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Family Secrets and Hybrid Identities: Rewriting the Past for the Future in Rafik Schami's *Reise zwischen Nacht und Morgen* and Zafer Senocak's *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft*

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German literature of the 1990s explores three crucial trends that dominated the public discourse of that decade: integration, normalization and globalization (Taberner 3). Connected with these major and overlapping concerns, it was also a decade that brought not only epochal political changes but saw «the emergence of a transnational or global memory culture of astonishing proportions» (Huyssen 147–48), affecting literary production on cultural and individual memory of the twentieth century in Germany and elsewhere. A growing body of literature, embedded in the larger framework of the period, focused on issues of national and individual identity, ethnicity, family histories and cultural/personal memory and thematized a diversity that was not only recognized as being part of the evolving present of a unified Germany but that also reached back to previous generations. This literature reflected on the new social realities and cultural struggles shaping and changing German society with an intense look at the past, the present, and the future. Questions of national identity and the memory of the past that had been suppressed became foremost concerns because of and following unification, which also resulted in new debates on racism, immigration and Germany as a de facto multicultural, multiethnic society. The 1990s offered a historical moment, a juncture, in which the recognition of a shared – even if conflicted or contested – past for minorities and ethnic Germans living in Germany became crucial. As early as 1990, Zafer Senocak had asked in his essay «Germany – Home for Turks?» «Doesn't immigrating to Germany also mean immigrating to, entering into, the arena of Germany's recent past?» (Senocak, *Tropical Germany* 6).[1] Sixteen years later in 2006 Senocak concludes that the wish for normalization since unification and the process of immigration and integration (especially of Turks in Germany) are still at odds. In his view Germany not only remains unprepared to deal with the current multiethnic society and the social conflicts that arise but also needs to adopt a different approach to-

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wards its past if it wants to include the new German citizens. German history, specifically World War II and the Holocaust, is no longer the history of all current German citizens (*das land* 150–52).[2] It is in the literature of the 1990s where the impact of these new national and psychological constellations and changing perspectives played out in reflections on evolving cultural perceptions, questioning previously held notions of an ethnically fixed homogeneous German identity and with that a homogeneous outlook on its past.[3]

In this essay I discuss two novels from the 1990s which aimed to offer new perspectives on issues of identity and the discourse on memory and family histories: *Reise zwischen Nacht und Morgen* (1995) by Arab German writer Rafik Schami and *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (1998) by Turkish German author and poet Zafer Senocak. Both novels are part of post-wall German literature of the 1990s and are texts embedded in various forms of transnational and cross-cultural entanglement, portraying multilayered references. As transnational texts, these writings convey a plurality of cultural experience and with that an awareness of simultaneous, at times also contrapuntal, dimensions, moving between times, spaces and places, thereby crossing into other histories and territories (Seyhan, *Writing* 14). Yet, more than (just) crossing into other histories, both texts to different degrees engage notions of historical and personal (family) «entanglement» across nations, languages, histories and memories – notions that have become the foci in debates on postcolonial studies and transnational histories in the social sciencies (Conrad and Randeria 17). Leslie Adelson suggests instead of the term «entangled histories» the notion of «touching tales» in her analysis of the literature of Turkish migration since these, she argues, are literary stories and not historical or sociopolitical accounts of causes and effects of entanglements (*Turkish Turn* 21). For her the concept of «touching tales» describes figurative ambivalences and effects of exchanges and interactions that reveal the historical and social interconnectedness in which the metaphoric touching of individual (his)stories portrays entangled histories and interwoven cultural contexts that are not necessarily easily understood, sorted out and categorized (*Turkish Turn* 21).[4] The concept of touching tales and close cultural entanglement also challenges, on the one hand, the commonly held idea of distinct (fixed) sides communicating with one another either as nations or as individuals and, on the other, the notion that immigrants live in suspension between two worlds. Thus the binary focus on the two sides is enhanced and not the connection between them and the change that has occurred within groups and individuals. The chosen texts question the construction of distinct entities through various means and challenge German society's dominant political and cultural self-

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understanding in vital ways. They importantly point to newly imagined life stories with a broader spectrum of shared histories in transnational contexts and as multiethnic identities than previously assumed. Gerd Gmünden in his critical essay on three German intellectuals and their problematic nostalgia in connection with a narrowly constructed German national identity argues for «acts of memory that connect the present with the past in profitable ways,» affecting the future positively (131).

Both Schami and Senocak have been outspoken about minority rights and the art of cultural production by minority artists in Germany since the 1980s. They both have argued for different ways to engage in a dialogue to enter into new realms of understanding in the German context (Schami, «Reden;» «Literatur» 56–57; Senocak, *das land* 119–21, 141–42). Schami has fostered an idea of dialogue that is supported by and integral to a multicultural atmosphere of tolerance and respect that many of his stories and novels portray; Senocak demands productive self-criticism as a prerequisite for a meaningful dialogue and a different approach to the German past and to Jews and Turks in contemporary Germany (*das land* 121). Even though Schami and Senocak pursue very distinct narrative and thematic models, there are striking similarities that I want to focus on (as well as differences) between these two texts.[5] The main protagonists in both works find or inherit a box with documents containing (supposedly) revelations about their family history that was previously hidden from them. This event triggers a search for identity in diverse historical, transnational and imaginary contexts. The main protagonist in each novel and their respective individual story represent «the heterogeneity that *already* exists within Germany – certainly as a consequence of forty years of Western integration, but also because the alleged cultural and ethnic homogeneity has always been a fictional construct» (Gmünden 131). The main characters in both novels fulfill this critical function of undermining notions of binarism by introducing cultural heterogeneity that embodies complex hybrid identities (Dollinger 59–60). In addition, the entangled family histories of both main protagonists reach back beyond the postwar era and go back to the early twentieth century, disclosing an even longer directly shared interaction that had to be imaginatively recaptured to make it known. Furthermore both texts do not present marginalized and disenfranchised minority protagonists living in Germany. The authors do not claim to be depicting representative minority experiences but «point to other lived experiences precisely in order to question the idea of an identity that is representative» (Hall 74). Both texts fit into a larger context of writing about family histories in Germany in the 1990s that reflect new ways of confronting German history, seeking to incorporate ethnic, cultural, religious, national, and biographic diversity into a different type of com-

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ing to terms with the past as, for example, Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe: Eine Familiengeschichte* and Kathrin Schmidt's *Die Gunnar-Lennefsen-Expedition* show.[6] While the attempt of «Vergangenheitsbewältigung,» of coming to terms with the past, meaning the Nazi past, was a West German project prior to the 1990s, a new way of thinking and literary writing about the past emerged in the 1990s that was more experimental and included different psychological constellations beyond the generational confrontations of older stories mainly focusing on the father-and-son relationship. One can say that the themes and the theoretical preoccupation of the 1990s had shifted to discourses focusing on various forms of memory in connection with forgetting, with history, with trauma, with narrative, and with mourning (Gerstenberger 237).

In a number of essays during the 1990s, Senocak criticized the mainstream German attempt to come to terms with the Nazi past («Vergangenheitsbewältigung»), which he saw more as a strategy to forget and suppress what had happened. Yet he also took issue with the Turkish immigrant population that wanted to gain financially from the migration north that shared Germany's present but took no interest in its history (Senocak, *Atlas* 20). He wondered then how a doubly divided («geteilt und getrennt») country, in East and West and from its past, such as Germany, spared the new immigrants their own confrontation with just this history (*Atlas* 20). We can see how Senocak's novels of the 1990s are influenced by his knowledge of this gap and also that his literary production is part of Turkish German literature of the 1990s that «signals cultural transformation beyond the mere themes of unification and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*» (Adelson, «The Turkish Turn» 327). The novels *Reise zwischen Nacht und Morgen* and *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* participate in these developments by introducing new characters, plots and schemes to ask different types of questions. Both novels focus on individuals and their hidden, fragmented family histories as telling examples through which the protagonists experience the connection between the past and the present. My focus in the examination of these two texts is on how they turn forms of remembrance for the(ir) (different) past(s) into a significant moment of change in the present by performing acts of memory that connect the present with the past in ways that the protagonists gain from this moment a sense of direction for a transformation in the future. The main protagonists attempt to overcome the ghosts of the past by wanting to invent the story that they can only imagine and will never fully know.

As an author and storyteller, Rafik Schami emphasizes the dialogical structure at work in his stories through which he aims to offer alternative viewpoints to the reader («Literatur» 55–58). By incorporating his particular con-

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cerns and sociopolitical ideas, his experience of life in Syria as well as his life of exile in Germany into his narrative, Schami introduces new elements of cultural hybridity into the text itself and into the German literary landscape. This articulation of difference and hybridity is seen as an ongoing complex negotiation between different processes that emerge in moments of historical transformations (Bhabha 2). In the 1980s, Schami was keenly aware of the emerging transnational literature in Germany as bringing forth «andere lebendige Formen, die aus dem Schmelz herauskommen» (Tantow 39). The author understands his literary contributions as a synthesis of European and Arabic influences and wishes to break open the limits of German literature and to seek new horizons (*Damals* 91). The emphasis on dialogue and storytelling can lead, in his view, to greater cross-cultural understanding and forms of polycultural identities (Schami, «Reden» 58; «Literatur» 56–57). These ideas correspond to similar views expressed by Senocak on multiple identity construction, syncretic writing styles, and important criticism on the current discourse on memory and the nation (Senocak GV 127, *Atlas* 63, *das land* 141–53). By intercultural dialogue Schami understands concrete conversations among various characters or between two individuals, as for example, among the circus troupe members, between Valentin and Nabil, as well as Valentin and his half-sister Hanan in *Reise zwischen Nacht und Morgen.* For him, the act of listening and reciprocity is crucial to a meaningful dialogue, which is a theme and also a structural device embedded in many of his stories (*Reise* 182). The term intercultural communication has been criticized (Eigler 95–96, Adelson, *Turkish Turn* 33) since it often foregrounds an encounter between distinctly homogeneous parties without problematizing the understanding of such a homogeneity and the image of the self/other. Yet, this is not the understanding of dialogic communication that Schami and Senocak uphold. Their viewpoints resonate in Friederike Eigler's proposal of a more dynamic and useful understanding of interculturality and dialogue stemming from a revised perspective on the evolving and changing internal processes of culture and identity in recent scholarly studies (95–97). For Schami, it is precisely in transnational literature, in storytelling, and in the arts as threshold spaces that cultural master monologues can be countered and a dialogue made possible as an alternative model against an orientation towards fixed contours and outcomes («Literatur» 55–58). Senocak also formulates a hope in literature as a translating – touching – force with transforming energy (*das land* 32). In fact, as some of his essays and his novel problematize, Senocak aims to shake up and restart a seemingly stuck conversation, as for example, between Turks and Germans, or Jews and Germans, and open up a real or «figural image of a trialogue» (Adelson, *Turkish Turn* 121).

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One important aspect of Schami's unique syncretic narrative style is his synthesis of the Arab oral and literary traditions and fairy tale form(s) with current discourses in Germany.[7] In the fairy tale novel *Reise zwischen Nacht und Morgen* the reader encounters characters that live in Germany of the 1990s and imaginary «Arabia» of the same time period. There are many «real» as well as clearly fantastic fairy tale elements interwoven in this text in the fashion of an Arabian story. This structure allows Schami to inject «real» elements as well as purely fantastic events which connect different possible layers of time, location, and cultural significations. The author fictionalizes more than in his previous writing the challenge of an inclusive (hybrid) German cultural identity, a search for one's roots, and topics relating to twentieth-century German history, moving away from earlier concerns of migration and immigration. Moreover, not only Germany experienced demographical, sociopolitical and conceptual shifts, but the Arab World and the Middle East were undergoing enormous political changes as well, starting with the long civil war in Lebanon, the Intifada, the first Gulf War, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the breaking down of peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis, the growing Islamic fundamentalism of the last two decades, and the Rushdie Affair, to mention only the most obvious instances. These changes, along with the breakdown of the Soviet Union, created a new reception in the West of the East, in which the images and reports turned from a cultural to a political dimension, and Arabs could become the new enemy (Aifan, *Araberbilder* 80). All these developments have influenced Schami and other Arab German writers. Schami saw a need to link his new themes with his agenda to inform his readers about the Arab world to counteract the increasingly negative images of Arabs that he experienced in Western media (*Damals* 63). As Uta Aifan points out, the 1990s generated a differentiation and reorientation in Schami's work in terms of Middle East developments and national (German) affairs and changes (*Araberbilder* 234–36). During that decade Schami concentrated on mediating the historical and contemporary relationship between the Orient and the Occident against existing clichéd images of the Arab world, on the one hand and, on the other, increasingly discussed the self-understanding of Germans, which had become a pressing issue after unification (*Araberbilder* 233). By negotiating these crucial elements thoughtfully in a story, Schami gives readers a chance to embark on a journey of reviewing notions of Arab and German identities and societies from a new angle. The author's fictional and essayistic work aims to present mediations and questions that contribute to a revision of the fixed understandings of Germans and Arabs of one another and of themselves respectfully and self-critically (*Eisberg* 40–50).[8]

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In the frame story of the novel *Reise zwischen Nacht und Morgen,* Valentin Samani, the sixty-year old director of a hundred-year old circus lives in a little town in Germany. He is waiting for an opportunity for his circus to travel and perform again. However, he is financially unable to get his troupe and his animals on the road. Then, surprisingly, he and his circus are invited to perform in fictive «Arabia» simultaneous with Valentin's discovery of his mother's diary in the attic. The journal tells the story of her secret love for his biological Arab father whom Valentin has not known about. Now he sees his own childhood, family life, his mother's suffering, and his (nonbiological) father's behavior towards him in a different light. By traveling to «Arabia,» by searching for his biological father's family and his mother's lost (her)story, the protagonist also realizes his wish to become a writer to narrate his mother's life and hidden love story.

The metaphor of circus life is central to Schami's web of tales and memories in *Reise zwischen Nacht und Morgen,* a text that creates an alternative multiethnic, multilingual, and transnational atmosphere. In an essay entitled «Vom Circus der Kulturen» (1999), Schami recognizes the circus itself as a fitting art form to negotiate complex interactions (albeit allegorically in his novel) between cultures. He discusses the existence of an intricate historical connection between the East (Arabs) and the West (Germans). The author speaks of the East as the cradle of Europe («die Wiege Europas») and of the forgetting of this relationship in our modern times («Circus» 30). Schami refers to images from the world of the circus to describe some specific difficulties as well as joys in this encounter between the East and the West, Arabs and Germans. A motive he has in using the circus image, as he explains elsewhere, is precisely to mix playfulness and ease with hard, risky work as is done in the circus itself: if an author presents a story in an artistically well-thought out, varied and gripping manner, readers/listeners will continue to pay attention (*Damals* 140). The way Schami uses circus acts and images in the essay to examine the problems of Arab German relations does not transfer easily to his novel, in which he portrays circus life through various interconnected layers. But the role of circus director that Schami takes on in his essay to mediate between Germans and Arabs resonates in the role of Valentin Samani, the main protagonist and circus director in the novel. Valentin functions as a mediator in many roles: between members of the troupe (*Reise* 224), between the circus and the outside world on their travels, and between the past and the present and his own manifold «real» and «unreal» impressions of living in «Arabia.» The circus in the novel stands for an array of ideas that he artfully configures as multilayered tales of love, of admiration of the circus as an art form, of transcultural exchanges, of migration and travel, and especially also of the

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search for one's family roots and complex identity. The circus functions as a metaphor for life and its complexities as well as its absurdities.[9]

The sixty-year old Valentin Samani is trying to discover his family's past, his biological father's identity, and the reason why his mother lived her life in separation from the man she loved. With the German Valentin, a son of a Hungarian mother who married into the German circus family, and an Arab German (paternal and nonbiological) grandmother, the family has had family ties and close connections to the Arab world reaching back to the beginning of the twentieth century and even to the Middle Ages (*Reise* 24). His paternal grandfather, married to an Arabic woman from «Ulania,» adopted the Arabic name «Samani» as their family name in 1900, discarding the name «Ruprecht» because he had such fond memories of the expression of an Arab friend: «Ja, Samani! O meine Zeit» (25). Valentin, restless and lonely after the death of his wife, coincidentally finds his mother's diary and discovers the untold story of his Arab father and the secret life-long liason his mother had. Very soon afterwards he wishes to write his mother's secret love story. One aspect of Valentin's writing project illuminates Schami's own narrative style (*Eisberg* 17): Valentin wants to construct his tale as a circus show. Alternating difficult acts with lighthearted clown pieces, he wants his readers not to be subdued by the complexity of the whole, but to be drawn into the story in an entertaining manner (*Reise* 40). In the process of envisioning places and story lines, it becomes very clear to Valentin that all the significant threads of his own life story come together in so-called Arabia (*Reise* 39). This corresponds strongly to the idea Schami expresses in his essay on the circus: the East as the cradle of Europe, forgotten and suppressed in the grand scale of history as well as in private lives. The novel reveals yet another vital dimension: when it becomes known to Valentin late in his life that his biological father is an Arab, heterogeneity enters the story consciously and questions – without leading to a discussion of the political consequences and social implications much further – the notion of an ethnically and culturally homogeneous German identity.[10] The fictional account of Valentin's multiethnic, heterogeneous identity is manifest in the following facts: his mother is Hungarian, his father an Arab, his paternal/nonbiological grandmother also an Arab, his nonbiological grandfather and father German. He was born in Australia and has lived in about 40 countries with the circus that calls Germany its home. These cultural and biological linkages present touching tales which invert the alleged homogeneity of a self-perceived German identity that has been publicly constructed throughout the twentieth century. It is significant that Schami presents Valentin's evolving hybrid identity and transnational family connections reaching back at least a hundred years and several generations, biologi-

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cally and nonbiologically. At the same time that references are made to Arabian and Aramaean history and architecture, political repression and military rule, Valentin also remembers the hunger, sickness, poverty and despair during and after World War II as a child (*Reise* 57–60). Schami constructs Valentin's family history in such a way that the character is able to reclaim, through conversations with Arab friends and his half-sister, bits and pieces and other secrets of his parents' story which were hidden from him earlier. However, it remains a fragmented family history, lost and partly retrieved between words and worlds, across locations and times and then invented by Valentin himself, often in close dialogue and critical correspondence with his lover, Pia. It is neither a typical family nor a family story by any means since it is the circus that makes up Valentin's «real» family, and it is importantly the circus that gives him the chance to travel East and to research his background and family history. Schami merges the layer of Valentin's family tale and search for identity with the adventurous existence and travels of the circus[11] and with that strategy creates a constellation that reaches beyond the nuclear-family construction as a primary institution to experience the connection between past and present. Ironically, Valentin finds out that his family secret was not a secret for many in Ulania at all; neighbors and family members knew about the two lovers. Once it even grew into a scandal, although his mother chose not to write about it in her diary. And then his biological father died prematurely, so their complicated relationship ended abruptly (348–51).

Despite an overall emphasis on a microcosmic community of multicultural and multilingual circus troupe members (*Reise* 85, 97), the most important cultural encounters, the touching tales, happen between and among the Arab and German characters.[12] The circus as the central stage provides this space, an in-between-space, where new developments are possible and fostered, as they are for Valentin and his Arab host, Nabil. Homi Bhabha interprets such an «in-between-space» as a temporal condition of revisionary time, a «beyond» in which the cultural present is newly described (7). This «beyond» consists of an ambivalence of time and space and an oscillation that brings about plural (re)visions in the characters involved. The conversations between Nabil and Valentin, who both embody outsiders' positionalities and hybrid identities, happen after the performances late at night and the early morning hours that the characters call «Nachmorg» (*Reise* 117). Then they tell each other stories of their lives, their joys, their sorrows, their interpretations of events, and learn about each other's culture, and offer questions, critique and insights that allow for nuanced understandings of their lives. The meeting hour of Valentin and Nabil has a dreamlike utopian charge to it.[13] This time of inner travel between night and morning, referred to in the title of

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the novel, evokes a connection, a temporal and symbolic coming together of the West (as «Abendland») with the East (as «Morgenland») in the figures of these two protagonists, a German with a Hungarian-Arab background and an Arab who was raised with German culture and language. Their private dialogue and the continuous reflections in their talks stand in stark contrast to the increasingly negative and dangerous political scenario unfolding in Ulania that ends in the sudden departure of the circus.

Senocak's novel *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* stands apart from his other fiction in that it is more closely linked to the concerns of his essayistic work on issues of German identity, history and society (Littler 359). In this novel, the author set out to ponder those identity questions that he articulates in his essays: «Aber bis auf das dritte Buch habe ich die Theorie von den Büchern immer sehr fern gehalten. Im dritten Buch ist es bewusst drin» («Einfach» 22).[14] In another interview in 2003, the author also emphasized that he wanted his writing to be understood as coming from an outsider's perspective, that of «einem Randgänger» (Konzett, «Gespräch» 132), and not necessarily or only from an ethnically fixed position assigned to him. Senocak chose to write *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft,* which is the third text in a tetralogy published in the 1990s, in an open form only loosely resembling a novel. Letters, journalistic essays, and interviews are interspersed throughout the text. In doing so, Senocak renounces a conventional story line, tackles the multilayered and interconnected aspects of the narrative more expressively, and also mirrors the fragmentation the main protagonist experiences. Senocak has been criticized for not representing a «richly detailed» family story (Shafi 210). But this is not the writer's intention as others have pointed out (Cheesman 102). Instead he has the narrator question the conventional narrative style and focuses on a fragmentary representation throughout the text in a language that is at once »banal, hyperbolic and abstruse» as well as objective and intellectual, in the process constructing a persona that challenges blind spots of German and Turkish national histories and identities (Cheesman 102–06). The novel touches on many important layers of complex issues of historical, ethical and literary concern (Huyssen 160). My focus in the following is to examine the importance of secrets in the main protagonist's family history and see how it relates to his construction of identity and especially how it corresponds to Schami's story of Valentin.

In *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* we encounter Sascha Muhteschem, the first-person narrator and writer of Turkish, Jewish and German ancestry who has just returned to Berlin in 1992 with his girlfriend Marie after living for several years in the US. After the death of his parents in a car accident, Sascha

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inherits not only a significant amount of money but also a silver box containing his paternal Turkish grandfather's diaries from the years 1916–1936[15] spanning the crucial and formative years from the end of the Ottoman Empire to the firmly established Turkish Republic. Similar to Valentin's search in Schami's story, these diaries lead the narrator to explore his German-Jewish-Turkish family history with a focus on the Turkish side «to assess this complicated heritage as he reflects on his own position as a writer and journalist» (Gerstenberger 238). Sascha intuitively senses that a secret lies within the words of the inherited notebooks that might not only reveal why his grandfather committed suicide in 1936 but perhaps also offer a key to his own ambigious identity:

> Ich sehnte mich danach, tiefere Schichten meiner selbst zu finden. Diese Tiefe war nur durch die Entdeckung meiner Herkunft zu erreichen. Ich wollte nicht mehr wurzellos sein, unverantwortlich für alles, was länger als zwanzig Jahre her war. Plötzlich erschien mir Grossvater als das Geheimnis, das zwischen mir und meiner Herkunft stand. (GV 118)

This statement has to be taken with a grain of salt since at other times Sascha mocks fixed identities and understandings as well as the attempts to document history objectively in his discussions with his girlfriend Marie (GV 18–22). He relates artistically and mentally more to an atmosphere that does not reveal everything that it shows (GV 22). When it becomes clear to him that these personal documents in Turkish, written in Arabic and Cyrillic script (GV12), do not offer what he wishes to find – not because he cannot read any of these languages and scripts (which he cannot), but because even the translated version does not convey what he is looking for (GV113–118) – he turns to the project of fictionalizing his grandfather's death (GV 23). Sascha's fear of discovering the truth behind the mystery, and at the same time his indecisiveness in getting all notebooks translated as well as his open-ended recreation of his grandfather's final year at the end of the text, heighten his contradictory and ambiguous feelings toward the notebooks, his family history and himself (Eigler 77; Littler 360). In fact, even before he had some of the notebooks translated, he did not simply want to reconstruct his Turkish grandfather's life. Rather, he wanted to invent it in his own words (GV 38). However, despite his decision to recreate the story of his grandfather, the diaries have a disruptive and provocative quality, forcing the unsuspecting recipient to revise stories of his own life (Gerstenberger 236). This can be said about Valentin in Schami's novel as well. Yet, there is the enormous difference that Valentin's secret is not burdened directly by history with guilt and victimization as these are evoked in Sascha's story.[16] For very different reasons, Sascha's parents have been utterly silent. His Jewish mother reacted to questions with

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silence due to the traumatic loss of her relatives in the Holocaust because she wanted to save him from the burden of that past (GV 58–59). On the other hand, Turkish was not spoken while he was growing up in Germany because of his parents' separation and his own alienation from his father. But more than any of these alienating and complex circumstances, it seems that it is his father's unwillingness to share stories and his claim that «über Geheimnisse haben wir keine Sprache» (GV 36) that imprints itself in Sascha's mind. It takes on a double meaning related to his grandfather's implication in the Armenian genocide and the taboo against discussing it.[17] In setting out to write about his grandfather, Sascha counters however ambiguously and contradictorily (since he also does not know the «truth») his father's claim about the inadequacy of language by airing imaginary secrets. Sascha also overcomes his writing block and finds his narrative voice and identity, counteracting the notions that others try to impose on him. Due to his lack of family ties and a pronounced absence of a communicative family memory of the past (Eigler 68) as well as the great mystery surrounding the inherited diaries, Sascha's decision to concentrate on his paternal Turkish family history is his alternative project to find himself and at the same time to begin a new conversation, a trialogue between Germans, Jews and Turks or Christians, Jews and Muslims (GV 89).[18]

In their different ways, both novels speak out against an amnesia evident in our contemporary globalized histories and lives. They give voice to silenced aspects of Turkish, German, and Syrian histories. History and individual as well as communal memory and imagination are key aspects interwoven into these two texts. Senocak criticizes different levels of forgetting that involve Turkey, its own history and its relation to Europe. As Senocak states, «Im 20. Jahrhundert waren die deutsche und die türkische Geschichte mehr als einmal miteinander verknüpft. Doch es gab daran keine nennenswerte Erinnerung mehr» (*das land* 161). In a recent essay entitled «Die Hauptstadt des Fragments» the author explains how his move to Berlin inspired him «diese verborgenen Geschichten aufzuspüren und zu erfinden» (*das land* 161) that we read about in his novel. As a writer living in exile, Schami deals with «the diversity of exilic memory» in many of his texts (Seyhan, «Lost» 418).[19] According to Azade Seyhan, this kind of literature becomes the «restorative work of cultural memory» which offers – in contrast to official historical accounts and forgetting – alternative viewpoints and interpretations of the past; it is marked by the culture of origin as well as the culture of residence (Seyhan, *Writing* 14–15). In this way, narration, storytelling, dialogue, and discussions of various historical topics and their representation by characters in the text bring forth a plurality of individual and collective lives and very importantly

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also of their historical times and society. These texts offer a counterweight to negative public views fostered in Europe and the West about the Middle East and articulate criticism of positions that are sanctioned by Syrian and Turkish official reports (Schami, *Hürdenlauf* 15).

Both Senocak and Schami portray unusual family configurations – multiethnic, transnational, fragmented – with secrets their protagonists discover or realize only as adults and a lack of communication about the familial pasts that challenge conventional nuclear family constellations and the characteristic generational stories of father's and son's in the 1970s and 1980s in German literature (Eigler 68–69; Gerstenberger 236). Even though there is no family life as such in Schami's novel, the community of the circus takes the function of an unconventional and extended family, one not connected by biological relation, but brought about by the love for and work in the circus. In contrast, Sascha is the last member of his family. He is much younger and also understands himself as the grandchild of victims and perpetrators (GV 40), a status that brings forth a very different configuration of how history and memory play out. As the grandchild, he can confront the guilt and the taboos that the parents could not face or articulate. For Valentin, his mother's secret and the truth of his paternity are not burdened by things unsaid and deeds done. The difference in their respective family histories is apparent. Whereas Valentin discovers a secret he can live with positively, Sascha inherits the difficulty of assuming or knowing that his «Verwandtschaft» on his father's Turkish side of the family connect to the responsibility for and silence about the Armenian genocide, and the narrator subsequently revises his notion of his Turkish grandfather as «ein Held der Nation» (GV 27). But the author does not compare the atrocities of the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide, nor does he juxtapose guilt versus innocence, victims versus perpetrators (Gerstenberger 240), at the same time that the protagonist ponders historical events, guilt, forgetting, silences, and betrayal. The protagonist does not identify with one side of the family more than with the other. He does not choose among the plurality of his family background and between the moral implications of these different histories. He only resolves for himself that he has to write about the Turkish grandfather and imaginatively confront these issues and layers of the past.

In Schami's story, it is the son who finds his mother's diary.[20] His story does not thematize guilt, neither victims nor perpetrators, as the German, Jewish and Turkish settings do. No one has committed a mysterious suicide or a crime. Just as Valentin in *Reise zwischen Nacht und Morgen* wants to tell his mother's story in his version, Sascha decides to write his story, and an excerpt of the end of it is given at the end of the novel, which nevertheless does not

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offer closure but subverts that expectation (Cheesman 205). Both novels hint at the reimagined tale, but essentially leave it as another story to be told elsewhere and at a different time and forgo closure. Sascha and Valentin identify the importance of a fictional narrative, of storytelling as crucial to reclaiming their complex family histories and individual identities, and would agree when Sascha says, «Erst wenn man keine Geschichten mehr hat, hat man wirklich nichts mehr» (GV 47). They create a more complex German identity with various consequences for society. Both protagonists inherit a multiethnic background through which affinities among ancestors of different ethnic and national heritage are explored. Neither novel can be categorized as a historical novel, despite the mention of dates and historical events in the narratives (McGowan 209).[21] Senocak and Schami each argue for stories to be told in order to engage in the discussion of German heterogeneity and cultural memory of the 1990s. They produce important texts that open up debate on hybrid identities, transnationally shared stories and interconnectedness.

Despite the fact that ensuing migrations and births have made Turks the largest national minority residing in Germany, they and the members of other minorities have to be recognized as becoming part of a meaningful national narrative of postwar German history and unification. Both novels I have discussed offer views of a historically different relationship between individuals of various ethnic, national, cultural, and religious groups in Germany's history. They envision a differently understood German identity itself. Both texts are embedded in the multilayered context of the literature of the 1990s in Germany in significant ways. The texts ask us to shift our focus to the numerous and varied shared qualities of a volatile moment in time that reaches from the past into the future (Adelson, «Coordinates» xxxv). They provoke us to rethink our notions about relationships between mainstream Germans and minority communities and nations figuring in Germany's history. Such a shift and restructuring of perspectives necessitate a different coming to terms with various pasts that are untold, forgotten or repressed. This new perception also breaks down dichotomous views of Germans and Jews, or Germans and Turks, or Germans and Arabs and opens up new visions of inclusion and interaction. Both authors feel and express that immigrants as well as Germans must enter into a conscious and conscientious relationship with a vexed German history (Adelson, «Coordinates» xxx).

In an essay entitled «War and Peace in Modernity: Reflections on the German-Turkish Future,» written in the mid 1990s, Senocak wondered in a polemical rhetorical mode about the future: «Germany long ago became part of us German Turks. Now a question is being posed that we cannot answer alone. Are we also a part of Germany?» (*Tropical Germany* 98). He calls

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for a «new shared language» that needs to be acquired. Senocak's as well as Schami's narratives give provocative credit not only to a shared, intertwined, complex present but also to a previously untold and entangled hidden history. Their artistic involvement with heterogeneous forms of cultural memory and aspects of the past and the present underline the fact that their voices have become integral to Germany. Schami states that *Reise* is his most political and «realistic» novel, for which he saw a need in the 1990s (Ohland 39). Senocak likewise wanted to weave his theoretical ideas into his novel. Schami wraps his multifaceted tale into the disguise of a love story that has political and social implications reaching back to move forward, just as Senocak ends his novel in a fragment of a love story that evokes other layers of remembrance, guilt and new possibilities. Both texts remain future oriented in the way they opt to recreate and diversify perspectives on the past, its memory/ies, and the multidimensional layers of interconnectedness and touching tales despite existing contradictions and struggles. They subvert the notion of *one* German cultural history and memory archive, and through their imaginative reflection on profound intersections and networks of thoughts, cultures, and peoples, they rewrite history, albeit fictively, and give food for thought.

Notes

[1] Throughout the article I quote mostly from Leslie A. Adelson's English translation of Zafer Senocak's *Atlas des tropischen Deutschland* as *Tropical Germany*. This citation can be found in the German original on page 16. When using the German text I will refer to it as *Atlas*.

[2] Andreas Huyssen asks this question as well: «how such histories are remembered and how they can be imagined and written at a time when the changing memory culture of Germany poses new problems for the Turkish immigrants and their descendants» (160). Empirical studies in the social sciences are being conducted that examine these issues and how the global and specific German memory of trauma and the Holocaust effect immigrant youth and their reflections upon this history in terms of their (German) identity; see, for example, Georgi.

[3] In Senocak's perspective it is still too early to tell if internal social and psychological borders will become less rigid and give space to a critical reflective, multiple national German identity: «so einer kritisch-reflektierten, multiplen deutschen nationalen Identität Raum geben, bleibt abzuwarten» (*das land* 142).

[4] For Adelson this also means that it recognizes reciprocal mental dimensions that are reflected in the literature of Turkish migration when it comes to German and Turkish history: fear of migration and victimization, national taboos, and Turkish perceptions of German fantasies (*Turkish Turn* 21).

[5] Senocak has criticized writers such as Schami who allegedly use the readers' fascination for oriental storytelling (GV 127, 130–31). Even though Schami has often chosen the fairy tale novel as his genre and definitely helped to increase the general popularity of

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(multicultural) fantastic storytelling in Germany, he distances himself from the German fairy tale tradition of the Grimm brothers. He is also averse to a purely folkloristic interest in his work as an oriental storyteller (Tantow 37–42). Since both authors have been at various times critical commentators and spokespersons for the rights of minorities in Germany and have written critical essays dealing with sociopolitical as well as literary issues, I think they have more in common on political (and even literary) issues than Senocak's criticism conveys. Senocak is considered by many the leading Turkish German public intellectual in Germany; see Matthias Konzett «Writing» and Littler 357.

[6] Andreas Pflitsch discusses three Middle Eastern novels which narrate different family (his)stories spanning the twentieth century and several generations in epic panoramas of diverse Middle Eastern locations and societies. He includes Schami's *Die dunkle Seite der Liebe* (2004) in his examination of «Erinnerungsbücher [...], die den autobiographischen Ansatz um die familiäre Dimension erweitert haben» (289). His article makes clear that family histories and entanglements are also of literary concern in other national settings and that Schami connects these touching transnational discourses.

[7] See Lutz Tantow, Iman Khalil, as well as Uta Aifan («Grenzgängerliteratur») respectively. Khalil does not emphasize the fairy tale tradition as such but asserts that Schami like several other Arab German writers incorporates «motifs, metaphors, and elements of style from Arab narrative traditions» (233). Aifan points out that Schami works with the «topos of Oriental storytelling and the motif of the cunning Oriental» (244) and inverts readers' expectations with irony to make them realize the criticism of false perceptions.

[8] See, for example, Senocak's essay «Das Scheitern der arabischen Welt» (*das land* 127–130) in which he remarks on the lack of democratic structures and civil institutions in most Arab nations. In a different but similar vein, Schami points to the lack of vision despite plenty of resources in the Arab world, which for him stems from a lack of humanistic traditions and values, even though they also make up the central message of Islam («Circus» 32–33).

[9] To read more on the importance of the depiction of circus life in the novel, see Arens.

[10] There is another curious twist to Valentin's identity in terms of age. After falling in love with Pia, who is much younger than he, he starts playing a game with her on aging that makes him feel increasingly younger and her feel much older (*Reise* 74–77).

[11] It is telling that the circus is chronicled in a «Circuschronik,» an archive of twelve volumes, that his grandfather had started. The emphasis is clearly on the circus and not on the family genealogy/history (*Reise* 26).

[12] The encounters between Arabs in the novel are crucial as well since they pose questions to each other and voice political criticism, as Nabil does when he tells a story in the circus ring that insults the President and for which he is then imprisoned and ultimately dies, signifying the power and fear of the word and oral storytelling.

[13] As Schami emphasizes the dreamlike nature and the possibilities that arise from the conversations at «Nachmorg,» Senocak tells us, «Es gäbe gar keine Geschichten, wären sie alle wirklich. Die Konturen der Wirklichkeit sind am schärfsten an der Grenze zum Traum» (GV 77).

[14] In this interview Senocak explains further that the contradictions and ambiguity of the main figure Sascha was something that he wanted to capture and write about since he felt it to be an important topic that others are also concerned with («Einfach» 21).

[15] As other scholars have pointed out as well, the books are referred to as notebooks with the number of the year printed on them (GV 13, 14, 115) and as diaries (GV 41).

[16] Valentin is also not portrayed as ambiguous and contradictory as is the figure of Sascha.

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[17] In the framework of this article I cannot go into this aspect of the text. See Adelson, Eigler, Littler, McGowan, Hall for further discussions. Several scholars discuss critically both the importance and the marginalization of the Armenian genocide as the background stage for Senocak's character to deal with guilt, victimhood and identity formation in individual and national terms, supposedly transferring German guilt onto a different platform. See Eigler (73–80) and Littler (360–67).

[18] Sascha ponders his phantasies of a «trialogue» since the reality is gloomy and he himself cannot even connect the three parts of his identity. He concludes: «Bekanntlich sind Dreieicksbeziehungen am kompliziertesten» (GV 90).

[19] Huyssen remarks on the difference between diasporic and transnational writers. Schami and Senocak can both be considered transnational (German) writers, but Schami's writings and concerns fit more the understanding of a first generation writer in exile or in the diaspora. Their loss of homeland and an imaginary of roots in the culture of ancestors is articulated in the texts (162).

[20] Schami also thematizes the different gender-specific perspectives when his character searches for and ponders his mother's (not father's) experiences in fictive Ulania.

[21] Historic dates and events are unclear and fictionalized in both novels, and the writers do not claim historical accuracy.

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