

Writer-in-Exile Jalal Barzanji finds sanctuary in Edmonton

KEVIN CHARLTON
News Writer

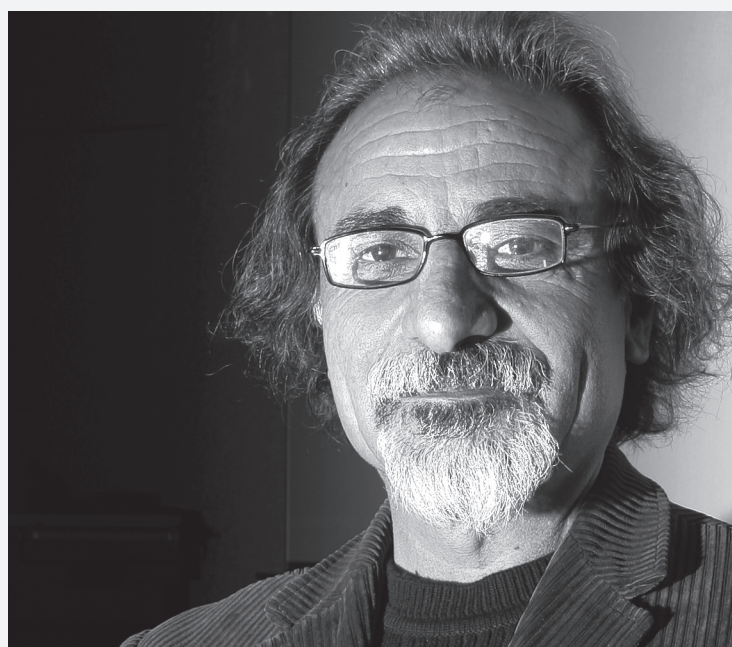
Jalal Barzanji, an ethnic Kurd, sat in a dirty Iraqi jail cell for committing what he believes isn't a crime—writing. According to him, all that has kept him going is his longing to continue doing what put him there in the first place: his desire to continue writing.

Barzanji recently appeared at the University of Alberta, along with the U of A Writer-In-Residence Rob McLennan, as a part of a creative writing series which will feature different writers reading their work.

Barzanji is the Writer-in-Exile here in Edmonton. He frequents the Edmonton Public Library, where he is available for local writers to speak to him about their writing. Since arriving here in 1998, he has worked hard to find a position in the writers' community in Edmonton.

"Since I arrived, I was distant from the writers' community because I had to work hard to support my family and learn English," Jalal says. "Now that I am starting my position as Writer-in-Exile, I have connections with writers, and I would like to become part of the writers' community. They are actually being very supportive because all that I tell them is that the important thing here in Canada is that they don't go to jail for their writing. That's very important for writers here because you don't go to prison for your thoughts or expressions."

Barzanji knows first-hand about the hardships caused by a lack of free speech, having spent three years in a prison in Iraq for publishing his thoughts and expressions there.



ZHENDONGLI

EXERCISING HIS RIGHT TO WRITE Barzanji has found refuge at the U of A.

"When I was writing about peace in Iraq, I knew the costs were high, and I put myself at risk. Then they put me in jail, but I don't regret what I did. All writers have the right to express their thoughts; freedom of expression is a basic right for all writers because most writers write about peace and beauty. Freedom of expression should be a basic right for all writers everywhere."

According to Barzanji, he had even less freedom than the prisoners in there for other crimes. Those inmates had visitation hours, but guards would just shut his door and not let him out during these times.

"I had a very bad experience in jail," he explains. "What's horrible is that they keep you on separate sides of the cell and you have to sleep on your side, you receive no

medical attention; and I was totally separated from my writing and all writing resources."

Barzanji believes that his move to Canada has positively impacted his life and his writing. Even if it didn't get off to a strong start, he is finding that many people and organizations in Edmonton are very supportive of him.

"I don't think I would move back because I don't believe the situation will stabilize. It's very complicated, and I don't think that free media or freedom of expression grows under a dictatorship or an unstable society," he says.

"Here I have freedom, and now I belong here. I went back once, and I realized that I don't fit in that society. If I go back for good, I feel that I would put myself in danger."

US not such a good neighbour—Mallick

SCOTT FENWICK
News Staff

On 4 October, Canadian political journalist Heather Mallick spoke of her dread of Canada's closeness with the United States—but some question the darkness in her message.

Mallick, a syndicated columnist for the CBC and the *Globe and Mail*, spoke to a full room in the Telus Centre, for the second Mel Hurtig Lecture on the Future of Canada. In her lecture, titled *Pox Americana? How the US Will Take Over Canada*, she highlighted Canada's relationship with the US as being too close for comfort.

"Since George Bush was elected, I have talked about little else," Mallick said. "The man has been a disaster to humanity, and I can't shut up about it."

Mallick predicted that once Americans start feeling the effects of global warming—around 2030—they will invade Canada for water. She said that Canada will remain liveable if it prepares for global warming, but she presumed the US wouldn't prepare and, as a result, will suffer.

"Their pursuit of happiness doesn't encompass lowered expectations," she said. "They will have our water, and if we do not want to give it to them, then at that point, I believe we will be attacked."

But some who have studied international affairs aren't so sure about the

invasion that Mallick predicts.

Aimee Fullman, who presented a workshop on Canadian and American culture at an international youth leadership conference held in Edmonton last August, said that Americans aren't even thinking about it.

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HEATHER MALICK
CANADIAN POLITICAL JOURNALIST

"If anything, many Americans see Canada as a great refuge for a new life when they just can't take it anymore," Fullman, an American, said via email, pointing to the unpopularity of George Bush among Americans as partial justification for this movement.

Fullman's co-presenter, Lisa Baroldi, who studied US/Canada relations with Fullman at Carleton University in Ottawa, added that there may be international agreements governing water use by that time, making an invasion impractical.

"To me, that's the logical approach

in a civil system of nations," she said. "There are so many maybes."

While the possibility of an invasion is controversial, Mallick stated a modern-day economic takeover is happening with the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) between Canada, Mexico, and the US. Mallick argued that the SPP mandates a common foreign policy, and makes it easier for the US to "grab" Canadian energy.

"It will essentially hand over Canada to the United States. It's a [...] project so huge and life-changing in its ambitions," she said.

"It means blending Canada and the US to the point where the two countries are no longer two countries in any real sense of the word."

However, Fullman countered that "further partnership or integration doesn't necessarily mean that it has to come in the form of subjugating one nation to another."

Baroldi added that the public at large still can't be sure what the SPP means because all of its talks are in private. She said that it's good that Canadians are talking about the SPP, but is concerned about the way it's portrayed, given the lack of information.

"It's just this fear aspect that really bothers me," she said. "It's reminiscent of George Bush's approach to politics in the States—instilling fear in the people to get them to act in a certain way."

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