

A Rainy Day in Marrakech

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A Rainy Day in Marrakech (2021) reflects on a moment in Marrakech (Morocco) that challenges dominant visual and narrative representations of the city shaped by tourism and media. Contrasting the usual imagery of vibrant markets and picturesque scenes, the account foregrounds a melancholic, rain-soaked urban atmosphere that reveals aspects of everyday life typically excluded from the tourist gaze. Through observational description and photographic reflection, the city is portrayed as a layered reality marked by absence, boredom, routine—and sudden tragedy. The narrative emphasizes the disparity between curated public images and the mundane, often invisible dimensions of urban experience. By resisting spectacular or exoticized framings, the text articulates a documentary and affective approach to urban photography focused on the unnoticed and the ordinary. In doing so, it formulates a critique of visual regimes shaped by commercial tourism and affirms the political relevance of attentiveness to the seemingly insignificant in the urban everyday.



Image: Marrakech, Morocco 2016.

It was almost as if the rain had washed away any traces of an identity we—the tourists, travelers, photographers, writers—had given to Marrakech over the years, and had now revealed a much truer reflection of a city usually depicted as far more colorful and exciting than it truly is. But not on that day. Gone were the beautiful, rich colors and the smells of various spices and freshly cooked foods, typically experienced in Marrakech. Instead, I was witness to a grey and flavorless, almost melancholic truth of the so-called Red City—unveiling a deeper drama of mundane life right before me, capturing my deepest attention. Wandering through almost deserted streets, I caught a glimpse of a reality hidden from most of the foreign visitors—a reality filled with boredom and futility. There was no need for artificial excitement, for there were simply no tourists present who had to be artificially kept excited. The only people present, aside from a few stray visitors like myself, were Moroccans going about their business or seeking shelter from the rain under canopies, in shops, or doorways, minding their own lives.

I met Nick at Café de France later that day. After being separated for a few hours—we decided to go our separate ways for a while to focus on taking photographs without distracting each other—we sat down to have a coffee and talk on the roofed balcony, just minutes before a heavy rainstorm hit. As those seated in the front row of the balcony fled from the fierce rain, Nick and I—seated safely in the back row—were rewarded with an excellent view of the usually crowded Jemaa El Fna square. We watched in awe as the storm grew stronger, with lightning strikes illuminating the sky, while people across the square frantically ran, seeking shelter. The sky cleared, and the storm ended just as abruptly as it had started, as we continued our journey through Marrakech together. Drawn to a crowd of people gathered in front of a large but inconspicuous building next to the Maison de la Photographie—which we had just visited—we decided to stay and observe the scene for a little while. It quickly became clear that the building was, in fact, an elementary school about to end its classes, and soon the people in front of it were greeted by dozens of children rushing out, screaming, chanting, and laughing—young lives invigorating the lifeless streets once again.

Stepping back to an opposite wall while joyfully watching the children embrace their loving parents, I looked around and noticed five or six men approaching quickly, carrying a gurney loaded with something unidentifiable, covered only by a white sheet. Seemingly unnoticed by the parents—too caught up in the excitement—the men slowed down, shouting as they pushed their way through the crowd. Catching a glimpse of what lay hidden beneath the sheet, I realized they were carrying the dead body of a young boy, carrying him as fast as they could through the narrow streets of Marrakech to whatever their final destination was. A man standing next to me—one of the very few who had noticed the scene—quietly told me in French that he had heard about the

recent tragedy of a young boy struck by a speeding car, not far from the very school where he and other parents had been standing, eagerly awaiting their children. »Il est mort,« he said in a subdued voice, certain of the boy's fate. »They're rushing him to a nearby hospital, but it's already too late. He's dead. It happens a lot around here. People get hit by cars almost every day. It's horrible. You just can't be careful enough,« he continued, shortly before embracing his own son and disappearing around the corner, his hand tightly pressed around his son's.

Pictures of Marrakech—and Morocco in general—often show us only the sunny days, the vibrant markets, the delicious food, the carefully curated tourist attractions in the Medina, the architecture, smiling elderly people, cats, and donkeys, and all manner of colorful, playful scenes, as captured in some of my other images. But a beautiful color palette doesn't matter if there is no light illuminate it. I guess, in a way, that was the reason why I chose to photograph mostly in black and white that day—so Marrakech, the Red City, could remain grey and sunless for a day, mourning the loss of yet another son.

»We like to pretend that what is public is what the real world is all about,« as Saul Leiter once said. But the truth is, there is always another world hidden beneath what is obvious and purposely displayed—a world not often photographed or recreated countless times before due to its mundane and unspectacular nature. But it is not sensationalism that drives me or that I seek in my photographs. It is the ordinary lives of ordinary people that interest me. On that day—while aimlessly roaming through Marrakech at first—I somehow managed to catch a glimpse of the very reality I seek, and I am deeply grateful to have experienced it.

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