

Voltaire Prize for Tolerance, International Understanding and Respect for Difference

Award Speech by Hilal Alkan (EUME Fellow 2016/17)

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“I am standing here, humbled by the words that define this award: Tolerance, International Understanding and Respect for Differences. I wish we could have assumed these as given, so there would be no need for awards. Yet we are living in turbulent times, the ground underneath our feet is trembling and we are once again recognizing that our aspired values are quite far away from us.

This award is given to an individual, but let’s acknowledge it, that it is also given to a story, my story: The story of a young social scientist who cannot continue her academic work in her own country. And let’s also acknowledge that we, human beings are never solely individuals. Our very being is connected to others in vital ways and what makes any one of us herself is the existence of others.

My story is part of the story of thousands who are imprisoned, detained, harassed and dismissed from their positions on political grounds in Turkey and elsewhere.

It is also entangled with the stories of those who have walked thousands of kilometres and swum seas to cross borders and establish new lives. It is not only because I am working on migration, but also because I became a migrant myself.

And finally, my story now intersects with the story of the generations of Turkish *Gastarbeiter* and their fate. I am sharing their experience of being and staying foreigners, as well as the hardships of learning a new language.

But my story also intersects with the stories of those who resist to rising nationalism, xenophobia and authoritarianism all around the world and who show solidarity with the ones who are affected. It also meets the writings of those who lived in exile and never gave up.

And now with a twist of fate it surprisingly intersects with the footsteps of Voltaire who enjoyed walks in these neatly manicured gardens of Sanssouci. Who wouldn't enjoy walking here anyway?

This award honours me greatly. I want to thank the University of Potsdam and Friede Springer Foundation for this honour. I cannot express my gratitude.

I also want to thank two amazing institutions, which welcomed me in Germany: Forum Transregionale Studien, where great scholars from the Middle East, United States and Germany meet and exchange perspectives; and the Zentrum Moderner Orient, which is a hub of mind-provoking research on modern Orient.

I want to dedicate this award to the hope and resilience of those who cross borders and who welcomes them. We should all be proud that there are many of those who said welcome both here in Germany and in Turkey. If tolerance, respect and understanding are going to be learned, they are our teachers.

I also dedicate this award to my fellow colleagues, the Academics for Peace, who struggle for peace in Turkey. And that peace shall come."