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People Walking in My Veins

I think that writers are the first eco-friendly movement in the world, a movement that uses our imagination to convert harmful and non-harmful objects into a wonderful material called Stories. I've moved inside and within this material all my life. Coleridge explained that we are not terrified by the dream we see, we see the dream to explain the horror we feel—because dreams and writing, in my opinion, are made of the same material, all these stories we write are just a way to explain the multiple lives we have and all those people who are walking in our veins.

I made my first Not-Self narrative was when I was only 3 years old, when I woke up one day to tell my parents that some aliens abruptly came through the window of my room and peed on my bed because their planet was too small and they didn't have a bathroom on it. Years later, I still do the same—I don't mean that I wet my bed, I mean that I still create other creatures to take responsibility for the reality that I'm ashamed of.

I was born in a city that seeks to erase its inhabitants and erase its own history. Something was always driving me to escape. Eventually I did, and I moved to a new city—in every novel I wrote, the escape continued, I ran and gasped across the map: Vietnam in my first novel, Spain in my second one. Still, my characters were always destined to come back to Casablanca, like a ball bouncing against a wall. With every novel written, I feel my own unfinished escape from Casablanca. And I hear Cavafy mocking me: **You won't find a new country, won't find another shore. This city will always pursue you.** And I let myself paraphrase him to add: “My **self** will always pursue me.”

Godard, the renowned French director, gave this answer to a question about where the stories of his films come from: “It's not where you take things from — it's where you take them to.” When I began my first novel, I was inspired by an old photo album that I once found in a forgotten attic at home. What intrigued me specifically was a snapshot of a young man sitting in a giant warplane, leaning his wrist on his gun. The look in his eyes would leave you with the same effect as Edward Munch's “Scream.” Is this self in the picture really *you*, Grandpa? Are those the same hands than often tickled me? I would have never guessed that the same hands had ever carried a gun. What did you see, Grandfather, that your young eyes look like two bullets in this picture?

My grandfather died when I was five years old. Thus, it was not possible to turn to him and hear his story. I wrote that novel because what reality offers us is not always enough, and because everyone around me seemed to have decided to forget and not talk about the past.

My grandfather had spent a few years in Vietnam serving as a Goumiers soldier with the French Army of Africa in the Indochina War. Only later did I discover that other Moroccans who entered the same war as soldiers defected and lived in Vietnam for years before returning to Morocco with a family and

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stories that would be excluded from Official Moroccan History. I tried to speak about the Moroccans who somehow found themselves involved in a war in a strange land, fighting a war that didn't belong to them, shouting slogans devoid of sense or foundation. They found themselves, out of the blue, with a gun in their hands and death in their hearts. This story bloomed into a means of talking about a generation of women who were part of the wars in Vietnam and Morocco, and the generation that succeeded. **War is a man's game**, in Virginia Woolf's words, yet Women are bound to pay the fuller part of the price. The same was the case with the Independence of my country. It never was a Women's Independence.

When writing the Not-Self we become weightless and gain the ability to move within time. I may return to the **past** to save an old song from being crushed beneath the wheels of oblivion. I may set up a tent in the **future** as a clairvoyant and read the borders on the world map as though they are lines in the palm of a hand, and foresee the future that awaits this enormous creature.

In all my novels and stories, every "I" I wrote—as an interpreter says "I"—is designated for someone else. I created characters that were utterly different from me, yet, through their eyes—as Duras said—I could see the reflection of myself. It is like donating your blood to someone else.

Like passing down Life (and perhaps your diseases/lies) to the character of your book.

It is no longer possible to determine your blood from his blood

It is no longer possible to determine what has happened and what hasn't

You can't tell the truth

Because the life that moves before you on paper is the truest, it's all that matters