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“Only Those Who Look Back, Move Forward”: Four Literary Responses to Genocidal Trauma in Greek and Transnational Prose

Tessa Hofmann

In my contribution, I introduce four authors of different generations and languages, but all of Greek origin: Elias Venezis, Dido Sotiriou, Jeffrey Eugenides and Aris Fioretos. Both the works of expelled authors from Asia Minor and of their transnational, postmodern descendants are remarkably free of revanchist clichés or the stereotypical ‘othering’ of Turks or Muslims. While Venezis points to the irritating ‘genocidal corruption’ and dehumanization within the victim group, Sotiriou puts the political responsibility for the ‘Catastrophe’ on Germany and the Entente, depicting Asia Minor as the homeland of Greeks and Turks. Eugenides chooses intersexuality as a metaphor of modernity and hybridity of (Greek and other) immigrant communities, whereas Fioretos is interested in flowing, flexible identities and the intersection of past and present that expresses itself in a non-linear narrative, where everybody and everything is related to others.

In my native German language, fiction is called ‘Dichtung’, a noun that means ‘closely compacted in substance’. In historically based prose, fiction can be defined as condensed reality. The literary ways of condensing reality depend on many factors, but mainly on the talent and intent of the author, on the time of publication and, of course, on the object depicted as well as on the intended functions of a literary work. If genocide as the ultimate crime becomes a literary object, the intentions are multiple, oscillating between documentation, accusation, interpretation and reflection. Literature on genocide may even substitute public discourse. When genocide survivors write about their experiences, literature serves as a ‘means of survival’ (‘Überlebensmittel’), as the German Jewish author and Holocaust survivor Edgar Hilsenrath accurately named this particular type of prose. For survivors, it seems easier to write about genocide as the unspeakable than to discuss it.

Event close¹ non-fictional memoirs

The history of the genocide against the Ottoman Greek population that identifies itself traditionally as Romiosyni, or Romans (Turkish: rumlar), coincides with the last decade of Ottoman rule (1912-1922) and can tentatively be divided into three phases²: The first

1. The terms ‘event close’ or ‘event-closeness’ are neologisms. They refer to the short time interval between an event and its transcript or oral report. In criminology and brain research event-closeness is an important criterion for reliability because personal memories are less influenced by collective memories/narratives or the recollections of any third party.

2. For the periodization of the Ottoman genocide against indigenous Greeks cf. Tessa Hofmann, “Γενοκτονία ἐν Ποῦ – Cumulative Genocide: The Massacres and Deportations of the Greek Population of the Ottoman Empire (1912-1923),” in *The Genocide of the Ottoman Greeks: Studies on the State-Sponsored Campaign of Extermination of the Christians of Asia Minor (1912-1922) and Its Aftermath*:

phase starts during the Balkan Wars 1912/3, when two types of deportation were tested in Eastern Thrace: a) trans-boundary expulsion of Greek-Orthodox Ottomans into Greece, b) deportation of Greek Orthodox Christians from Eastern Thrace to Anatolia. Whereas the expelled Greek Eastern Thracians would return after the war, the fatality rate among those deported into the interior was nearly 50 percent and the number of returnees remained low respectively. This kind of fatal deportation, or death march that prevented return was then repeated in Western Anatolia (Ionia) before the First World War, and in Pontos and other regions of Asia Minor during the Great War; however, these deportations never reached a nation-wide scale, as it was the case with the Ottoman Armenians. After WW1, deportations, forced labor and in particular massacres continued in all areas under the influence or control of irregular Kemalist or Nationalist fighters.

The destruction of the Ottoman Greeks has caught the attention of many authors not only of Greek descent or language. Most focus on the final of the three phases of this genocide, the period of 1919-1922, which ended with the 'Great Fire of Smyrna' and the enslavement of surviving Christian men in the age range of 18 to 45 years.

Prose about genocide shows remarkable amplitude of narrative techniques, varying from non-fictional ('factional') novels or stories to fictional narratives. The preference for a certain genre seems to be influenced by the fact whether the author is a survivor or immediate witness of genocide or belongs to second and third post-genocidal generations. Survivors and witnesses of genocide, i.e. first generation authors often choose (auto) biographical testimonies to depict real world events, but blend them to various degrees with fictitious conversations and may also use the storytelling techniques of fiction. These creative techniques of narration set the individual tone and mood; they also convey the narrator's judgments about the events. The authors of such non-fictional testimonies write with the claim and authority of telling the truth, and they influence their readers 'only' by their creative choice of narrative techniques. On average, this kind of factional prose tends to be event-related rather than focused on characters. Authors of the second or third generations usually interpret the events in fictional genres.³ In this contribution I tentatively suggest a typology that includes two prominent authors of the first generation as examples of a realist, (auto)biographic response to genocidal events in Asia Minor in the early 20th century, in particular during the year 1922; a major difference lies in the 'event-closeness' of these two representatives. The two other authors, belonging to the third post-genocidal generation, represent transnational fiction which is, among other specifics, characterized by its reflection on the permanent flow, transfer or circulation of people, cultures and ideas; in addition, the two authors under scrutiny here have transnational family backgrounds and personal experience with transnational migration⁴; they are bi- or multilingual, and their literary work occurs outside of national contexts and borders.

History, Law, Memory, ed. Tessa Hofmann, Matthias Björnlund, Vasileios Meichanetsidis, (New York, Athens: Aristide D. Caratzas, 2011), 100f.

3. For the debate on 'factional', 'non-fictive' or 'documentary fiction' in the context of Holocaust fiction cf. Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 93-94.

4. Transnational migration is characterized as repeated transboundary migration between two or more countries.

The first author to be introduced in this comparative context is Elias Venezis (born Mellos; 1904-1973). Born in 1904 in the predominantly Greek town of Ayvalık, or Kidonia in Greek, Venezis was just 18 years old when he was conscripted into a forced labor unit in the fall 1922. Out of the originally 3,000 conscripts from his native Ayvalık, only 23 men survived the premeditated cruel treatment, the deliberate shootings at the beginning of their death march into the interior and the subsequent concentration camps and forced labor. Shortly after his release from 14 months of Turkish imprisonment, Venezis published his haunting memoirs in the local weekly 'Kambana', or 'Bell', on the island of Lesbos, from where his family originated. In 1923 and 1924, 'Kambana' was run by the author Stratis Myrivilis (born Efstratios Stamatopoulos, 1890-1969), who became a mentor and literary model for Venezis. In 1931, a first book version with 20 brief chapters appeared under the title "The number 31,328: The Book of Slavery" ("Το noumero 31,328: Το vivlio tes sklavias"). Venezis called his book "written with blood" and largely waived on literary methods and fictionalization, trying to let facts speak for themselves. His photographically precise representation reflects a world in which the supreme goal of life is to be registered as a number, because only after 1923 Ottoman Greeks were registered as prisoners and subsequently got a chance to be protected by the International Red Cross and eventually to depart to Greece. Until their registration, they possessed no rights whatsoever.

Due to the author's documentary approach, 'The Book of Slavery' reads as an illustrative history of the destruction of the Greeks of Asia Minor, including scenes of humiliation, gang rape, and massive killings, in which even Turkish children took part. Venezis recalled a group of thirty Greek Orthodox priests who were detached to his labour convoy; among them was an old man, who soon broke down and could no longer walk:

The soldiers dragged him to the side of the road and they released him face down and then began to beat him with their rifle butts. He did not even give a groan, only his tongue began to lick the earth to see if it were dry or bitter.

From the heights of Attalus, a few meters from where we were, the Turkish children were playing, and they ran downhill to the scene. The soldiers withdrew in order to continue our march and the children began at once to stone the body which was in its death throes. For some time we could hear the dull thud of the stones as they began to accumulate atop the priest.⁵

In the 18th chapter Venezis tells how he and his comrades were given the task to hide the corpses of approximately 40,000 Christian men, women and children from Smyrna and Magnesia (Greek: Μαγνησία ή υπό Σιπύλω; today: Manisa) before the arrival of a commission from the League of Nations. This commission is expected to monitor, for the first time ever, the conditions of the 'labor battalions'.

5. Quoted from: Speros Vryonis, "Greek Labour Battalions in Asia Minor," in *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies*, ed. Richard Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 282.

Corrupted by genocide: loss of empathy

One of the outstanding features of Venezis' narration is the precise exploration of gradual corruption by the infliction of genocide: Long before physical death itself, the victims' dignity, humanity and integrity is destroyed; exhausted and tired, as the deportees are, they become indifferent to co-sufferers. This loss of empathy and compassion is illustrated, among many other examples, with the refusal of the first person narrator and his comrades to intervene when a Greek woman is brutally gang-raped in the presence of her husband and their three-year-old infant in a church where the deportees have to spend the night. On the next day, the husband, a watchmaker, collapses during the death march, while his wife is struggling to carry their infant alone. The other male deportees realize her difficulties, but are too weak to help (chapters 4 and 5):

The herd halted. The soldiers tried to bring him back into a trot. They pushed at him. It did not help. They beat him with whips, afterwards with rifle butts. The baby began to cry.

You will kill him! Do you not see that? Called his wife, who lunged at the soldier. I will carry the child! Her lips trembled. Her eyes were cold and hard. She held out her weak arms and sat the crying child on her shoulders. She did not caress it. None of us moved to help her.

She will not stand it. She is a woman, told one of us.

No, she will not endure.

(...) The watchmaker rose, and we moved on. Before long, sank the hard gaze of the woman. It softened. Finally, it was filled, silently, with tears. A little further on she fell. Beside herself, she took the child in her arms and burst into tears.

Let us! ... Let us die here! She cried, sobbing.

Now, the leader of the escort said angrily, then another will carry that child.

We all made an unconscious movement, as to escape a threat. The soldiers seized one of the last in the column and put the child on his shoulders. A bit farther he cried they should give it to somebody else. Then it was my turn. It was real martyrdom - because we had to walk, were naked and starving, were so exhausted that we ourselves were to fall on the ground at any moment. I went tumbling there, then I called, another should take the child. Everyone rushed to the front to escape in the first rows. (...) A little child had become a nightmare. The anger hardened more and more in our tormented heart. Why it does not want to die? Suddenly someone uttered wildly. (...) No one said that this would be a pity. Was that hatred of a little child? Yes, it was hatred.⁶

6. Elias Venesis [i.e. Venezis], Nr. 31328; *Leidensweg in Anatolien* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1969), 60-62; translated from German by Tessa Hofmann. – On online edition of the Greek original is available

In this world of merciless self-interest of the victims and perpetrators, rape and even killings of co-sufferers represent welcome interludes, for they provide the other deportees with an opportunity to rest longer or to stretch out more comfortably in their cramped accommodation, once some of their comrades are shackled and led away to be killed (chapter 9):

The two girls that we had with us since Pergamon gave us a lot of relaxation. They were still unploughed soil and over again there were stays. The soldiers shared them, retreated with them, came back; then we marched further. These border decorations of the march did us good.⁷

Being the only two young male deportees in this convoy, the narrator and his friend Argyris, who is also among the deportees, have an additional reason to be thankful that women and girls are raped instead of them (chapter 7).

With his focus on the overall loss of humanity and civilization, including critical self-exploration, and in particular with his sarcasm, Venezis resembles the master of literature on dehumanization, the Polish author and survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau, Tadeusz Borowski (1922-1951)⁸, who after the Second World War literally explored the 'Auschwitz system' as the complete corruption of human empathy and compassion. In Borowski's stories, the differences between the victims and perpetrators blur, because the 'Auschwitz System' destroys in numerous ways the humanity of all those who come into closer contact with this system, voluntarily or not. Among other examples, Venezis and Borowski exemplify genocidal corruption by the system of overseers, or *kapos*⁹, who belong to the same groups as the other inmates of the Turkish and German concentration camps, but are given certain privileges and powers over their fellows:

*The battalion was divided into companies, the companies into trains. The management by the Turkish officers could not easily be done in direct ways. Therefore from the beginning a non-commissioned officer or *çavuş*, who had a command of Turkish, was determined for each train. Mikhál *çavuş*, Vasil *çavuş*, Yován *çavuş*. These sergeants did not work. They led only supervision. In these positions came, as it always happens, the most devious. Greeks and Armenians. (...) To gain the favor with the battalion, they sucked us out at work. They feared neither God nor devil. (...) ¹⁰*

on this site: <https://1oholargou.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/13078091-31328.pdf>

7. Venezis, Nr. 31328, 75.

8. Cf. the collection of stories in Tadeusz Borowski, *U nas w Auschwitzu* (Here in Auschwitz), 1946; *Pożegnanie z Marią* (Farewell to Maria), 1947; *Kamienny świat* (A World of Stone), 1948; *Proszę Państwa do gazu* (This way for the gas, Ladies and Gentlemen), 1949.

9. In the Greek original, the Ottoman Turkish term '*çavuş*' ('sergeant') is used which was a military rank in the army and the police (gendarmes). The German translation of 1969, however, uses 'Kapo' instead. The origin of 'Kapo' is uncertain: German (abbreviation from 'Kameradschaftspolizei'), French (caporal) or Italian (il capo). The 'Kapo system' was established in German concentration camps during Nazi reign.

10. Venezis, Nr. 31328, 157 f.

Mikhál *çavuş* embodies the worst characteristics of Greek overseers. Without any scruples, he sells an entire train of Greek labor soldiers to be butchered by revenge-seeking Turks, sharing the profit with a Turkish officer.¹¹ He also torments Venezis' narrator Elias for the refusal to serve Mikhál as a cook and presumably also as a sex slave. The narrator points out the profound polarization between those 'slaves, who gave orders and pocketed the bribes, and on the other side, us, the people that shed the sweat and blemished the air with its moans'.¹²

Such a polarization does not exist in Borowski's depiction of Auschwitz. In his startling short story "Proszę państwa do gazu" (1946; "This way for the gas, Ladies and Gentlemen", 1967), Borowski recounts a typical workday of the 'Canada' squad in the Auschwitz camp, where the 'Canada' members collaborate in the daily extermination of 10,000 and more Jewish deportees from all of Europe. The squad members have the task to meet the incoming deportees, to drive them hurriedly out of the railway waggons to the selection by SS men and to rush the designated victims to the gas chambers. The 'Canadians' enjoy this 'work' as an opportunity to amply steal and rob from the victims, and they are largely immune to the massive human suffering that they witness daily.

The monstrosity of the events, depicted by Venezis and Borowski, contrasts with the simplicity of their narrative styles. In particular Borowski limits his narration to the description of the behavior and outward reactions of his characters; unlike Venezis, whose narrator articulates clear moral judgements, Borowski entirely excludes the description of inner emotions, motivations or moral positions. The first person narrators both of Venezis and Borowski bear autobiographical characteristics of their authors, but the differences between Tadeusz Borowski and his 'survivalist' narrator Tadek seem to be larger than those between Venezis and his young narrator Elias. In his conclusive reflections, Borowski's narrator cynically lists the material benefits of mass murder for the overseers and other privileged inmates of Auschwitz, suggesting a system in which nearly everyone benefits from the Holocaust, albeit to various degrees:

*The Kapo is busily engaged with a large kettle. He stuffs in silk, gold and coffee. That's for the guards at the gate. In return they will let the squad pass uncontrolled. For a few days, the camp will live by this transport, will eat its ham and sausages, it will drink its booze and liqueur, wearing its clothes and trade with its money and jewelry. The civilians carry a whole lot of things out of the camp. To Silesia, to Kraków, maybe even further. In return, they bring cigarettes, eggs, booze and letters from home ... For a few days the camp will talk about the transport "Bendzin-Sosnowiec". A good, rich transport it has been.*¹³

Like Venezis before him, Borowski published his memoirs promptly after the crimes that he

11. Ibid, 160-162.

12. Ibid, 187.

13. The English translation of Borowski's "Proszę Państwa do gazu" (New York: Penguin Group, 1967; 1976) contains too many deletions and other arbitrary changes to the text; I therefore translated from the German edition; cf. Tadeusz Borowski, *Die steinerne Welt. Erzählungen* (München: R. Piper, 1963), 132.

survived and depicted. In difference to Venezis, however, Borowski did not live to (relatively) old age, but committed suicide after a few restless years in post-War Poland and Germany.

Later non-fictional memoirs

This promptness of the literary response is one of the main differences between Venezis and the journalist and writer Dido Sotiriou, who captured inter-communal life during the last decade of Ottoman rule from the distance of 30 years after the destruction of Smyrna. Her biographical non-fictional novel *“Ματωμένα Χώματα”* (“Bloodied Soil”, 1962; English title: *“Farewell, Anatolia!”*) is based on the testimony of 360 handwritten pages, which the witness and survivor Manolis Axiotis had handed over to her.¹⁴ Born into a poor Ionian peasant family of the village of Kirkica (today: Şirince)¹⁵ above the ancient city of Ephesos, where the indigenous Greek population had to assimilate linguistically to their Turkish neighbors, Axiotis experienced conscription into labor battalions twice, in 1915 and in 1922; at both occasions, he survived daily workloads of up to 18 hours and numerous fatal hardships to which the Greek conscripts were deliberately exposed. He deserted the units each time, until he was eventually saved by fishermen from the Greek island of Samos and became a dockworker in Piraeus. Three years after the publication of Sotiriou’s transcript of his account, Axiotis came out with his own book *‘The Tangled Ball’* (*“Το μπερδέμενο κουβάρι”*), which was “heavily influenced by the author’s experience of decolonization, international socialism and the peace movement of the 1960s”¹⁶. Axiotis subsequently criticized Sotiriou for having ‘nationalized’ his account.¹⁷

In contrast to Axiotis, Dido Sotiriou was the daughter of a wealthy Ionian entrepreneur, who went bankrupt due to the Young Turks’ boycott measures against the Greek financial and industrial elite of the Ottoman Empire. However, being communist, Sotiriou largely shared Axiotis’ political views. Repeatedly, her narrator in the first person, and in particular her Cretan protagonist Nikitas Drosakis, emphasize that it is not the people, but the profiteers of war and conflict who bear the responsibility for the destruction of the Greeks and Armenians of Asia Minor. Therefore, and despite her numerous examples of anti-Greek atrocities, Sotiriou’s narrative contains several examples of good, just and likable Turks, be it Ismail Agha, the benevolent military doctor, Şükrü Efendi, who saved 700 labor conscripts, the farmer Ali Dayi, who tries to treat Manolis like his own son, or Ali Dayi’s daughter Advije, who fell for Manolis. “The same earth nurtured our two people”, reflects the literary Axiotis on the relationship of Turks with Greeks. “Deep down we neither hated them, nor they us.”¹⁸ According to Sotiriou, the real competitors of the Greeks of Asia Minor are not the Turks, but the Christian Levantines who enjoyed an extraterritorial status; one

14. Vangelis Calotychos, *The Balkan Prospect. Identity, Culture, and Politics in Greece after 1989* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 154.

15. After the Lausanne Treaty (1923), the village has been populated with Muslim settlers from Kavala (Greece).

16. Calotychos, *The Balkan Prospect*, 154.

17. Ibid.

18. Dido Sotiriou, *Farewell, Anatolia*, trans. by Fred. A. Reed (Athens: Kedros, 1991), 61.

of Sotiriou's Greek peasant protagonists calls them "European leeches, sucking Turkey's blood straight from the vein."¹⁹

In the novels of Sotiriou and other Greek authors from Asia Minor, such as Venezis, Myrivilis²⁰ or Kosmas Politis (born Paraskevas Taveloudis, 1888-1974)²¹, we find, "maybe for the first time in Greek literature, 'the ordinary Turk', (...) who is not a conqueror, a person in the service of the 'state'"; if a literary Turk (or a Greek) behaves cruelly, it is because of war and conflict.²² Venezis articulates criticism and disdain for those Greeks who work as overseers of their compatriots (chapter 15), but simultaneously understanding for the poor soldiers from Anatolia who have to watch the Greek prisoners and are mistreated by their superiors: "*How did they differ? We were infidels, were prisoners. And those, who were free?*" (p. 202)

Both Venezis and Sotiriou describe the same fatal Turkish-Greek dialectic of atrocities, retribution and revenge killings, but Sotiriou projects the political and ethical responsibilities for the 'catastrophe of Asia Minor' largely on external, 'imperialistic' factors, and less on the military occupation and civic administration in Ionia during 1919-1922, as established by Greece with Allied and in particular British consent.²³ According to her, a million Armenians and about 500,000 Greeks fall victim to the imperialist plans first of the Germans, then of the victorious Entente: "*The deeply rooted Christian population who held in their hands the wealth and the keys to Anatolia had to be eliminated.*"²⁴ Here we must remember that Sotiriou's accusation occurred against the more recent background of starvation, massacres and dispossession, suffered in Greece during the German occupation in the Second World War, thus perhaps representing a constructed continuity of German war crimes against the Greek nation throughout two world wars.

In this vein, Yakovos, the godfather of the narrator Manolis, quotes the martyred and

19. Sotiriou, *Farewell, Anatolia*, 57.

20. St. Myrivilis was born on the Aegean island of Lesbos that until 1912 belonged to the Ottoman Empire. In the literary context of Asia Minor, he is mostly known for his autobiographical novel *Η ζωή εν τάφω* (The Life in the Tomb, 1924), in which he depicts his experience as a volunteer soldier against the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1922.

21. Born in Athens, K. Politis lived in Smyrna from his early childhood until 1922. In his popular novel *Eroica* (1937-1938) which combines elements of autobiography and a novel of education (*Bildungsroman*), Politis tells about a group of boys, growing up in Smyrna.

22. Iraklis Millas, "Tourkokratia: History and Image of the Turk in Greek Literature," in *When Greeks Think About Turks: A View from Anthropology*, ed. Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 54.

23. For Lloyd George's foreign policy towards Turkey and Greece and Greece's policy towards Asia Minor see: Michael Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision. Greece in Asia Minor, 1919-1922* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1973; with extensive bibliography: Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998); about the Greek occupation and administration of Ionia see the unpublished doctoral dissertation of Victoria Solomonides, *The Greek Administration of the Vilayet of Aidin 1919-1922* (London: King's College, University of London, 1984); Giles Milton, *Paradise Lost. Smyrna 1922* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Edward Hale Bierstadt, *The Great Betrayal. Economic Imperialism & and the Destruction of Christian Communities in Asia Minor* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1924; Reprint: Bloomingdale: The Pontian Greek Society of Chicago, 2008)

24. Sotiriou, *Farewell, Anatolia*, 138.

canonized Metropolitan Chrysostomos Kalafatis of Smyrna (1867-1922), warning his flock of the Germans and the 'conqueror' General Liman von Sanders²⁵ in particular: "He had been sent to our land with the cruel intention of eradicating us, to tear the Golden Fleece from our hands. In fact, Turkey had become little more than a German colony. (...) In a word, the Greeks and the Armenians were a serious obstacle to German interests; they had to be pushed aside."²⁶

When a controversy around history school textbooks in Greece emerged during the years 2007-2009, the government suggested replacing a debated textbook with Sotiriou's popular novel. As the debate of those years revealed, 'Farewell, Anatolia!' is usually perceived according to ideological and political proclivities; for leftists, her narrative about 'national betrayal' is sometimes perceived as too nationalistic, whereas rightists cannot agree with the communist author's antiimperialist interpretation of 'national betrayal'.²⁷

The literary works of most 'μικρασιάτες' [mikrasiates] – as the refugees from Asia Minor are called in Greece – do not contain revanchist appeals and perhaps therefore were

25. The case of Liman von Sanders illustrates the discrepancies between political or literary myth and historic reality: In reality, the intervention of the German General of Cavalry, Otto Liman von Sanders, supported by the German Foreign Office, saved the Greeks of Ionia from wholesale deportation in 1916 and the Greeks of Smyrna in late 1917, although in April 1917 Liman had ordered the 'evacuation' of the Greek population of Ayvalik (Aivali, Kydonies) and its surroundings, which at that time was estimated to be 12,000 to 20,000. The reason given for Liman's order was 'persistent treason and espionage communication' of the Ayvalik residents with the Entente military. In 1915, Liman von Sanders successfully stopped the deportation of Armenians from Smyrna, against the will of the Ottoman governor Rahmi. In his memoirs Liman von Sanders did not mention the Ayvalik deportation of 1917, but wrote in the context of his inspection tour to Ayvalik in summer 1915 that Germans in Turkey were exposed to "truly unfounded attacks": "During summer of the same year, at the time of the Dardanelles fights, I received a letter of the German Ambassador, by which King Constantine of Greece inquired whether I really had said to the mayor of Edremid that 'all Greeks deserved to be thrown into the sea.' But during my brief stay in that town I had neither met, nor talked to the mayor of Edremid, nor to a similar personality, and of course I did not make any remarks about Greeks, with whom I had nothing to do there. I was able to reject with few words this shameless invention. (...) Being a Turkish general, I was a stumbling block to several fanatic Greeks." Otto Liman von Sanders, *Fünf Jahre in der Türkei [Five years in Turkey]* (Berlin 1920), 70.

False accusations led to the detention of Liman von Sanders on 3 February 1919 and his arrest on Malta until his release on 21 August 1919. He was one of the only three high ranking officers of Jewish descent in the German forces during the First World War and suffered from the anti-Jewish atmosphere; in Turkey, he was in conflict with the pro-German War Minister Enver, whom Liman despised. – See also: Jürgen Gottschlich, *Beihilfe zum Völkermord. Deutschlands Rolle bei der Vernichtung der Armenier* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2015), 104f., 107-110, 120-123

26. Sotiriou, *Farewell, Anatolia*, 73f.

27. Lydia Papadimitriou, "Book Review: The Balkan Prospect: Identity, Culture and Politics in Greece after 1989, Vangelis Calotychos (2013), New York: Palgrave Macmillan", *Journal of Greek Media & Culture*, 2014, 1:1, 167. More recently, the socialist-nationalist coalition under Alexis Tsipras has changed official memory and history politics: The destruction of Pontian Greeks is no longer qualified as a genocide, but minimized to 'persecutions' (diogmoi), whereas more generally the genocide of the Greeks of Asia Minor seems to have completely disappeared from official wordings and announcements. In summer 2015, the ministry of education enacted a policy as a result of which the 'Pontian persecutions' would not be included in the examination content.

acceptable for Turkish readers, too. Both Venezis' and Sotiriou's novels saw Turkish translations, in the case of 'Matomena Homata' 16 editions in all.²⁸

The loss of the Anatolian homeland is nevertheless deeply mourned by Greek authors. In the first sentence of his 'Book of Slavery', Venezis expresses the nostalgia for a gentle and abundant land in contrast to the horrors to come: "1922. Anatolia was so sweet - as a sonnet or something of the kind. Everything in nature was gentle and mild this fall." The comparison of the desired country with a sophisticated classical poem underlines the cultural dimension of the loss.

In the end of his tale Sotiriou's narrator Manolis Axiotis directly addresses a personalized Anatolia, asking for her forgiveness; for him, Anatolia is a country where the Greeks were deeply rooted, but had to abandon everything, after, under Hellenic administration and for less than three years, they had enjoyed the liberty that they were denied for centuries under Ottoman rule:

There, across the water, we abandoned our homes, our bolted storerooms, our wedding wreath laid atop the iconostase, our ancestors in their graveyards. We abandoned our children and parents and brothers, left our dead unburied, the living without a roof over their heads. Haunted dreams. There. Over there, until just yesterday, it had been our home.

*(...) So much suffering, so much tragedy. Now my mind wanted only to return to the past. If it could only all be lie, if we could only go back to our land, to our gardens, to our forests with their songbirds, sparrows and tiny owls, to our orchards with their tangerine trees and flowering cherries, to our beautiful festivals... (...) Farewell Anatolia! Hold it not against us that we drenched you with blood. (...) A curse on the guilty ones!*²⁹

Desiring the other: Eros and sex in times of conflict and genocide

Passionate, but socially unaccepted and therefore not lasting erotic encounters between Greek and Turkish protagonists are part of the plots not only in Sotiriou's novel, but also in Aris Fioretos' transnational novel³⁰ 'Den Siste Greken' (2009; 'Der letzte Grieche', 2011). In Venezis' early published memoirs, the narrator meets the deportee and slave laborer Jacques, who is a 23 years old Armenian musician posing as a Greek. When Jacques' real profession is revealed, he is detached to become the piano teacher of the Turkish colonel's young daughter; this tremendously improves his living standards, but at the same time causes a profound dilemma:

28. However, in 2015 a publication of "To noumero 31,328: To vivlio tes sklaviav" by the Istanbul Belge Publishing House was banned; the case is now under trial. According to publisher Ragıp Zarakolu, in Turkey there are since 1996 five cases of banned and trialed books on Greek issues. A new edition of the 1970 Turkish edition of "Farewell, Anatolia" was banned and put on trial in 1982, with the accusation of "insulting Turkishness".

29. Sotiriou, *Farewell, Anatolia*, 297f.

30. Transnational novels (and perhaps transnationalism in general) are characterized by the three topics of immigration, cultural clash and cultural diffusion, which cause the figures and the readers to search for identity.

Since one or two days, she began to look at him with other eyes. In the beginning her behavior towards him was neutral – she touched him, teased him, did not look at him as a male being. She treated him as an object, let’s say, like the piano. They told her: He is yours. But due to the better food Jacques transformed into the Jacques he had once been. And this old Jacques was a sweet boy with huge eyes.³¹

Instructed by his Greek friend, the narrator Elias, not to give in to the girl’s persistent attempts to seduce him, Jacques eventually becomes the victim of her revenge. “Angry, as a wild animal”, the repulsed girl whips the young man’s face bloody, dismisses him as a teacher and returns him mercilessly to his miserable life as a slave laborer.

In Sotiriou’s novel the main protagonist and narrator Manolis Axiotis finds himself in a similar conflict, but with some remarkable distinctions: Given to the farmer Ali Dayi as a slave laborer, Manolis submits for once to the seduction by his beautiful daughter Advije. But when she understands that they have no chance as a couple, the generous Advije is far from taking revenge and from egoist claims: “*I do not regret a thing, and I’m not worried for myself. You are all I care about, Manolis. I don’t want you to be hurt. Love blinded me; I did not know what I was doing. You are Christian, I am Turkish. The laws are strict. It would be hard for us to marry. How could you ever live in a place like this, what with your land down Smyrna way?*” (...)

I could not sleep that night; what was I to do about Advije? I had become entangled; badly. I was afraid that we might be found out, that I might be forced to turn Turk, to marry her. I had to make a decision, fast, no matter how hard. It was time to leave!³²

When Advije learns about Manolis’ secret plan to desert, she even offers self-denial, i.e. her conversion to Christianity:

Don’t do it, Manolis. Stay with us until the war is over, and then, if you wish, I will come with you to your land. You can tell your family I am Christian, does it really matter? Whatever you love I will love, and whatever you believe, I will believe. Here in Ankara all the Christian women speak Turkish, and I cannot tell the difference between us. Don’t tell them my name is Advije, tell them it’s Maria.

My poor little Advije! You spoke the language of true love, but how could I have ever hoped to understand in the whirlwind of hatred whipped up by the war?³³

Sotiriou’s treatment of this conflict follows traditional gender clichés: Although Manolis is a prisoner and Advije a free woman of the ruling Turkish majority, it is the nevertheless the constrained man who takes the decision. Lacking imagination and trust in their common future and perhaps also lacking true love for his Turkish lover, Manolis decides to leave Advije.

31. Venezis, Nr. 31328,114.

32. Sotiriou, *Farewell, Anatolia*, 126.

33. Ibid, 139f.

In Fioretos' 'The Last Greek' it is again the Greek partner, who takes the decision about a seemingly unacceptable bi-religious and bi-ethnic love story: The deaf, but educated and beautifully green-eyed Turk Erol Bulut, a mechanic of bicycles and a scribe, has set eyes on Despina Bakirikas, the 17 years old daughter of a Greek baker in Smyrna. In her environment, Despina is reputed to have an "adventurous heart" and to be a girl "that did what Turkish boys were doing". Although Despina's illiterate mother Sofia intercepts the perfumed love letters of the young Turk, Despina, who likes cycling, agrees to join Erol for a bike tour and to be seduced behind a mosque at the periphery of the city. When she realizes her pregnancy, Despina arranges a meeting with Erol in a cafe, trying to metaphorically explain her situation to her deaf lover:

Well, it is like this: Even the moon that shines above your quarter of the city is growing. Today it may be a crescent, but tomorrow we shall have a half-moon and after-tomorrow the full moon. And then, my friend, it will not be bread that is coming out of the oven. If you know what I mean. (...) I mean, if you do not understand what can happen behind a mosque, it is Good Night. Please try to understand that, for God's sake. Or the sake of Allah, if you prefer. Soon new stars will be born.³⁴

In contrast to the humble Advıye of Manolis Axiotis/Sotiriou, Despina dares to confide in her mother who then convinces her husband Lefteris to hurriedly arrange a marriage with his compatriot Yannis Georgiadis, who soon develops a preference for young boys in the capital city Constantinople. Although many in Despina's environment sense a possible 'illegitimacy' in Despina's son Yannis, who is born only seven months after marriage, the climate of overall tolerance and tacit acceptance of 'adventurous passions' across communal borders prevent dramatic twists, for Fioretos' protagonists are convinced that collective identities are constructed rather than inherited: *The priest, who had seen more strange baptisms than this one, also preferred to keep silence. But when he anointed the fore-head, chest, back, hands and feet of the infant with olive-oil, he whispered, for safety's sake: "Wherever you may have come from, little friend, from now on you will be a genuine Greek. Don't ever forget that! And make your mother proud!"*³⁵

Although not officially accepted, the friendship and love between Erol and Despina proves to be lasting and even lifesaving. When Erol reads the wedding announcement of Despina and Georgiadis, he decides not to belong to anyone except "Allah, the Almighty" and becomes a mu-ezzin. But from afar he follows the destiny of his erstwhile lover and their son Yannis. 27 years later, in mid-September 1922, when Kemalist troops set fire on the Christian quarters of Smyrna, Erol suddenly and just in time appears at Despina's house: "Y-you were right", he explained *tonelessly, but comprehensively, as if their last conversation of two decades ago had never end-*

34. Aris Fioretos, *Der letzte Grieche; Roman* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2011), 70. The novel first appeared in Swedish (2009), than in Dutch and German translation (2011), followed by a translation into French (2012). The quotations in this contribution were translated from German into English by Tessa Hofmann.

35. Fioretos, *Der letzte Grieche*, 80.

ed. (...) *"It is f-full moon, I mean. At present your God hides in a r-rabbit hole."*³⁶

Erol gives his garment of a muezzin to his son, helping him to disguise and to escape, together with Despina and her bike. Despite the hardships that mother and son endure during the subsequent death march, Despina recalls Erol with gratefulness, once they reach their new homeland:

*Together they marched in one of those kilometers long columns, consisting mainly of Greek families and their animals that left Smyrna in September 1922. Many perished, others fell to the ground and refused to walk any further. (...) Two weeks later the refugees arrived in a homeland that none of them had ever set foot on. "Beloved Erol, Allah ismarladik", murmured Despina, when they crossed the border.*³⁷

Comparing the literary treatment of sexual encounters between members of conflicting ethno-religious communities under genocidal circumstances, the two authors from Asia Minor, Venezis and Sotiriou, depict them as socially impossible, painful and tormenting, regardless of whether Greeks and Turks afflicted by desire gave in to their passion or resisted. With a time difference of more than 85 years, Aris Fioretos treats the same constellation in a more relaxed and even humorous, tongue-in-cheek way: Although he does not lead his Turkish and Greek lovers into marriage, he describes their profound love as unshaken by times of complete disaster and catastrophe.

Transnational fiction

In some postmodern³⁸ novels of the 21st century, authors of the Greek Diasporas³⁹ expanded the narrative of the Asia Minor 'catastrophe' into intergenerational tales of flight, migration and integration into the societies of receiving countries. The most prominent examples, published by such 'global Greeks', are Jeffry Eugenides' Pulitzer awarded 'Middlesex' (2002), written in English, and Aris Fioretos' novel 'The Last Greek' (2009), written in Swedish. Eugenides' narrator and main protagonist is the hermaphrodite Cal Stephanides (born as Calliope Helen, or Callie), who embodies physical and social hybridity. The cultural concept of intersexuality, or hermaphroditism, derives from Asia Minor, where according to Greek mythology the intimate embrace of the goddess Aphrodite and the god Hermes generates the hybrid Hermaphroditos.⁴⁰ Being positioned 'in-between' their country of origin and the receiving country, immigrant communities can similarly be

36. Ibid., 86.

37. Ibid., 89.

38. In this contribution, the term 'postmodern fiction/novel' is used in its rather formal connotation, relating to fiction after the Second World War. While there is little consensus on the precise characteristics of postmodern literature, the term seems stylistically applicable to Aris Fioretos' 'The Last Greek' and the use of historiographic metafiction, fragmentation and temporal distortion in that novel.

39. Cf. Dimitris Tsiovas (ed.), *Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700: Society, Politics and Culture* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

40. Anika Götje, *"Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides' 'Middlesex'."* (MA Thesis, Universität Hannover, 2005), 4ff.

defined as hybrid. According to one of the protagonists in Eugenides' immigrant novel, the hermaphrodite represents "what is to come next", i.e. the New Man with changing and highly individual identities. For the author, androgyny serves as a metaphor to question identities, based on difference⁴¹; Eugenides suggests a concept of bridging or crossing the differences, be it gender, ethnic/communal or social difference. The scholar S. Caovoux concluded: "(...) *Middlesex* show(s) the erosion of the traditional understanding of both ethnic identity and gender identity. Describing the limits of multiculturalism, the (...) author (...) seem(s) to reject any given identity category, unable to fit to individual subjectivities."⁴²

Callie or Cal Stephanides' particular sex is the genetic result of an incestuous romance between his grandparents Desdemona and Eleftherios ('Lefty'). Typical for the social-economic situation of rural Christians in the Ottoman Empire, the orphaned siblings are producers (Desdemona) and traders (Eleftherios) of silk cocoons. Grown up in the remote village of Bithynios⁴³ at the slope of Mount Olympus⁴⁴ (Asia Minor), they are confronted with a declining population of less than one hundred and few chances to meet agreeable Greek marriage partners. Instead, the two young people, who grew up together, discover their attraction to each other. In a milieu where the Orthodox prohibition of intermarriage between cousins of first and second grade has been violated for generations, such a step does not appear all too unexpected. However, the night when brother and sister first realize their mutual attraction to each other coincides with the retreat of the Hellenic administration from nearby Bursa (Prusa in Greek) on 31 August 1922 and the defeat of the Hellenic army in Asia Minor. The siblings decide to leave for Greece via Smyrna:

By the morning (...) Desdemona's forebodings had been borne out. The Megale idea had come to an end. The Turks had captured Afyon. The Greek army, beaten, was fleeing toward the sea. In retreat, it was setting fire to everything on its path. Desdemona and Lefty, in dawn's light, stood at the mountainside and surveyed the devastation. Black smoke rose for miles across the valley. Every village, every tree, every field was aflame.

"We can't stay here," Lefty said. "The Turks will take revenge."

*"Since when did they need a reason?"*⁴⁵

Desdemona and Lefty disagree on the interpretation of the sequence of events and revenge-

41. Arne De Boever, *States of Exception in the Contemporary Novel: Martel, Eugenides, Coetzee, Sebald* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 54.

42. Sophie Coavoux, *Greek Diaspora and Hybrid Identities: Transnational and Transgender Perspectives in Two novels: Loaded, by Christos Tsiolkas (Australia) and Middlesex, by Jeffrey Eugenides (USA)* "Transtext(e)s Transcultures: Journal of Global Transcultural Studies", 7, 2012, <http://transtexts.revues.org/451>

43. A fictitious toponym, after the ancient region of Bithynia

44. Mount Olympus (Olympos in Greek) is one of 20 mountains of same name on the territory of recent Turkey. It can be identified as the highest mountain in the Marmara region, Uludağ, or Keşiş Dağı, "Mountain of Monks in Turkish (2,543 m), which is located at the southern edge of the ancient region of Bithynia.

45. Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002), 42.

taking on both sides, and so does the narrator/author, leaving it to the reader to decide whether the massacres and crimes, committed in mid-September 1922 in Asia Minor, were intentional destruction or rather retaliation.

With changed passport identities the siblings succeed to embark from Smyrna and marry on board a ship to the United States. The story of their family develops according to the experience of immigrant communities from Asia Minor in the United States during the first half of the 20th century, where Greeks and Armenians find themselves sandwiched 'in-between' the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant upper class and the African Americans. Although Eugenides always refused to have his novel categorized as autobiographic, he nevertheless drew on his own family story, in particular on his father's Greek ancestry and also on his childhood and adolescence in Eugenides' native city Detroit and his time in Berlin.⁴⁶

Flowing, flexible identity is also a major theme for Aris Fioretos, who is of Greek-Austrian descent, grew up in Sweden and has found an adopted home in Berlin.⁴⁷ His third novel 'The Last Greek' tells the story of Yannis Georgiadis, who was born in a Macedonian village as a child of refugees from Smyrna. This postmodern 'picaresque novel'⁴⁸ unfolds over four generations starting in the mid-19th century, and develops a story of repeated catastrophe and losses, which is followed by emigration, migration and alienation each time: first from Asia Minor to Greece and from there to North and Central Europe. Fioretos' narrator Kostas Kezdoglu is a friend of the main hero Yannis and author of his biography, which comes as a supplement to the 'Encyclopedia of Diasporic Greeks'. The twelve volumes of the 'Encyclopedia' form a collective memory, established and written by Smyrniote survivor Eleni Vembas and her friends, who took it upon themselves to write the history of all those Greeks who had to leave their homeland during the 20th century. Yannis Georgiadis, the protagonist of the supplement, is the last of three generations of the same name, and he is also the last member in his family born in Greece. His biographer and friend Kostas documents the life of the last Yannis Georgiadis not in a linear, chronological way, but fragmented and thematically modularized according to the network structure of this novel. Interlinking past and present, Fioretos emphasizes the interconnection of all places and times: "People consist of other people. The only way to do them justice is to not be limited to the bare facts and a sheath of skin, bones and some internal organs."⁴⁹ At the same time the novels of Eugenides and in particular Fioretos illustrate that the literary topic of Asia Minor, which originally had been embedded into Greek national literature, moved not only into European literatures, but has been globalized, due to English or other European

46. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Writers and Their Work*, ed. Jeff Hamilton and Brian Jones, (New York: Facts On File, 2010), 125.

47. Ursula März, "Provinzler und Weltreisender," *Deutschlandfunk*, November 20, 2011, http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/provinzler-und-weltreisender.700.de.html?dram:article_id=84957

48. A reviewer classified 'The Last Greek' as 'picaresque novel'. The genre emerged in Spain in the 16th century as a variety of baroque romance, and became popular also in other European literatures since the 17th century. The term derives from the protagonist ('pícaro'), who retrospectively narrates or justifies his life in the first person. Although the classification as picaresque novel could be challenged, A. Fioretos' 'The Last Greek' contains at least some traditional features of the genre, in particular the preference for comical or satirical elements, or the linking of individual biographies with general history.

49. Fioretos, *Der letzte Grieche*, 10.

interlanguages. Meanwhile, the Great Fire of Smyrna and impossible romance between Turks and indigenous Christians caught also the attention of the Izmir born resident of Toronto, Loren Edizel, who published her English written historical novel “The Ghosts of Smyrna” (2013) first in her homeland and in Turkish translation (“İzmir Hayaletleri”⁵⁰; 2008; translated by Roza Hakmen).

In this sense the destruction of a pluralist city that has been praised as the ‘Paris of the Orient’, acquires universal significance, as Eugenides’ narrator comments: “*I want to mention these things, because they all happened in that city that was no place exactly, that was part of no country because it was all countries (...)*”.⁵¹ The irreversible loss of Smyrna therefore denotes a loss for humankind.

The Smyrna Holocaust as an episode of transnational prose

In the novels ‘Middlesex’ and ‘The Last Greek’ the destruction of Smyrna and the subsequent expulsion of surviving Greeks by Mustafa Kemal and his troops in September 1922 is a linchpin of the story. This final episode of the genocide against Ottoman Greeks has been documented and analyzed in non-fictional literature, starting with the event close recollections ‘The Blight of Asia’ (1926) by the US consul to Smyrna, George Horton (1859-1942) and Marjorie Housepian Dobkin’s (1922-2013)⁵² book ‘The Smyrna Affair’ (1966). Born as a daughter of a Smyrniote Armenian who did not survive the ‘Great Fire’, or ‘Holocaust’ of the Ionian capital, Housepian based her work on extensive eyewitness testimonies from survivors⁵³, Allied troops sent to Smyrna during the evacuation, foreign diplomats, relief workers, and Turkish eyewitnesses. Later studies, in particular by Giles Milton (‘Paradise Lost: Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of Islam’s City of Tolerance’, 2008), confirmed the accusation of contemporary witnesses that Kemalist forces set fire to the Christian quarters intentionally.

Fioretos refers to the ‘Great Fire’ and the subsequent expulsion and flight of Christian communities twice: in the fictitious editor’s prologue, which sets the novel’s frame story, and in the paragraph of the love-story of Erol Bulut and Despina Bakirikas, which results in her successful flight with the initial help of Erol. In his prologue, a fictitious editor introduces Kostas Kezdoglou as author of the supplement to the ‘Encyclopedia of Diasporic

50. Literally „The Ghosts of Izmir“; the Turkish edition avoided the original Greek toponym.

51. Eugenides, *Middlesex*, 54.

52. For a biography of Housepian see Huberta von Voss, *Portrait of Hope: Armenians in the Contemporary World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 88-92, (Chapter 10: The Ashes of Smyrna: Marjorie Housepian Dobkin, Writer (New York)).

53. A late publication of a handwritten testimony is the diary of the Armenian physician Garabed Hatcherian, published by his granddaughter Dora Sakayan in Armenian original (1995) and in English translation under the title “An Armenian Doctor in Turkey: Garabed Hatcherian: My Smyrna Ordeal of 1922” (Montreal: Arod Books, 1997). More recently, Lou Ureneck published the story of the American Methodist Minister Asa Jennings and the naval officer Lt. Commander Halsey Powell, who organized the rescue of Christians from Smyrna; the author drew largely on previously known primary sources and research by Michael Llewellyn-Smith, Richard Hovannisian, Daniel Yergin and Andrew Mango. Cf. Lou Ureneck, *The Great Fire: One American’s Mission to Rescue Victims of the 20th Century’s First Genocide* (Ecco, 2015; new edition under the title: *Smyrna, September 1922: The American Mission to Rescue Victims of the 20th Century’s First Genocide* (2016).

Greeks', which has been established by Kostas' grandmother Eleni Vembas. Already on the second page of the book the events of Smyrna in Fall 1922 are mentioned, thus becoming a major reference point in the novel:

We write the year 1922. In Smyrna they hear screams and shattering glass, bolting horses and something that could have been theater thunder, but wasn't. (...) In that fall Eleni became 38 years of age and marched with the Greeks and the animals that left the mad city in convoys. Many perished, many disappeared.

In the same summarizing style, Fioretos catches the events in the chapter 'Homeland and Homeland', which starts with the death of Despina's mother Sofia Bakirikas, who at that time suffers already from dementia ("Incapable to rise from her couch, Sofia died in the flames"), in order to return to the general picture:

On a warm day in September with unfavorable winds – we write the year 1922 – Turkish forces cordoned the Armenian quarters. They invaded in stiff uniforms with flashing sabers – gaunt, dark, determined. For nearly a week they did with the residents as they wished. When the wind eventually turned into the direction of the Christian quarters, they set the houses on fire. Because the soldiers had spilled petrol on the streets, the fire spread rapidly and greedily.⁵⁴

The following events are described mainly from the perspective of Yannis Georgiadis, who, in his disguise as a muezzin, arrives at the destroyed house of Despina's friend Eleni, where he discovers the youngest son, Pavlos Vembas. Swimming, he evacuates the child to an Italian vessel in the gulf of Smyrna: "Around them all kind of things swayed on the water: bundles of cloth, mashed water melons, charred branches, a horse... And of course human beings. In whole or parts of them, living or less living." At her old age of 94 and sick from mercury pollution and perhaps also dementia, Despina is still tormented by flashbacks from her Ottoman past: She takes her daughter-in-law for an intruding Turkish soldier ("Out of my land!") and warns of a "hill, back there, for there the tongues of the Armenians are cut off".

The devastation of Smyrna is described even more extensively in the third chapter ('An Immodest Proposal') of Eugenides' 'Middlesex', where the illegitimate love-story of Callie/Cal's grandparents unfolds against the background of the final chapter in the Ottoman Greek's destruction. The events are reflected upon from the divergent perspectives of the narrator Cal Stephanides, adding his comments in brackets, of Despina and Lefty, Dr Nishan Philobosian, a Smyrniote physician of Armenian descent, General Hajienestis⁵⁵ and the British Major Arthur Maxwell: While the siblings find themselves among hundreds of thousands of desperate, starving Greek refugees, Hajienestis is described as insane and incapable: "On September 6, 1922, General Hajienestis, Commander in Chief of the Greek Forces in Asia Minor, awoke with the impression that his legs were made of glass. Afraid to

54. Fioretos, *Der letzte Grieche*, 85f.

55. The historical model for this character was the Hellenic General Georgios Hatsianestis (1863-1922), who largely led the war against the Turkish nationalist forces from his bed, for fear that his alleged 'glass bones' might break.

get out of bed, he sent the barber away, forgoing his morning shave” (p. 43). On September 8, he gives his first and only command for weeks (“Up anchors! Reverse engines. Full steam ahead!” p. 54), leaving the city of Smyrna entirely undefended:

On shore, Lefty and Desdemona watched the Greek fleet leaving. The crowd surged toward the water, raised its four hundred thousand hands, and shouted. And then it fell silent. Not one mouth uttered a sound as the realization came home that their own country had deserted them, that Smyrna had now no government, and that there was nothing between them and the advancing Turks.⁵⁶

To this betrayal the next one is added: The refugees and Christian residents of Smyrna hope for Greek ships to evacuate them, but no vessel appears. The conversations between Maxwell and his subordinate Phillips reveal that the commanders of Allied ships in the Gulf of Smyrna have neither any intention nor any order to evacuate Christians from Asia Minor for whom Maxwell has nothing but racist contempt:

But surely, sir, if the Turks arrive and there's a massacre...

There is nothing we can do about it, Phillips. I've spent years in the Near East. The one lesson I've learned is that there is nothing one can do with these people. Nothing at all! The Turks are the best of the lot. The Armenian I liken to the Jew. Deficient moral and intellectual character. As for the Greeks, well, look at them. They have burned down the whole country and now they swarm in here crying for help. Nice cigar, what? ⁵⁷

Dr. Philobosian hopes in vain that he and his family will be protected by a letter of recommendation written by Mustafa Kemal, whose diverticulitis the Armenian physician has successfully treated. But the Turkish soldiers, who raid his house in Philobosian's absence, are illiterate; returning home, Philobosian finds his entire family wiped out:

It didn't occur to Dr. Philobosian that the twisted body he stepped over in the street belonged to his younger son. He noticed only that his front door was open. In the foyer, he stopped to listen. There was only silence. Slowly, still holding his doctor's bag, he climbed the stairs. All the lamps were on now. The living room was bright. Toukhie was sitting on the sofa, waiting for him. Her head had fallen backward as though in hilarity, the angle opening the wound, so that a section of windpipe gleamed. Stepan sat slumped at the dining table, his right hand, which held the letter of protection, nailed down with a steak knife. Dr. Philobosian took a step and slipped, then noticed a trail of blood leading down the hallway. He followed the trail into the master bedroom, where he found his two daughters. They were both naked, lying on their backs. Three of their four breasts had been cut off.⁵⁸

56. Eugenides, *Middlesex*, 54.

57. *Ibid*, 52.

58. *Ibid*, 60f.

In Smyrna, the destiny of the Armenian physician and the Greek siblings intertwine: First, Philobosian saves the wounded and starving Lefty by providing free medical care and supporting the young refugee with some money, then in return Lefty saves the completely shaken doctor from suicide. After Lefty has succeeded to gain a French visa for himself and his alleged wife Desdemona, he helps Philobosian to leave Smyrna, declaring the Armenian to be his cousin. In the United States, Philobosian remains the family doctor of the Stephanides and is responsible for not realizing the sexual anomaly of the newborn Cal, whom he mistakes for a "beautiful, healthy girl". Metaphorically spoken, Cal Stephanides, the hybrid New Man, emerges from the destruction of the global city of Smyrna, for the anonymity and chaos in the devastated city help Lefty and Desdemona to achieve new identities for their marriage and escape.

But as in Fioretos' novel, the female survivor Desdemona suffers from lifelong trauma. The 1967 Detroit riots remind her of Smyrna and the looting, arsonist Turks. No less traumatized, Dr. Philobosian, on the other hand, never mentions Smyrna again and leaves the room, if somebody else does. He never mentions his first wife or murdered sons and daughters. "Perhaps for that reason he was still alive", comments the narrator.

Complex symbols of creative continuity between the lost world in Asia Minor and the new homeland in North America are the silkworms and Desdemona's knowledge about them that she brought with her from Bithynia. In 'Middlesex', the silk worms are described as highly sensitive, almost mythical creatures, reacting immediately to their keepers' well-being and psychic state; in the crisis of fall 1922, they stopped spinning their cocoons. In 1932, when Desdemona is looking for ways of earning money to sustain her family, she therefore eventually accepts an offer to train young Black Muslim women to produce silk, despite her initial hesitation. Ancient Greek belief from Asia Minor meets with new African American religious convictions:

"Listen, Des, before I became Supreme Captain, I did hair and nails. Not no farmer's daughter, understand? This thumb look green to you? Help me out. What do these silkworm fellas like? How we get them to, you know, silkify?"

"It hard work."

"We don't mind."

"It take money."

"We got plenty."

Desdemona picked up a shriveled worm, barely alive. She cooed to it in Greek. (...)

Twenty-three pairs of eyes fell on Desdemona. She gathered courage. She translated what she wanted to say in English and went over it twice before she spoke. "To make good silk," she then pronounced, beginning her lessons to the Muslim Girls Training and General Civilization Class, "you have to be pure."

"We trying, Des. Praise Allah. We trying."⁵⁹

59. Ibid, 147f.