

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

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Atlas of a Tropical Germany

Essays on Politics and Culture,
1990–1998

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University of Nebraska Press
Lincoln and London

To My Readers in the United States

In Germany one often speaks of "American conditions" when the effects of migration on society are being discussed. Despite forty years of experience with immigration, which has resulted in 7.5 million persons of foreign origin residing permanently in Germany, questions and concepts of multiculturalism have remained controversial here. The multicultural society that is already part of official social policy in immigration countries such as the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands appears, to many Germans, as a scenario of horror. Visions of something like a "Los Angeles syndrome" fill their heads. They see the threat of ethnic conflicts, the impoverishment of urban areas, the overthrow of their intact German world by foreign elements. Behind these fears lurks the vision of a homogeneous ethnic community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) of Germans, a community to which strangers are granted temporary access at best. Although West Germany subscribed to a democratic constitution after World War II and developed an exemplary system of social pluralism, the country has nonetheless inherited the Romantic idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, an idea whose origins predate the National Socialist regime by far. In the consciousness of Germans, genealogy, culture, language, and *Volks* form one unit.

There is a German people (*Volks*) that defines itself ethnically, but is there a German nation that can also be multieθνic? The problems of the German nation-state have often been described. One speaks of the belated nation. According to the literary scholar Karl Heinz Bohrer, "The German people has not succeeded in becoming a modern nation because it never adequately universalized its concept of *Volks*."¹

As long as Germany was divided and the Federal Republic eked out a quasi-a-national existence under the umbrella of the West, the

question of a German nation-state was of only secondary significance. Since unification, that has radically changed. A sovereign, united Germany must address its role as a nation-state in a Europe engaged in its own unification process.

The concept of nation is directly related to the question of immigration. For the unavoidable question is this: Who belongs? And under what conditions? It can come as no surprise when questions about citizenship law are often at the core of debates in Germany about multiculturalism. And yet in recent years a second line of debate has developed, one directly related to visions of a homogeneous society and fear of heterogeneity. Again and again the German media depict the Turkish population—with more than two million human beings, the most powerful of the immigrant groups—as incapable of integration, even as undesiring of integration. The Turks are stigmatized as forever strange. Even for this vantage point the question arises: Why is it so difficult to accept heterogeneity in society? Especially since the Turks in Germany behave relatively inconspicuously and their demands are extremely modest and cautious. But even their existence is taken as grounds for unrest. Urban areas with a high percentage of Turkish residents are viewed as problem zones. Although there is nothing in Germany comparable to American neighborhoods with an ethnically homogeneous population, one speaks of ghettos. It is precisely the diversity, the multicultural activity of neighborhoods like Berlin-Kreuzberg, that frightens many citizens and politicians. They mourn the German ghetto that has been broken open, transformed into a colorful state of confusion. Of course the colorful state of confusion is not a world without problems. The atmosphere is not marked by one jubilant celebration after another. There are tensions, social conflicts, economic straits. But must these conflicts always be grasped in ethnic terms? In Germany these conflicts seldom have ethnic foundations.

If Germany wants to secure its long-range position in Europe and the Western world, it will have to change its understanding of what it means to be German and its understanding of itself. This transformation, from a state defined by blood lineage to a modern citizens'

republic, is inevitable for yet another reason. The problems of an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous German society cannot be solved in any other way. This transformation is rich in tensions.

The essays in this book were written over the last ten years. They attend, almost exactly, the time that has transpired since the fall of the Berlin Wall. You might think of them as a kind of taking stock of German reunification, a description of Germany on its rocky road to becoming a modern nation, in a united Europe.

ZAFER ŞENOCAK

Zafer Senocak & Bülent Tulay

Germany—Home for Turks?

A PLEA FOR OVERCOMING THE
CRISIS BETWEEN ORIENT
AND OCCIDENT

To the extent that it took place at all in the shadow of current events in the GDR and in Eastern Europe, the discussion about the new foreigners' law in the Federal Republic of Germany was conducted for the most part without involving us, the second generation of Turkish immigrants. For this law continues to ignore our reality. Having been born and reached adulthood here, we can hardly identify with the law's operative concept of "foreign fellow citizens" (*ausländische Mitbürger*). We can no longer imagine a future in this country that fails to recognize us as German citizens. Until now, however, the authorities have doggedly avoided this decisive question.

Even for the majority of Turks, above all for the first generation, there seem to be more important topics than the security and equality of their future in Germany.

The media and public opinion of Turks in Germany are extensions of Turkish media, Turkish public opinion, and Turkish consciousness. Until now Turks in Germany have had no stance of their own, no vision.

This might not be anything to object to if we were not already in the thirtieth year of immigration and if it were not high time to think about granting citizens' rights to Turks in Germany.

As a result of the labor immigration that led to the phenomenon of the guest worker, the Federal Republic has become a de facto land of immigration for the majority of foreign workers and their families. A second generation of foreigners has grown up here, and a third is already being born. But legislation and even the vocabulary of public discussion limp along behind the existing situation. For years the

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broad majority of the population has spoken of the "integration of foreign citizens," while the Left has spoken of a "multicultural society." Unfortunately, the discussion exhausts itself in the mere mention of these slogans! Nowhere is it made clear what a profound change of consciousness must take place for all those involved in order for native and future German citizens really to live together successfully.

UNLIMITED CITIZENS' RIGHTS

"We already have a multicultural society," say some. By this they presumably mean cultures and perspectives existing side by side without touching each other. Everyone should be blissful as he sees fit, keep his eye on his own plate, and make himself comfortable in the ghetto.

"Integrate," say the others. By this they mean nothing short of absolute assimilation, the disappearance of Anatolian faces behind German masks.

But can there be an integration for Germans of Turkish origin who have decided to live their lives in Germany if they are not granted unlimited rights of citizenship?

Fellow citizens without citizens' rights—in our opinion no democratic state can sustain such a situation over time without social conflicts and tensions. One must not overlook the fact that there are forces, even in the ranks of the ruling parties (CDU/CSU), that regard even those "foreigners" who have been living here for decades as an alien threat that they would much prefer to get rid of if this could be done legally and economically. These forces, which do not shy away from waging atmospheric battles, benefit from a widespread, undifferentiated view of foreigners. At most one differentiates among different degrees of strangeness: "the greater the strangeness, the greater the danger."

Grotesquely, the view from the Left presents a mirror image of this. Those party congress participants who vote for a general right of residency for every foreigner who comes here are not blessed with an advanced capacity for differentiation or sense of reality.

Demonization and glorification of things foreign lie close to-

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gether. Both are defensive mechanisms that rest, not on a relationship of partnership, but on one of domination.

THE SECOND GENERATION

When we speak of a comprehensive change in consciousness, we mean that it is time to take up a long overdue discussion of repressed problems of identity and fears of contact. The Turks must finally speak up to situate themselves anew, to orient and define themselves. This holds above all for the so-called second generation and the coming generations. They are the real foreigners because their glance in the rearview mirror is blocked; they live without a homeland or rights of citizenship. And yet they are often not even perceived as foreigners because their language, their appearance, and their patterns of consumption scarcely differ from those of the Germans in their age group.

Is Turkey still their home, then? Can it be the home of their children?

We have the good fortune, which unfortunately often goes unrecognized, of living in a time when concepts like fatherland, home, and nation can be seen from different perspectives and when they no longer function as key words that fit only one certain lock.

Among the young Turks in Germany there still prevails that spirit that only bemoans a split identity, that is to say, speechlessness. They write an endless book of memories, in scraps of childhood, in lost languages or languages not yet found, and the pages remain empty. They have not yet found a language that they could use to translate this book and share it with others. For their fathers and mothers they are the lost generation. Will they be, for their own children, those without speech? Is there a way out of this passivity, out of niches, ghettos, and half-truths?

The birth of German citizens of Turkish, Islamic origin also puts Germans to the test. The tolerance of some Germans for integration seems to have exhausted itself even before integration has begun. The Turks are stigmatized as the ever foreign.

But even the diametrically opposed position, which sees in every

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foreigner a better human being, which thinks it must accept every archaic custom, every foreign habit, leads in the end only to a tangle of conflicts. For even this position thinks it can get away without changing its own consciousness, without needing the other. But change and contact are key words for a multicultural social perspective. There are paths that must be explored to overcome latent as well as blatant fears of contact, to break out of the ghetto, and to create the atmosphere that will allow the strange and the intimate to be in constant touch, in order to allow something new to grow—a process that can be pleasurable but equally painful, like rubbing a wound. In many ways this process is like creative work.

CRISIS BETWEEN ORIENT AND OCCIDENT

The younger generation of Turks in Germany has a historic opportunity to overcome the crisis between Orient and Occident that has plagued Turkish identity for over a century. Yet these young Turks must not be guided by the psychologies of today's society in Turkey.

Already the next generations will no longer stand in between, but right in the middle of a European context. Changes of location and perspective are mutually constitutive. Changing one's location without simultaneously changing one's perspective leads to a vacuum. The break with the original homeland took place long ago. But it is also imperative to grasp this break in all its consequences before the empty space to which it gives rise can be bridged.

More often than not the interests of Turks in Germany are a mismatch with those of Turkey. The disenfranchisement of Turks in Germany manifests itself not only in the denial of citizens' rights by Germans but also in Turkey's claim to be the sole legitimate representative of Turks in Germany. In order to realize their capacity to formulate and perceive their own interests in the future, in order to speak their own language, the Turkish youth of Germany must rid themselves of their parents' allegiance to authority and reject a one-sided orientation to Turkey.

Turkish youth must not cling to the phantasm of the lost homeland.

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MULTICULTURAL—BUT HOW?

Almost all associations that Turks in Germany have founded have their roots in Turkey. That is not unusual if the interests of the first generation are considered. But will it suffice for the future? The German citizen of Turkish origin needs his own face, which must abide differences. For even adaptation cannot prevent him from remaining the other, the one who is different. This difference forms the foundation of his new, perhaps dual identity, or more precisely, his identities!

We must say farewell to an all-too-common notion of unbroken identity. Identity has meant and continues to mean a drawing of boundaries, a resistance, and all too often the destruction of an other. It is no coincidence that Hans Mayer's book on outsiders (*Außenseiter*) attests to the failure of the Enlightenment in a bourgeois society that excluded and marginalized those who were different and strange.¹

A new concept of identity that would allow us to live together without having to sacrifice difference and personality on the altar of identity would need to have gaps through which what is different and foreign could come and go. Identity would then not manifest itself as hegemony. Whether this remains a pious hope or becomes reality someday probably depends on whether we learn to accept differences and to shape them productively, whether we learn to touch each other.

A comprehensive change of consciousness must take place, a re-orientation that links the Turks with Germany's problems and perspectives, that enriches the Germans with the cultural legacy of the Turks, and that finally grants the second generation the space it needs to find its own way.

Precisely in these fields of tension, in the contradictions of two cultures, in the conflict between modernity and tradition, the Turks of Germany can cultivate the kind of creativity that leads to a distinctly specific culture. They will hold their own roots in awe as something strange, and they will make the strange land their own. No mummification of ancient identities, but a brilliant negotiation of standpoints and perspectives.

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But German society, its cultural life, its curricular programs in the schools, all this needs to change. A society's multiculturalism cannot exhaust itself in satisfying needs for exoticism and folklore. Rather, it must lead to a serious encounter with the culture, language, history, literature, and religion of those who are different. Of course this is especially crucial in the arena of formal education in the schools. Today's discussion about the future of the multicultural society barely acknowledges initial signs of moving in this direction.

IS HISTORY CATCHING UP WITH US?

The consciousness of individuals and the collective unconscious always have a longer breath than administrative measures and legislative periods. For unlike these short-term phenomena they are guided by symbols and metaphors that are thousands of years old. For this reason it will be crucial to explore where, how, and why different cultures that have tried to live together have failed in the history of civilization. We have not yet digested the bitter experiences of the twentieth century!

But who among us, Turks of the second generation in Germany, has concerned himself in real depth with Germany's past and its future?

Doesn't immigrating to Germany also mean immigrating to, entering into, the arena of Germany's recent past?

The history of Jews in Germany—the history of the largest minority of another faith—and the creative influence that this history had (but also the effect of the Enlightenment on Jews, with all its consequences, including emancipation and assimilation), all this offers us an experiential background that we have not yet analyzed. Even the bitter experiences that led to the [near] annihilation of the Jewish minority in Europe must be reflected upon in the conception of a multicultural Europe.

But doesn't an anti-Islamicism, dug out of medieval mothballs and restyled for the present, threaten to join the anti-Semitism of European history? The era of depoliticization, short-lived concepts, and postmodern arbitrariness has been followed by a neoconser-

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vative phase that makes nationalism and xenophobia socially acceptable again.

GERMAN QUESTION—GERMAN IDENTITY

Without question most Germans have successfully been integrated into the European process since 1945. Nonetheless, the so-called German question still touches a nerve. This is less a question of borders than one of German national feeling, German identity.

The Germans, especially those in the West, have banished their national feeling into the unconscious. This too was part of a strategy of "coming to terms with the past" (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), which should more properly be designated a project of forgetting. Aside from formulaic reconciliation and commemorative events, the ritual of overcoming also includes the suppression of moods, the sublimation of emotions, embedded in the total concept of reconstruction, which didn't exactly take the thorniest path.

As the French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut impressively describes in his book *Remembering in Vain*, this ritual of overcoming actually prevents the realization of memory and encourages the bravado of forgetting.²

The presence of a historical, cultural, and religious minority could prove to be an important corrective in the process of rediscovering a new German national feeling. Obviously this situation also harbors an enormous potential for conflict. And because conflicts build up and are fueled by the unconscious, action must be taken now.

NO INTEGRATION WITHOUT CITIZENS' RIGHTS

In the thirtieth year of immigration, Germany must no longer be last in line in Europe when it comes to the rights and life options of foreigners. Despite German assurances to the contrary, we see no serious desire for integration as long as the debureaucratization and the liberalization of the German naturalization law and its implementation are excluded from discussion.

The offer entailed in the statement "The foreigners could become citizens if they really wanted to" remains a mockery in the face of

many aspects of German citizenship that derive from genealogical criteria. According to these principles, someone of German descent from an Eastern European country, whose ancestors might have lived for as many as five hundred years outside German territory and who speaks only broken German or no German at all, is considered a German. But not a Turk of the second or third generation who speaks far better German than Turkish: he is and remains a foreigner. The fact that racialized thought (*der Rassegedanke*) can continue to play such a central role in a country where such thinking led to unimaginable crimes is, to put it mildly, alienating.

ISLAM AS A EUROPEAN FACTOR

The fact that German citizens of Turkish origin are simultaneously German citizens of Islamic faith seems to give rise to growing fears of contact.

Islam has long since become a European factor. In Germany, for example, there are nearly two million Muslims. Unlike other countries in the European Community, Germany does not recognize Islam as a legitimate religious community in the public sphere.

The future will show whether extremist positions on all sides will yield to a dialogue or whether they will further encumber the consciousness of those involved. After anti-Semitism, Islam must not become a new target for European self-definition. Muslims must also work against this. They must finally begin to consider their tradition critically. This means not only tolerating freedom of expression but also encouraging it.

Islam doesn't force itself on anyone. The true nature of this religion is more tolerant than one might easily think in light of so much fresh violence and arbitrariness in the name of Islam.

The roots of Islam's tolerance lie in its history, not in a glorified utopia, but in the everyday, lived history of a Moorish Spain, a Seljukian Anatolia. The time is long since upon us to take up and further that critical Enlightened spirit, which determined Oriental thought from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, brought a high civilization to flower, and decisively influenced the European Middle Ages en route to modernity.

Humanist ideals and Enlightened thought did not derive from Europe's own. They are, rather, twilight creatures of West and East, coproductions. Practicing and cultivating them would not be alienating for Muslims. On the contrary, this would be the discovery of a lost Muslim tradition.

This rediscovery and recultivation of Muslim tradition in the critical light of pluralism will be possible only for those who have learned to change perspectives, to consider what is strange as one's own and what is one's own from a distance. And only therein lies the chance of the coming generations to deal differently with prejudice and stereotypes, in order to eliminate them—perhaps, one day—from the language of humankind.

January 1990

The Island

Immaculate Conception, Icarus, the Wright brothers, and socialism, which inherited something from everyone without giving birth to anything new. There is something obscene about everything that ends, like a knife that disappears in a sheath. The ceremony of disguise goes by the name of melancholy. The end was settled on a long time ago; nonetheless, it must take a surprising turn every time, an unexpected twist (*Einbruch*). The end must not be a consequence. In the end, developments bring ruin to every belief that one holds.

A tear opens, a chasm, an abyss. The other shore becomes unattainable. Without a sound the grief over what has been lost and the joy about what is anticipated mix indistinguishably, against a coarsely patterned background, a historical place that has become an imaginary site, as if they were entering into a complicated relationship, long desired and strictly forbidden.

August 1991

What Does the Forest Dying Have to Do with Multiculturalism?

Much as Michel Foucault has changed our understanding of sexuality in Occidental societies, we need to study the discourse of migration in Europe and scrutinize its practices.¹ Talk-happy media have taken to commenting on the phenomenon of migration in an inflationary way. The complexity of concepts and their internal contradictions disappear in dubious simplifications. Even in scholarship and especially in public discussion, there is a widespread assumption that, on a planet crisscrossed with communications networks, virtually immune symbols that define cultural differences could still exist. In the current discussion this leads to concepts being taken as a point of departure that are incapable of grasping and expressing the complexity of the entire situation or the intricacies of the details. In other words, no archaeological work on concepts is taking place. One speaks of *foreigners*, *naturalization*, *integration*, *assimilation*, the *second generation*, and so on. But all these terms convey different realities, in keeping with different perspectives. Even if this society were willing to understand itself as a society of immigration, what it would demand of immigrants—what it would be prepared to give and to take—remains completely open.

Heiner Geißler's sketch for a multicultural society—one that would take its cue from economic and demographic necessities and be held together by the concept of constitutional patriotism—is a first step toward addressing the situation today.² Unfortunately, even Geißler relies on the static images that mark the majority's encounter with foreigners, rather than conducting empirical analyses about the immigrants' state of consciousness and their symbolic universe. These static images would have us believe that Turks harken to monotonous Turkish music and prefer lamb to pork. And they are also entitled to do so.

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Many questions remain unanswered because the speaker is not able to think in different languages, that is, to think in terms of the standpoints and interests of his objects and addressees. His point of departure is not interest in the culture and specificity of the others, but the plain economic necessity according to which Germany and Europe again and again require a new supply of labor. But will numbers and external factors suffice to create a society that allows the participants to know each other's perspectives and symbols, to bring them into contact with each other, and thus to set new identities and identifications in the place of those that are crumbling?

In Germany the end of socialist utopia and rapid unification have created the illusion that current events and contemporary phenomena can be described with nineteenth-century language, with concepts such as *nation* and *Volk*. We have no concepts for the emotions and psychic structures to which recent historical ruptures have given rise, no concepts for the disarray of the new arrangements. The ones that are used are ripped out of context. Facades of ruins.

In public discussion the concept of a "multicultural society" belongs, even more than the concept of "the forest dying," to a conceptual framework that pairs understanding with repression. While discussion about forests dying took place in the middle of society—because the problem concerned everyone directly—discussion about a multicultural society happens on the periphery, with no noticeable influence on practical politics. Those who are strange (*Fremde*) are *per se* marginal groups, even if their strangeness is not always cast in terms of socioeconomics. Their passivity and powerlessness are a fundamental condition of their existence. Every time they try to break out of their role, they encounter not only the power of the center but also the firm will of those marginal figures who want to stay on the margins, who come like day trippers from the center to look into the depths for a while. The day trippers from the center borrow the marginal feeling of those who are strange and foreign (*fremd*), those who supply the other and a projection screen for yearnings that the day trippers have. These strangers will not succeed in breaking out unless they engage in fundamental debate with those

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from the center who are invested in establishing minority. If the feet are bound by the chains of resistance, the hands are bound by the chains of solidarity.

The majority of the center would like to distance itself from the margin, to cast it out. The minority of the center wants to preserve the margin as margin, to conserve the margins. In both cases distance and its preservation are essential. The majority of the center distances itself from the margin. The minority of the center identifies with this distance. Everything strange must be preserved at any cost. Even understanding that which is strange would already diminish its allure. Because of this there are hardly any efforts to question and to analyze modes of behavior. That which exists exists as if it were a law of nature. Things have always been as they are now, and things as they are now will always be so in the future.

Every relationship rests on differences and similarities. If the similarities disappear behind the differences, a dialogic relationship collapses into the stigmatization of the other. Language is used to speak no longer with one another but only about one another. Those who are strange express themselves now only in their symbols. Head scarves, circumcision and wedding celebrations, talismans, extended families, mothers-in-law, men's honor, wedding dowry... The problem of integrating those who are strange becomes a problem of perception. The perception of the stranger rests in turn on a disabled (*verkrüppelt*) concept of strangeness, on a restrictive model that recognizes only assimilation or ghettoization. In each case the point is to avoid any contacts that could provoke change. The tension between self and others (*dem Eigenen und Fremden*) must be maintained at any cost.

The majority of the center and he who has assimilated, the ghetto and the minority of the center, they all speak one and the same language to distance themselves. But reality is syncretistic. It is the reality of mulattos, of bastards. Reality is taboo.

When symbols of strangeness that could be pinpointed are at stake, the other religion plays a key role. The discerning rationalisms of modern industrial societies allow for faith only as fortress or as

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nothing. Galloping changes in the external world are accompanied by only a creeping change in the human soul, perhaps even less. Perhaps a desperate force tugs wildly at an immovable rock. Every modern religion seeks to rescue the soul, which is without words, from the onslaught of words outside. Christianity has come the furthest in adapting to new circumstances because the European secularization process has promoted it the most. Islam, on the other hand, still carries those mythic elements that irritate and also unsettle modern human beings. This mode of faith can exist only in the ghetto, to the extent that it stigmatizes modernity as devil's work and is perceived by modernity as the dark, uncharted part of human beings, forced into the deepest layers of consciousness.

It is remarkable that Islam, which at its core most certainly has strongly rationalist elements, should appear so irrational in today's diaspora. What role does the stigmatization of this religion play in its seeming implacability? Is it not the case that images of Islam as a closed, fanatic, and threatening force more and more frequently lump all Muslims together, including the secular and critical among them, and lock them into this restrictive and hostile perspective?

Religious dogmatists like the fringe position.³ They need the stigmatization in order to define themselves as others. They have taken leave of the process of Enlightenment, of reasoned majority (*Mindigkeit*), and human emancipation. Rationalist, late-industrial society reminds them of their own ritual, mythic remnants, displaced into the subconscious. Citing the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Theodor W. Adorno [and Max Horkheimer] concluded in an essay on anti-Semitism, "Those blinded by civilization experience their own tabooed mimetic features only in certain gestures and behavior patterns which they encounter in others and which strike them as isolated remnants, as embarrassing rudimentary elements that survive in the rationalized environment. What seems repellently alien is in fact all too familiar."⁴ It becomes a projection screen for fears and yearnings.

In this regard the preservation of all cultural identities that are supposed to provide the foundation of a multicultural society ap-

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pears in a completely different light. The pressure to assimilate exerted by the majority corresponds to a counterpressure, exerted by the minority, to preserve. This counterpressure is usually circumscribed with terms such as *cultural independence* and *identity*. In both cases the participants take as their point of departure the illusion that their respective identities are unbroken and easily distinguished from each other. The Muslim becomes the stranger *per se*. The minority represents society's potential enemy. The agenda becomes not to recognize this minority but to expel it.

September 1991

Translated by Judith Orban

Tradition and Taboo

All the taboos of a culture revolve around *topoi*, around the fixed measures of one's own identity, details of pictures and letters of a text.¹ The quoted, fragmented, broken-up text is praise of discord, the body split in two, a spell upon totality. The text toys with those coordinates of identity, built up as power, destroys positions and points of view. Text as an injured tongue. Does the injured person love his wound, his cut tongue?

How much familiarity do we need in a foreign place? How much of that security, that state of being embedded in the legends, myths, configurations of beliefs shared by a people, a sphere of culture?

Stories of prophets, legends of saints couched in a mother tongue that has been pushed into the background, into the role of a second language, these stories displaced to distant, never-seen places known only through photos or dreams. Every strangeling (*Fremdling*) has gone through a coming-to-terms with the mother, but has another such ahead: coming-to-terms with the father. The mother is the guardian of language, of gestures. The father is the keeper of conventions. Father defends the saints from blasphemy. Faith and its prophets. An inner voice holds the strangeling back from blasphemy against his own origin, even though he is filled with rebellion. His inner voice holds him like a chain, until the root has gone numb.

Sooner or later, all feelings die off, together with the numb root. A great deal of pain could be avoided if the root could be ripped out sooner, but it can't be found. What remains after the feelings are gone is the cynicism of the homeless, who travel from one longing to another, ever restless.

Like rotten teeth, the taboos are extracted from the language. A cynic feels no pain. The roots are dead. Nothing is sacred. Fears are banished.

Tradition and Taboo

As soon as the taboo grows silent, it is removed. The mother is already dead then.

How many conventions do we need? How much history? How much tradition?

The history of every stranger ends with his birth. That is what distinguishes him from others, who are the writers of their own histories. The stranger is a writer of stories—often only a storyteller—because the spoken word is the writing of the homeless.

In the pursuit of tradition, many a discovery seems ridiculous, many a feeling seems borrowed, some things are only a cloak, which the next one will throw off. There is no inner voice that promises the ultimate silence, a chain for truth, only noise about a simulated past. Flailing arms, the rage of speechlessness, toothless violence. The taboos are extracted teeth.

Show me your teeth and I will tell you where you come from. The locals have teeth filed to points, with sharp edges and solid roots. With the strangelings it's the very opposite. Their roots are sharp and turned inward, cutting into their own flesh. The points are blunt and smooth.

The identified stranger loses all intimacy. Everything must be revealed. History. The chain that will not relinquish him. He becomes the addressee of others. The foe-friend not chosen by himself. He is mired in an absolutism of relationship from which there is no escape.

The white man hates him. The greatest fear of the white man is being without a home country (*Heimatlosigkeit*). The sum of the suffering of all exiles. The sum of all pangs of conscience for all those whom he has driven out. History in the no-man's-land between memory and conscience, forgotten but not yet entirely repressed—never to be entirely suppressed by any institution of oppression or judgment.

March 1992

Dialogue about the Third Language

GERMANS, TURKS, AND THEIR FUTURE

The girl from whom I bought newspapers every day when I was in Istanbul once asked me if I was a German or a Turk. When she noticed that I was taken aback by her question and hesitating with an answer, she continued talking, as if she were talking for me:

In recent times many come here in order to learn Turkish.

Turks or Germans? I ask back, in the hope that this will enable me to avoid an answer.

Like you, neither nor.

Or both, I say. After all, I can speak Turkish and read newspapers and books in both languages every day.

And where is your homeland? the girl asked back.

Homeland! Who on earth invented this term, and from where did you get it, I blurted out, although inside I felt calm and even keeled.

You must be very sad. Are you mad at me?

I am not sad. I live in Germany and am happy there. I grew up there, you know. I know almost every corner there.

Are you here on vacation?

Finally, a question that I can answer, because the answer will be different from the one she expects, I found myself thinking.

No, I am working here. I came here to write a book. A book about the Germans.

A book about the Germans? About the ones that you know or about the ones that you don't know?

Dialogue about the Third Language

That's something I haven't thought about yet. I think that, in general, I know the Germans very well.

Yes, you are of course one yourself. The girl laughed craftily.

I am very happy not to be a German. To be a German in Germany, that is doubly difficult.

What do you mean?

There are many peoples who don't like themselves and who, because of that, start to hate others. But they love their country, the landscape, the air, the climate in which they live. They balance out the hatred in their head with their body.

Like the Turks, countered the girl.

But the Germans can't stand themselves or their country. They hate with head and body. That's why they need distance between themselves and others. A kind of buffer zone. The others usually don't understand it, but that's in their favor. A hygienic zone that keeps germs from crossing over. It's not necessary to fall over each other.

But they travel around the world so much. Even here there are a lot of them.

That's only to show the others how strong and superior they are. Besides, as I already told you, they don't feel comfortable at home. It's much too cold there and full of factories and superhighways.

That's not true at all, the girl protested loudly. An uncle of mine also lives in Germany. He sent me a calendar once. A wall calendar with twelve pages, one for each month. There were many gorgeous, green landscapes with a lot of forests and old churches. I had a strange feeling inside and wanted to go there right away, a feeling like a yearning, although I've never been there and can't stand my uncle.

Can you understand now why I like living there? Germany is a country that one hates from yearning. A yearning that one absolutely has to get rid of. A country in which every type of gaiety systematically turns itself into mourning. For every way of speaking and

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walking there are clubs and associations, and the state earns money for the belief in God. Just imagine how hard it must be for a German. Everyone envies him for his success and his wealth and the beauty of his country, but no one loves him. He hates the others for what they admire in him. He is like a man unhappily in love, whose desperation sometimes creates something unimaginable and sometimes gives rise to unimaginable destruction. He is lonely.

Isn't it dangerous to live with the Germans? It must be just as bad as with a father and a mother who don't love each other and take it out on their child.

That's exactly what I'm writing about. I'm looking for an answer to the question, How can one like a people that calls itself ugly?

You know, the Germans and the Turks actually get along very well together. They hardly know anything about us, barely take notice of us. We on the other hand know them very well. We play a kind of hide-and-seek. Our relationship is enlivened by an unspoken tension. Yet they suffer from the compulsion to speak about everything until they draw their last. They don't suffer, they enjoy it, especially when they are talking about something that, from their perspective, is outside. They domesticate everything strange with language. In fact, they take notice only of what they put into words. This is how we can protect ourselves from them.

What side are you talking about now?

I'm talking about us and the others. But is that so important? Whether it's us or others, those are just blank spaces that everyone can fill in for himself.

I can't follow you, but I do know that I'm on the side of the Turks.

We are in the process of building islands for ourselves in Germany; we are burying ourselves in our neighborhoods, our familiar routes. We're getting used to the mentality of the buffer zone. Recently I've even started going to a Turkish dentist.

Now I'm really certain that you're a Turk.

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In Berlin, the city that I come from, we live completely according to the city map. There are districts and areas that we're better off not entering. But among ourselves we are safe; we can touch each other, laugh, and be glad. This established order makes life easy for us. Depending on the game plan, we are sometimes more German than the Germans, sometimes more Turkish than the Turks. Perhaps we are even a little more friendly to each other than you all are here among yourselves.

That's like living in prison!

You're exaggerating. Besides, we don't have any language problems anymore. If we don't learn German, we can be certain that the Germans, sooner or later, will learn Turkish.

If you haven't all forgotten your Turkish by then.

And anyway, is that good for you all if the Germans learn Turkish? You said you didn't want them to know you.

Yes, that would completely overburden them. Then our life would really be in danger. Maybe we, Germans and Turks, would have to learn a third, common language that no one except us would understand. That would make us accomplices. In which every one of us would have to spell out who he is. A language that would inject us into each other like a vaccine and immunize us against each other so that we can be together without hurting each other. A third language, in which our children can tell each other about the beauties of their common father- and motherland, can complain to each other about the love and affection that each side withholds, can come together in cold and warmth without neutralizing each other. A third language crafted from the alphabet of the deaf and dumb, from the broken sounds, a bastard language that transforms misunderstandings into comedy and fear into understanding.

That sounds really nice, she says, but just in case you don't find this language, you can all come back here. Sure, it's getting more and more crowded, but somehow we manage. We just shave off some of the buffer zones. Besides, for all of us, this is our homeland. And

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if you all can't part from your Germans, just bring them along with you.

For the person who has lost his homeland and tries to go back, the return will be a minor escape attempt in the face of a larger one. That's what I thought to myself without putting it into words.

April 1992

The Poet and the Deserters

SALMAN RUSHDIE BETWEEN
THE FRONTS

Cultures have begun to fall into formation like armies in battle. This began even before the Ayatollah Khomeini issued the *fatwa* against the writer Salman Rushdie.

The Islamic legacy in European culture has been dispelled from European consciousness in spite of or because of its significant influence on the Renaissance. In the twentieth century the Jewish legacy was subjected to the most comprehensive attempt at eradication in human memory.

Arab thinkers, translators, and poets decisively helped shape European arts and sciences—especially philosophy—in the late Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. Is it possible to imagine Thomas Aquinas without Ibn Sina (Avicenna)? Or the critique of church dogma without Ibn Rushd (Averroës)? How were the poets of Provençal and the troubadours related to the Minnesingers of Arabia?¹ Today these questions occupy, if at all, only a small handful of scholars who call themselves Orientalists. In this context important studies, such as *Avicenna und die Aristotelische Linke* [Avicenna and the Aristotelian left] by Ernst Bloch, have been almost completely forgotten.² In their stead it has become fashionable to speak of the "Islam Problem." It would appear that Islam threatens European civilization, sentences poets to death, banishes those who think differently, exercises no tolerance whatsoever, and is fundamentally inclined to violence. Isn't this ghostly image, eagerly disseminated even by enlightened media, used to justify the behavior of those who act like crusaders of modernity? Those who even pursue ethnic cleansing, as the current jargon has it, in order to save the Occident from the aggressive reach of the Islamic Orient?

something like a negative hermeneutic could perhaps provide a way out. We should no longer cast our eye on what we presume to understand, but on what escapes understanding, defies digestion, violates taboos and boundaries. Only then does work like Rushdie's actually begin to take effect instead of being incorporated and domesticated. Ram A. Mall, an Indian philosopher who teaches in Trier, has described the situation to date best: "Enculturated understanding of the stranger is an understanding of the self with a mask, a masked understanding. The understanding subject appropriates the object to be understood by changing it according to the subject's own design and its own prejudices, by arranging the object and raping it."⁷

On both sides, the generals still have the say, and not the deserters.

December 1992

The Concept of Culture and Its Discontents

One could say that cultures are like trains moving each on its own track, at its own speed, and in its own direction.—Claude Lévi-Strauss, The View from Afar

When one speaks of "culture," one is always speaking only of oneself. There are no other cultures. "Culture" is in itself a tautological concept. When cultures are compared with each other, this happens on the basis of a concept of culture that is a synonym for the person who looks from himself to Others and distances himself from them. The concept of culture is bound to a certain perception of the world, of human beings, and of their history.

When one speaks of "cultural conflict," one has reached the limits of one's own concept of culture. The gaze that looks at the Other falls back onto the one who is looking. From the vantage point of one's own "culture," differences are ascertained that must be removed to resolve conflict. Otherwise one is threatened with the loss of one's own identity, or at least with an identity crisis.

In this sense "culture" has evolved in the history of ideas as one of the most nebulous concepts that language knows. All "cultures" that have not themselves developed this concept, but wanted to apply it to themselves, or were exposed to the more or less "forced" choice to have to apply it to themselves, have failed in doing so. This concept could neither describe nor develop their view of the world; neither could it bring their view of the world into fruitful contact (*Berührung*) with the culture of Others. It led only to a solidification of one's own standpoints, often on unfamiliar ground, to a binding of identity, which became impermeable and—even where it is supposed to

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express self-determination—trafficked in determination by something outside itself. Culture is a circumscription of relations of power (*Herrschaftsverhältnisse*) according to which those in power maintain their positions and convince those whom they dominate to act like them. Thus the desire to preserve one's own "culture" becomes a boomerang. Relations of dependency are veiled behind concepts such as "self-determination" and "cultural identity." One speaks without recognizing that one has no language.

We speak to the Other with our words. We do not speak *with* him because we do not know his words. Perhaps he has no words for the things that we mean. Perhaps the relationship between his words and the things they designate is different from the one that we construe.

For the Greeks of antiquity, those who lived outside Greece—that is, those who did not belong—were barbarians. But what did the barbarians call the Greeks? And what did they call themselves? With the discourse about culture and civilization our sphere, also geographically designated as "West," has created an illusion: the illusion of global, generally human insights. In the abstract, Enlightenment values, such as the concept of human rights, are uncontroversially correct and understandable. Yet we lack the words to communicate these values to others. For we express these insights only in our own language and piously hope that the others will adopt this language. The others are supposed to learn our language because we define the world for everyone. This dissolution of boundaries on our part makes us strong and often arrogant as well. We no longer perceive the other even though he stands before us. If the other wants to communicate with us, he must make our language his own. He must choose concepts that he has not developed. Thus arises a forced dialogue—less a dialogue than a reflected monologue (*reflektierter Monolog*).

Concepts are mirrors into which we gaze. When one speaks, for example, of the "discontent in culture," which culture is meant? The culture that uses this concept to describe itself is distorted when the concept is cited to describe others. "They have no culture" and "their culture is different" are helpless constructions in the futile attempt to situate oneself and others, to create intimacy or distance, or to de-

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scribe such intimacy and distance. It is as impossible to construct generally valid patterns for human relations as it is for people to drink stones. European civilization believes that relations can be generalized, and this belief simultaneously makes it ill. European civilization has glorified interpretive models of the world, which represent variations, as generally valid, eternal truths.

The objective sciences (*Wissenschaften*) in the secularized world, which have assumed the legacy of monotheistic religions, do not function any differently from their predecessors in this regard. It is not the invisible that they render absolute but the visible. Even if there are skeptics and fringe figures in scholarship, as there were in theistic times with respect to absolute metaphysical truths, the dominant tendency is nonetheless to describe and interpret the world unequivocally. This narrows the spectrum of truth. This is what causes the modern world enormous difficulties in dealing with differences. We stand in the tradition of eternal truths and unequivocal explanations, which are at best resolved dialectically. How can theses and antitheses be thought without synthesis, without immediately being forced into a state of war? If "culture" goes hand in hand with keeping drives in check and dampening aggressive potential, then it relies on certain interpretations of drives. Is Freud's school of thought imaginable without the Judeo-Christian-Occidental school that preceded it?

Meanwhile, the counterfeit coinage brought into circulation with the concept of culture has reached astronomic proportions. For one person, culture means home and provincialism; for another, it means national identity. For a third, it means his sexual identity. For yet another, it means openness to the world; and so on.

The concept of "multiculturalism" wants to lend expression to the simultaneity of diverse cultures. But does the meaning of the word (culture) allow for a culture that is not multicultural? Can there be different cultures at all according to the word "culture"? Or is culture not already a concept that is bound to a certain worldview and time?

From the vantage point of culture there can be, as I have said, no other cultures. The concept of "culture" describes always only one

culture, the one from which it itself emerged as a concept. The definition of other cultures as culture already entails a certain way of imagining culture, one that is supposed to be valid for the others too.

There are basically two possible stances one can take toward this state of affairs.

One can make one's own culture, which represents culture *per se*, the measure of the Others. According to this principle, the Others are equal, inferior, or superior in worth. The universalist perspective, which takes a notion of what is generally human as its point of departure, uses such a definition, as do the particularist perspectives, which rest on the perception and respect of differences.

Or one can say farewell to the concept of culture and not grasp one's own language as the means of dealing with (*Auseinandersetzung*) other "cultures." We and the Others are all equally speechless when we look at each other. Language is created only for our own purposes (*für uns selbst*). It doesn't explain the Other; it makes him appear beyond explanation (*unklar*).¹ Once we have recognized that our languages are useless, we take our leave of the need to define the Other in order to define ourselves. We do not have to bind him in order to free ourselves. We are forced to create a new language, together with the Other. For this new language we have no textbook. We cannot rely, as in scholarship (*Wissenschaft*), on facts and an imagined objectivity. But even the concept of subjectivity seems inadequate (*unzulänglich*), since we can no longer define ourselves through the other. That is to say, since we have dissolved our traditional identity. Even the dialectic method, by which we established positions, has lost its usefulness because opposites are no longer discernible as such.

We find ourselves on a journey without having left the place where we stand. It is not our surroundings that are different but we ourselves. We take our leave not only of the concept of "culture" but also of concepts such as synthesis or symbiosis. We turn away from the certainty of knowing that we possess our knowledge only through language, which has gotten away from us.

What is to be done? First of all, we must overcome a fear that the

Other could be somehow superior to us on this score, that he somehow possesses a magic formula, a language for the shared situation that neither of us knows. We are all confronted with a *tabula rasa*, a situation in which we must regard and express our origin, our memories, our legacy anew. We are mute contemporaries, standing blind in front of the past and recognizing in it only hazy, broken outlines. We must take recourse to communicating with each other with a kind of sign language.

Let us try to be clear about what we have lost with the concept of "culture." "Culture" did not only describe our life habits and contexts, our creative achievements and modes of production. It was the very ground on which these things arose and on which they were able to flourish or wither. It was the expression for a certain way of living. If we want to communicate with Others, who find themselves on another ground, who use another expression or have no expression at all for it, we must confess to our speechlessness instead of insisting on our concept of culture. This is difficult because speechlessness is always tied to loss of power. Without language the Other cannot be met with power. Will the Other force his language on us? Will he alienate us from ourselves? Expose us? Perhaps as having lied? Do we not have to resort again to tools of domination in order to escape defeat? All these thoughts are created by a dialectically cast mode of thought that is concerned with describing world history and the civilizing process not as a constant search for shared new languages but rather as a relationship between rulers and ruled, masters and slaves. Everywhere where history unfolded only in categories of domination, history meant the failure of human beings living together. Those presumed to be the victors were only the shadow of the vanquished. Their power was founded on the powerlessness of others.

When those without speech stand across from each other, they must rely on their senses and their bodies. Their bodies develop a new, immediate relationship to space and thus also to each other. They move and interpret the movements of the Other. They coordinate their movements with one another. They cannot shed the fear of being determined by the Other, but at the same time they are guided

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by a drive to observe the Other, to recognize him and to know him. There is a process of cognition, at the end of which something like a coexistence of the One with the Other could stand. Recognition, getting to know each other, and acknowledgement are interdependent. They are the physical, pedagogical, and psychological steps in a process that moves inexorably toward the elimination of speechlessness and the development of a new shared language. The existence of the Other, the perception of his existence, leads to the relativization of one's own standpoint. Whoever takes leave of the concept of culture has razed his fortress. He will no longer be able to think of his standpoint in absolute terms, for he is just as naked and untouched as the Other. His orientation no longer derives from the tips of his shoes but from the horizon, the point where this horizon can melt together with the horizon of the Other. He perceives himself, his own standpoint, as only one possible point on the map of the world. No longer does he perceive the world as a point inside himself.

September 1993

*Interview, conducted in Turkish by Halil Gökhan for
the Istanbul Journal Kitaplık [Bookcase] (1994)*

Germany Is More a Language Than a Land

GÖKHAN: How would you situate yourself and your poetry against the background of home and belonging (*Heimat und Zugehörigkeit*)?¹

ŞENOCAK: It may be that the poet is a part of his poem, yet where does the poem belong? If you approach the poem as a scholar, then you can assume that the poem belongs to the language in which it was written. A sociologist or a literary scholar interprets the poet in the context of the society, the country, the environment in which he lives. Generally the poet is regarded as a being that has provisionally settled into society. Why is this the case? Perhaps the point of departure for a poem is the moment in which a human being does not feel that he belongs to the world in the midst of which he sees himself; the poem is the echo of a dissonance. In the poem I am not looking for the answer to the question "Where do I belong?" For the poem gives no answers. To a certain extent it is a question, a structure unto itself, woven out of questions that have not been asked.

As I understand it, a poem is not a reaction to the world in which a human being finds himself, but to the world that he carries inside himself. I may, for example, live in Berlin. But is the place inside me Berlin? To what extent Berlin? Which Berlin? Where on earth is Berlin? Perhaps I have a Berlin inside me that is located close to the equator.

My poems are perhaps an echo of these questions. Every human being carries a map inside himself, and that is his childhood. I draw my poems on this map, with my own scale. In the process I sometimes follow paths that have been previously marked, sometimes new