

Fragments of Memory

By Zafer Şenocak

Translated by Jessica Nicholl and Martina Schwalm

Translators' Introduction

In *Tongue Removal* (2001) Zafer Şenocak offers readers an intimate insight into his personal migration from Turkey to Germany and raises awareness for all those who have questioned the meaning of home, migration, and belonging. At times light and playful, at others critical and grave, Şenocak's texts speak from both German and Turkish perspectives. They open the eyes of communities to the unquestioned norms and judgments that arise from a mutual lack of knowledge—particularly, the ways in which immigrants are misapprehended in Germany. Although Şenocak's writings are primarily about Turks, Germans, and Turkish-Germans, this conversation is not limited to these groups, but is a conversation that can be held globally. Comparisons and contrasts are not often made between axes of immigration, such as France-Africa, Europe-Central Asia, and USA-Latin America. But Şenocak's texts can be read as a point of comparison and complement to texts concerned with immigration in other countries and regions, such as questions of Latin American-USA migration addressed in Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1981), Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) or Miguel Syjuco's *Ilustrado* (2010). The aim of this translation is to open a unique and profoundly universal work to a broader audience and broader debates.

Presenting this text in English was not without its difficulties, the most poignant of which was translating the German word "Heimat." Often untranslatable, as Şenocak himself states in the work below, Heimat is generally translated as "home," but its resonances are much larger. For a German-speaker, Heimat is not a house one grew up in or where one's parents live; the term encompasses feelings of belonging on a larger scale. It can refer to a city, region, or country—any place to which one is tied by a romantic feeling of nostalgia. For this reason, Heimat has not been translated in the body of this work, so as to avoid confusion with the word "zu Hause," which is in many ways close to the English "home."

This translation joins a relatively small number of English translations of Şenocak's work. In addition to the poetry collection *Door Languages* (2008) translated by Elizabeth Oehlkers Wright, one other essay collection has also been translated, *Atlas of a Tropical Germany: Essays on Politics and Culture* (2000) by Leslie A. Adelson, and two novels *Pavillion* (2011) by David Gramling and *Perilous Kinship* (2009) by Tom Cheesman.

The following seven essays compose the first section of *Tongue Removal*.

Şenocak, Zafer. *Zungenentfernung. Bericht aus der Quarantänestation*. Babel Verlag: München, 2001.

The Grip is Cracked

My assimilation had already begun on the first evening after my arrival in Munich. A glass of cold milk and a bar of Milka chocolate.

There was of course milk in Turkey, but the milk from Turkish cows had to be drunk after it was cooked and when it was still hot or lukewarm, due to the bacteria. Cold milk tasted better. I was five years old, still somewhat too young for beer, but the perfect age for lederhosen. I was very proud of my first pair of lederhosen, which differentiated me from all the other children upon my return to Istanbul.

If all of the guest workers had fed their children milk and chocolate on their very first night in Germany and then stuck them in lederhosen the next morning, we would not have any problems with integration today. But my parents were not guest workers. That may explain their affinity for cold milk, Milka chocolate, and lederhosen. They had absolutely no fear of contact with German culture. They had only come to Germany for two months in order to learn German in a small town in Upper Bavaria. Granted, it was a somewhat strange choice to go to Upper Bavaria to learn the German language.

My parents played in and with German culture. I think that this game gave them a lot of joy. But they were simply living out a play. When you learn a foreign language, it disguises your tongue. So why not disguise your whole self then. It has been proven that you can learn German faster when you wear lederhosen.

In any case, I became the laughing stock of the town for wearing my lederhosen in Istanbul. Nevertheless, I refused to take them off. Finally my parents realized my martyrdom and decided to immigrate to Germany. Four years had passed since my last stay in Germany, but many things from Germany remained clear in my memory. Above all, the taste of cold milk and Milka chocolate.

My parents would have much preferred to immigrate to Hamburg. They had good friends there, and besides that, the sea was not far away. But I tormented them until, either out of concern, love, or merely a nervous breakdown, they bent to my will and settled in Munich.

Today, after thirty years, I have the feeling that we only moved to Germany because of my lederhosen. Be that as it may, no one in our small family has ever regretted the move. We are all convinced advocates of German workmanship.

I recently visited my parents in Hamburg. After I turned eighteen they finally found the courage to live their lives the way they had imagined and emigrated from Bavaria to Germany. That is at least how my father described their move. More accurately, they moved to Hamburg, their favorite city. From my point of view it was an incomprehensible decision, but for my parents it fulfilled a dream. They adore Hamburg and since the move they have not once gone back to the South.

So I recently went to visit. My father led me into the kitchen. He is an ardent collector of the kitchen knives “Marke Solingen.”

“I have recently acquired a new Solingen Marka that I want to show you,” he exclaimed, but more to himself than to me.

I took the knife in my hand. It was of medium length. The sharp blade shined in the light. Its stab could have been deadly. My father's eyes lit up. What was that all about?

"Look at this, the grip is cracked. You should take it back tomorrow. They will certainly exchange it for you."

I was raining on his parade, but a complaint had to be filed. The warranty for such complaints was only seven workdays, after all. For my father, the evening was ruined.

"Made in Germany' isn't what it used to be," he muttered.

"Psh, it's all Polish products anyway," my mother commented dryly, "just with the 'Solingen' printed on it. No one takes it so literally anymore."

My father vehemently opposed my mother's statement by bringing up the price of the acquired knife. That started an argument, which seemed to have no end because no one was certain what exactly had started the whole commotion. I really think we are a well-integrated family.

Out of the game that my parents once so loved to play, has come bitter seriousness. It seems to me that it is the unwritten law of life that every game someday results in only seriousness. It is no longer about the masquerade, but rather about some form of defense of the fatherland when the conversation is about one's own and a foreign culture.

The words "own" and "foreign" have always remained only foreign terms to me. Particularly when they are spoken by people whom I think I know well. From their mouths these words sound somehow phony. At least in my ears. Maybe I have a hearing disability.

No one says, "My fatherland is Germany" anymore, rather they say, "I come from Germany," as one might say, "I just came from the kitchen." Fatherland, so it seems to me, is not a geographical or political concept anymore, rather it is a cultural one, which one thinks about in small, quiet chambers rather than speaking aloud. Cold milk and Milka chocolate are rationed. One worries about the effects of rationing on one's own children, every morning meticulously scrutinizing the color of the milk. There are rumors that it is not as white as it was ten years ago. I can understand these fears. The cold milk does not even taste like it did thirty-three years ago.

At any rate, the taste in my memory is not identical to the taste today, but then again perhaps it is not identical to the taste from then either. I thought at first that this alteration in taste had to do with leaving Munich and going to Berlin. But every time I visited Munich, and I went regularly, I assessed the cold milk and determined that in the interim it too had taken on the bland flavor as in Berlin, different than the milk in my memory. That the milk is not what it once was must be due to my own sense of taste.

Territories

I

In Germany these are important: Stammbaum, the family tree: the roots and the tree, and Stammtisch, a table reserved for the weekly gathering of friends: the regulars and the table.

So it happened that I delved into my own roots, without stumbling across a tree or even a table. There were merely loose leaves that could no longer be associated with any tree, crossbreeds that the wind had willfully designed with individual, sometimes unidentifiable patterns.

And a table? Where did our tribal ancestors eat, where did they write, where did they change the world? After extensive research, I stumbled upon a surprisingly easy solution to this complicated question: on the ground. Where else?

Our tribal ancestors ate the leaves from the ground and crossed them with the leaves from other family trees.¹ The wind, depending on its direction, carried those leaves to us, sometimes from the north, sometimes from the south, sometimes from the east, sometimes from the west. And so we missed out on the evolution of the table, which we should have had set up in the midst of everything, in order to finally become sedentary, to actually come from the ground on which we ate. During my research, I also got the feeling that my ancestors tended to lose the most basic essentials, namely, the ground. However, they tended to find their way to the other tribes, which were all in possession of their own fully-grown family trees and only wished for a few fresh leaves, for which they printed separate documents. But were our leaves fresh enough? Or maybe they had been on the road for too long to flourish somewhere else on a foreign tree?

II

My father sits on a tree stump, whose roots are identical to my grandfather's bones. This is how far back he went. What keeps me grounded? I created a collection of loose leaves. I turned over many colors, sometimes in the light, sometimes in the dark; I said little, wrote little, only my name if I had to. I did not have much more.

Then someone came, who was just traveling through, and took everything. Was it a stranger? Was it my brother?

I stood with him on the edge of the path for a while. A third person could barely recognize if he had come or I; if he were leaving or I. We did not trade addresses in the end. He did not have one and mine was known to him.

III

They are curious, wanting to know where I come from. Which road I have walked barely interests anyone. Everyone is obliged to take the shortest path home. Roadways cause fear. Detours are cause for suspicion. On the roadways one is unidentifiable. Is this a harmless traveler with a sure destination, or a highwayman? Does he have a passport, a visa, the right skin color, a suitable face? Detours are to be avoided at any cost; where they cannot be avoided, they are to be shortened. Only one specific point at the end of the road creates safety. You are not comfortable or protected there, but you are safe. You can get your bearings in such a place, orient yourself.

IV

Since I became a foreigner, I have faith again. The foreigner always has his god with him. The foreigner's god is a pocket god. Do not ask me how you become that, a

¹ In this passage, *Şenocak* plays on the German word *Blätter*, which means both leaves on trees and sheets of paper.

foreigner. It must have happened in a moment of aloofness. I knew it in an instant. No incubation time, no preparation, no test, nothing, nothing at all. You are addressed on the street and you know it. That alone is not enough, still you start to believe it anyway. At home faith becomes superfluous at some point. One knows every nook and cranny and cannot even imagine anything buried there anymore. In the twilight of a dubious place where faith once was, now enters glaring certainty.

There is hardly any reason for you to live out your faith. You read the letters you are able to read, put them together into words that you know, and believe to understand all the languages in the world with them. A foreigner does not even understand his own language anymore. He has only his faith.

V

We jump from one point to another and barely know anymore where the border runs. We arrive at abandoned border stations. We cannot locate them on any map. The former border runs right through us. He who looks inside himself, comes upon an invisible wall. Soldiers chew on their now useless machine gun bullets. They do not look dangerous anymore, but can they be trusted? We have to overcome ourselves, to cross the border. It is possible, but only on secret paths.

On the Backs of Animals

Back then our people were in search of a place to sleep. It took six centuries riding on the backs of animals. The animals and our people were exhausted, one exhausted entity.

We had long since collapsed by the time the automobile was invented; we were no longer able to continue on by foot. We settled in the place where we had collapsed and called it Heimat.

The whole world imitated our way of building tents. They learned the custom of sleeping on woven wool by watching us. We have nothing against people mimicking us. We just do not like the fact that strangers travel through our country and know our ways better than we do ourselves.

We just want to take a breather. For the next six centuries. After that we will show the world that we can also drive cars, without depleting ourselves in the process.

We are, after all, mortal beings like you, and even if it is sometimes hard to believe, we also fear death. Maybe we understand how to transform death into a long sleep, which strengthens our body and spirit.

After awakening, every one of us drinks several jars of horse milk and goes to work. We set our Heimat up that way, so we are able to move on at any time. Because we can lose our land and life at any time, we do not build permanent houses. We are used to always living on some border or another. When there are divided opinions among us, it is about boundary lines. Some of us simply do not understand animals. They concern themselves with thoughts. Lonely people. Most of them are very fat, because their work is not labor. During the times when we are moving around, their numbers decrease.

When we are settled they become overconfident. They invent magic spells, with which they mean to rule over the others. They go head to head with our sorcerers. They are destroyed.

We imagine life to be like a big circle. One comes into the world. That is similar to the dawning of the day. One becomes old and falls asleep. That is like the night. Dark and secretive. Only a few can remember what they experienced during the night. The long sleep rejuvenates. When he wakes up, he comes back into the world. We need neither thinkers nor sorcerers in order to know how everything runs. The animals we ride are enough for us.

My Europe

For me, as a child in Istanbul, there was only one Europe.

“Avrupa” was the name of the toy store paradise that stood a couple hundred meters away from our house. Inside there were fire-red toy cars and model trains with silver locomotives for sale. Everything for unaffordable prices. European products were always more expensive than domestic ones. That is how one could be sure that they were also better. A couple of years later the aging building with the toy store inside was torn down. In its place they built a modern shopping center called “America.” It was brighter and more spacious than the toyshop. It had numerous departments, including some for ladies’ and men’s underwear.

“We are going to Europe,” my parents said one day. This is how my parents announced their move to Germany. I was eight years old and began to slowly realize that Europe was something other than a torn-down toy store, for which I mourned even though I could not buy anything there. Europe always had something to do with cars. Owners of European cars, like my father, were proud of their possessions. Japanese cars were considered unreliable and American brands were usually used as shuttles.

Even today I still have not grasped whether we moved to Europe or Germany. Germany is the country in which I live, my concrete environment. Europe, however, was only a dream that once stood a couple hundred meters away from our house and that was suddenly not there anymore. Dreams are long-lived because they are not real.

A Greek friend of mine told me during a conversation that in Greece everyone talks about going to Europe, when they want to move to Germany. That surprised me, since I thought that Greece was in Europe. Unlike Turkey. Turkey lies both inside and outside of Europe. This geographical occurrence causes frequent political confusion. I do not find this problematic, as long as there are no walls being built, which in this case would run right through the middle of Turkey.

Do writers really even have to occupy themselves with Europe? Is it not enough when children buy their toy cars and adults their big expensive vehicles there? Is the Europe of financial minds and managers not sufficient? Does a political Europe even exist? Will there ever be something like the United States of Europe? Europe’s magic power nowadays is good for nothing more than increasing monetary capital. Otherwise the Germans certainly would have never separated themselves from their beloved DM. They only did it unwillingly, not for the sake of the EURO, which

means equally as little to them as the Rial or the Peso, but because of the prospect that even more money would line their pocket books.

Managers are the shamans of our time. They have the ability to be everywhere at the same time. Conference calls over the Internet make it possible. Writers do indeed travel quite a lot, but if they ever feel at home somewhere, then they are at home with themselves, inside their own head. Granted, this head has long since ceased to be rooted to only one place. It also oscillates, vacillates, wanders around aimlessly. Yet it mostly indulges pipe dreams. These determine the writing.

It is not easy to peel the European idea out of the rhetoric of the European Community, to realize it as an idea and not as a construction created by a conference. The idea for the European Community was born from the idea of a stable peace. After two World Wars there was no other alternative. Today there are politicians in power all over Europe who no longer have memories of those horrific wars. And they do not always succeed in keeping the peace, if one considers the events in the Balkans.

Maybe something like the European idea will be preserved in the works of writers, based on the ideas of Humanism and the Enlightenment. Will this idea stand a chance against the superiority of economics' and politics' claims to power, which is becoming more and more an end unto itself?

Europe is standing before the imminent ruin of the nation state. The major centers in Europe are already multicultural centers, with Asian, African and Islamic physiognomies. The identity of the European will be challenged, if one defines it exclusively as Christian-Occidental. But is there a European identity at all? The Bulgarian and the Irishman are certainly not cut from the same piece of wood. But this wood, from which identities fit to be sold in a catalog had once been whittled, has long since been burned by demagogic nationalists on the funeral pyre.

The citizens of Europe are at the same time cosmopolitans and regionalists. They love their neighborhoods just as they love their metropolises with their laboratories of amalgamation. If only. The reality looks somewhat different. Many places are dominated by overwhelming fatigue and only slight curiosity. They would be happy if the world around them were a little smaller and clearer and not a global Moloch.

Only a dynamic cultural term, which does not firmly establish identities within a cultural context, but allows them to oscillate freely, is able to prevent a looming culture war. The individual always stands out from the group and its firmly established identity. The individual is always a disturbance when it comes to team-based games. In the writer's work this individual is discovered and developed. He gains shape. Artistic work grows at the fault lines of group identity, between cultural clichés.

The metropolises of Europe, with Paris, Berlin and London leading the way, are like laboratories in which the new Europeans, not only immigrants but also natives, are both researchers and guinea pigs. Are they becoming cosmopolitans or tribal warriors, or something else altogether, which we cannot even fathom?

I enjoy observing these processes. Frictions and conflicts are the driving forces of writers. Still, I think it is a pity that my Europe does not exist anymore. I would have loved to buy the fire-red car that I could not afford back then.

We Carry Heimat Within

Some terms cannot be grasped. They give me the impression that someone had invented them in a dream. When one wakes up, one remembers their sound, without ever experiencing their meaning. The German language, a language that developed more in thought than through experience, has an abundance of such terms. Heimat is one such German term that can hardly be translated into another language. The romanticists tried to experience contrived terms. They built houses out of words. But are these houses still inhabitable? They give me the impression that they are like deserted homesteads (Gehöfte). They are uninviting, but nevertheless release an indefinable longing in me. Heimat can only be experienced from afar.

“Where do you come from?” When someone asks me that question in Berlin, the city in which I have lived for ten years, I answer: “I am from Munich.” The answer to the question does not seem to satisfy the inquirer, because he asks again: “No, where do you really come from?”

In Germany the question of Heimat seems to be directly linked to the question of origin. But can a person’s place of birth, or even that of his parents and ancestors be the sole definition of where he comes from?

I was born in Ankara, but for quite a long a time I lived in Istanbul, Munich, and Berlin. The memories of all the places I have lived in so far have long since been somewhere else.

The city in which I lived the longest and which has the greatest effect on me was Munich. My Ankara, my Istanbul, and my Munich are now in Berlin.

A city, in which one lived for an extended period time, can never really be left behind. Places that one wants to forget become nightmares. Places that one leaves against his will become magnetic attractions.

Everyone has his own personal geography in which borders run differently than on the map. I would not have stayed in Berlin if it would not have been possible to make this city habitable for my memories. Every move to another city is a form of transplantation. It is possible that the body will reject the new environment like a foreign organ.

Berlin is, from my point of view, the only metropolis in Germany. A metropolis in progress. A cosmopolitan city in which only a few people are cosmopolitans. Like every other metropolis, Berlin will only be a Heimat for those people who are ready to detach their memories from the rigid pictures of their origin. He who wants to go on living in Berlin like he did in Bonn or Anatolia does not become a Berliner. He remains a foreigner. Metropolises portray themselves as places that allow foreigners to become locals. They are receptive places. But they also challenge. One cannot live in them easily without being curious about and open to new experiences.

In Berlin I am at home. But I could also live somewhere else. Maybe the ability to leave a city or, above all, a metropolis is the prerequisite to being able to be at home there. He, who wants to experience Heimat as an unambiguous concept, will always be heimatlos (homeless) in a large city.

In Islamic mysticism, Man is described as a guest on Earth. Man suffers from being an expellee from paradise. An exile even. This description points to a state of mind that is indeed relevant today. The modern human being has long since invented terms to describe his desolation and created new coordinates of his existence on the

planet. What the village community, family and the pastor once were, namely, entities of solidarity, are nowadays abstract terms like state, constitution, and fatherland. But Heimat can only be poorly constructed with such terms. They are not sensory and do not correspond with the inner-world of any individual. This inner country is his true Heimat. The borders may be, but do not need to be, identical to the borders of the country in which he lives. Every attempt to identify a person's inner country with his country by using violence, leads to contortions of the most sickening kind. To profess one's own inner country is rarely accepted, and is often even perceived as a provocation. Because the language of one's inner country is a personal one. It is out of this language that literature arises.

The question of origin can feel annoyingly patronizing. But it can also be dealt with creatively. The question of origin is always a question about Heimat. It is one's conception of one's Heimat that decides how this question is approached. If Germany is supposed to be a Heimat for Turks, at least a part of the Turkish population living in this country should feel like cosmopolitans, and Germany should become a cosmopolitical country. The place in Germany, which best qualifies as a laboratory for this experiment, is Berlin.

The rudiments of a distinct German-Turkish culture originated in Berlin. It is one of many different cultural currents that flow into this city. But the culture is still too distant to emanate impulses that would be of vital importance for the metropolis of Berlin. The German-Turkish culture is a subculture, the echo of an imaginary ghetto, whose existence is at best able to create a cultural sub-scene. These scenes are carried by weak memories of one's origin and thin strings connected to a complicated present. Thus far this has been too little to erect sustainable foundations at the world's most suspenseful construction site.

Thoughts on May 8, 1995

My father experienced the Second World War through the radio. In 1938 the rich people in town pooled some funds and purchased the first radio set. It was placed in the town's only coffee shop. People met there and listened to the voices of Ankara or Baku. In 1941 Stalin's armies were standing in the Caucasus region at the Turkish border. During the summer of 1941 an invasion was considered imminent. The border region was evacuated. Hitler's surprising ambush of the Soviet Union prevented the Russian invasion of Turkey. Hitler was in high regard. There was no love lost in Turkey for the Soviet army, which had attacked Finland and divided Poland with the Germans. The Germans, on the other hand, had been brothers in arms during the First World War. Many remembered them fondly and well. Many marveled at their propriety and their organizational talents.

During the First World War my grandfather stood on the Turkish-Russian front. He and his father were taken prisoner in 1916. Both survived their captivity. The empire of the Czars was toppled. From the ground up, a new world arose in Russia. Whoever was sympathetic with this world was considered godless in Turkey. Even though modern Turkey was a godless republic, it still persecuted these godless men and women. Turkey was spared during the Second World War. My father, who was born in 1926, belonged to the fortunate generation that did not actively experience war.

What access does one have to this event when his father experienced the Second World War over the radio, distant from the battlefield? Through the incipient news technology my father was an unaffected witness. Since then we have all become unaffected witnesses to some war or another, which take place more or less far from our houses.

My father experienced neither liberation nor a complete breakdown. He was neither a victim nor a perpetrator. And so, from this standpoint, posing questions is considered permissible.

Without a doubt, all of the peoples occupied, persecuted and enslaved by Nazi-Germany were liberated in 1945. But what happened in Germany? Was it just the regime that was defeated, or an entire people who had made themselves either actively or passively complicit? That Germany had been allowed to re-emerge, in spite of all the crimes committed, seemed to me a tremendously civil move on the part of the victorious powers. The victors' prescription was not vengeance or utter annihilation of the enemy, but rather healing through pragmatic means. The division of Germany was not a method of healing, but rather a calculated side effect. After the collapse of the Third Reich, Germany was not just divided into East and West, but also into perpetrators and victims.

The victims were remembered. One would have rather forgotten the perpetrators over night. The more one kept oneself busy with the victims, the more successful he was at forgetting the perpetrators. Because occupying oneself with the victims is, above all things, a distraction from the perpetrators. The burden of memory was laid on the shoulders of the victims. Sometimes there seems to be something obscene about symbolic rituals performed around the victims. They act as gestures of memory—as though someone would in retrospect acknowledge their sorrow. This culture focused on the victims is referred to as “Vergangenheitsbewältigung”: overcoming the past. A fuzzy term. Can a people ever free themselves from their own history in the way they can free themselves from oppression and foreign domination?

What raised difficult questions concerning the actions of the Germans was not the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war on May 8th, but rather having overcome the division of Germany in 1989–1990; these questions would be heavily debated in the following years.

In a confident, reunited Germany no one turns to their history with psychotherapeutic intent. The word “normalcy” is making its rounds. History is becoming an instrument of political power again. It is acquiring its original meaning for the future of the nation. Even more meaningful is the constitution of the nation, which no longer lays half-numb in a hospital bed with the prospect of healing. The patient assumes he is successfully healed and is given leave. You know how it is with newly recovered patients. They are especially inclined to throw warnings regarding their fragile state to the wind. Only time will tell if the disease is still laying dormant, slumbering in their bodies and if it could trigger a relapse. Germany currently finds itself in this period, which is difficult to bridge.

The period from 1933 to 1945 remains a wound in the German memory. But has the wound become a scab? Will quacks with their questionable salves be allowed to come near the wound that has been held under lock and key for so long? The collapse

of Germany as a Kulturnation ended in 1945, but it began when Hitler seized power in 1933. Was it really an example of general consensus prevailing in this country?

By 1945 Germany had lost the Second World War. The Nazi regime collapsed. The subtle consequences of National Socialism continue to have an effect on present-day Germany. Does the brutal attempt of the Nazis to create an ethnically homogeneous society have nothing to do with the present opposition, which recognizes that the ethnic diversity of Germany is a result of migration?

History is far too seldom confronted with the present. That is how memory becomes, above all, a symbolic act. Through memory one thinks that he can atone for something. The operation of remembering is calculated on behalf of the victims. Remembering the victim is essential. But what were and are the consequences of this remembering? Notoriously, the Federal Republic of Germany was no uncomfortable place for former Nazis. Many of them were able to resume their careers after a short re-orientation period. United Germany is a land in which four to five thousand attacks and riots against foreigners occur annually. The foreigners in Germany, most of whom are long since at home here, rarely think about the history of the Germans.

Now, when a new world order is the topic of conversation, it seems appropriate to consider the old world order more carefully. Otherwise the danger looms that the new order will turn out to be a nasty surprise, namely, a return to the old order, the failed order, the order which always leads to failure and condemnation.

Fifty years after the war's end, paths of remembrance leading to the present still must be sought in Germany. Not only silent monuments and orators holding grave speeches in solemn voices are allowed on these paths.

Keep Your Hands Off of My Biography

An origin that does not serve a constructed, collective memory, but rather a personal one, is biography. Biography that the bearer does not wish to make public is something intimate. No one can take away another's experiences and memories.

Meeting a person always involves encountering his biography, his second, invisible face. Understanding one another begins with the discovery and the exchange of biographies. If one wants to truly comprehend the other, he must grapple with his own biography.

Biographies become more meaningful the further apart they are. People from different countries, with various native languages and cultures, cannot come closer to one another without a mutual acknowledgement of each other's biographies. In a dialogue between natives and foreigners, the biography of each partner cannot be disregarded.

With "integration of foreigners" the meaning is almost always understood to be "the foreigner adapting to the native community." But can adapting succeed if it is based on the denial of biographies? I was born in Turkey and grew up in Germany. My biography is different from the biography of a German whose parents and grandparents were Germans. His Heimat is Germany. But is Germany also my Heimat? Can I, as a Turk, also be a German? Under specific circumstances a Turk living in Germany can apply for a German passport and become a German citizen.

But from that moment when he begins to carry a German passport onwards, is he no longer a Turk?

The identity of a person is connected to his biography. A Turk with a German passport, regardless of whether or not he had to give up his Turkish passport, would still be a Turkish-German. He would not be able to erase his biography, even if he wished to do so.

To demand that someone deny, hide or re-write his biography cannot be right. A pretense like this does not lay the groundwork for understanding. Rather, it leads to misunderstandings and mistrust. Is the other trying to hide behind a façade? Does he show me a side of himself that is different than who he really is? What is he really like?

If integration is going to succeed, people should acknowledge their own biographies and live in agreement with them, and acceptance of them.

In Germany many of the natives remain distant from, if not distrustful of, the foreigners. This mistrust is a manifestation of the fact that they are not ready to grapple with the biographies of the others. Because of this lack of readiness, integration collapses. Integration into a modern state is to integrate especially those who are different from the majority, but without removing the differences by force. Instead a modern state trusts that its citizens will be mature and responsible, ready and willing to accept diverse biographies and that they will have the capability to communicate.

In Germany this type of communication is broadly missing. Instead a set of expectations prevails, which might come from times when one paid homage to an ethnic or culturally homogenous state. Homogeneity instead of heterogeneity, unity instead of diversity, monologue instead of dialogue.

The relaxation of naturalization laws in Germany would, in the foreseeable future, turn many foreign nationals into German citizens. It would be fatal if this change were to give the impression that these people would automatically lose or change their biographies. It is this very expectation that is behind the vehement rejection of dual citizenship. The unified front of naysayers sees in integration the most likely, contradiction-free venue for foreigners to adapt.

But integration in our times is a highly contradictory, complicated process. It creates people with multiple identities, people with fractures in their biographies that can no longer be categorized through a fixation on some unambiguous idea.