August, 1H20

Dear Eulyne,

When you receive this letter, I won't be here anymore. It will upset you I know; so how heartbreaking to write it to you in the middle of the night. You are all that the departure of our mother left me six years ago, you and our father who since then has been consumed by pain, injustice, the memory of mourning, but also the social obligations that as a valiant son of Ganze he was called to continue to fulfill despite his sorrows, his wanderings. That day in June when she left, I was barely twelve years old, while we were preparing to celebrate your eighth birthday...

Our father never had the strength to take care of us again. Our mother's death had destroyed him! I still remember all those nights when I surprised him, stifling his sobs in the dark, when I had gone into his hut without warning... In the village, however, we always said that our men do not cry! What we learn with life is that there are sorrows, pains and grief that break everyone, warlords and little children alike. I understood with time that the day our mother left us, life also left her. He has become a lonely, withdrawn, weakened, broken man.

If I have to tell you tonight the story of our parents, this story that you have always been too precious for me to inflict on your fragile little sister's heart, we will spend hours and months on paper; even though, these last few years, I have fought a perpetual battle with my memory to forget everything.

Our mother was a beautiful, feminine, loving, comforting woman. I don't know if all mothers are like that, if they are all as caring as ours was with you and me for the short time we had. I don't know if I'll have enough of a lifetime to finally heal the thousand deep, horrible wounds that her departure has left in my life. EMELYNE, she was called. With our father, they named us both after her: Melya, and Eulyne.

She was a part of me, of you, of us; never forget her. She loved to gather us in the evening around our meals, to tell us stories; to tell us a thousand anecdotes of this village behind the mountains where she came from. She was always so cheerful, the kind of parent who, even with nothing, has everything to make a child happy. During those years, we lived our quiet little life in the fierce jungle that is Ganze. Seeing our mother with us, you could feel that she had waited for us for a long time... or simply that she knew, unconsciously, that we would not have much time...

Since her departure, it is Mamé her elder sister who has more or less taken over. Between our father's hut in Ganze and his kitchen in Motare, this kitchen where our mother had grown up, she tried as best she could to help us bounce back, to find the strength we needed to become autonomous, so that if this woman that our father's brothers had found for him in Souyane while he was still widowed ended up joining our court, we could manage alone in the new adversity...

As Mamé must have already told you more than once, the union of our parents had not been unanimous at the time of their meeting. As soon as the dowry was given, the two families had totally missed each other; the story is long!

When you think back, a skeptic would have immediately decided that their relationship was doomed from the start. Our father - descended from a line of nobles in Ganze, a line that had been impoverished over the generations by fierce successors - had met our mother, the younger sister of the third wife of the king of Motare and the adopted daughter of the said king, at a harvest festival. She had been that year of the young girls of Motare who had danced in their market place as part of their maturity. She often told me that after this ceremony, mother had 12 suitors, eight of whom were men from their village and four others from neighboring villages like our father. Having lost her mother also very young, it was Mamé who had the task of choosing her husband. Mamé had chosen a young valorous man from Motare, also descended from an important court there but, what Mamé did not know, was that for several days, our mother had crossed the path

of our father and they had already "clandestinely" met. When mother told them, Mamé was categorical: she did not want a foreigner! Ganze and Motare may have been two neighboring villages, but she still thought that there was a reason for the river and the mountains that separated them.

« The gods, in creating the waters, did not make bridges to cross them; it was the men who built them »

She always liked to quote... Besides, between our father and her, there was always a certain distance. They respected each other, but did not socialize ... especially since when our father's family arrived in Motare, the king of Motare himself had marginalized them, judging them on their gifts (dowry) that he did not consider up to the level of a girl who grew up in a royal court. Refusing the union on these grounds, the father's family turned back in anger and shame. When our two parents then made the decision to defy the incompatibility of their two families and marry, they broke centuries of tradition. However, they had agreed in their intimacy that the prejudices of society, the pride and follies of men would not separate them!

It was in this spirit that Father, in the weeks following their rejection of Motare, went back alone to look for this woman he could no longer forget. When he brought her back to the village, they knew that they would have to face the consequences of this gesture, which his older brothers would consider as a contempt for his family. Despite his efforts to reconcile with them, these brothers in their legendary pride and self-importance never flinched. Certainly, through consultation, he saw them all gradually distancing themselves. He realized that he was no longer invited to the rituals, the cults, the dowries. He realized that his brothers were no longer coming to his house, that they were keeping him away from the life of the big family by leaving him, they said, with "his wife" whom he had gone back to find without anyone knowing. They built partitions. Father, however, did not really complain about it, Mother often said. He was happy at home, he had made his choice and did not regret it. Mother was his new family. Their home was flourishing.

Our parents were treated as outcasts here for a long time. After their marriage, our mother had seven long years of infertility, and the slander and the look of people could have destroyed them, but they remained strong and positive. Also, by chance, the Catholic Church was built after the fifth year of their marriage and they presented themselves as an alternative to the thousand fetishists with whom they had walked for a long time and who

all condemned their relationship, on the grounds that the ancestors had not accepted this union and that no fruit would ever be born of it.

The parish priest, Father Jean, came into our lives with the arrival of this church. At first out of curiosity, our mother often went to talk with him in search of an outlet, of appeasement. Our father, who was never very far from her, followed suit. They trusted Father Jean who never ceased to teach them lessons in patience, endurance, self-giving and humility. They then gradually entrusted their prayers and torments to the Lord. Two years later when I was born, they proclaimed his glory. My baptism afterwards was perceived by my father's brothers as another affront, those infallible traditionalists who had been the first to rise up against the project of this Catholic mission, saying that it would take the villagers away from our traditions and culture.

"This house of white people," they said, "is only there to divide us.

From these thousand battles, fought together, you can understand what fell on father's head the day our mother so passively left him. He could not hold on. The grief, all the pressures from his family and the community afterwards - like the pressure on him to take a second wife, to send Motare's daughters (you and me) home and to come back to his family to ask forgiveness for his estrangements, etc. - affected him badly. Growing up, you only really knew this sick man, exhausted by life, taciturn, who became claustrophobic with time. I remember that more than once during these last years, these laxities on his part annoyed you. You often went to complain to Mamé about having the feeling of not having a parent, of often talking to a wall when you were in front of father, of seeing him having no authority over him or anything else. It hurt me more than once. I cried because I had always hoped that one day he would bounce back and be that father of my tender years again. Now that I am writing this letter to you, I would like to ask you to always keep a pure and simple heart towards him, a loving heart, a heart without contradictory feelings, because a father, like a mother, never forgets that there is only one in this world, that all beings are unique and exceptional and that we must always live towards our fellow men in such a way that each departure does not leave us with feelings of regret or unspoken.

I don't know in which corner of our landscape you will curl up to read this paper but I know it will disconcert you, confirming the rumors and all the big apprehensions that will

have already been forged in you because, I know that when you return to Ganze by the time you find it, you will already have heard about my prolonged absence here. They will say that I have disappeared; they will say a thousand things... God knows what the jealous, envious, vain, hateful and unhealthy will like to spread, but, in any case, I will not leave without having given you my reasons.

Words on paper are not as strong as words delivered with the emotions of the person, hugs, gestures, but I could not get to Motare to say goodbye. I think I didn't have enough time, or simply the courage to do it. I have always known that I am not one of those explosive people, full of energy who really face life. More than once it has been easier for me to hide, to let others take initiatives for me, to claim for me; so as I leave this paper today to say goodbye for me. Our mother always said to this effect that since my childhood she had detected in me this shy side, more often lacking in confidence, or perhaps even simply devious. She often wished that as I grew up I would become more open, more militant. She was so optimistic about life! She saw me growing up under the current of those women who were rising up more and more in the world to speak out, to stand up to our macho communities... I am writing this note to you from this late woman's kitchen.

You know all the things we shared and lived in this kitchen, when she was alive and since she left us. It's been ten years and I'm still in denial, a kind of transitional stage that keeps all my repressed feelings alive. It's been 10 years and in my head, it's still as if she's just gone somewhere, maybe to Motare, or to the plantations, and that she'll come back any moment... In 10 years, between the gullible little girl and the teenager in search of bearings that I've become, I think I've played the "face veil game" a lot, concentrating on thinking about everything, except the fact that she's dead and that in this world, there won't be any more second chances. Today I'm growing up but I haven't made any progress on that front.

10 years later, there are still those long nights that repeat themselves and during which I always find myself asking myself how to overcome a death, how to accept not to understand the why of certain things, to succeed in putting a definitive partition on the life that we had with the person and to move forward... 10 years! and I still did not know how to overcome a mourning, to heal from it, to not think about it anymore!

From the age of eighteen to this day, in this crazy Ganze in which we had to grow up in spite of everything, I have become almost a mother to you. Without pretending to replace her, I have kept you without her since you were 5 years old. I didn't have the choice because it was the last mission she entrusted me with on her bed, her last moments... I still remember...

She knew she was leaving. Our last night with her, every moment is engraved in my memory. 19 nights that we squatted on the modest benches of the hospital of the Sisters of the Immaculate watching that fever bring her a little more after each hour. The sister on duty had come in the early evening for the usual round. For the past few nights, we had seen this weariness on her face. On this particular night, as Mother's temperature was rising and she couldn't even articulate, she adjusted the IV, felt her pulse, and then turned to Father and told him that if our mother made it through that night, she would survive. She then added that it was going to be a long night. She said it shyly. I was sitting on father's legs, she thought I was asleep. At the time, I was too young to understand what she meant, but I never forgot her words.

We stayed up with her afterwards. I think she herself sensed that this night would have something decisive, if not definitive. She tried to smile when her eyes met mine or Father's. She kept caressing you. She kept stroking your hair with what little strength she had left as you fell asleep in her hospital bed. You hadn't left her side for days. We were her three caregivers. She was trying to articulate a few sentences while we counted on the fingers of our hands the number of days she had been out of the coma for over three weeks. In our naivety, that night, we thought she was coming to. Around midnight, as I lay asleep on Father's legs on the stool around the corner, I was awakened by thumping noises in the room. I saw Father in a panic next to her, shaking her hand. I immediately ran to take his other hand. It was warm, soft, light. She asked me where you were and yet you were lying right there. She was vague...

Outside the sky was rumbling. It was a stormy night. She then asked Father to have me lie down next to you and cover us with an extra sheet because she said we didn't want to have a cold the next day. Now there were two of us around her. Nevertheless, I didn't feel sleepy anymore. I couldn't sleep when she was awake and her body was so hot. I held her hand tightly all night. From time to time she would say something. Sometimes she would ask me to take good care of you, adding casually that she knew I could do it on my own. She said many things at once... I preferred not to ask questions, just to listen to her, not to give her words their proper meaning. She would slip between two banal words, others charged with all their meaning, as if she wished that, if one day she was no longer there, I would keep the "home" and that despite our young age, she knew that we could live alone, one for the other and get by! This went on until dawn when I finally dozed off in her warmth. In the morning, she was no longer there. I haven't forgotten anything, but these are the moments I most often avoid remembering.

Our situation was nothing new for the people of Ganze. We had seen younger people become orphans! Remember that your friend Kabi, for example, never knew his mother, who died on the delivery bed. So for one like her, we were even lucky.

And so it was with our last moments with this woman for whom my love remained undaunted...

Since mother left, I think I lived with you as she would have wished! Since you were born, she was teaching me to keep you. You were barely a year old when she left just the two of us, for the first time, for almost a month, when she had to accompany Mamé to the plains to harvest the Motare people. You could have been my own daughter at my young age, I don't think I would have fared any better. You grew up in my hands.

I know your laughter, I know your tears, I know your cries. I know your habits, your attitudes, that joy of living that you always overflow with. I would recognize among thousands your piercing voice when you come home in the evening and I hear you from the entrance of our house saying goodbye to your friend Kaby! I know how to interpret your moments of silence, your bad days, your good days. You have been a ray of sunshine in my life since you gave your first cry. Our mother, although left too early, left us everything. I have always been happy with you.

In my loneliness you have so often filled me, soothed me, you were enough for me. Today, it is to keep this happiness alive that I must write you this goodbye letter. I cannot tell you in advance how much time will have to pass before I find you again. I feel all the pains in the world to leave you alone in this Ganze where rain and storms are always flowing in our hearts; this Ganze where, despite the surroundings, the proximity of our houses, the omnipresence of neighbors and friends, loneliness is always part of our lives. I am fully aware that I am leaving you alone in this village where the coldness, hypocrisy and pettiness of the people are constantly eating away at us; fiercely destroying fragile souls.

You must have already heard about Zoulikha's death. She was my best friend's mother. There were seasons when I loved her like my own mother. You loved her so much too! She was so gentle and affectionate with you. She almost saw us as the other girls she couldn't have...

If there is one thing here that spreads at the speed of light, it is the echoes of grief. It goes from the mouth to the next ear, and so on. Even the birds carry the news to the

depths of the countryside when we lose someone. Back in Motare, the news of Zoulikha's death may not reach you until tomorrow, market day, after the farmers and traders of Motare and Ganze have met and shared the news.

I know it will be hard for you to hear about this death. I can only suggest that you "stop your heart" as we say in our language.

She left us yesterday in the early morning. Since June, when you went to Motare for vacation, her condition went from bad to worse. At first it was a bad flu, then a migraine and one week after the other we saw her die on the bed of the provincial hospital. I went with Reda every morning and evening, to carry clean sheets, clothes, soups, or just to keep them company. Some nights I slept with her on the damp benches of the waiting room. Often I reassured her, other times it was Zoulikha's smiles that reassured us both. We believed it until the last second.

Yesterday morning, as Reda and I were coming out of another night of sitting behind the door, Modou and Moudib, the Yemessoua sons had arrived. We were all sitting in the hallway, waiting for the nurse who, like every morning, was there for the wake-up call. Suddenly, we saw her open the door of the room in a hurry and rush to the reception to alert her colleagues. Intuitively, we all ran like fury to the room. When we entered, we saw that she was choking on her vomit. Reda screamed and screamed. When the doctor on duty arrived, they tried everything. We were taken out because Reda had become uncontrollable. I tried as best I could to hold her close to me in the corridor, to calm her down. Moudib and Modou also did everything they could to keep her physically upright, to carry her grief... It was a difficult moment.

In a matter of seconds, my fears were confirmed and our hopes dashed as soon as we heard the commotion in the room subside and the doctor emerge. He had that sorry look on his face. It was a horrible morning for Reda. I can still hear his screams echoing in my head. His mother was the only family that life had given him the opportunity to know so far.

Afterwards, Moudib and Modou had to do what any man would do. They carried the body to their pickup truck and drove it home. Moudib wore the mourning on his face, the mourning was also his own. He had known Zoulikha since he was ten years old and for the past six months he had been talking more and more about marrying Reda. He had loved her since she was a little girl, at first as a sister, and as she grew up, she had become the only woman in Ganze with whom he could see himself making a life, he told anyone