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TRACES LEADING TO PONTUS AND THE BOSPORUS: THE OTTOMAN GENOCIDE IN GERMAN LANGUAGE (POST) MIGRANT PROSE

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This literary analysis examines the representation of the Ottoman genocide against Armenians and Greeks in contemporary German prose using four examples of family narratives and travel texts, respectively. Two of the authors analyzed – Katerina Poladyan and Laura Cwiertnia – represent fictional prose, while Mirko Heinemann and Michael Asderis represent factual prose. Written three to four generations after the Ottoman genocide, all four authors ask themselves what the events of that time mean for the descendants of survivors: a burden or a legacy obligatory to preserve or remember?
At the same time, genre hybridity as a characteristic of post-genocidal or post-migrant German prose is analyzed.

Keywords: Ottoman Genocide, Post-migrant prose, Post-genocidal prose, intergenerational experience, family novel, travel prose.

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Introduction

The abundance and literary quality of contributions by the third and fourth post-genocidal generations of Armenians and Greeks to the U.S., French, and transnational prose in contemporary literature is remarkable. As I noted in a 2014 essay,[1] these are (semi-) biographical narratives from authors' family histories, centered on the Ottoman genocide and the loss of ancestral homeland (patricide). A simultaneously developed variant of contemporary Turkish prose can be described as "coming-out", for this prose touches on social taboos and identity issues that have existed for decades and continue to exist up to the present, because of the Ottoman genocide of approximately three million Christians. The best-known author of such taboo-breaking literature is the Istanbul lawyer Fethiye Çetin, whose work *Anneannem* ("My Grandmother," 2004) has had an impact far beyond

1 Tessa Hofmann, "Zwischen Coming-Out, Identitätsstiftung und (An)Klage: Der Völkermord an den Armeniern in der Erinnerungsprosa der US-armenischen Diaspora und in der Türkei," *Armenological Issues* 1 (2014): 76-91.

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Turkey thanks to numerous translations. The fact that the discovery of a grandmother's Armenian ancestry may trigger a social shock even decades after the 1915 genocide has become comprehensible to numerous non-Turkish readers through this book.[2]

With a time-lag, the genre has now found its way into contemporary German-language prose. The "gateway" is so-called (post)migrant prose, which is very pronounced in Germany, not only thanks to the extensive community of people born in Turkey, or people with a so-called Turkish migrant background. In addition, authors from the post-Soviet areas, such as the Georgia-born Nino Haratishvili or the actress Katerina Poladyan, who was born in Moscow in 1971, have likewise introduced the historical experience of their countries or their ethnic groups of origin into German-language literature. The term "post-migrant" reflects the unwillingness of numerous authors to be reduced to their ancestry or "migration history." The Germanist Jara Schmidt formulated the term in 2020 as follows:

> In recent anthologies and essayistic prose, attention is increasingly being drawn to intersectional discrimination in Germany, for example in: Fatma Aydemir / Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (eds.): *Your Homeland is Our Nightmare* (2019); Kübra Gümüşay: *Language and Being* (2020); Reyhan Şahin: *Yalla, Feminism!* (2019). What repeatedly comes to the fore in these social critiques is a frustration at having to constantly explain or even justify one's own condition, for example, one's origin or ancestry or one's religion. This state of having to explain oneself and the discrimination that goes along with it result in an almost collective feeling: rage.[3]

The four authors on whom my analysis is based represent a subgenre of migrant or post-migrant prose in the German language; it could also be called post-genocidal literature, because it is based on migration experiences triggered by the Ottoman genocide. However, the experiences of persecution and the trauma of extermination of the Armenian or Greek ancestors of these authors, who come from transnational families, date back to mostly four generations ago. Narrative communities, on the other hand, usually span only three generations: from grandparents to grandchildren. After that, experiential knowledge is no longer transmitted individually and personally, but as a component of collective, usually written knowledge. How do the authors, examined here deal with this fact? How do they and their protagonists approach events that took place more than 100 years ago?

Fictional and Factual Prose

A distinction between fictional and factual prose can already be found in Aristotle's "Poetics" (4th century BC). According to him, historians and poets differ in that "the one communicates what really happened, the other what may have happened."

2 Ibid., 80-86.

3 Jara Schmidt, "Postmigrantische Literatur und Germanistik," *Multicultural Germany Project*, 3 November 2020, https://mgp.berkeley.edu/2020/11/03/schmidt-postmigrantische-literatur-german/, accessed 27.04.2022.

In the prose on the Ottoman genocide, however, this distinction becomes blurred, as it fluctuates strikingly between fact-based narrative forms and varying degrees of fictionality. Moreover, especially for fictional prose, the mixture of two novel genres is characteristic: the family or generational novel and the travel novel. For the generational novel, the conflicts between generations are significant, as is the motif of legacy. Both genres are apparently necessary to enable the authors not only to approach the now very distant time of the Ottoman genocide but, at the same time, serve to introduce the geographically as well as culturally distant Armenia as the presumed country of origin.

Fictional prose: two travel novels

K. Poladyan (Berlin) and L. Cwiertnia (Hamburg; born 1987) are daughters of Armenian fathers and survivors of the genocide of 1915/6. Cwiertnia's Armenian family, as she confided to me, originally derives from Sinope. The Black Sea port city is also the place of origin of the family of her literary protagonist Karla, but the city remains anonymous and vague in Cwiertnia's novel. Karla's grandmother emigrated from Istanbul as a "Turkish guest worker" after the anti-Greek Istanbul pogrom ("Septembriana" 6/7 September 1955).[4]

The family of Poladyan's protagonist Helen Mazavian originates from Kars, but the search for the origins of an Armenian family bible leads Helen to the Black Sea coast and the port town of Kotyora/Ordu. This choice of the place of origin of an Armenian family story lends Poladyan's narrative the character of arbitrariness: although more than half of the population of Kotyora at the beginning of the 20th century were Christians, most were, however, Greeks.

The actress and author Poladyan grew up speaking Russian, while the journalist and author Cwiertnia spoke German in a working-class neighborhood (Bremen-Nord); she now works as an editor for the renowned weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.

The protagonists of both authors obviously display autobiographical traits. Like her first-person narrator Karla, author L. Cwiertnia went on a trip to Armenia with her father in 2016.[5] In her novel, she uses the legacy motif: with the journey to Armenia, Karla wants to fulfill the last wish of her recently deceased grandmother Maryam, because Karla's journey is dedicated to the search for a certain Lilit Kuyumciyan, who is to receive a golden bracelet. Like Cwiertnia's real Armenian father, Karla's father Avi has never been to Armenia before. K. Poladyan's protagonist Helen, in turn, travels via Istanbul to Yerevan, where she is to complete a three-month internship in manuscript restoration at the Matenadaran Manuscript Museum-Institute. She practices her skills on

4 The author's Armenian grandmother is still alive. She also came from Istanbul and arrived in Germany in 1968 as a guest worker. L. Cwiertnia tells the fate of her grandmother in her article "The Forgotten," *Zeit-Magazin,* no. 18/2022, 27 April 2022.

5 Laura Cwiertnia, "Zeigst du mir die Heimat, in der du noch nie warst, von der du aber ständig träumst, Papa?" *Die Zeit*, 19 January 2019, https://www.zeit.de/2017/04/armenien-tuerkei-reise-familie-vater-geschichte, accessed 02.03.2022.

an Armenian family bible ("healing bible"), whose signs of use and colophons soon raise the question concerning its previous owners. In both novels, then, it is objects that trigger the protagonists' quest for the past.

In the tradition of Russian-language travel texts

Beginning with Alexander Pushkin's wartime travelogue (*A Journey to Arzrum* [Erzerum] *during the Campaign of 1829*, "Путешествие в Арзрум во время похода 1829 года"), Armenia assumed an important role in the Russian prose of the 19th and especially the Soviet-dominated 20th centuries. While Pushkin perceived Armenia in the early 19th century, from a Russian perspective, still largely as a curiosity and was ultimately disappointed, Soviet Armenia rose, for Russian writers and their readers, to become the symbol of world culture, because it replaced, for educated citizens of the Soviet Union, the ancient Mediterranean cultural heritage of Greece and Italy, inaccessible to them. The poets Andrey Belyi (1880-1934), Ossip Mandelstam (1891-1938)[6] and the prose writer Andrey Bitov (1937-2018) were equally fascinated by Armenia. Moreover, Mandelstam, a Jew born in Warsaw, recognized the kinship of fate between Jews and Armenians, which is why he called Armenia the "younger sister of the Hebrew soil."

Belyi and Bitov traveled through Armenia at the invitation and under the expert guidance of prominent Armenian intellectuals; in Belyi's case it was the classic Armenian modern painter, Martiros Saryan (1880-1972), whom Bely already knew from Moscow[7] and, in Bitov's case his friend and fellow writer Hrant Matevosyan (1935-2002), the most renowned prose writer in Soviet Armenia after the Second World War. Bitov, a native of St. Petersburg, recorded his travel impressions in his book *Armyanskie uroki* ("Armenian Lessons," 1969); it did not pass through the censors entirely unscathed. Matevosyan's remarks on Armenia's history, culture, and fate are cited anonymously as utterances of "the friend," perhaps in deference to the censors of the time. The German edition (2002) of the second version of Bitov's *Uroki* notes, in the blurb, the special significance of Armenia for Russian readers and authors:

> Russians have always longed for Armenia, their south, their Italy. For Bitov, as for Mandelstam, it is a country that wants to be read. Here history has 'no beginning' – it has always been there. There is no village that was not once the capital of an ancient state in prehistoric times, no hill that was not the site of a decisive battle, no stone that was not covered in blood, and no man who is indifferent to it.[8]

6 Carmen Sippl, *Reisetexte der russischen Moderne: Andrej Belyj und Osip Mandel'stam im Kaukasus* (München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1997) https://www.academia.edu/36257239/Reisetexte_der_russischen_Moderne?email_work_card=reading-history.

7 Ibid., 117.

8 Andrej Bitow, *Armenische Lektionen: Eine Reise aus Russland* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), quoting the text on the left inside the cover.

Poladyan's travel novel is obviously in the tradition of such Russian-language travelogues about Armenia. These works are about discoveries of the unknown and deliberate confrontation with the hitherto unknown. This is also indicated by the title of Poladyan's novel: *"Here are Lions – Hic Sunt Leones"* (or Hic Sunt Dracones) is the usual paraphrase of medieval maps for undiscovered, unknown and therefore uncanny regions, the "terra incognita." Poladyan's narrative style and her narration are similar to Bitov's: a foreigner embarks on a journey to Armenia and presents Armenia, its culture and history from the perspective of a stranger to the country. Bitov and Poladyan do this in a light, miniature, unobtrusive and, for long stretches, pleasingly non-didactic style, with humor, a wink and also unmistakable sympathy for a people afflicted by fate.

Similar to Bitov's and Belyi's, Poladyan's protagonist and first-person narrator Helen Mazavian arrives as a stranger in Armenia, which was unknown to her previously and, just like Bitov and Bely, she meets a local Cicerone there. In Helen's case, it is Evelina, her superior at the Matenadaran, who doesn't just introduce her to the secrets of Armenian book art. In Poladyan's novel, and especially through Evelina, one learns a lot about Armenian book art, healing and family bibles with their history-revealing handwritten marginal and end notes. This emphasis is not accidental, but stems from the conviction that Armenians form an ancient cultural, if not a "book-nation". Evelina explains to Helen the Armenian fixation on the past and book worship or highly developed book art as a result of centuries of persecution experiences:

> Why do you think our Bibles are so small and handy compared to the occidental manuscripts? Many of these heavyweight Western manuscripts are too self-conscious, saying, "I want to influence you, I want to intimidate you." Armenian family Bibles had to be small enough for you could tuck them under your arm at any time. That's what people did. Some left their own children behind rather than leave their Bibles. People were always prepared for uncertain times, always ready to flee. People found comfort in family Bibles; they were used, not just looked at and put back in their place. You are German. You know Heinrich Heine; you will know what Heine wrote about books as being a portable home. It was always about protection and defense, hence the sturdy binding, the pages being tightly pressed to provide protection against insects. Pests could not easily penetrate a tightly bound book. This people have always been afraid of disappearing. (...) I am talking about centuries of persecution. We are still living in history, not in the here and not in the now. In books, perhaps in the face of death, eternity revealed itself. (...)[9]

9 Katerina Poladyan, *Hier sind Löwen; Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2019), 61-62.

Unconnected plot threads: the travel novel and historical retrospective

Beginning with the section "Devotion and Waste"[10] Poladyan's novel tells the story of an Armenian family from the Black Sea port city of Ordu (Greek Kotyora) in parallel with the present-day travel novel plot: the father owns an inn on the Black Sea beach. He and his eldest son Sarkis are seized one day by gendarmes, then the two girls Sona and Keghuhi were too. Their mother is killed. Only 14-year-old Anahid and her younger brother Hrant manage to escape. Starving, the siblings roam the mountains.

In the main plot of the travel novel, Helen becomes involved with Levon, her superior Evelina's son. She falls in love with the amateur bass player and professional officer, but abruptly breaks off the relationship when she realizes how strong her feelings for him are. Shortly thereafter, Levon conveniently dies in a military accident, so Helen is no longer forced to choose between him and her boyfriend Danil, who remained in Germany. Helen does not attend Levon's funeral, but instead goes on a brief visit to Ordu, Kars and Lake Van, accompanied by her Istanbul acquaintance Tarık, before returning to Yerevan, where she is met by Danil for her return to Germany. These passages seem somewhat contrived.

Only once in the novel's plot, in the Ordu chapter, do the storylines of the present and the past collide, for it is here Helen and Tarık meet sisters Seda and Melek, who live in the former Armenian quarter and whose father was apparently Hrant, the uprooted boy from the retrospective subplot. His life and story of suffering is told in fragmentary form by Seda: Hrant first comes into the "care" of an Ottoman orphanage, then of a Pontus Greek shoemaker, then of a Cretan Muslim who had to leave Crete after the Greek-Turkish population exchange. Hrant is given a new name each time. In the meantime, he has long since lost the family Bible, the symbol of his Armenian identity.

The reader also learns that Greeks and Armenians did not get along well in Ordu; according to Poladyan, the number of Armenians there was 20,000; in fact, it was far lower, only being three thousand. More than half of the population of Ordu in the early 20th century were Christians, mostly Greeks.[11] The number of Armenians, who had emigrated mostly from the area of Giresun and Tamzara to the town of Ordu as late as in the second half of the 19th century, was about 3,000; the Armenian population of the entire *kaza* of Ordu numbered 13,565 in 1914.[12]

Poladyan's narrative about the fate of the Armenian family that once owned the Bible Helen was to restore is thus atypical and appears peculiarly pale in comparison to the narrative of Helen's impressions in post-Soviet Armenia set in the present.

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10 Laura Cwiertnia, *Auf der Straßen heißen wir anders* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2022), 37.

11 At the turn of the 20th century, the city was more than half Christian (Greek and Armenian) and was known for its Greek schools. According to a 1911 statistical survey on "Greek villages in Pontus," 39,800 Greek Orthodox Christians lived in the *kaza* of Ordu in 109 communities, with 100 schools, a monastery and 80 "private chapels." 103 other churches were Catholic. See Konstantinos Emm. Fotiadis, *The Genocide of the Pontian Greeks* (Monee, Il., 2020) 58.

12 Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 483-484.

Her novel has little action. Where there is action, it appears unmediated, as in Helen's abrupt separation from Levon or Anahid's from her brother Hrant. In Armenia, Helen gets to know her boss Evelina's family: husband Araik, Evelina's son Levon and his little daughter Julia, as well as Ano from Syria, who remains the only diaspora Armenian in the novel, and some younger colleagues.

Thus, her stay in Armenia seems strangely devoid of any consequences and superficial: Helen neither uses it to clarify her own identity, nor gets involved in lasting relationships with people in and from Armenia. Her relationship with her Armenian mother Sara also remains in limbo. Helen goes in search of her mother's relatives in Armenia and does find them, but this too remains an emotionally inconsequential relationship. And even Helen's mother suddenly seems indifferent to the results of the search for relatives; it is also uncertain what Armenia or Armenian ancestry mean to Sara Mazavian. All the protagonists seem to avoid any real contact.

Apart from the encounter between Helen Mazavian and Hrant's daughters Seda and Melek in Ordu, Poladyan's retrospective on the fate of Hrant and Anahid remains almost unconnected with the main plot – Helen Mazavian's travel novel. At the end of the novel, Anahid abruptly separates from her brother, thus leaving him to assimilate because she sees her separation as saving him. Anahid, too, avoids further emotional attachment at the end. Her own fate remains open, like so much in this novel.

Cwiertnia's post-migrant family novel likewise resembles a travel novel from the 7th chapter on. Daughter Karla and her father Avi travel through Armenia like all tourists. The chapter opens with Mount Ararat as an unavoidable cliché of every Armenian trip, then it goes to Khor Virab and Lake Sevan.

Strange and familiar homelands

Cwiertnia's novel underlines the fact that Armenia has not become a home for the Armenians who have fled from Istanbul and Turkey. The father, Avi, is initially reluctant to travel to Armenia: *"... it is not good to deal with these old things!"*[13] He also refuses to visit the Yerevan Genocide Museum out of the same conviction. His relationship to Armenia and its history remains contradictory until the end of the novel: on the one hand, he calls the foreign country his home, and on the other, he plays the Cicerone for his daughter, pompously trying to explain the country and its inhabitants to her. This is not without stereotypical attributions: *"Armenians are enterprising";*[14] even his daughter Karla does not always successfully avoid ethnic stereotypes: the large Armenian noses appear twice in the novel.[15]

The tensions between father and daughter sharpen in Armenia. There, Karla perceives her father as a foreign person, even a comic figure, because he simply does not fit into the

13 Cwiertnia, *Straße*, 60.

14 Ibid., 133.

15 Ibid., 112.

surroundings, speaks too loudly, is dressed differently, i.e. conspicuously.[16] This triggers Karla's reflections on the concept of home: *"How are you supposed to find a home in a place you've never been in?"*[17] In Armenia, even the sunflower seeds are unfamiliar to her father, because they are prepared differently than in Turkey; the schnapps ("oghi"), which in Armenia is usually vodka and not aniseed schnapps as in Turkey, also remains strange to him. But it is only in Armenia that father and daughter discover the contrast between a familiar homeland and an unfamiliar foreign country. Armenia is a necessary experience for them both. Only there does Avi realize that "yaya" ('grandmother') is not an Armenian word. That it is a Greek word and indicative of the family's origin from the predominantly Greek town of Sinope is a reality that L. Cwiertnia unfortunately does not elaborate on; perhaps she herself being unaware of the connection. Karla recognizes that Turkey and especially Istanbul as the real homeland of her family: *"In Istanbul I looked, for the first time, for the fragments of history that my father wants to blur."*[18]

Although Avi leaves Istanbul and his parental home at the early age of 17, the city and the treatment of its ethno-religious minorities have left a deep impression on him: he is bothered by nationalism and prejudice, including his own mother's prejudice against a German as the mother of her grandson. Because of his minority affiliation, he has learned to deceive: *"Avi knew better than most how to pretend without blowing his cover. But there was nothing that made him more uncomfortable."*[19] He quickly makes friends among Germans. L. Cwiertnia describes him as unprejudiced, open-minded and cosmopolitan. At the age of eight, Avi occasionally sells newspapers on the street, unbeknown to his father, a cobbler who had to work as a shoeshine boy after the 1955 "Septembriana." Avi has wanderlust, longs for Germany. He skips school and spends the night outside his father's house, in trucks in a parking lot nearby. Later it becomes clear that his skipping out is not only out of boredom, but also because of 'the pledge' that the students have to recite every day: *"Happy the one who calls himself a Turk…";*[20] however, his history teacher has told Avi that he is exempt from 'the pledge' and consequently is not allowed to recite it.[21] When Avi is caught stealing from a store, the owner recognizes him as the son of the Armenian shoeshine boy. The delinquent is handed over, in a humiliating way, to his father. The father now beats Avi, mainly because he has broken the following rule: *"Don't cause problems. Don't talk back to anyone. Don't mess with a Turk under any circumstances. And, never, never with the police!"*[22]

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16 Ibid., 163.

17 Ibid., 164.

18 Ibid., 160.

19 Ibid., 74.

20 Ne mutlu Türküm diyene (Turkish for "Happy the one who calls himself a Turk") is one of Atatürk's mottoes that is still widely used in Turkey today. The entire wording was used in Turkish schools from 1933 to 2013. This text was recited by a boy or girl every morning before classes began, as a pledge and was repeated by all the other students after the national anthem was sung.

21 Cwiertnia, *Straße*, 174.

22 Ibid., 131.

Armenian life in Turkey after 1915 meant invisibility. Camouflage and at least outward conformity formed the consequences of racist discrimination against Armenian Genocide survivors, the "left-overs of the sword." The camouflage of Istanbul Armenians begins with their Christian first names: Maryam is called Meryem outside her home, her husband Hagop Hüseyin.[23] The short form of her son Avedis' name is Armenian Avo, but in Istanbul his family calls him Avi, because it sounds so much like Ali.

The fact that Armenians are still threatened four decades after the genocide is portrayed in the 16th chapter, titled "Maryam." It deals with the night of the pogrom on 6 September 1955. The small cobbler's shop, which Maryam's husband Hagop inherited from his father, is marked with a cross in advance of the pogrom.

Avi's family is holed up in their apartment on the night of 6 September 1955, awaiting the gangs of killers. At the same time, there are flashbacks to Maryam's past: she was married off to Hagop by her mother Armine when she was only 14, which is why the date of birth in her identity document was raised to 18 by bribing the registrar. Armine also prevented Maryam from attending school because she is allegedly mentally disturbed. Here, a mother imposes her own fate on her daughter, as Armine was also forcibly married at a very young age. Atrocities repeat themselves, victims become perpetrators.

In her Ordu chapter, Katerina Poladyan manages a very accomplished portrayal of a hybrid situation characteristic of the last Armenians living outside Istanbul; in it, the two daughters of her protagonist Hrant, Seda and Melek, embody, respectively, the Armenian and Turkish legacy of this genocide survivor forced to adopt. Asked about the family and healing bible, the following dialogue unfolds:

> *"Did* our father have a bible? *asked Melek.*
> Yes, our father was Armenian, *said Seda.*
> Our father was Turkish, *said Melek.*
> Our father was Armenian.
> *Maybe Seda got something mixed up, Master Ibrahim said that could happen when one had lived here for eighty-six years. Then he said goodbye, the business calling him back.*
> He was a Turk, *Melek said.*
> What was his name? What did you call him? *asked Seda.*
> I called him Baba, like you did.
> *Seda said the neighbours sometimes came over for tea and brought nut cakes drenched in heavy honey. Back home, the neighbours said 'we were with the infidels', they didn't say 'we were with Seda and Melek'. That's how it used to be, they said, just like now. Gâvur Mahallesi, neighbourhood of the infidels, they said, not Ermeni Mahallesi.*

But in the end, we are children of the Republic, in the end we are children of Atatürk, *Melek shouted."*[24]

23 Ibid., 211.

24 Poladyan, *Löwen*, 232.

What Poladyan presents here, in her own concise manner, tempered by humor and light irony, is in line with Raphael Lemkin's definition of genocide in his seminal work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1943). According to this definition, the decisive factor in genocide is not so much physical extermination as the complete disappearance of a nationally, ethnically, or religiously defined group.[25] Their members may survive massacres and deportations, but can no longer appear publicly as Armenians. The next step in this forced assimilation is, as in Melek's case, the complete acceptance of the identity of the perpetrator group.

(Post)migrant family novel: *On the Street We're Called by a Different Name*

Family or generational novels – the term "family novel" goes back to Sigmund Freud – were considered a "worn-out genre" after WWII, but since the 1990s have experienced a renewed boom and currently constitute perhaps the most popular novel genre in European and North American literature.

The memoir literature within post-migrant prose has been particularly strong in following this trend. Laura Cwiertnia's hybrid travel novel, for example, simultaneously forms a backward-looking Armenian family history. The penultimate chapter, titled 'Armine', provides the starting point of the plot, with the genocide of 1915 and the key to understanding the subsequent biographies and fates from more recent times. The narrative style is almost multi-perspective, but only the chapters titled 'Karla' are told in first person. The period covered spans four generations: from great-grandmother Armine to her daughter Maryam and her grandson Avedis (Avi) Kunduracı, to great-granddaughter Karla; the flashbacks to Karla's childhood and youth are titled "Karlotta."

L. Cwiertnia's exposition is reminiscent of that of Fethiye Çetin, whose "Anneannem" also begins with the funeral of an Armenian grandmother, except that here it is not a Muslim but an Armenian Apostolic funeral in a run-down working-class neighborhood of Bremen, where the protagonist Karla/Karlotta hangs out with an international gang of "Asi kids" (asocial children) in a playground or in their apartments, yearning for a higher and socially enhanced status. The third chapter, again titled Karla, continues the main plot: after the grandmother's funeral, a wake is held in her small apartment. Grandmother Maryam left a kind of written testament behind as well as various objects, including a gold bangle with the handwritten note inscribed "Lilit Kuyumciyan." The clarification of its origin becomes the external trigger for the rest of the novel's plot, especially the journey to Armenia. But it is not until the last chapter ("Armine") that the mystery of Lilit is cleared up: she is Karla's great-grandmother Armine's youngest sister; the two sisters Armine

25 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation; Analysis of Government Proposals for Redress Concord* (Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 1944; new ed.: Clark, New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 2005), 79-80.

and Lilit lose sight of each other during the genocide. Armine's entire family is deported, while Armine delivers goods – the gold bangle – to a Muslim customer for her father, a goldsmith, thus escaping deportation. Only in the penultimate chapter does the reader learn that Armine is later taken by Armenian rescuers to an orphanage in Istanbul, where she is married off at an early age. It remains unclear how the gold bangle came into Armine's possession, as it seems unlikely that she would have taken it back after her errand. Almost at the end of the novel, Avi advises his daughter to get rid of the bangle and, with it, the burden of her Armenian family legacy: *"(...) It's just ballast, much too heavy to carry."*[26] L. Cwiertnia leaves open what Karla decides.

Poladyan's family novel also is open-ended, but with the author's confession of fundamental human goodness. After her protagonist Anahid makes sure that her little brother can stay with the friendly Turkish goatherd they met on the way in the mountains, she falls asleep, exhausted, on the Black Sea beach and it remains unclear whether she will ever wake up.

> But Hrant would do well with this woman. Of course, he would do well. Man is good, only sometimes he forgets to be good. But Hrant will live. The mother is dead. 'Turn around Anahid, turn around at last', she shouts and Anahid does so and sees everything. (...)
> The familiar sea is familiarly calm in front of her. Anahid lies down in the sand and lets the last rays of the sun warm her. (...) She closes her eyes and slips into sleep. Whoever wants to wake her, should do so gently.[27]

Factual prose

Ambivalent Constantinople/Istanbul

As previously mentioned, German-language prose on the Ottoman genocide mixes fictional and factual literature. This can be seen particularly clearly in Michael Asderis' book *The Gateway to Bliss*[28] (2018), which the publisher appropriately classifies as "narrative nonfiction" on its cover.

The legacy motif characteristic of the fictional family or generational novel is likewise echoed in factual family prose. Similar to the healing bible in Poladyan's novel and the gold bangle in Cwiertnia's novel, it is an object that leads Michael Asderis' autobiographical first-person narrator into the past: the small mother-of-pearl cross that Michael Asderis (b. 1950 in Istanbul) takes with him from his mother's apartment in Frankfurt/Main when he has to clear out the apartment after her death at the end of March 2004; it had hung over the door of his family's Istanbul apartment in the Pangaltı district

26 Cwiertnia, *Straße,* 238.

27 Poladyan, *Löwen*, 284-285.

28 Michael Asderis, *Das Tor zur Glückseligkeit: Migration, Heimat, Vertreibung – die Geschichte einer Istanbuler Familie* (Berlin: Binooki, 2018).

for many years. The death of a mother or grandmother as an exposition of a narrative about the fate of a family resembles both Fethiye Çetin's memoir and Cwiertnia's later novel.

Michael Asderis is descended, on his father's side, from Greeks of Ottoman and Greek nationality and, on his mother's side, from Catholic Italians from Trieste, who in turn married Armenians and Greeks of Italian, Greek and especially Ottoman nationality.

> "What these people experienced decisively shaped their collective memory across generations. The small mother-of-pearl cross from my parents' apartment represents, for me, a symbol of this society which had been a part of Istanbul since Byzantine times. Those who were Greek-speaking among them referred to themselves as Romyos[29] and not as Ellines, even if they were Greek citizens."[30]

From a denominational point of view, his maternal family is particularly diverse: in addition to Italian, there are also Greek and Armenian Catholics in it. M. Asderis explains their highly interesting social and migrational peculiarities using the example of his grandparents Andrea Poldrugo and Anastasia Casa:

> Many of the young male immigrants from Europe married local Catholic women. They were either Greek-speakers from the Aegean islands[31] or Armenians. The young wives helped the immigrants to integrate quickly into the long-established Catholic society of Constantinople. But they also caused the loss of the attachment to their country of origin that had prevailed in the first generation. National origin slowly faded into the background.[32]

Asderis's hometown had always been "a place of immigrants"[33] and accordingly bore many names.

> We, the Romyi, call it simply Polis, the city. The question does not arise for us. For us there is no other name, only this one. It is called, in Greek, Konstantinoupolis, which means City of Constantine; in Russian, Tsarigrad, the imperial city; in Turkish, Istanbul, in Ottoman it was often called 'Der-i Saadet', Gateway to Bliss."[34]
> "Most of them did not know what (...) the meaning of this ancient name [*Der-i Saadet*] was; it originated from Persian (...); according to legend, this gate opens to

29 The Greeks of Asia Minor and the Pontos saw themselves as direct heirs of the Eastern Roman and Byzantine Empires, respectively and therefore proudly called themselves Romans (Greek "Ρωμαίος" – "Romayos"; abbreviated "Romyos"; plural: "Ρωμαίοι" – "Romayi", abbreviated Romyi; "Ρωμηοσύνη", or "Ρωμιοσύνη" – Romiosini; Romiosyni). In Turkish, this self-nomination was adopted as "rum" ("Romans"; plural "rumlar").

30 Asderis, *Gate,* 12.

31 These are the Cycladic islands of Tinos and Santorini, which lost their previous Venetian Catholic protectorate status after their conquest by the Ottomans in 1580.

32 Asderis, *Gate,* 76.

33 Ibid., 17.

34 Ibid., 16.

> some for a state of bliss, while at the same time it closes access to the others. (...) No one was ever happy for a long time.[35]

Asderis's family narrative is divided into four sections of varying length: the first two cover the Ottoman period between 1848 to 1922, the following two the Turkish Republican era until Asderis's father's removal in 1964, as well as his entry into Germany. Asderis tells the story of his family as the story of the city of Istanbul and ultimately of the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic of Turkey. Different narrative forms – summarizing resumés, dialogues, quotations – enliven the narration, whereby Asderis relies not only on the individual fates as well his relatives' memories, but also on secondary sources, including Turkish and Greek-language literature.

According to Asderis, society living in Constantinople, the Ottoman capital, was not a "melting pot" but a "salad bowl":

> The components did not mix to form something new; they remained side by side. The state itself neither encouraged nor enforced a mingling between Muslims and non-Muslims. It did not interfere; there were regulations only in matters of marriage. Marriage was forbidden between non-Muslim men and Muslim women, but not vice versa. However, the latter, i.e. the permitted marriages between Muslim men and non-Muslim women were extremely rare. Mixed marriages occurred almost exclusively between the Romyis and Armenians and, in some cases, with Jews.[36]

The family narrative begins with the politically motivated flight made by Antonio Poldrugo (died 1855/1866?) from Trieste, after the Austro-Hungarian Empire subdued and suppressed the Italian independence movement there. A generation later, after 1870, the paternal great-grandfather, Periklis Asderis (b. 1849), who came from the Greek region of Epiros, immigrated to Constantinople to escape compulsory payments to the irregular Greek gangs, the *klephtes* (Greek: thieves).

Drawing on ambassadorial reports and other eyewitness testimony, M. Asderis initially portrays the predominantly Christian Ottoman capital as a refuge for Christians both inside and outside the Ottoman sphere of power. The *Tanzimat* (1839-1876) reform period as well as the overthrow of the authoritarian "Bloody Sultan" Abdül-Hamid II by the Young Turks (1908) and the reintroduction of the Ottoman constitution of 1876 nurtured hopes among the Christian population of the empire for a lasting and fundamental improvement of their position, especially for their equality with the Muslim population. But this hope was deceptive. Nationalism prevailed faster and more effectively than the reforms. Ottoman federalism had no chance. With reactive Turkish nationalism – reactive with regard to the emancipatory, secessionist and irredentist movements among Ottoman Armenians and Greeks – the idea of having to get rid of the Greeks and Armenians took hold permanently.

35 Ibid., 149.

36 Ibid., 23.

The 1896 slaughter and the "Bloody Sunday" of 24 April 1915

Asderis's narrative of the oppression and extermination of Ottoman Christians includes sections on the 1986 massacre and "Bloody Sunday" (11/24 April 1915):

> Where the murdering and looting mob came from and how it was on the scene so quickly has never been clarified. However, foreigners staying in the city at the time were certain that the Sublime Porte had known beforehand of the planned attack [*of 26 August 1896, on the Ottoman Bank*] and had been informed of its details through its informers operating throughout the city. Curiously, the police neither arrested the bombers in advance nor prevented the storming of the bank. On the contrary, they let it happen and turned it into a welcome occasion for the massacre. (...)
> The exact number of massacre victims has never been determined. There are some estimates of ten thousand or more dead. The damage to Armenian society was immense. Many took the experience as an opportunity to emigrate. They saw no future in their homeland.
> The Armenian population of Constantinople decreased rapidly in the next ten years. It decreased by more than half to about 70,000. Many of those who remained moved to the sixth district. There, among co-religionists, they felt safer than in the other areas of Constantinople.
> No sooner had the situation eased than uncertain times began for the Romyis. The city did not become calm (...). At that time, the Romyis of Constantinople lived in permanent fear for their future. Everyone thought of what had happened to the Armenians the previous summer and feared the worst if war broke out. (...) The Asderis family hoped that Greece would now refrain from its expansionist plans. Eurydike and Periklis dreamed of finally living in a country where peace reigned and where they could grow old in peace and without fear.[37]

The deportations during WWI mainly affected the Greek and Armenian intellectual and spiritual elite, as well as officially unreported Armenians who had moved in from the 'provinces'. Surprisingly, in the section titled "Red Sunday," Asderis reports only 235 Armenian notables arrested on 24 April 1915 and claims: *"Nothing happened to the remaining Constantinople Armenians."*[38] It is true that due to the presence of numerous foreigners, including many diplomats in the Ottoman capital, the C.U.P. regime was reluctant to annihilate all the Greek and Armenian inhabitants. Nevertheless, the capital's police chief announced that 30,000 Armenians had been deported from Constantinople by ship in the summer of 1915 alone; another 4,000 followed in the winter of 1915/16. 30,000 Armenians had already fled the city in the summer of 1915.[39] The German theologian,

37 Asderis, *Gate*, 87-88.

38 Ibid., 123.

39 Johannes Lepsius (ed.), *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918: Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke*

missionary and documentarist of the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians, Johannes Lepsius, reporting to the German Chancellor (head of government) on 29 November 1915, gave the figure of 10,000 Armenians who had been deported from Constantinople, most of whom were probably murdered in the Izmit mountains.[40] Contemporary Greek sources – the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Hellenic Embassy of the city – give detailed accounts of deportations of Greek Orthodox Ottomans from within the city and the province of Constantinople.[41]

WWII, 6/7 September 1955

The next Turkish attempt at the final disposal of the Istanbul Romyis occurred during the Greek-Turkish peace negotiations of 1923, when the Turkish delegation wanted to *"include the Romyis of Constantinople in the exchange and, in connection with this, to see to it that the Patriarchate left Constantinople."* The British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, who became involved in the negotiations as their coordinator, expressed opposition to such an intention: [the Romyis] *"were crucial to the existence of Constantinople as a great city of commerce and industry, and without them it would be in danger of losing its authority, prosperity, and trade."*[42] Asderis adds:

> What he [*Curzon*] actually meant was the fact that an expulsion of the Romyis would hit the considerable interests of the English and French economies hard. Not only were the executives of the large companies with foreign concessions still Romyis, but their proportion among the other employees of these companies varied between fifty and ninety percent. Not insignificant were also the numerous lawyers and commercial agents on whose assistance the European companies depended. Their help was necessary in order to continue to handle lucrative orders in the new state.[43]

However, the new state, the Republic of Turkey, continued to seize every opportunity to get rid of the last Christian minorities. The experiences of 1941-1944 reminded the Romyis and Armenians of C.U.P. practices: on the basis of an extended conscription law, only members of minorities were drafted from mid-April 1941.

(Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1919), 202.

40 Ibid., 200-201.

41 Ecumenical Patriarchate, *Persecution of the Greeks in Turkey 1914-1918* (Constantinople: The Hesperia Press, 1919); Ecumenical Patriarchate, *Black Book: The Expulsion and Martyrdom of the Greeks of Turkey, 1914-1918* (Constantinople 1919); Carroll N. Brown and Theodore P. Ion, *Persecution of the Greeks in Turkey since the beginning of the European War* (Oxford University Press, 1918); Alexander Papadopoulos, *Persecutions of the Greeks in Turkey before the European War: On the Basis of Official Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1919).

42 Asderis, *Gate,* 142.

43 Ibid.

> Those called up had to report within two weeks. They were taken to assembly points, crammed into cattle wagons and sent toward Anatolia to an unknown destination. Identity checks were carried out on the streets of Istanbul to arrest those who were in hiding. Some were led away from their workplaces like criminals, even if they had just finished their regular military service a few days previously. They were not allowed to notify their relatives.[44]

As an Italian citizen, M. Asderis's grandfather escaped conscription; as a Greek citizen, his father escaped, too. The law on capital tax, introduced in 1942[45] was applied exclusively to non-Muslims. If the amount due from arbitrary tax 'calculations' could not be raised through the proceeds of auctions, the non-Muslim tax debtors – 2,500 people – were deported to Aşkale near Erzurum for forced labor. *"Greek-language newspapers reported on the work assignments, which took six hours of walking to get to, at an altitude of 1,200 metres, in temperatures of minus 15 degrees and in 1.50 meters of snow.'*[46]

Turkey's transition to a multiparty system and the influx of American capital temporarily improved the situation not only for minorities. *"Many bought back the properties that they had lost due to the wealth tax. Soon, half of the stores and many of the properties in Istiklal Caddesi belonged to the Romyis again. This upsurge, however,* aroused *dismissive feelings among nationalist-minded Turks.'*[47]

Ten years later, on 6 September 1955, pent-up and state-incited social envy led to the 'Septembriana' pogrom. Asderis, who witnessed the anti-Greek riots himself as a five-year-old, dedicated one of his most detailed chapters to them under the telling heading "In Fear of Death" quoting, among other things, the recollections of his relatives. A young Romyos, who was at the cinema at the time and initially did not notice the riots, found himself in the midst of the angry crowd as he was leaving the cinema and saw himself surrounded by *"wildly beating and shouting figures. In order not to attract attention, I took off my glasses and put them in my pocket. People who wore glasses were called* dörtgözlü [four-eyes] *by such people. For this type of individual, glasses were the sign of a better social position, of the wealthy. Under the gaze of this rabble in ecstasy, I was in real danger.'*[48]

Imposed invisibility as a means of survival also formed a basic experience of the Istanbul family described by Laura Cwiertnia. Asderis expands the traumatizing experience of Septembriana to include the aspect of *damnatio memoriae*, as a special type of punishment against famous personalities was called in the Roman Empire; in a figurative, general sense, this is the suppression of public memory, which continues to shape how the former presence and culture of Greeks and Armenians are dealt with in Turkey today.

44 Ibid., 185.

45 "The Capital Tax was marked by chauvinist and racist concepts." See Faik Ökte, *The Tragedy of the Turkish Capital Tax* (London, Sydney, Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Croom Helm, 1987), 94.

46 Asderis, *Gate,* 189.

47 Ibid., 202.

48 Ibid., 223.

> *To what took place, today people say Σεπτεμβριανά* [Septembriana]. *The word is difficult to translate, it means roughly September matters. However, I remember somewhat differently. People often spoke of September matters afterwards, when they were among themselves and felt safe, for example at home, when they knew that no stranger could listen. In public, on the street or in cafés, one was afraid that a casual passerby would pick up the word and, even if he did not understand it, phonetically associate it with the month of September. They feared that the mention of this month from the mouth of a* Romyos *might cause trouble. They preferred to avoid this and instead used another word that was not so easy to understand phonetically. One said simply Γεγονότα* [yeyonóta]. *This meant events. (...) Later, among the Romyis, when someone spoke of the events, he did not mean an event such as a brawl after a soccer game or riots during a demonstration, but exclusively what had happened that night. (...) Moreover, it became the key word for a collectively suffered pain that was better left silent in public. It became a synonym for our silent, common life.*[49]

From a German perspective

Mirko Heinemann's monograph *The Last Byzantines: The Expulsion of the Greeks from the Black Sea* bears the subtitle "A search for traces." Similar to the protagonists of the authors Poladyan and Cwiertnia, M. Heinemann approaches a region that is foreign to him in terms of tourism: Pontus and, in particular, the city of Ordu (today Altınordu; Greek Kotyora). There he, too, entrusts himself to a local Cicerone, Tansel, who knows the place well; his Muslim grandmother came to Ordu from the Macedonian Drama during the compulsory Turkish-Greek population exchange of 1923. But Tansel has no reservations about Greeks. With him or alone, Heinemann roams the largely uninhabited, former Greek quarter of Taşbaşı, which reminds him atmospherically of his youthful experiences in Kavala, Greece. Significantly, M. Heinemann has titled this chapter 'The old homeland,' for he emphasizes Ordu's commonality with the city of Kavala with which he is familiar:

> Where are all the people who once lived here?" the cat seems to ask. Why are the rooms behind the bay windows, half-timbering and facades, lifeless? I think that nobody wants to live in the old town and I know why. If there are no ghosts here, where are they? But how did this place come to be depopulated? And what is my role here? I want to revive these houses, I spontaneously think. Not in the literal sense, but each of these houses holds a story. It is also my story. Everything looks, feels and smells as familiar here as it did in Greece, as if I had spent my vacations here as a child and not in Kavala, as if I had bought the *koulouria,* the sesame curls that are

49 Asderis, *Gate*, 231.

> called simit here, in the Düz Mahalle near the Fidangöris. My parents would have been waiting for me for breakfast on the terrace overlooking the Black Sea.[50]

Already in the second chapter Heinemann narrates what little he knows about the fate of his Pontic Greek grandmother Alexandra Markopoulou (née Tatsou) thanks to family lore: on 9 August 1917 Alexandra embarked on of one of the twelve or so Russian warships which, coming from Trabzon, blew up an ammunition depot and destroyed an airfield in Ordu.

> When the Greeks realized that the Russians would leave again, panic broke out. Shouts rang out: "The Turks will take revenge on us. Leave your homes!"
> Among the hundreds who flocked toward the Russian ships was a girl who was 15 years old. (...) From somewhere shouts rang out: "*Women and children first!*" The people pushed the girl along until she was suddenly standing in front on the landing stage. A Russian sailor lifted her down into the boat. Stiff with shock, she let it happen. She only came to her senses when the boat left and the men steered towards the ships with strong strokes of the oars. (...) The girl could not have known that this would be her last view of her home town. She would never again see the house where she had been born and raised.[51]

Alexandra escaped Turkish deportation. With a deadline of eight days after the announcement of the deportation order, the approximately 3,500 Greeks remaining in Ordu were deported in seven convoys via Mesudiye, Bazar Çiflik and Niksar – a total of 200 kilometres on foot – to a camp near Erbaa on the orders of the local authorities as well as the commander of the Ottoman army, Vehib Paşa. 40 percent of the deportees from Ordu died of epidemics and malnutrition there.[52]

Drawing on contemporary accounts, Heinemann recounts the fate of the Pontic Greeks during the last decade of Ottoman rule in four of his 17 chapters. Another chapter, titled 'The Empty Houses: What Happened to the Armenians?' describes the extermination of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and especially in Ordu, where two Armenian families are said to still live today:

> Some Armenians in Ordu had been separated from the others. They were made to board two boats. It was said that they were to be taken to the nearby port city of Samsun. The boats' passengers were drowned in the sea on the way there. The boats returned empty two hours later, eyewitnesses reported. A short time later the bodies washed up on shore.[53]

50 Mirko Heinemann, *Die letzten Byzantiner: Die Vertreibung der Griechen vom Schwarzen Meer; eine Spurensuche* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2019), 110.

51 Heinemann, *Byzantiner*, 19-20.

52 Ibid., 162.

53 Ibid., 115.

Heinemann strives for a differentiating, factual, and non-partisan narration. In his historical accounts, he repeatedly points out that there were protests against deportations among the Turkish or Muslim population, or people that stood up for their neighbors or took persecuted Christians in. This particular emphasis seems to stem from the German perspective concerning memory politics, which Heinemann emphasized in his introduction as also having shaped his perception. There he writes about his research interests in the history of Turkish-Greek relations:

> Greeks and Turks lived in our West German town. They were classmates, neighbors, guest workers and thus my father's colleagues in the steel factory or operators of small restaurants. I had nothing against them. Their way of life was even familiar to me. (...)
> "I could not understand the hostility between Greeks and Turks. Language and culture were different, but the culture seemed quite alike to me. Where did this antipathy of my Greek relatives come from, which seemed to be of biblical vigor and reminded me of the story of Cain and Abel? The darkness in which my family's past lay made me uncomfortable. Did my existence possibly have more to do with this enmity than I wanted to admit? And why could I do so little with the attributions that were served up to me in Greece? Was I too much of a German, who reflexively rejected criticism of the foreigner because he was plagued by a guilty conscience instilled in him in countless school lessons about the Holocaust? (...) My search for answers led inevitably into the past.[54]

The vocabulary with which Heinemann treats the historical facts in detail and in a way that is easily comprehensible for uninformed readers probably also originates from this specific "German perspective." This vocabulary is ambivalent: In the subtitle of his chapter titled 'Blutige Erde' (Bloody Earth),[55] the author speaks of the extermination of the Pontic Greeks and thus uses a term that is synonymous with genocide. But in general, Heinemann uses the term "ethnic cleansing," which unfortunately still predominates in secondary literature. This term is not only unqualified or undefined in legal terms or under international law, but also stems from the slang of genocide perpetrators, because it originates from a dehumanizing view of the victims. Instead of making his own statement, Heinemann addresses the question of whether the crimes committed by the Young Turks and Kemalists against the Ottoman Greeks constituted genocide in his concluding chapter under the heading "Genocide – or not?" by citing expert opinions: according to Heinemann, the genocide researcher Tessa Hofmann, the Greek historian Theodosios Kyriakidis, and the *International Association of Genocide Scholars* (IAGS) stand for the inclusive use of the term genocide in the Greek context. On 1 December

54 Ibid., 14-15.

55 Heinemann uses here the title of the novel "Ματωμένα χώματα" ('Matomena khomata', Blood-soaked or Bloody Earth, 1962) by Dido Sotiriou (1909-2004).

2007, the IAGS issued a resolution classifying the crimes committed against all Christian ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire as genocide.[56] Heinemann, on the other hand, cites the German genocide researcher Boris Barth as well as the Turkish-born U.S. historian Taner Akçam as examples of an exclusive, hierarchizing assessment; he quotes B. Barth as saying, *"During the war, the Young Turks took a series of anti-Greek measures that can be described as ethnic cleansing, but not as genocide."*[57]

Barth still held this view in 2006 in his monograph *Völkermord: Genozid im 20. Jahrhundert* (Genocide in the 20th Century). In the meantime, he has altered his view and accepts the crimes committed against Ottoman Greeks in the period 1912 to 1922 as genocide as well. B. Barth told me this in 2016 at a conference in Frankfurt/Main. However, M. Heinemann does not leave the last word in this discussion of the genocide question in connection with the Ottoman Greeks, especially the Pontic Greeks, to a scientist, but to the then German head of state Joachim Gauck. A few days before the official commemoration hour in the German Bundestag on the occasion of the centenary of the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, the German President said in an address on April 2015:

> Without distinction, men, women, children and old people were deported, sent on death marches, abandoned without any protection and without any food in the steppe and desert, burned alive, hounded to death, beaten to death and shot. This planned and calculated criminal act hit the Armenians for one reason only: because they were Armenians. Similar action hit their fellow sufferers, the Assyrians or Arameans and the Pontic Greeks.[58]

The European Parliament and Pope Francis had previously expressed themselves in the same inclusive sense.

Conclusion

The four intergenerational novels of German-speaking authors of Armenian and Greek descent discussed here deal not least with the question of what the Ottoman genocide, the loss of homeland and the post-genocidal experiences of suffering mean for the identity of the authors and their protagonists. Looking for answers, the protagonists or the author Heinemann go in search of traces to Armenia and Pontus, without ultimately committing themselves: Poladyan's protagonist Helen leaves Armenia and the Pontic city

56 Heinemann, *Byzantiner,* 248. The resolution passed on 1 December 2007 with the support of fully 83 percent of IAGS members who voted; it was first published in a press release on 15 December 2007. Cf. also http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/2007-december.php.

57 Ibid., 243.

58 Ibid., 249.

of Ordu without being recognizably touched by her respective discoveries. L. Cwiertnia's protagonist Karla, or rather the omniscient narrator, succeeds in reconstructing the Kuyumciyan family history, but it remains open at the end whether Karla will carry the burden of her Armenian legacy, symbolized in her ancestor's gold bangle, or, as her father advises, throw it away. Mirko Heinemann takes refuge in an only seemingly neutral German perspective, which allows him to view and judge the suffering of his ancestors from a quasi-uninvolved point of view, without having to commit himself emotionally and judgmentally.

Michael Asderis, on the other hand, succeeds in making this emotional statement as a matter of course, presumably because of his generational affiliation; with his birth year of 1950, he is the oldest of the four authors analyzed here, and the story he tells is also, at least in part, his own. Unlike his three colleagues, Asderis has personally undergone what he writes about. Asderis is a *Romyos*, a 'last Byzantine' and not just an author writing about the *Romyis*. Constantinople/Istanbul – Polis – is his immediate home, the place of his childhood and youth. The fate of the Armenians and Greeks of this city is his own. This fate includes the social invisibility of the Christians, the discrimination they suffer and their constant fear of renewed persecution, which is also impressively reconstructed by Cwiertnia.

At the end of its 150-year history, the Christian Asderis family was expelled from Istanbul. Since 1988, M. Asderis has visited Polis, albeit at long intervals, and describes these travel experiences in his final chapter ("The Visitor"). But again, he distinguishes himself from his three other colleagues even in this formal tourist situation. For he does not travel abroad and discover a *terra incognita* but returns to his painfully familiar homeland.

Asderis was often asked during these trips to Istanbul why he spoke Turkish so well. In the last lines of his book, for example, a cab driver asked him that question:

> I tell him that I come from an old Istanbul family and that we were expelled fifty years ago. Surprisingly, he is one of the very few who have heard about it. After we have conversed for a while, he says, 'Then you've been lucky. You are now in Germany. I'm sure you're better off there than many people here and you can come and visit anytime.'
> 'I'm not a stranger who comes to visit,' I say. 'I belong to this city. It is my home.'
> The cab driver is silent.[59]

The pain of patricide, which for the survivors of the Ottoman genocide was and is inseparable from their deportation from society and life in Turkey, has been portrayed best, and unpretentiously, as well as convincingly comprehensible by Michael Asderis, followed by Laura Cwiertnia.

59 Asderis, *Gate,* 323.