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Migrants and Monsters

Migrants as readers. Who is that supposed to be? Maybe people without noses? Or even people with a third eye on their middle finger? Little monsters? Probably.

Luckily, some politicians help us to make up our minds about migrants. None other than the former German Interior Minister, Horst Seehofer, proclaimed publicly a few years ago: "The mother of all problems is migration." Migrants seem to be real troublemakers. But how could it come so far?

A short review: back in the early 60s, because of the Second World War and the Holocaust, Germany was in desperate need of people who would ensure its economic development. Bilateral agreements between Germany and dozens of other states were made. A giant mass movement started. Only the most efficient people were selected. During that time, over one million workers from Greece, Spain, Portugal, former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Tunisia, and Morocco came to Germany. My father was one of them – you know them as guest workers.

They built colonies inside the state, ensuring the economic recovery of Germany by doing the hardest physical and harmful work in factories, mines, or in the road and house construction. At the same time, living in segregated settlements and lodgings, with almost no participation in social or political life.

The deal was meant to be a win-win situation for all parties. Germany had a cheap and willing workforce; the workers in turn got the chance to make several times more money than they would in their home countries. They would make money and hopefully piss off soon, go back where they came from. Well, the math did not add up. Unfortunately, the workforce were people and not machines – nobody had expected that.

It was a writer, Max Frisch - one of us - who had to remind the Germans, that "we sent out a call for workers and got people." These people really wanted to have a life besides work? Unbelievable! They wanted to love and to be loved, they wanted to have families, their own apartments, a car, a radio, television, and maybe even a skateboard?

Besides: It was not possible to save enough money to build a basis for a better life upon returning home. That was just one of those fairy tales of capitalism.

Long story short: some of these migrants managed not to die after retiring, some of them even remigrated, but a lot of them just got stuck in Germany. So here we are; migrants, most of them not even migrants anymore, they just inherited the migration status of their parents, as I did. We all live in Germany.

So the question is: Are we a special sort of readers? Are our toothache, hunger, and loneliness different one? I doubt it. But of course, there is this little, crucial point with migrants and their descendants: they are forced to be a pain in the ass of those who still believe that Germany is for Germans by blood only.

Unfortunately, a long time ago, Germany transformed into a migration society, and it's the honorable duty

of us monsters – with and without noses – to make this secret public. And that is a task for writers of course.

Does it work? – Yes, it works!

This year, just a few days ago, an absolute novelty in the routines of the literary world in Germany occurred:

The Georg-Büchner-Prize, coming along with € 50.000, is a price given annually to German writers since 1950. Usually, it is given to men – only 12 times to women, and not once to a writer with a migration background. This year, however, this prestigious prize was given not only to a German-Turkish writer but a woman on top: Emine Sevgi Özdamar.

Özdamar, who came as a political dissident from Turkey to Germany during the 60s, was one of the first writers who began dropping Turkish-German words in her novels – without being censured by editors and publishers. She used neologisms from these communities, and special word compositions valuing the speaking world, lives, and realities of migrants in Germany.

Awarding her work with such a prestigious prize makes at least one thing clear: migrants - and those who are still labeled as such - are putting themselves gradually from margin to center by writing and reading. And it seems, that for some institutions of the nation-state, these people are doing really good work.

What else can I say than Maşallah Germany – after half a century, you started realizing the transformative power of your sweet little monsters!