

## **Two homelands? Krefeld and Boston? Germany and America?**

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### ***Zwei Heimaten? Krefeld und Boston? Deutschland und Amerika?***

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[*Since this essay was originally written in German for a German audience in Krefeld, Germany, the reader of the English translation needs to be aware that (a) some of the English in the translation may be awkward because the translator has to balance the tasks of remaining loyal to the original text and yet render it into reasonably fluent English, and (b) some of the explanations inserted in the text for the German reader may seem superfluous to the English reader as, for example, the explanation of the term Yankee.*]

In 1957, after earning my *Abitur*<sup>2</sup> at the Fichte Gymnasium, I went happily on my way to Frankfurt to study sociology and law. Just after having enrolled, I found out about a two-year scholarship to study at Georgetown University in the US. This was an unusually alluring opportunity, but did I really want to delay my professional training by two years? Even though I was among the youngest of my *Gymnasium* class, two years are quite a long time for a nineteen year old. Therefore, I sought advice from two trusted mentors from my *Gymnasium* days. Both Mr. Hülsmann, who taught us advanced German and Philosophy, and Dr. Rudolf Besouw, the religious studies teacher at the Arndt Gymnasium and spiritual advisor to the *Bund Neudeutschland* Catholic student association, for which I had served as city leader for two years, strongly encouraged me to apply for the scholarship. My parents also agreed. This firmed up my resolve, and to a certain extent I became, in the words of the old German children's song:

Little Hans, quite by himself,  
went forth into the big wide world.  
His hat is perched jauntily on his head.  
Gripping his walking stick he marches on in good spirits.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Frau Waltraud Fröchte, principal at the Fichte Gymnasium in Krefeld, for her valuable assistance in writing this article.

<sup>2</sup> The *Abitur* is equivalent to 12 years of an American high school plus 2 years of college.

<sup>3</sup> Freely translated from:

I submitted my application, which required a CV and my reasons for applying written in English, my *Abitur* certificate, proof of my personal qualifications, and a personal interview. At semester's end I was somewhat surprised to learn that I had turned out to be the winner of the scholarship contest. The scholarship paid the very high tuition costs in the US, all my living expenses, and the travel costs. To pay for out-of-pocket expenses I was offered part-time work in the University library. In today's dollars the scholarship was worth around \$140,000. But I didn't give that too much thought because I was more worried about how I would make it through the next two years in this far-away country, which at that time was still considered the land of unlimited opportunities, as there were no plans for a holiday trip home during that entire two year period.

Once I had obtained confirmation of enrolment at Georgetown University, I applied for my entry visa to the United States and was vaccinated for smallpox, as stipulated by US regulations at the time. My suitcases were packed (for two years!) and I was ready to start my adventure. This is how after my *Abitur* and just one semester of sociology and law studies in Frankfurt I left my German homeland for the very first time.

Nowadays it takes eight hours to fly from Frankfurt to New York, but in 1957 the trip by sea from Bremerhaven to New York took 10 days. I stood on the pier in New York, happy to have met two American women students whom I had gotten to know during the boat trip and who helped me find my way to the train station (in New York there are two large train stations) and get on the right train, which took me to Washington in five hours. Having studied English for seven years, I could write and read classic and modern texts with ease, but in the curriculum at that time no attention had been paid to everyday conversation. It was during my initial inability to talk English that I first realized what it means to leave your home country and find yourself in a foreign land.

Already as a six-year-old in 1944 I had left Krefeld and the Rhineland with my mother and older brother, as we had been evacuated to Vogelsdorf near Halberstadt in the Harz region. But what did I as a six-year-old know about homeland? I was with my mother, and my mother provided all the warmth and security I needed. I had not yet really developed a feeling of belonging to a particular location. The feeling of belonging to a place seems to develop only *after* one's feelings of personal belonging have matured. For example, when our daughter Veronica was five years old we spent the month of August at the seaside. At the end of the month we started to pack up and explained to her that we now would be returning home again. Veronica instantly replied: "But this is our home here!" Can we conclude from this that for a child the feeling of homeland as a place comes after the feeling of personal belonging?

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Hänschen klein, ging allein,  
in die weite Welt hinein.  
Stock und Hut, steht ihm gut,  
ist gar wohlgemut.

Surely the presence of parents provides a key sense of security to a child. When I was 10 years old and was “sent off” to Bad Orb for six weeks, without my family, to convalesce and get better nutrition (these were the post-war hunger years), I never had any doubts that Krefeld was my home and where I belonged. Even my train trip to the university in Frankfurt did not feel like leaving home, because studying in another city did not mean a permanent change in residence. As is conveyed in German so appropriately, I “*visited*” the *university* as a student while planning to return to my hometown of Krefeld during semester breaks as well as after the end of these studies. At least this was how I envisioned it, even if things didn't quite turn out that way.

At Georgetown University in Washington DC I fell in love with an American woman whose home was in the US state of Rhode Island<sup>4</sup>. She was born and lived there until coming to Washington for her studies. Other than her local home in Rhode Island, she also had another ancestral homeland, as her ancestors on both her mother's and father's side had come from Ireland. As I soon discovered, this emotional attachment was very strong, and she described herself – as did all her relatives and many friends with the same history – as Irish American. It is interesting to note how these concepts and feelings of homeland last over three generations and across wide geographic and time distances. In America this is true not only for Irish Americans, but also for Italian Americans, Russian Americans, German Americans, and many others. Furthermore, the idea that someone could be attached to *two* homelands was new to me.

Our relationship led to our engagement and then to the question of where we should start our new lives together, in Germany or the United States. Since I had by now been living in the United States for two years and had at least an idea of what it meant to be born and raised in America as well as to live there, the question arose as to whether it would be important and meaningful for my future wife to learn something about my homeland in order for our marriage to have a solid foundation. We decided that indeed it was important for my wife to learn something about my origins, or, as is said in the American vernacular, “what makes him tick.” This is an American expression which asks “What's happening inside this person?” by using the concept of a clock in a transferred sense (i.e. “What kind of a clockwork does he have?”) to convey the broader question “What kind of a soul does he have?” For we both sensed that our inner identities are marked deeply by the experiences in our childhood and youth in our respective homelands.

Thus, we agreed to spend a few years in Germany, or at least as long as I needed to finish my law studies. At the end of this period we would then decide together where we would make our common homeland, in Germany or in America. And so it came to pass that we spent four years in Frankfurt, where I successfully completed my law degree. Then we looked at each other and asked “What now?” My wife said that she felt comfortable in Germany and would be

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<sup>4</sup> The full name of this smallest of US states is “Rhode Island and Providence Plantation,” wherein the word *Plantation* is taken to mean that people needing to leave their homeland could settle in this new area and were “*transplanted*” to a new homeland. The state's founder, Roger Williams, intentionally used the word *Providence* to indicate God's hand in transplanting settlers.

happy to stay there with me. But I was drawn to America. I have often asked myself where this feeling of being “drawn” to America came from. One explanation is surely based on the experience that in the sixties married students in Germany were still by and large a rarity and that, furthermore, marriages between Germans and Americans or other foreigners were viewed with some scepticism. On the other hand, in the US, marriages between different nationalities, religions, foreigners and locals, today even between different races, were and continue to be more tolerated. Moreover, I was drawn to the many opportunities in the US, even if these were not in fact unlimited.

So we decided to emigrate, to leave the homeland of my birth and to settle in the United States, establishing a new homeland there. And that’s when I experienced my first shock: already in Washington, I had to re-spell my German name Köhler as Kohler, because at least at that time the *umlaut* was not only largely unknown but barely recognized in American speech and writing. This has changed in the meantime, as the New York Times, for example, now prints German names with *umlauts*. But at that time, when I immigrated to America, my name was permanently changed to Kohler, and that hurt. It was the loss of a little piece of my German identity, of my connection to my homeland.

I was not conscious of the fact that I had been preceded in my emigration from Germany to America by millions of others. Today, it is clear that in all countries and in all periods of history emigration is a very common part of life. You could almost say that *Homo sapiens* started off as *Homo migrans* in the African crib and then spread out across the world. Anke Seitz describes this in her article *In Search of Oneself [Auf der Suche nach sich selbst]*<sup>5</sup> as follows: “The history of humanity begins with migration, it is as old as mankind itself. Historically, it is a natural human activity in the search for food, pasture, and space to settle. ... If in pre- and early human history migration had more to do with climatic changes, today we can identify many causes for migration. There are economic, social, religious, philosophical, professional, and political reasons driving people to leave their ‘homeland’.” As for me, you could add one more personal reason, namely the idea that in our country of choice we would find a better environment for our marriage. In our case you could almost say that we expected more feelings of security and belonging in terms of homeland, in terms of “being at home,” and in terms of being accepted as an international married couple in the new homeland rather than the old one.

At the same time, however, I knew from the start that by leaving Germany I not only would lose my first homeland but also my connection to the German language and culture, relationships with my German friends, and to a certain extent to my German family. Last but not least: I would lose the comfort of the flat landscape of the Lower Rhine region with its nearly endless sky. These losses were final and are not easy to replace, if at all. For me and my new family it was not possible to bring my first homeland with us to the New World. Our student pastor in Frankfurt, Ottmar Dessauer, had said with a wink that

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<sup>5</sup> Anke Seitz: *In search of oneself – pathways to discovering identity for children and youth of immigrant families*. Analytische Psychologie [Analytical Psychology], Volume 156, pg. 153 (Brandes & Apsel Verlag 2009)

we both needed an island in the middle of the Atlantic where we could unite both worlds, the old and the new.

We found our common homeland in Boston with its many universities and opportunities to earn a Doctorate of Law. After passing the bar exam I started out as a fresh baked lawyer at a large Boston law firm, which then counted 25 lawyers and now has several hundred. But this occurred slowly – it wasn't exactly overnight – because back then, in order to be admitted to the bar, you had to be an American citizen.<sup>6</sup> This meant I had to give up my German citizenship, a further loss in my connection to my original homeland.

It was not long, based on my fluency in German, my German law degree and my familiarity with the German scene, before I practiced in the area of international business law, especially with regard to business transactions between Germany and the US. This offered me the possibility to remain connected with my German homeland through German correspondence and counselling in German.

Did Boston and the US also become my homeland? Roughly five years after immigrating, I flew to one of the states in the south of the US for a German client. There I met two business people, one who knew that Boston was my home but not that I was German, and the second, who knew nothing at all about me, asked the first: "So where is Kohler from?" To which the first replied, "Can't you hear it by his accent? *He is a damn Yankee!*"

Here I must add two clarifications: the first is that since the American civil war of 1861-1865, Southerners, who lost the war, sometimes refer to Northerners disparagingly as *damn Yankees*. Secondly, people from Boston and its vicinity in New England have an accent that is distinctly recognizable to the American ear, as do Southerners, those in the so-called Mid-West, and people from other US regions or of different racial origins; it is the same kind of difference one finds between a Bavarian and a Rhine dialect, for example.

Even today I am amazed at how being called a *damn Yankee* gave me a feeling of belonging in America. It was from this unintentional compliment from a US Southerner who did not know me that I suddenly was an American. It was as if my German accent and my German origins associated closely with it had been simply erased. Of course, this was an exception, because normally I am recognizable as a German living in the US. After a few years, I had the same experience in reverse when I came back to Germany for visits, in that suddenly my German colleagues, clients, and other business people would see me as an American. Even my mother noticed that my German had acquired a new, supposedly American cadence.

It appears to be a human tendency to classify others according to their geographic origin. For American Southerners I was a Northerner or *damn Yankee*, and for Americans in general I was a German or in the best case scenario an American who had originally emigrated from Germany. In Germany,

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<sup>6</sup> Shortly after I was admitted to the bar in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the US Supreme Court declared this condition of being an American citizen as unconstitutional because there is no reason for linking a lawyer's profession with national security.

sometimes, I was perceived as an American. Once, while visiting a client in Bavaria who found out that I was originally from the Rhineland, I was called *Saupreuß* (a disparaging term for northern Germans in Germany's South, literally translated as "Prussian pig"). As he expressed so colorfully in his Bavarian dialect: "Of course, you are a Prussian pig. [Bist jo a Saupreiß.]"

Such disparaging categorizations of others can be seen as the negative or dark side of the feeling of homeland. The human need for security and belonging seems to require separating oneself from others and from the unknown. The more we emphasize homeland and our associated comfort level, the more we exclude that which does not belong to it. Surely it is important that a family, an extended family, a tribe, and people living together in the same locality should develop and foster connectedness and a mutual sense of belonging, but there is a danger that overemphasizing this "sense of home" can render it difficult to understand other people living in a neighboring town, another German or US state, country, or continent. Even the US, which was founded by immigrants and today is comprised 99%<sup>7</sup> of immigrants and their descendants, the local population frequently opposes new waves of immigrants, which today are comprised largely of Asians, Africans, and Central and South Americans, especially if the latest arrivals threaten the economic well-being of those who have been here longer.

After a few years working as a lawyer I accepted a professorship in American and International Business Law at one of the Law Faculties in the State of Massachusetts. As a professor I then began to write regular articles for the German legal journal *Recht der Internationalen Wirtschaft* ("International Business Law"). This afforded me yet another significant connection to my native German language.

Having earned a sabbatical in the seventh year of my professorship, I wanted to use this free time to engage in activities completely unrelated to law. On the advice of a good friend I began a Jungian psychoanalysis and attended classes at the C.G. Jung Institute Boston. This would have serious consequences. As Goethe's Sorcerer's Apprentice cries out:

My Master, I have need of Thee!  
From the spirits that I called,  
Sir, deliver me!

The deeper I went into analyzing my dreams and the more I progressed in the understanding of my life and soul and in my psychological studies, the more these activities devoured my time. It was not long before I gave up my professorship. A few years later I closed my law practice and devoted my time exclusively to my training in order to obtain my Diploma in Analytical Psychology at the C.G. Jung Institute Boston. In 1991, I began my practice as a Jungian Psychoanalyst and am still practicing today.

During my training I had an experience which has consequences even today. The *Collected Works* of C. G. Jung, about 20 volumes, had been

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<sup>7</sup> Less than 1 percent of the US population consists of Native Americans as "Indians" are called today.

translated into English decades ago. Regardless of the fact that this translation must be described as less than successful, while reading the English translation it soon appeared to me that it could not adequately convey the emotion or the meaning of the original. Only when I read Jung's texts in the original German did a "bulb switch on" and I understood, both in my head and in my heart, the insights and wisdom contained in these texts. I had never experienced this during my studies of American law, and I asked myself why it was necessary to return to my native German tongue in order to obtain a deeper understanding of Jung's concepts and the meaning of dreams. Today I suspect that this was necessary because both the mother tongue and the "language" of dreams are deeply rooted in the human soul and connected there.

Dreams and visions have been important to humanity since times immemorial. In the Hebrew Bible we read about young Joseph, whose dreams appeared to lift him above his brethren. His brethren therefore sold him into Egyptian slavery,<sup>8</sup> but Joseph nevertheless became an important dream interpreter for the Pharaoh.<sup>9</sup> When his brethren suffered a great famine, they came to Joseph and begged him for grain. They were compelled to bow to him, just as he had dreamed. In the New Testament we read that the birth of Jesus was accompanied by many dreams and visions.<sup>10</sup> And in modern times Freud called dreams the *via regia* to the depths of the soul. Today we know that analyzing our dreams can help us understand our innermost selves and the meaning of life, thereby improving the way we live our lives.

Despite the need to utilize the knowledge of my native German to understand Jungian psychology, shortly after starting my very own analysis something quite notable occurred. I dreamed less and less in German and more and more in American English. One doesn't just dream "in a language," but the people who appear in our dreams often converse with the dreamer, and these conversations in my dreams were increasingly in American English. Did this mean that my homeland had shifted from Germany to America, at least in the depths of my soul? Had I finally left the homeland of my ancestors?

I saw my parents' house for the second-to-last time in 1980 after they had died the previous year, on the occasion of emptying the house and arranging its sale with my brother. Much more than simply losing the home and even the attic room I had built myself, I felt the impending loss of our garden where I had spent many hours as a child playing in the sandbox and later gardened as an adolescent. My father had granted me permission to redesign the garden, even to change the paths and replant shrubs such as gooseberries and currants. This intimate connection to "Mother Earth," in more than one sense of the term, was to be torn apart. It hurt.

The last time I saw my parents' house was no longer with my own eyes but on photographs that a schoolmate sent me a few years ago. My parents' house as I remembered it had been an unpainted grey stucco row house. However, the photos show a dark-red brick façade, which gives the house a completely different character. This was no longer my parents' house, which

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<sup>8</sup> Moses, Chapter 37.

<sup>9</sup> Moses, Chapter 41.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew, Chapter 2.

made it relatively easy to abandon the fantasy of a *parental* home, an *ancestral* home to which I could return.

So where is my homeland now? In Krefeld, Germany *or* in Boston, USA? Or is this the wrong way to ask the question? Is the right question perhaps: “Is my home in Krefeld *and* in Boston, in Germany *and* in America? Do I need to say, in the words of Goethe’s Faust: “Two souls, alas, live in my breast?”<sup>11</sup> Is it possible to integrate the two outer homelands at least within the soul? I have struggled with these questions for several years now.

In psychology, just as in theology and philosophy, the quest for what is real and the relationship between the external and internal, or between body and soul, has always been very important. When I recently read my last German *Gymnasium* essay from 1957, I was surprised that at the age of 19, I already had something to say about it. The essay had the following assignment:

“Give your opinion on the following statement by Bertrand Russell: Man is an interesting biological species which has had a remarkable history and whose disappearance none of us can desire.”

What surprised me today about this essay I wrote then was my discussion at its end, in which I rejected both Russell’s overemphasizing mankind’s biological side as well as the overemphasizing of humans as rational beings:

“In my opinion, the truth is most likely that in an ensouled body, body and soul live in mutual interaction, permeating and influencing each other. One cannot conceptualize the human being as a material being in whom the soul exists separately within the body.”

This is essentially my opinion even today, and I am moved by how I had already articulated the core of my conviction today during my youth. A few years ago I formulated this in an article appearing in JungPage<sup>12</sup> as follows: “I believe that at the time of the very earliest development of the human person, when both physical and psychic components (or two sides of the same coin) begin to unfold, happens what Ken Wilber calls *Spirit-in-action*, ‘where Spirit unfolds itself at every stage of development, ...an infinite process that is completely present at every finite stage, but becomes more available to itself [i.e. consciousness] with every evolutionary opening’.”<sup>13</sup> Modern neurobiology and quantum physics appear to confirm this hypothesis.

My dreams have also been occupied with the question of the external and internal realms and with the question of an external local or geographic home and an inner spiritual home. In 2006 and 2007, I had a series of dreams that appear to integrate my birth and my chosen homelands. In the first dream in early 2006 my father visited us in the United States. At this point he had already been dead for 27 years and furthermore had never been able to visit us in the US. In the dream he accompanied us to mass, which was celebrated by a German-speaking priest. After giving an introduction in American English, the priest said the following in German: “My brothers and sisters, I will say

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<sup>11</sup> Goethe’s Faust, Part 1, Before the Gate.

<sup>12</sup> [www.cgjungpage.org](http://www.cgjungpage.org).

<sup>13</sup> *Archetypes and Complexes in the Womb* (2007), to be read or downloaded at [www.cgjungpage.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=870](http://www.cgjungpage.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=870).

something special to you today.” I interpret this dream as a coming together of my homeland by birth, represented by my father, with my chosen homeland in America, represented by my father’s participation at the mass in America. My dream father, at least in a spiritual and emotional sense, brought my *fatherland* to America.

In the last dream in late 2007, I was on a bike tour in Germany and visited my parents, both of whom had in fact been dead for 28 years and their house had been sold two years after that. While in the first dream my father, representing my German ancestral family, came to America, this time I travelled as the American back to my German homeland and made a bike tour, as I had frequently done in my youth. What was quite clear in this dream was my feeling that on this tour I was both: *at home* with my parents while *visiting* them at the same time. Since in Krefeld at my parents’ house I felt both at home and like a visitor, as a visitor I must have had a home somewhere else, and that is America.

In the beginning of this essay I wrote how *Homo sapiens* is actually *Homo migrans*. This human trait, that of the wanderer, does not manifest itself merely in the continuous change of our external location, but also in our inner spiritual development: the new-born becomes a child, the child becomes the youth, and the youth becomes the young woman or man, who then often become married individuals who might become parents. Then a whole new cycle begins when parents become grandparents and maybe even great-grandparents before getting very old and nearer to death, our last known migration. During this internal migration we leave behind our spiritual homes over and over, conquering new ones. But we never lose our earlier homelands entirely. “The child remains within the man,” as the folk saying goes, and quite correctly.

This is how it is with me. My first home in Krefeld, in the Rhineland and in Germany, had to be given up in order to achieve a new homeland in Boston, in New England, and in the United States. And yet – and yet – as my dreams show, both homelands appear to unite within me. It is notable that it took a half century, from the first time I left my parents’ house and my homeland in Krefeld in 1957 until my dreams and their interpretation in America in 2006 and 2007 before my soul was able to integrate my birth and chosen homelands in such a way that the feeling of being home encompasses both worlds. It doesn’t surprise me at all that this inner adaptation of the soul to outer circumstances has taken so long, because we know that the human psyche changes only very slowly.

The answer to the question of my title “Two homelands? Krefeld and Boston? Germany and America?” thus should be – at least in my case – that there is one greater homeland encompassing Krefeld and Boston, Germany and America. In other words: my new homeland did not replace the old homeland, but instead it became a new inner spiritual homeland encompassing both my birth homeland of Krefeld and Germany and my chosen homeland of Boston and America. Our student pastor Dessauer had it right 50 years earlier with his fantasy island, but not in the literal sense of an island in the middle of the Atlantic, but in the sense of a central, rooted feeling of homeland in myself, big enough to include and unite the series of homelands I have experienced.



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