

Living bibliodiversity



Inci Bürhaniye at Meyan in front of her books PHOTO Peter Ribaud

There has been some talk about *Deutsche Leitkultur* (German leading culture) and the dominance of the German language in a country that has never perceived itself as a place of immigration. But this narrow-minded image of Germany has long been outdated in many areas, especially in the diverse realm of culture and the arts.

I am in the Berlin suburb of Schöneberg on a sunny cold Saturday in February for a meeting with one of the most interesting new publishers. Inci Bürhaniye is a tall and beautiful woman whose laughter is full of warmth and willpower. Together with her sister Selma she founded the independent publishing house binooki in 2011 'because of our love for Turkish literature and inspired by our mother, who instilled her passion for reading in us.' Both sisters were newcomers in the world of publishing. Inci herself is a successful lawyer with her own practice. The three sisters (the third owns Meyan, the arty café and Turkish deli in which we are sitting) grew up in the south of Germany; their parents are Turkish immigrants.

binooki specialises in contemporary Turkish literature translated into German. 'I always loved to read in Turkish and later recommended the books to family and friends. Selma still preferred German as her literary language and wanted to wait until there was a translation. Which never happened! So we both decided to do it ourselves and founded our publishing house after visiting the Istanbul Book Fair in 2011.'

binooki is part of the so-called independent publishing scene, which is playing an important role in the German book market. 'The future role of the independent publishers? Hard to say, but it will be difficult times. But they will be very important to present the diversity of literature and the book sector. We already created the term "bibliodiversity" in the industry and among colleagues. This theory means that independent publishers and book shops are decisive for a "healthy" book market.'

Independent publishers are entities that are not affiliated to the big players of the industry. But there is also a more emotional definition as 'a small publisher with a special interest programme that is not dominated by commercial considerations. Thanks to reduced digital printing costs and social media, it became easier to embark on the business. It is difficult to estimate how many indie-publishers exist in Germany right now. The German Publishers Association has 300 members, the smallest of whom are one-man or one-woman operations.

Since binooki's humble beginnings in 2011, the two sisters have been successful in their important task to 'offer German language readers Turkish literature in excellent translation.'

It is an important impetus of their work to enable a diverse image of Turkey beyond stereotypes. To convey a multi-faceted image of modern Turkey today, particularly now that it is under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is very difficult. binooki's slogan of



Gezi - A Literary Anthology, published by binooki

'Achtung! (Attention!) Stereotype-free zone' is meant primarily for their literature but fits perfectly well to the work of the publishing house too. Inci is aware of their role not only as bridge builders between two countries and cultures. It is a courageous political endeavour too to offer those writers a voice who have been silenced or even imprisoned in Turkey and have no opportunity to be heard in public because they engage in a democratic society. Inci is particularly proud of our Gezi anthology, which we published in 2014 after the protests in Gezi in Istanbul. A unique book! 'Gezi - A Literary Anthology captures the energy of the protests by 20 authors who all took part in the demonstrations that began in May in 2013. The range includes young, hip writers, bestselling authors like Ayşe Kulin and the grand dame of politically-engaged literature, Oya Baydar. Gezi was not only a resistance movement against autocratic policies that were becoming more restrictive, it was also a self-contained linguistic cosmos, full of slogans, symbols and new metaphors that were ripe to be transformed into literature. This enormous task is what this unique and crucial anthology, with its diverse contributions of short stories, photos, essays, poems and illustrations, successfully fulfilled.

The engagement of the two versatile sisters has been recognised beyond the world of literature. In 2013, binooki won the Kurt Wolff Prize for Independent Publishing, and in 2017 they were awarded the prestigious Kairos Prize for

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their engagement in intercultural exchange. 'The two publishers are bridge builders par excellence, who foster a deeper understanding for Turkish Culture,' says the statement from the jury. 'Not least does the award honour and support those Turkish intellectuals, publicists and writers, who speak out in times of repression and in fear of personal threat.'

This recognition is important as support for Turkish writing and Inci believes in binooki's role as a cultural lighthouse in the bleak times of Erdoğan.

'I see us as a necessary addition to the book sector. Sometimes a bit like an outsider as our books never seem to fit anywhere. Then suddenly Turkey is neither Europe nor Asia,' Inci says and explains that 'most of our customers are small, private bookshops and, as far as we know, most of our readers are German speakers without Turkish backgrounds but often with a concrete interest in Turkish culture. But, in general, I would say our readership is as diverse as our books.' She smiles and talks about future plans. 'I would love to open a cultural foundation here in Berlin, to create a place of culture and exchange, to further foster arts and its dialogue and I wish that will keep on growing and will continue working with our wonderful writers and translators.' Her incredible journey is so inspiring and I wish she had time to visit us in South Africa with one of her writers to share experiences and opportunities. **CF**



Literary Landscapes is a monthly column by **INDRA WUSSOW**, a writer, translator and director of the Sylt Foundation.