

Department of English
Readings in Culture/S2/G3/Spring 2020
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Pamela Nice, *Dreaming in Morocco* (a documentary, 2007)

Main Idea & Aim

Interviewing a number of young Moroccans aged between 18 and 34 from different cities in Morocco, Nice's main idea (addressed primarily to Americans) is to show that Moroccan youths are in no way different from other youths in the USA. In speaking about their everyday experiences, their passions or interests, their future careers, and their dreams, the young Moroccan interviewees are revealed to be entertaining common dreams : to be good and tolerant, to get a job one likes, to do one's best in life, and to feel free and independent, in the words of Nidal. Nidal's main passion is to become a successful singer, committed to making her own culture known round the world. Nice rhetorically asks at the end of her documentary: 'How are they (these Moroccan dreams) different from yours?'

In speaking so about Moroccan youth Nice's aim is twofold:

1. To help Americans know about Morocco, about which they know little. (Note the big surprise and shock that Nice's friends expressed, when she told them that she would go to Morocco).
2. To develop better cross-cultural understanding by dissipating stereotypes and misrepresentations about Moroccans as Arab terrorists and vilified people. (The documentary interestingly begins with the 2003 bomb attacks in Casablanca, and the Moroccan demonstrations against terrorism that followed; these events show that Moroccans are as peace-loving people as Americans).

Structure & Themes

The documentary is structured in terms of seven sections, with a specific title to each section, in addition to a preamble and the concluding dedication. Each section or act introduces a set of characters and a specific theme or dream.

1. Salah: faith & football

The first section is about Salah and is entitled 'finding what is important in life.' For Salah, Islam is important because it offers him spiritual guidance and meaning in life. He is also a football fan. Young Salah lives in Casablanca and has a passion for football; in fact, as a kid he used to play a lot of football; he's a fan of one of the two big competitive football teams in Casa, Raja. He's a devout Muslim.

2. Karima & Manar: the veil as a sign of inner beauty

The second section, 'becoming a new Muslim woman', is about Karima & Manar, who wear the hijab but this doesn't show that they are oppressed or confined—common stereotypes about veiled women in the West; nor are they shown to be fundamentalist—another stereotype that is attached to the veil. Karima & Manar are young educated working girls who speak about themselves as good and tolerant Muslims.

3. Maroua & Aymane: a better education

The third 'getting the best education' concerns Maroua and Aymane, who are university students. They are interested in their studies and hope to pursue further education abroad. Aymane is also critical about American interventions in the Middle East, especially the Abu Ghraib scandalous treatment of Arab prisoners, which undermines democracy.

4. Miloud & herraga

The fourth 'burning for a job' tells Miloud's story on illegal immigration. Miloud tried to emigrate illegally but failed. He talks about the ordeals and hardships of clandestine emigration, and he is keen on restarting a better life in Morocco.

5. Nouredine: surviving without a dream

The fifth 'surviving without a dream' is about Nouredine's unlucky life. Of all the young Moroccans speaking in the documentary, Miloud is the least dreamy person; he has seen all his dreams come to nothing, and now he's jobless but he's not desperate. If it weren't for Islam, he says, he would have committed suicide.

6. Amal and associative work

The sixth 'developing my country' takes us to Amal in Salé. She is a social worker in charge of child education as part of associative work. Amal loves her job

7. Nidal and singing

The seventh 'becoming an artist' is about Nidal's dream to become a singing star. For her, singing can be a means of making known to the world her own Moroccan culture she is proud of.

Analysis & Commentary

The titles provide a clue to the individual passions or dreams of all these young lives. But the overarching theme is Islam. In Nice's doc Islam occupies center-stage, and it is represented as an open, tolerant and enlightened religion; the young Moroccans who talk about themselves are all shown to be religious, and some are manifestly so—Maroua and Karima, who are veiled girls, maintain that the veil is not a symbol of Muslim women's oppression but is expressive of their inner beauty ; Salah, a soccer fan, is shown praying and is interested to cultivate himself accordingly ; even Nourddine, who's been crushed by the harsh circumstances surrounding him from young age, finds spiritual strength in the Quran and is able to avoid committing suicide.

- The documentary is framed by two narrative moments. The first moment introduces terrorism as a global phenomenon, and how it can be uprooted by an enlightened and more tolerant culture the world over. Nice does a good job, showing to her compatriots that young Moroccans are ordinary people like most American youths, challenging the dominant stereotypes about the Muslim other as terrorist. she takes the viewer on a swift journey of discovery about youthful lives in Morocco that demystifies and shatters common Western stereotypes of Islamic society and what it means to be a Muslim in the early twenty-first century. In Nice's narrative, rather than simply stoically reacting to life or uncritically adopting Western ideas or constrictive ideologies to understand their situation, the youths of Moroccan Islamic society are seeking to take charge and actively drive change. In doing so, these Muslim young Moroccans are seeking to redefine themselves, their religion, their role in society, and, most of all, their future.
- The other moment is the concluding dedication—Radouane's dream to get reunited with his family in the US--a photograph of an American wife and her baby appears at the end of the documentary, and no commentary is offered. America as the ultimate dream ends the narrative.
- The main storyline (the young Moroccans speaking about their dreams) is accompanied by many photographs and camera shots that depict Morocco as a whole. The point is to help the American viewer gets a general idea about the country, but sometimes the documentary falls back on touristy and exotic images. For instance, the donkey carrying packs of coca cola aims at showing the contrast

between tradition and modernity, but the photograph is in fact an old postcard. The several shots about Morocco's great monuments contrast with the different scenes of its impoverished and mean places have something of a déjà vu spectacle about them.

- The use of the map to situate Morocco geographically is justifiable, as Nice tells us that most of her friends expressed surprise and doubt as to whether Morocco is situated in Africa or Europe.