



ON FEAR, SHAME, DEATH, AND HUMOR

A Conversation Between the Rocca Family and Zizi

The Rocca Family is the name for the top-secret collaborative art-practice work of Ola El-Khaldi and Diala Khasawneh with Rocca the cat as their pussy power. They perform the Zizi Show under the names Taita O and Zizi.

Seven years ago, they traveled through space and time from the faraway (some refer to it as Jordan for highly politicized quasi-practical reasons) and landed with their cat Rocca in San Francisco. On November 30, 2016, they locked their San Francisco home for the last time and embarked on their RF USA 2017 Road Trip. Through its practice, in search of home perhaps, the Family uses all its folkloric know-how and food powers, trusting in humor, to make friendships and talk about immigration, family, freedom, and the meaning of life.

Along their life journey, the Rocca Family found Zizi, a philosopher without concrete definitions and inclined to mood swings, who is not afraid of discomfort or anger. While she might make references to ideal worlds and imagined realities, she also

makes up truths and brings forward lies. Zizi is a playground, a space for the Rocca Family to be silly, a platform to challenge their own fears. Zizi is their uninhibited character, their act of resistance, their voice of anger.

Rocca Family (RF). Zizi, we heard that you are traveling around the globe, giving workshops on fear. We are now on a road trip trying to face fear, fear from seeing the other and the other seeing us, fear from being stopped from our right to movement from one place to the other, fear from going back to a place that became too small for us, a place that is getting smaller and smaller in accepting us. We are dreaming of expansion, of no limits to where we look, we are searching for freedom, freedom from fear. Zizi, is that possible? You always talk about fear as a tool for survival—is it possible to be fear-free?

Zizi. No. No, my darling Rocca Family, you shall never be fear-free. The best you could hope for is to befriend fear. Think of it as such, imagine if you can take the adrenaline or whatever hormones that fear makes the body produce and invest this as a stimulant, a drug, toward deeper and more radical living. How exciting it can be to feel your heart racing and you start to smell your sweat = alive!

Indeed, fear is important. How many spankings would you have received if you did not fear Mme. Suzette? That was a bad example, but Zizi has found that it often hits home. Also, other fears help keep us alive and well. However, as you know, my karbujeh,¹ most fears that control our lives are mythical.

As my bbff recommended, when faced with fear, imagine the worst-case scenario and experience it in your head. Bring the fear into proportion. As a matter of fact, bbff told me it was I who had recommended this remedy for fear. (naturally)

I congratulate you for facing fear rather than running away from it. Even if you forgot your raincoat.

1 My sweet.

If you see my auntie the lazy crocodile, do not feed her. Nor the bear. Be bear aware. Now. That is a space that allows for fear. If you allow fear to control you, chances are you will turn around and run away from the black bear, and it will chase you down and eat your toes. Befriend fear, pause, take a deep breath: is this black bear a terrorist busy munching berries? Start walking back really slowly and create more distance between you, because bears like space. That is why you do not find them in the center of human urbanistics, where oxygen hardly has space.

RF. Zizi, we would like to talk about shame, do you ever feel that? Or do you even know what it means? We are trying to cleanse ourselves from it; it's hard, very hard. We shave our heads, grow our bodily hair, show our big asses and big thighs. We also have sex with each other and with others; we have many loves, our definitions of commitment are very diluted, we don't believe in the one, we feel deep pleasure in all these practices, and this is how we learned to resist and survive. But we want to go deeper and feel no shame at all; do you think we are doomed? We strive for a shameless existence, Zizi, but we carry the burden of holding the name of our families, our histories, a certain existence that we were born with; how do we change that?

Zizi. Zizi never ever feels shame. What a shame is shame, anyway? However, interacting with the earthly two-leggeds, I get the idea. Deep and silly like snot. It starts with the body, and for many it stays there. How can the two-leggeds fight shame or cope with it if the foundation is shame? If the body they carry is shame, the body they are—blood, veins, flesh and skin, bone and snot and inherited trauma—embodies shame. (Shame/fear/modernity.) Fighting body odor, calling sex sleep, storing farts, black plastic bags for monthly period secrets, childbirth is called beautiful, soaps, perfumes, haircuts, Brazilians, perpetual stunned arches for eyebrows, baby pussies gaping cold at the world, waxing is getting clean, bras,

corsets, tight shoes, high heels, smaller noses, bigger boobs, sharper ass curves.

Perpetually faking it.

Shame, shame, shame.

يا عيب العيب ويا خجل الخجل وما عيب، يا روگًا فاميلي، إلا العيب²

Beauty is in hiding behind shame. Beauty in bad lies and poor imagination. A cosmetic surgery industry, and no one buys horns or antlers or hooves or zebra stripes or roaring climaxes! (Tongue-splitting absolute maximum ceiling! Rolling my eyes.) Starting from there—steep uphill to freedom. Lightness. How can the two-legged really understand nature if they are so far from it within and without?

Zizi's mantra for this one is (everyone sings after me):

أنا كرشي كبير وبحبّه كثير³

again:

أنا كرشي كبير وبحبّه كثير

أنا كرشي كبير وبحبّه كثير

أنا كرشي كبير وبحبّه كثير

Rub the bellies. Love the bellies. Reveal the bellies. Scratch the bellies.

(Do this twice a day for the rest of your life and you may have a chance to cope with shame.)

RF. Zizi, you speak as if you know better than anyone, that you have the magic of just knowing, that you have the secret

2 *Shamiest* of shame, *embarassingliest* of embarrassment. Nothing is shame, O Rocca Family, but shame.

3 I have a big belly and I love my belly. [repeat]

of all secrets; you always say “there is a secret inside a secret of a secret,” that you are beyond everything and everyone. We, on the other hand, are trying to practice humility, we want to become nothing, we believe that if humans reach a point where they know they are just a moment in time, then we can all just relax and just be and enjoy our cigarettes. We just want to reach the point where we know and believe that death and birth are the only guarantees, and love, for sure love. Does that get on your nerves?

What if we pause and say that without humility one cannot love or maintain love? By love, we mean creating a safe and solid space for the people we care about to be themselves, to allow for a mutual growth for everyone involved, to be extremely sensitive.

Zizi. My dear Rocca Family, if you plan on repeating and/or quoting and adhering to the Zizi, please learn your lessons right. Zizi says:

The secret is a secret inside a secret, and it can only be truly obtained if you do nothing and everything.

Pahleeze.

Let me remind you of what Zizi declared cosmically some time ago or never: Everything Zizi says is possibly the truth and also probably a big lie. Zizi never promised to declare fiction from reality. And Zizi continuously as long as Zizi lives will remain true to changing her mind. My dear Rocca Family, those who claim they know are full of BS gone bad. One can, at best, claim to know to the best of their knowledge.

We seek. And continue to seek. Until it all goes silent.

And Zizi likes you saying: “We, on the other hand, are trying to practice humility, we want to become nothing.” You may have chosen a tough journey. You continue by saying: “We believe that if humans...” Zizi recommends you drop the “believe” notion. How about you suggest, try, attempt (maybe trust) this or that, rather than believe? There is very little space for humility in belief.

The pleasure hidden secret like a whisper in the sharp pain

of freezing breath venturing into your lungs hiking up the mountain of all beauties. Literally. Or is it breath sharply taken in, gentle like a whisper, sharp like glass, to defrost your lungs in the freezing winters? Does it matter, the difference? The pleasure deep in the pain of witnessing your breath in front of, in the presence of, magic, beauty, ancient nature before and after your birth and your death.

As for love: How dare anyone ever claim the life of another? In any shape or form? Via love or hate? Via human trafficking or marriage? The channel does not matter. You hardly own yourself let alone any others.

أولادكم ليسوا لكم أولادكم أولاد الحياة⁴

Fucking period.

No claim of anything. Not their bodies. Not their hearts. Not their times. Not their freedoms.

And maybe just maybe if you truly believe this, you can be free.

No one can own you.

And you are free to share your love.

Share your time and body, share your wine and laughter.

Share your dreams and worries.

Understand the individuality and the communality as well as the commonality of life, pain, and death. And, in between, be open to love, joy, and promise.

Respect the mind in its sharpness and loss.

The mood in its light and darkness.

The wealth in its abundance and poverty.

And the mess that comes with all that.

RF. In your lectures, you ask repeatedly, “Are we too scared to live?” So Zizi, are you not scared of death?

The Rocca Family, in our practice, we try to encourage turning pain and guilt into accepting the pleasures that are in front of our eyes, that we don’t need to go far to seek pleasure,

4 Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself.

many bodies to feel, many hearts to get warm with, many waters to swim, we try to live and not think of living as a dream, a future plan, but to accept our existence in its simplest form. Maybe we are scared of talking about the future, because in the future there is death. In your world, is there a future? Zizi, our homelands are burning, are disappearing; does it mean we are disappearing too?

Zizi.

الحياة لحظة⁵

Are you scared of death?

Wildfires eating up acres of life reducing it all into ashes are fundamentally a problem of the earthly humans living near them. They lose their homes and belongings, clothes, and photographs. Maybe even lives. And that is a problem because they do not see themselves equal to the tree or to the bird or to the coyote burning, losing, rebuilding. The wildfires are rebirth. Life in death. Like in hurricanes and tsunamis. For everyone except man. Because man is arrogant. Man is separatist. What if we were all trees? We grow and experience wind and sun and rain and hunger and thirst and satisfaction; we give birth, we give shade, we offer homes, we make memories, and we burn so others can live. There is real pain in loss. Real pain in being lost. Real pain in bleeding wounds and burning skin. Real pain in unrealized dreams and broken families and hunger and rotting, untreated wounds of the flesh and of the emotion/psyche. Life brings us pains—lick them.

Zizi sees humans treadmill-running, bored out of their wits, in their pursuit of immortality at the price of living. The fountain of youth in the strict diets and bulging hysterical eyes and taut skins and guilt and shaming and foolish choices and inhumane priorities. Waking up early to witness

5 Life is but a moment.

a sunrise that will never be again versus going to the gym—something's gone real wrong. Even worse, if one does not even see the sunrise as it is happening on one's way to the gym (self-absorbed, high buildings, pollution fogs, whatever the reason). On one's way to the fountain of youth, is one already dead?

Are we scared of death or dying? Is the fear of dying the wrong side of the coin? Love for living the other side? What is the value in answering those questions anyway?

RF. Zizi, how do we maintain our sense of wonder and curiosity without feeling exhausted? Why do we fear losing it? We try to hold on to it very strongly, every day, every moment we seek the unknown, we follow the unknown, we want more and more. How do we separate greed from wonder?

Is this a question because we come from a place that we are no longer curious about? Have we lost curiosity in home?

Zizi. It is time for that cigarette.

The end of curiosity is death. Be exhausted. Be tired. Be curious at any price. It is sometimes okay to take a break and float in the mainstream using a traditional structure. Tradition has lots of wild within it, can offer a parachute just in case you needed it, a foundation to rest on—but never ever make it your home. Start by never living in the same place for more than two years. Always have guests, turn a blind eye to dirty dishes, and always ask why a certain law is in place and break it.

RF. What do you say to my unrelenting need to do the dishes as soon as I finish lunch and/or before I go to bed? I just cannot sleep with dirty dishes in the sink.

Zizi. You are a fool. That is what I would say. You are using the dishes as a distraction. Go for a walk and think carefully, what are you so afraid of?

RF. What if curiosity is a commodity and the need to always be in awe is a sort of addiction?

Zizi. Are you there yet? When you arrive at too much curiosity, call me. Curiosity is about listening to the answer when you ask a question. Curiosity involves sitting back, being quiet, and listening and watching. And then curiosity is about falling asleep to a world of wonder; go for the rides in dreamland and tell your dreams (only the interesting ones) to a fellow curious. Curiosity is also about sitting back with your emotion and living it. If you get too excited with your curiosity, grab a drink, go out for a smoke, take a break, be lazy, be slow.

Some Zizi teachings:

Life brings us pains, lick them.

Life brings us unknowns, chew them.

Life brings us germs, take them. Sip them.

*When it is most challenging, consider offering
your body.*

Seek the monster under the bed. Let there be pee.

Embarrass yourself.

Surrender to Zizi tonight, and you shall be free.