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Shared Histories in Multiethnic Societies: Literature as a Critical Corrective of Cultural Memory Studies

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Abstract: The staging of history in literature is engaged in dynamic exchange with society's memory discourses and in this context, literature is generally seen as playing a creative role as a formative medium in memory cultures. For some time, however, many feel that established concepts of Cultural Memory Studies need to be reconsidered for multiethnic societies. The assumption is that official memory cultures tend to exclude people with a migrant background from identity-forming discourses about the past. Using Germany as an example, this paper argues, first, that the question of memory in multiethnic societies needs to be reconsidered indeed, but in a different direction than has been assumed so far, and, second, that much-discussed concepts such as the post-migrant paradigm or multidirectional memory tend to circumvent the problems at hand rather than contribute to their solution. The paper therefore discusses the preconditions for a literary-theoretical engagement with this socio-political issue and the direction in which an alternative conceptualization would have to go – that is, not a new theory or method, but a *novel perspective that should be the basis for future theory building*.

Rather than confining the notion of a »shared history« to, either the common history of a country's native population, or to the history *since* migration shared by minorities and receiving society, this paper proposes to focus on actual links between the histories of Germany as the receiving society and the histories of the new Germans' countries of origin. Using literary texts and discussing a concrete example, it brings such shared histories to the fore and explores how they *open up national memory discourses transnationally*. The underlying vision is that these important components of multiethnic societies have the potential to show a way in which national and transnational memory landscapes as a whole could be transformed. In this sense, the metaphor of »Migration into Other Pasts« may be rephrased as migration *not* »into the past of others« but a *territorial move within one common shared history*. The paper therefore shows that the prerequisites for a literary-theoretical examination of the question of

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memory culture in multiethnic societies and its literary representations must be sought in the offerings of literature itself. The literary example, Orkun Ertener's novel *Lebt* (Alive/Live! 2014), with its numerous entangled and interweaving shared histories shows particularly clearly how literature can function as a drive or even theory generator for concepts to be developed – instead of, conversely, imposing readymade concepts on both German multiethnic societies and its literary production.

The novel perspective of this paper can be summarized in the inversion of the conventional point of departure: Instead of looking for a way to include people with a migrant background into the German memory culture, the first question to be asked should be how, in the age of the general recognition of concepts of entangled history, the idea could arise and persist for so long that migrants with Turkish roots, for instance, have no relation to German history. By focusing on the historical connectivities between Germans and new Germans, Orkun Ertener's novel *Lebt* chooses a different approach in this regard. It provides a transnational expansion of memory discourses on German, Greek, Jewish and Turkish/Ottoman history and thus opens up a new and long overdue memory space that is of central interest to multiethnic societies in Germany and beyond. As it seems, it takes writers who are more interested in entangled histories than in history as a resource for identity to get this right. Ertener undoubtedly belongs to this type of writers, as evidenced not least by the fact that he cites or refers to some of the most important historical studies for his context from Mark Mazower's *Salonica – City of Ghosts*, a standard reference on the multiethnic and multicultural history of Thessaloniki, to *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust* by Corry Guttstadt who challenged the myth of a Jewish-friendly policy in Turkey. Ertener's novel *Lebt* is saturated with the interconnected histories of various ethnic groups and may therefore serve as a *blueprint for a vision of memory culture in a multiethnic society*.

In conclusion, the essay outlines that developing an alternative concept of memory and historical consciousness in multiethnic societies and their literary representations cannot be based on much-discussed concepts such as post-migration or multidirectional memory. Although a superficial glance suggests that they might be the obvious choice for the topic of this paper, a novel take on multiethnic memory landscapes must start from specific shared histories and their entanglements. The paper therefore proposes that a bottom-up development of theoretical-methodological work is necessary in the case of representations of memory in multiethnic societies. This approach must highlight how links between the histories of the receiving societies and the histories of the migrants' countries of origin are, or could become, important components of an alternative memory culture in multiethnic landscapes – and that these links

hold the potential for transforming national and transnational memory landscapes as a whole.

Keywords: Memory Studies, entangled histories, multidirectional memory, post-migrant society, history as identity resource, Orkun Erterner's *Lebt*

1 Framing the Question: Multiethnic Societies and Shared Histories

The staging of history in literature – the way in which literature thematizes history, how it represents, produces, critiques, or reflects upon it – is engaged in dynamic exchange with society's memory discourses (cf. Erll 2005, 84). In this context, literature is generally seen as playing a creative role as a »formative medium« in memory cultures (Neumann 2008, 334; cf. Herrmann/Horstkotte 2016, 79), insofar as it is able to develop new perspectives on the past and make an active contribution to the negotiation of cultural memory. For some time, however, there seems to be a growing unease[1] with established concepts of Cultural Memory Studies – among other things, many feel that they need to be reconsidered for multiethnic societies in which official memory cultures tend to exclude people with a migrant background from identity-forming discourses about the past. The link between memory and ›collective identity‹ is usually assumed to be naturally given in this context. Using Germany as an example, this paper argues, first, that the question of memory in multiethnic societies needs to be reconsidered indeed, but in a different direction than has been assumed so far, and second, that much-discussed concepts such as the post-migrant paradigm or multidirectional memory tend to circumvent the problems at hand rather than contribute to their solution. Accordingly, the paper draws attention to blind spots and errors in reasoning that previous attempts to deal with the phenomenon of »Migration into Other Pasts« (Huyssen 2003) have exhibited and provides an impetus for the further development of Literary and Cultural Memory Studies. It discusses the preconditions for a literary-theoretical engagement with this socio-political issue and the direction in which an alternative conceptualization would have to go – that is, not a new

1 Referring to the title of Sigmund Freud's essay on »Das Unbehagen in der Kultur« (»Civilization and Its Discontents«), two volumes on the subject of memory culture were published some time ago, *Das Unbehagen an der Erinnerung. Wandlungsprozesse im Gedenken an den Holocaust*, edited by Ulrike Jureit, Christian Schneider, and Margrit Frölich (Frankfurt a.M. 2012), and in response to it *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur. Eine Intervention* by Aleida Assmann (München 2013).

theory or method, but a *novel perspective that should be the basis for future theory building*.

Memory-political turbulences as part and parcel of the negotiations and renegotiations of a German self-conception still revolve around the Holocaust as a specific German issue. The older question whether the Holocaust was unique, or rather unprecedented, is joined by the more recent version of whether one may classify it as one matter of genocide amongst others including in particular colonial violence.[2] As a result of this renewed debate – triggered, amongst other things, in the spring and early summer of 2020 by the *Causa Mbembe*[3] and revived a year later by the »lurid theses« of A. Dirk Moses (Nutt 2021)[4] –, another aspect of cultural memory is again largely neglected: The relationship of »memory and migration«, »each issues of great political and social relevance« (Glynn/Kleist 2012, 238). In 2010, Cem Özdemir, then chairman of the German Green Party, was one of the first politicians who showed concern about the exclusionary nature of the German memory culture and suggested that »we need to fashion remembrance in a way that people with a migrant background become involved« (Özdemir 2010). In the academic realm, by then Andreas Huyssen introduced the metaphor of »migration into other pasts« (Huyssen 2003). This phrasing refers to the exclusion of migrants from national memory cultures based on the widespread assumption that immigrants have no relation to the national histories of their host countries.[5] The price of this view – held by migrants and receiving

2 As Ingo Elbe summarizes, the debate largely revolves around the postcolonial idea that the emphasis on the Holocaust (allegedly) leads to the blocking of memories of colonialism (Elbe 2020; likewise critical Klävers 2019). John Torpey argues by contrast: »Because of its prominence as a model for all politics concerned with coming to terms with the past, the Holocaust has given a major boost to other such projects, helping to make them more successful than they would otherwise have been« (Torpey 2006, 9).

3 See for instance Beyrodt 2020; Eimermacher 2020; and many others.

4 Many of the core issues of the *Causa Mbembe* were indeed resumed in 2021 after the publication of Moses' article »Der Katechismus der Deutschen«/»The German Catechism« (Moses 2021) and in the context of the anti-Semitism scandal surrounding *documenta* 2022.

5 The terms »host« and »guest« have long been criticized in the context of migration (»In the imaginary world of hosts and guests, there is an asymmetry«; Hervik 2004, 252). Referring to her Scandinavian work area, anthropologists Marianne Gullestad likewise famously stated that the »metaphor of a host/guest relationship« may be »well-intended and self-evident« but »can have serious consequences for the distribution of power«: »a host has the right to control the resources of the home, to decide on the rules of the visit, and, accordingly, to ›put his foot down‹ when the guest does not conform« (Gullestad 2002, 54). This criticism has been voiced repeatedly since then, but with little consideration of the fact that at a particular stage of the migration process the terminology is neither objectionable nor meaningless, while it is, of course, both at another stage. As it seems, no adequate alternative terminologies have yet been developed to

societies alike – became apparent in Germany after reunification when renewed nationalism and the memory boom of the 1990s simultaneously produced new mechanisms of exclusion. Recent calls for a memory culture that *includes* people with foreign roots (cf. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2016) show that this issue has not lost topicality.

For many, notions of national identity and belonging are premised on a national past – with the German collective responsibility for the Holocaust a pertinent example – which is usually not understood in terms of citizenship or socialization but of origin and descent. The much-debated transnational or transcultural turn in post-migrant societies notwithstanding, this legacy of the 19th century nation state is not easily overcome. What is more, »Migration is a challenge to the traditional concept of social memory as a provider of national identity« (Glynn/Kleist 2012, 237). While politicians in Germany have been campaigning for years for »a new German ›we‹« that would equally include »old Germans and new Germans« (Gauck 2014), thinking along the lines of »us« vs »them« seems time and again to come in through the back door of national politics and memory culture.

The field of international Memory Studies predominantly considers these issues to be outdated but does not seem to offer alternate visions in this regard. After a first phase in the early 20th century, associated with Maurice Halbwachs, and a second in the context of Pierre Nora's *Sites of Memory* (1984–1992) and the early work of Jan and Aleida Assmann, international Memory Studies have now entered a third phase (cf. Erll 2011, 9),[6] marked by the paradigms of the transcultural (cf. Bond/Rapson 2014) and the transnational (cf. Wüstenberg 2019). This has produced a multitude of new approaches[7] which all take a stand against what the sociologist Ulrich Beck calls »methodological nationalism« (Beck/Grande 2010). While basic assumptions of established memory theories such as the concept of »identity-through-memory« are questioned by many

address this problem. It is against the background of this deficiency – and knowing that one can hardly overcome binary positions by merely pointing fingers without presenting alternatives – that I use alternating the »host-guest« metaphor, the juxtaposition of »receiving countries and countries of origin« or Germans and new Germans.

6 Stef Craps suggested to introduce a »fourth phase« in the age of the Anthropocene (Craps et al. 2018, 500).

7 Such as *Cosmopolitan Memory* (Levy/Sznaider 2002), *Multidirectional Memory* (Rothberg 2009), *Memory in a Global Age* (Assmann/Conrad 2010), *Travelling Memory* (Erll 2011), *Globital Memory* (Reading 2011), *Crossroads of Memory* (Amine/Beschea-Fache 2012), *Palimpsestic Memory* (Silverman 2013), *Transnational Memory* (De Cesari/Rigney 2014), *Transcultural Memory* (Crownshaw 2014), *agonistic memory* (Cento Bull/Hansen 2016), *Impure Memory* (cf. Silverman 2019).

(e. g., Erll 2011, 14; Hoskins 2014, 34), scholars in the Social Sciences and History usually assume that »history« has not ceased to be »identity-relevant« (Georgi/Ohliger 2009, 8). The most exciting contribution to the question of the relationship between memory and identity comes from historian Ulrike Jureit, who has traced how Maurice Halbwachs's concept of memory, focused on concrete social groups, has become inextricably linked to ›collective identity‹ in the work of Jan and Aleida Assmann – a direction, Jureit believes, that Halbwachs himself seems to have deliberately avoided (cf. Jureit 2010, 63–71 and passim). Another interesting point of view is that memory cultures may interlink and travel across borders, but contrary to »the dominant views« these dynamics« are not »necessarily forces of progress« in their own right (Amine/Beschea-Fache 2012, 99). Moreover, this also applies to concepts such as multidirectional memories; when events or places become sites of multidirectional memory, one can *assume* that this has creative potential. However, multidirectionality is not ethical per se and ›creativity‹ may very well produce questionable or politically explosive constellations. Bill Niven (2020) has therefore rightly attributed »idealism« to recent Cultural Memory research. In this sense, he also suggested that many of its concepts are normative rather than descriptive. And quite obviously, the »tension between national memory cultures and transnational developments« (Radonič/Uhl 2016, 18) cannot be grasped through a focus on cross-border movements alone. Transnational research clearly must not lose sight of national frameworks. Accordingly, critics now note »a shift from a celebratory or euphoric moment in ›third phase‹ memory studies to a more critical and reflexive one« (Craps 2019, 85).

2 A Novel Take on Shared Histories in Multiethnic Societies

Against this background, this paper seeks to promote a novel approach to a transnational memory culture – or public forms of the visualization of transnational history[8] – that focuses on *actual historical entanglements* between the receiving country Germany and the new Germans' countries of origin. The considerations presented here are, as it were, antecedent to theorizing about literature and memory. The crux of the matter is a refreshed understanding of the familiar notion of »shared history«. My analytical framework is based on two prem-

8 Following suggestions by historian Ulrike Jureit, which will be introduced in more detail later.

ises: Rather than confining the notion of shared history to, either the common history of a country's native population, or to the history *since* migration shared by minorities and host society, I suggest, first, to start with shared histories that do not entail a *single shared national* past. More specifically, I assume that receiving societies and migrants and their descendants (who are certainly *not* seen as natural, let alone closed groups) more often than not actually *do* have common historical pasts. Second, although they are often overlooked in national memory discourse, *historical connectivities between people with migrant backgrounds and those in receiving societies* are – or should become – important components of multiethnic memory landscapes. Using literary texts as evidence base, this paper brings such shared histories to the fore and explores how *they open up national memory discourses transnationally*. The underlying vision is that they have the potential to show a way in which national and transnational memory landscapes as a whole could be transformed. Literature thus serves as a drive or even theory generator for the development of literary-theoretical concepts.

Before I discuss relevant examples that may help to clarify my purpose and approach, I will briefly elaborate on the calls for an inclusive memory culture as touched upon at the beginning of this paper, since those who bring up this claim usually have a certain kind of inclusion in mind. In the year of Özdemir's plea, for example, the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* commissioned a survey that posed questions such as: »What do German-Turks know about the Holocaust? What do you think of the National Socialist genocide? How do you assess the German ›coming to terms with the past‹ [...]?« (Ulrich et al. 2010). However, this kind of questioning reproduces precisely the dichotomous way of thinking that is otherwise harshly criticized in these contexts: On the one hand, the Germans and ›their‹ National Socialist past, on the other, migrants with (in this case) Turkish roots, for whom National Socialism and the Holocaust are, strictly speaking, of no relevance – if it weren't for the unwelcome and annoying mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion linked to a shared or not shared past. As for research on this issue, the social and thematic scope has so far been rather limited. Suggestions are on the table that minorities, in short, may find »their own ways to Holocaust remembrance« (Assmann 2013, 129; similarly Rothberg 2014). In this way, however, the basic assumption of a German history that belongs to the Germans is tacitly perpetuated. It may, for instance, at first glance appear pleasing when groups in Berlin-Neukölln with immigrant, primarily Turkish roots decide on their own initiative to find out more about Germany's Nazi past. One may even celebrate such initiatives as »new forms of participation« (Rothberg/Yildiz 2011, 39), but they are unlikely to provide fresh impulse for research on transcultural and transnational memory cultures. Interpretations of these activities, while appreciating the creative ways in which minorities engage with the *Germans' past*, likewise

reproduce the very dichotomy they seek to overcome: On the one side there are those who ›own‹ the National Socialist past, on the other those who are invited to deal with it as a kind of *Borrowed Memory* (*Entliehene Erinnerung*, Georgi 2003) or »Borrowed Narratives« (»Geborgte Narrative«, Bodemann/Yurdakul 2005). This premise, however, is not conducive to generating a fresh perspective on »Memory in Migratory Settings« (Rothberg 2014) – and this is especially true when crucial but uncomfortable issues such as the »Armenian Genocide« are mentioned at best in footnotes (see for instance ibid., 139 sq.).

In contrast, a shared past in the above outlined sense of a »shared history« does not depend on borrowing others' historical narratives – which may then be returned when one has lost interest. Rather, it must be understood in terms of actual historical entanglements. With regard to Turkish-Germans, for instance, there is no lack of reference points for common historical experiences. Given the lively cultural productions of Germans with roots in Turkey, it is even surprising – and only unsatisfactorily explained with the Turkish governments' stance on this issue – how very few representations of this obvious choice of intersections of national histories and crossroads of memory exist. The 1998 novel *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* by Zafer Şenocak (*Perilous Kinship* in Tom Cheesman's translation), which is repeatedly brought up in this context, can hardly count as a convincing paradigm of a literary representation of transnational entangled history.[9] Beyond some rather vague references to the Holocaust and the Armenian case it is otherwise characterized by a severe neglect of important historical context.[10] The Algerian writer Boualem Sansal, on the other hand, negotiates in his novel *Le village de L'Allemand* (2008)[11] the entangled French-Algerian-German histories and refers in passing also to the German-Turkish history: »In the history of their own country they [the Turks] have a genocide of their own, one which is all the more terrible since they have the gall not to admit it« (Sansal 2011, 182). Along with their »pact of friendship with the Third Reich« and their offering »Nazi officers an escape route« after the Second World War there is no shortage of links between the German and the Turkish histories (ibid.). Incidentally, the Armenian genocide is only one part of a neglected entangled history around the First

9 In the field of historiography, the concept of *entangled history* or *Histoire Croisée* »can be traced back to the 1980s« and was developed in the 1990s out of a motivation to »question the monumentality of nationally defined borders and to account for the constituent power of transcultural circulations in a world of entangled influences« (Bauck/Maier 2015).

10 For a more detailed critique see Albrecht 2021a; see also Shafi 2003.

11 In English translation *An Unfinished Business* (2010), German translation under the title *Das Dorf des Deutschen oder das Tagebuch der Brüder Schiller* (2009).

World War in Asia Minor:[12] the Armenians, Assyrians and Ottoman Greeks were the largest affected population groups in an ethnic cleansing process for which the Young Turk government was responsible (cf. Shirinian 2017; Albrecht [forthcoming]). Descendants of the survivors, especially Ottoman Greeks expelled from Asia Minor, later came to Germany (and other European countries) in the course of labor recruitment and live there today as new Germans of Ottoman Greek descent in the third or fourth generation.

By focusing on actual shared histories of precisely this kind, memory culture in a multiethnic society can be addressed from an angle not considered before. The innovative nature of this approach may be framed as *a novel kind of posing questions*: One should not ask how people with foreign roots can be included in a national memory culture, but rather how – in the age of the general recognition of concepts of entangled history – the idea that these people have no relation to the history of their host countries *could arise in the first place*. The concept of »shared history« in the outlined sense has emancipatory potential since it is focused on transnational histories of entanglement. In contrast, it neglects national or nationalist concepts of genealogical or ethnic belonging and the exclusion of those who do not share the required ancestry. This frame of reference thus simultaneously undermines an understanding of belonging along ethnic lines of memory culture. In this sense, the metaphor of »Migration into Other Pasts« (Huyssen 2003) may be rephrased as migration *not* »into the past of others« but a *territorial move within one common shared history*.

Literary texts can address historical links between receiving societies and their minorities, and increasingly do so since the 1990s. Indeed, many novels recall and reflect upon a variety of different entangled histories: For example, East Berlin-born writer Sherko Fatah illustrates in his novel *Ein weißes Land* (*A white country*, 2011) how closely the Arab world was linked to Germany during the Nazi era by using an Iraqi protagonist who follows the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, to Berlin. Orkun Ertener's novel *Lebt* (*Alive/Live!* 2014) deals with the entangled histories of Germany, Greece and Turkey including that of their Jewish population during the same period. Doğan Akhanlı's most recent novel, *Madonnas letzter Traum* (*Madonna's last dream*, 2019), likewise tells of the Nazi era not as a national German, but as an entangled German-Turkish history. Literary renderings of shared histories in this sense are, of course, not limited to writers with a migrant background, just as cross-cultural interaction has long

12 The historian Matthias Bjørnlund suggested the term »violent Turkification«, by which he means »interconnected policies of, for example, ethnic cleansing and genocide aimed at the homogenization of the Ottoman Empire« (Bjørnlund 2008, 41).

since ceased to be the ›responsibility‹ only of the relevant minorities.[13] Novels such as Stephan Wackwitz' *Ein unsichtbares Land* (2003; *An Invisible Country*, 2005), the trilogy *Menschenfresser* (*Cannibals*, 2005–2008) by the Austrian Max Blaeulich and the dystopian novel *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* (*I'll be here in the sunshine and in shade*, 2008) by the Swiss Christian Kracht are examples of the link between the memory of European colonialism and its aftermath (with German, Austrian and Swiss references) with the memory of fascism, National Socialism and the Holocaust. The multi-layered memory discourses in novels such as *Vielleicht Esther* (*Maybe Esther*, 2014) by Katja Petrowskaja, *Die Fische von Berlin* (*The fish of Berlin*, 2005) by Eleonora Hummel, *Eine Art Liebe* (*A kind of love*, 2003) by Katharina Hacker and *Die Unvollendeten* (*The Unfinished*, 2003) by Reinhard Jirgl, on the other hand, based on centuries of migration and entangled histories involving formerly German-speaking areas especially in Central and Eastern Europe, link the memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust to a plethora of other experiences of violence. Many other examples of neglected aspects of shared histories are undoubtedly to be found.

3 A Case Study: Orkun Ertener's novel *Lebt* (2014)

The following will illustrate that the prerequisites for a literary-theoretical framing of representations of memory culture in multiethnic societies must be sought in the offerings of literature itself. The choice of the example, Orkun Ertener's novel *Lebt*, is not accidental, because it shows with its numerous entangled and interweaving shared histories particularly clearly how literature can function as a drive or even theory generator for concepts to be developed – instead of, conversely, imposing readymade memory concepts on both German multiethnic societies and its literary production. The novel's plot revolves around entanglements on both the individual level and the level of history. Ertener's narrator, Can Evinman, works as a ghostwriter and is the grandson of a Turkish-Jewish-Muslim Dönme whom the German »SS chief of Thessaloniki« (L 446)[14] expropriated and later murdered (cf. L 570), while the central German character, Anna Roth, whose biography Evinman is supposed to write, is married to the grandson of

13 I would like to thank Dirk Göttsche for pointing the following novels in this section out to me; cf. his *Remembering Africa* (2013); see also the study of his PhD student Sofie Friederike Mevissen, *Gewaltgeschichte im Familiengedächtnis* (2021).

14 Quotes from the novel *Lebt* (Ertener 2014a) hereinafter with the acronym »L« followed by page number. Translations from the German text are my own.

this murderer. Large parts of the novel show Can Evinman and Anna Roth on the trail of the family secrets of the grandparents' generation, while the readers of the novel witness, as it were, how both the ›little‹ and the ›big history‹ becomes successively accessible to these two protagonists. Other characters are likewise involved in this historical research, for example a historian in Thessaloniki, and in Germany especially a friend of Evinman's, the writer Georg Lisinski. At one point, Evinman receives a long email from Lisinski that goes right to the heart of the crimes of the past, both on an individual and historical level, as it deals with the issue of expropriation and murder during the Nazi era. This email is the result of thorough research in Berlin archives, where Lisinski found out, among other things, that the Turkish government »revoked Turkish citizenship from Turkish Jews who lived in the Nazi-occupied areas«, thereby »driving them into the hands of their murderers«: »unnecessarily, without any coercion, of their own free will« (L 337). In this way, Can Evinman's grandfather, »in his business an immensely successful Turk, a Muslim on paper« and therefore actually completely safe in Berlin, lost the protection of Turkish citizenship because he was denounced »as a Jew« (L 336). With these and other historical details, Ertener is up to date with current historical research – also shown by the fact that he recommends in an appendix to his novel the very study that some time ago challenged the myth of a Jewish-friendly policy in Turkey and has since advanced to the relevant standard work: Corry Guttstadt's *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust* (2008). In fact, Guttstadt was able to prove that earlier studies that unanimously portrayed Turkey as the savior of European Jews from Nazi persecution mostly referred to exceptions or were based on favorable circumstances (cf. Baer 2015 for a summary). This myth of a Jew-friendly Turkey is also explicitly addressed in Lisinski's email: The Turks »always had a particularly good relationship with the Jews, even as a kind of protective power: They took them in when they were expelled from Spain 500 years ago, and during the Third Reich Turkey was a safe exile for many refugees from Nazi Germany«, he initially writes. But his research led him to a different view, so he continues: »That's how you know it, and how the Turks like to be celebrated for it. But one only has to dig a little in the archives and browse the internet – until you look into a new hell that probably very few people know about« (L 336).

Another narrative thread of entangled history in the novel *Lebt* unfolds the story of the policeman Giorgios Xenos in Thessaloniki up to the generation of his great-grandparents: »his life story had a background of almost a whole century« (L 359). The history of this family – third generation of Greek guest workers – is traced back to the time of the Greco-Turkish war: »in 1923 in the course of the population exchange his great-grandparents were displaced from a village in the vicinity of Izmir to Thessaloniki« (L 206). The Xenos family with their tavern in

Frankfurt-Bornheim thus descends from Ottoman Greeks from Asia Minor (cf. also L 243–244). The novel does not reduce the Thessaloniki setting to a mere backdrop for the search for clues in the past; rather, through the story of this important minor character, Ertener draws attention to yet another entangled history, that of the Germans and Greeks. His novel *Lebt* is thus saturated with the interconnected histories of various ethnic groups and may therefore serve as a *blueprint for a vision of memory culture in a multiethnic society*.

In the appendix to this novel the author states that – unlike the »characters and the plot« – »the historical background« is »unfortunately« not his own »invention«; he therefore recommends several studies for further reading, among them Mark Mazower's *Salonica – City of Ghosts*, a standard reference on the multiethnic and multicultural history of Thessaloniki (L 639). Certain extended passages of Ertener's novel reminded the reviewer in the newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine* of a crash course in the relevant areas of history (cf. Hintermeier 2014), in terms of narrative devices achieved, among other things, through the use of knowledgeable characters such as the Jewish historian Binah Veissi, the important supporting role in the Thessaloniki setting. This character introduces the narrator Can Evinman and his travel companion to the »history of the Jewish Thessaloniki« (L 251) which plays a central role not only in her own family history but also in the entangled family histories of all characters in the novel (cf. L 443–452). This includes the history of the Jewish community of the Dönme and their »self-proclaimed Messiah from Izmir«, who »converted to Islam under pressure of the Ottoman government« (L 252). It is the story of »a more or less secret religious community that lived outwardly as Muslim for over 200 years, but internally continued to follow the commandments of its Messiah« (Ertener 2014b). For a reading on »the prehistory of the Dönme« the appendix lists Gershom Sholem's study *Sabbatai Zwi – The Mystical Messiah* and for »further study of this fascinating story« (L 639) *The Dönme – Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries and Secular Turks* by Marc David Baer, who is also referred to in the novel itself as a »historian from the University of California« (L 398).

While some reviewers did not seem to take pleasure in or gain from the »history lessons« (Müntefering 2014), the historical passages embedded in the plot are actually indispensable for an understanding of the widely ramified German-Turkish-Greek-Jewish-Muslim history and its entanglement in National Socialism. On the positive side, these »history lessons« introduce, embedded in an exciting story, the transnationally interwoven stories of people with and without a migrant background to the general reading public to whom they were in all likelihood previously unknown. This new knowledge includes a significant historical constellation that is – aside from the German occupation of Greece during the Nazi era – the decisive causative factor in the family stories in Ertener's

novel: In the course of the population exchange of 1923, members of the Dönme community had to leave Greece because they were considered to be Muslims; during the Nazi era, however, they were nowhere in the world safe from being exposed and betrayed as Jews. In the novel, a Dönme denounced in this way (cf. L 258) and an unscrupulous Nazi who builds his fortune on the expropriation of the denounced (his »billions are stuck with blood«; L 291) are the two key figures in the grandfather generation of the two families.

Instead of looking for ways to include people with a migrant background into the German memory culture, the first question to be asked – and to be considered in the development of an alternative concept of both shared histories in multiethnic societies and their literary representations – should be, again, how, in the age of entangled histories and transnational approaches, the idea could persist for so long that migrants with Turkish roots have no relation to German history. Ertener's novel chooses a different approach in this regard, one that provides a transnational expansion of memory discourses on German, Greek, Jewish and Turkish/Ottoman history. It thus opens up a new and long overdue memory space that is of central interest to the multiethnic society in Germany and beyond. Instead of directing attention towards minority *subjects* which are excluded or exclude themselves from a ›cultural‹ or ›collective memory‹, the novel seems to suggest that national memory discourses should be expanded to transnational ones *through concrete historical contents and objects*. If the memory-political gaze is, in this sense, directed at perpetrators, victims and collaborators on all sides, the goal can of course neither be a relativization of the Holocaust nor German exemption from responsibility. However, since the descendants of perpetrators, victims and collaborators are living together in multiethnic societies – together with those who do not easily fit into these categories – alternatives to the current memory culture are indeed desirable. However, there are many reasons for no longer speaking of memory or memory culture, but of historical consciousness. At one point in the novel *Lebt*, Ertener's narrator takes a brief look at the Yahudi Hamam in Thessaloniki – »a Turkish bath [...] which was called the Jewish bath because it was in the former Jewish part of the city« – or to be more precise, he sees especially the »flower shops that surrounded the Ottoman building and made it almost invisible« (L 246). The busy present hides the past, you have to stop and take your time to discover the traces of a rich, transnational history. Ertener's novel certainly stimulates such a point of view and thus contributes to an alternative to memory culture based on reflection on and a common understanding about history.

The importance of literary texts in the context of transnational memory cultures should, of course, not be overestimated – but the impulses emanating from a novel like Ertener's may likewise not be underestimated either. One could even go

so far as to argue that the aforementioned group of people in the Berlin-Neukölln initiative might be better off reading Orkun Ertener's novel *Lebt* – not with the aim of new kinds of identity formation but as a reflected confrontation with entangled histories – rather than engaging with the Holocaust and the German past in a way that blurs the real connectivities of people in German multiethnic societies. In an epilogue set two years after the narrated time, Ertener's novel makes a number of interesting suggestions in this spirit. The narrator Can Evinman is now writing the biography of the Jewish-Sephardic entrepreneur Daniel Carasso from Thessaloniki, one of the founders of the later global corporation Danone, whose family had to flee from the Nazis in 1941 from Paris to the USA (cf. L 240 sq.). The science fiction author Georg Lisinki also changed the genre and realized an idea that had come to him during his research two years earlier (cf. L 338). He now uses his writing skills to create »one of the rare books« that »would be missed if they would not exist« (L 632): »the story of a young Turkish-Jewish woman« who »lives in Berlin since birth and in 1942 finds herself in an almost hopeless struggle for life and death« (L 631). What particularly outraged Lisinki while working in the archive, is the role of the Turkish government in the fate of the Jews and Dönme (L 337), that becomes the central issue in his new novel: »The Turkish authorities are depriving her and her family of the Turkish citizenship – and thereby the only possibility to save themselves from the Holocaust« (L 631). This epilogue of Ertener's novel could also be read as a call to those who work in the fields of culture and the media to grapple with such transnational interwoven stories – especially since the writer Georg Lisinki already recognized during his research in the Berlin archive that an unbelievable story took place in the National Socialist era: »I cannot imagine that this story has already been told, the story of the first Turkish guest workers in Germany, about whom nobody knows anymore« (L 338). The epilogue also leaves no doubt as to how, exactly, the narrator Can Evinman would wish such stories to be written, namely in the sense that literature – as Uwe Timm demanded in 1970 – should be located »between entertainment and enlightenment« (Timm 1970, 79): »As exciting as a thriller from the first to the last sentence, touching and stirring, the investigation shockingly precise, of painful historical clarity, entertaining and disturbing at the same time« (L 632).

4 Change of Direction: Public Use and Visualization of History

While a single novel is an overly narrow basis for developing a new theoretical approach to memory in multiethnic societies and Literary Memory Studies, the

above suggests that such an endeavor should be based on a bottom-up approach, one that first highlights how links between the histories of the host societies and the histories of the migrants' countries of origin are, or could become, important components of an alternative memory culture in multiethnic landscapes. Even more so, these links carry the potential for changes in national and transnational memoryscapes as a whole – in the very sense that the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas recently outlined a perspective for a multiethnic future: »By acquiring citizenship, the new citizens accept the political culture and historical heritage of our country [...]. But the immigrant acquires at the same time the voice of a fellow citizen, which from now on counts in the public space and can change and expand our political culture« (Habermas 2022, 12 sq.).[15] However, the above also suggests that developing an alternative concept of memory and historical consciousness in multiethnic societies and their literary representations must start from specific shared histories and their entanglements. Although a superficial look at the topic suggests that they might be the obvious choice, a novel take on multiethnic memory landscapes cannot be based on much-discussed concepts such as post-migration or multidirectional memory.

To begin with, the abstractions of the post-migrant paradigm tend to obscure the fact that this approach more often than not amounts to freeing people with migrant roots from obligations and transferring responsibility for integration to the host society alone – which is then euphemistically described as »a political achievement« against which »the state and pluralistic democracy must be measured« (Foroutan 2019, 41). It remains thus unclear how a memory culture of entangled histories could flourish if such a society is the goal. After all, the comparison often drawn between the »post« in »post-migrant« and the »post« in »postcolonial« is not accidental, as their shared strategy of empowerment is based on the same double standard familiar from the postcolonial paradigm (cf. Albrecht 2021b; Albrecht 2012). By contrast, historical connectivities as a basis for both a new memory culture and a cohabitation of equal participation may very well require *new kinds of commitments and obligations*. With regard to memory culture, the need for a self-critical approach to these histories and historical contexts on the part of *all fellow citizens* is obvious.

The concept of multidirectional memory, in turn, is often credited with the ability not only to solve the problems of memory competition, but also to change

15 »Mit dem Erwerb der Staatsbürgerschaft akzeptieren die neuen Bürger die politische Kultur und das geschichtliche Erbe unseres Landes; davon ist die Ächtung des Antisemitismus ein unverzichtbarer Kern. Aber der Immigrant erwirbt gleichzeitig die Stimme eines Mitbürgers, die von nun an in der Öffentlichkeit zählt und unsere politische Kultur verändern und erweitern kann.«

all other issues of memory culture for the better. None of this, however, can be achieved by looking through the lens of this overrated concept as such. It is merely descriptive, albeit normatively charged by many with an emancipatory potential. This is all the more astonishing because multidirectional memory was also at work in the design of the »People's Justice« poster, which triggered the *documenta* 2022 scandal because of its anti-Semitic drawings. It is no coincidence that Michael Rothberg – who in the 2009 study *Multidirectional Memory* time and again emphasized the creative potential of overlaps and interactions within memory processes – called for »an ethics of comparison« when he turned to the questionable slogan »Gaza is Israel's Warsaw« two years later. The acknowledgement that such »an ethics of comparison« should be able to »distinguish politically productive forms of memory from those that lead to competition, appropriation, or trivialization« (Rothberg 2011, 525), is at the same time the admission that the concept of multidirectional memory as such is unable to do so and does not follow emancipatory, let alone ethical imperatives. Since it is not at all clear where such an ethics is supposed to come from and what exactly it should strive for – especially if the idea of »a differentiated empirical history« (ibid., 526) is brought into play in this context –, my alternative proposal for dealing with memory in multi-ethnic societies cannot gain much from this concept and its implications.

Although the reflections in this essay do not yet represent a fully developed analytical perspective and approach, it is at least possible to indicate the direction in which the framing of transnational memory in multi-ethnic societies might productively go. To begin with, as just outlined one should abandon the belief that convenient concepts such as multidirectionality or the post-migrant paradigm can contribute anything purposeful to the questions at stake. On the contrary, concepts such as multidirectional memory – and, of course, many other factors – are rather counterproductive because they play their part in making questions about historical accuracy, facts, or correctness seem almost obsolete. The central tenet of Memory Studies, that memory is always responding to current needs and concerns, seems to be for many a license to blur the distinctions between a recovered history and an invented one, sometimes to the point of fabricating facts for political purposes. This does not only happen on the side of the politically far right, which also uses constructivist concepts when it serves its purposes. About a year after the then AfD leader notoriously claimed that Hitler and the Nazis were allegedly »just a bird's shit in over 1000 years of successful German history«, a small but disproportionately visible group that would place itself on the politically opposite side launched the *1619 Project* in the *New York Times*. It was a particularly clear example that illustrates how the influence of such groups not merely leads to »differing interpretations of history, but an out-

right misinterpretation of it« (McWhorter 2020). In this case, the new reading was that slavery was not only a very significant factor – no serious scholar has ever disputed this (cf. Mackaman/North 2020) – but the single defining force in American history. Proponents persistently sought to replace the 1776 *lieu de mémoire*, representing the American Revolution, with that of 1619, »the year the first slaves were brought to Colonial Virginia« (ibid.). However, the critics were successful in their view that a complex history cannot be reduced to the fate of a single group of people, even if they were horribly abused, oppressed and dismissed. »The *New York Times*, without announcement or explanation, has abandoned the central claim of the 1619 Project: that 1619 – and not 1776 – was the ›true founding‹ of the United States« (ibid.).

The alternative approach to transnational memory that focuses on *actual historical entanglements* between the history of receiving countries and that of the new citizens' countries of origin would have to be exactly the opposite of such a creation of a »counter-memorial culture«[16] – and not only because of the not always foreseeable political consequences that such undertakings entail.[17] Furthermore, serious consideration should be given to completely detaching the dealing with actual historical entanglements from the concept of memory – replacing the notion of a memory culture with that of a critical historical consciousness – a »reflected historical consciousness as a starting point for a civil history of the future« (Knigge 2010, 10). In fact, useful terminologies have already been proposed, which may in fact be more appropriate for this context than the vague term »memory« – such as a collective visualizing of historical events, public visualizations of history, or social references to the past,[18] and one could even »speak generally of the public use of history« (Jureit 2019, 29). And last but not least, an alternative approach to transnational memory must thoroughly rethink the problematic link between memory and ›collective identity‹. Volkhard Knigge, the director of the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, quite clearly refers back to Maurice Halbwachs when he suggests that »instead of asserting memory collectives, i. e. constructing them rhetorically, socially or politically, reasonably one could only ask about supra-individual framework conditions for historical memories and formation of meaning as points of contact for a historical consciousness that is at the same time linked to the subject and transpersonal« (Knigge 2010, 14). The list of questions to be asked of relevant literary texts would

16 The term originates from an essay by Ana Milošević and Tamara Trošt (2020, 19) who, however, do not refer to the *1619 Project*.

17 Many agree that the *1619 Project*'s distortion of historical facts »has been an enormous gift to Donald Trump« (Mackaman/North 2020).

18 For the illuminating use of this terminology see Jureit 2012, 21, 17, Jureit 2019, 36, *and passim*.

thus also include the question of »History as a Resource of Identity« (Jureit 2019), that is, of whether they make the connection between memory and ›collective identity‹ as close or even inseparable as is assumed in parts of Memory Studies. The subsequent question would be about the relevance of the idea of the exclusion of people with a migration background from national memory cultures. In any case, Orkun Ertener's novel *Lebt* is about the public and individual use of history, but this history is at best marginally relevant to questions of identity.

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