

Rouhi ya Casa...*

Maria Daïf writes about her city Casablanca

Maria Daïf (°1972 Casablanca) is a journalist and a cultural manager. Since 2015 she is the director of 'La Fondation Touria et Abdelaziz Tazi pour la promotion et le soutien de la culture', and of the arts centre l'Uzine in Casablanca.

Borrowing the expression from Zola I often like to say that Casablanca is the belly of Morocco. To feel the pulse of the country, an immersion in the indomitable metropolis is unavoidable. Receptacle of a massive rural exodus, laboratory for small and large investors, playground for real estate developers, source of so much misery, generous when one takes the trouble to probe her, heartless for he or she who doesn't have the cash: Casablanca is by herself the condensation of the contradictions that traverse and define the whole kingdom.

Casablanca is difficult to define. It's difficult to give her an identity, a *cachet* – like the tourists who frown at her like to say. She escapes all uniformity. She changes form from street to street, from season to season, from day to day. Even in the most general sense, there's no typical *Casablançais* or *Casablancaise*. Petrified by the paradoxes of their city, her inhabitants navigate between liberalism and conservatism, without really knowing where the wind will lead them. They live from day to day.

Casablanca's tensions are visible to the naked eye and one needn't be a prophet in one's town to know that it are these same tensions that generate this two-faced energy of which she alone has the secret: an energy that is both violent and creative.

Two facets of Casablanca compete. The most dangerous city in the country is also, surprisingly, the most cordial. The city where women are the most harassed in the street is also the one where you'll find the most active and autonomous women. The city where every derby is a riot is the same city where creativity is most surprising.

Thus is Casablanca, in the eyes of those who are passionate about her. Her best side always saves her from her worst side. She is in perpetual redemption. No doubt, that's what makes her so terribly human.

Recently, she has taken on colour. To the rural exodus has been added the forced or chosen immigration of new communities. Senegalese, Congolese, Syrians, Chinese, Filipinos, Thais, Spaniards, French: all seek temporary shelter, employment or adventure. They end up staying here, founding families and homes (some more easily than others), predicting a serenely cosmopolitan Casablanca in the years to come. This will not be done without clashes, that goes without saying. Let us not forget where we are.

Casablanca gives nothing for free. She opens her arms to everyone who has a name, cash or the gift of the gab. She unscrupulously bans the one who only has her tears to offer. She loves neither the oppressed nor the troubled souls. She prefers conquerors whatever their weapons. No one lives in peace in Casablanca. Everyone accepts this state of affairs, as one

accepts a divine fatality. In the end, in Casablanca you try to get what you want, that's all. To each his technique and I have mine.

Take Casablanca with open arms. Look for the best and find it, inevitably. Continue searching. Especially do not pretend not to see the worst. On the contrary, confront it. Believe, perhaps naively, that Casablanca will eventually show her most beautiful side.

* In the two senses. 1. Go, oh Casablanca. 2. My soul, my love, oh Casablanca. A reference to *Rouhi ya*