

Tomorrow, might there be glory



SÉBASTIEN BACHELET

&

a poem  
by HOUDOU

The following poem, translated from French, was written by Houdou, a young Cameroonian migrant, in Douar Hajja, a marginal neighbourhood of Rabat, Morocco. There, hundreds of sub-Saharan migrants in an irregular situation like Houdou, or the young Burkinabe man pictured on the accompanying photograph, find themselves in very precarious living conditions. After long and harrowing journeys, migrants reach Morocco, a stepping stone to an almost unreachable Europe. On the one hand, unable or too ashamed to return to their home countries, migrants are faced with violent and hazardous circumstances in Morocco which hinder installation for those who would wish to stay. On the other hand, European-Moroccan cooperation at the border makes attempts at crossing via sea or land into the Spanish enclaves and mainland extremely perilous.

In such a context, Douar Hajja is a neighbourhood where migrants return from failed journeys to rest, often wounded and in poor health, or to look for money to prepare other “attempts”. However, sub-Saharan migrants are not mere suffering bodies simply stranded between a rock and a hard place. In the face of adversity and despair, they constantly stress the importance of hope and not “becoming mad”. In places such as Douar Hajja, migrants, or “adventurers” as they call themselves, constantly reassess their options to decide on their next move, whether to stay in Morocco, to return or to continue. They share information on routes and opportunities. During idle moments, they trade old stories and imagine together what their future lives might be. They talk of “reaching the objective”. Aspirations for the future vary from one person to another, indeed from one moment to another; but all point to a better life, wherever migrants will be.

Whilst the picture was taken by myself in the field, the poem was written by Houdou, one of my informants in the field. As he is still in an irregular situation, we decided to simply leave his first name. The poem and picture capture the tension between hope and despair as migrants imagine a better life, and, despite limited agency in the face of hostile migration policies and practices, strive to reach it. Shortly after completing this poem, Houdou crossed to Spain on an inflatable boat. He now lives in Europe, where “the struggle continues”.

*This poem and photograph have previously appeared in Jadaliyya.*

<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/18153/sub-saharan-migrants%E2%80%99-quest-for-hope-and-other-dan>

*Title image: Young Burkinabe man in Rabat.*

*Photograph © Sébastien Bachelet.*



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# Hope

a poem by HOUDOU

Tomorrow - why not believe?  
Tomorrow, why ever doubting?  
Tomorrow, there might be glory;  
tomorrow, there might be love.

No money in these pockets  
but hope in the heart  
no care for the spell cast  
by those true scorners  
one only is the mistress

Youth  
tenderness

When love is a feather  
fervent on the hand –  
never mind today  
if I hoped tomorrow

Always I reset in  
motion, again  
'cause the revolving earth  
goes back to the start

Tomorrow - why not believe?  
Tomorrow, why ever doubting?  
Tomorrow, there might be glory;  
tomorrow, there might be love.

Indulgent  
penniless

At all times  
close to here  
despite yourself  
crushed  
deprived of the  
essential  
but valiant;  
and believing  
in oneself

Depicting life one day,  
I understood it comes with ups and downs

Today we cry;  
tomorrow with joy we shine

When suffering overtakes me,  
I console myself, saying  
it's a school of wisdom

'Cause in songs –  
like my grandfather  
used to say –  
through obstacles  
we recognise a man

Tomorrow - why not believe?  
Tomorrow, why ever doubting?  
Tomorrow, there might be glory;  
tomorrow, there might be love.

Simply: who am I?  
Yes! I introduce myself  
Houdou is my name  
I come from a country  
where people are

above the law.  
This made me

an outlaw

A far corner  
where the future  
of the youth  
is seized.  
Where media

is at the mercy of corruption.  
Daily our rights violated.

Where freedom of speech is but an illusion.  
Look at the state of my country

We walked one-hundred-and-sixty-eight hours  
for things to fall back in orbit  
but violence we harvested instead

This injustice, one day,  
Held me to a pause

I faced the Sahara  
Phew! I faced the Atlantic  
I faced Gibraltar

Madness this was! I know,  
but I had no choice  
but to express myself one day  
Yeah! The struggle continues

Tomorrow - why not believe?  
Tomorrow, why ever doubting?  
Tomorrow, there might be glory;  
tomorrow, there might be love.