

Hajar BALI

Djalila or Hajar? Hajar or Djalila? ... Would You be Schizophrenic, Say?

Reflecting on human rights, or subjects related to the rights of everyone, whether in the universal or local sense, is, for me, inseparable from the question of citizenship.

As writers, whether we like it or not, we occupy a space of influence in our respective societies, since we have the ability to read and write and, above all, to think and reflect. We must share our knowledge—contribute to a discourse, or participate in a global cause. Reading and writing inspires rationality, helping us to think beyond our immediate environment. Thanks to this, our profession helps us become more world-wise. And by the world, I mean the many sufferings we observe all around us; the knowledge that the lives of others, elsewhere or close to us, are in disarray. We know this because our profession makes us aware of the fact that, as we say in French, “We are ourselves, but we are also something else.” As such, we have duties. In an interview with Bourdieu, Gunter Grass said we have to “open our mouths,” meaning, we **MUST** participate in rebuilding the world and ourselves together.

How? Today the world asks us to have opinions on everything. I think that, as writers, there’s no need for us to open our mouths with speeches. More importantly, it seems to me, is being informed, and especially, to be able to detect the ingredients of that recipe the politicians and economists of the world use to sauce and eat people. This means that we must possess the ability to decipher the diagrams and figures the experts align before our tired eyes, and understand how the mechanisms of power operate, so as to deconstruct them, and confront reality without looking away.

This is something that, as a person, I could militate for. By that, I mean a field in which Djalila would willingly engage. Hajar is ... something else. Maybe that’s why I use a pseudonym, dividing who I am as a citizen and a writer.

Hajar is the one who tries to write literature. Literature, to my mind, is something different. When I try to write, I have to shut out the slogans, speeches, and sound-bites that bombard us daily, which is no easy task. I explore the complex universes that WE are. This is the universal for me.

When I write, I claim total freedom. Irresponsibility. I probe the unconscious. I “search the dumpsters of the world,” seeking “the irreverent, the sublime.” I can be an angel or scoundrel, and often both at once. To dig and to dig, to search, to extract the rarest pearl, by which I mean, the most translucent, wildest thought, the one not spoken through borrowed words, the one that mixes the times, the epochs, the strata, the layers, and diabolical, real or imaginary; that which, paradoxically, circulates in us all. It is in this quest that the marvelous Marquez, Kafka, Faulkner, Cervantes, Rushdie, and the many others we love have attained universality.

Will I ever get there? The path is long, I know.

Concerning freedom, Camus wrote: “It is a long and solitary race, and very exhausting. No champagne or friends wait to raise their glasses or to look upon you with kindness. Left alone in a morose room, alone in the box, to decide before the judges, before oneself, and the judgment of

others. All freedom ends with a sentence, which is why liberty is too heavy to bear, especially when one suffers from fever, or pain, or the dislike of everyone (From Albert Camus' novel, *The Fall*).

This could very well define the task of the writer. So, yes, the path is long! But I reassure myself by thinking, as one character says in my novel, that the pretext is often more exciting than the goal.