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Migration literature in Austria and Great Britain – a Comparative Thematic Approach

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Le présent article se propose de définir la littérature de migration comme une littérature concernant le thème de la migration et vise à montrer qu'elle est un sous-genre qui existe à la fois dans les diverses littératures et langues. Afin de prouver mon hypothèse, mon étude tire plusieurs exemples des ouvrages contemporains sur les expériences de la migration en allemand et anglais, et se concentre sur les thèmes et les motifs récurrents qui y sont attestés. En particulier, il est question de textes rédigés par des auteurs qui habitent et travaillent en Grande-Bretagne et en Autriche, par exemple Monica Ali, Anna Kim, Timothy Mo, Caryl Phillips, Hamid Sadr, et Vladimir Vertlib. Malgré leurs contextes différents, ces ouvrages montrent souvent une série importante d'analogies dans les questions abordées, telles la langue et l'apprentissage de la langue, l'identité et la recherche de l'identité (exprimée, par exemple, par la cuisine, l'alimentation, la nourriture), ou les représentations d'une nouvelle patrie. Toutes ces questions sont examinées avec une approche comparative.

In this article, I define migration literature as literature on the topic of migration and I argue that it is a sub-genre that exists in both various bodies of literature as well as various languages. In order to proof my point, I illustrate it with examples from contemporary texts on experiences of migration in German and English and focus on recurrent themes and motifs in them. In particular, I look at texts by writers living and working in Great Britain and Austria, i.e. by Monica Ali, Anna Kim, Timothy Mo, Caryl Phillips, Hamid Sadr, and Vladimir Vertlib. These texts, despite their different contexts, often show great similarity in the motifs they deal with, such as: language and language learning, identity and the search for identity (expressed for instance by cooking, eating and food), or depictions of the new homeland. In this paper, I scrutinise these motifs in a comparative manner.

Migration literature/*Migrationsliteratur* has most often been defined as texts written by migrant authors, a definition that has been discussed, criticised, and even rejected by critics and authors alike.[1] Rarely has migration literature been understood as literature on the topic of migration, which is an approach I would like to adopt in the present paper. I argue that migration literature is a sub-genre that exists in both various bodies of literature as well as various languages. In order to proof my point, I will illustrate it with examples from contemporary texts on experiences of migration in German and English and focus on recurrent themes and motifs in them. In particular, I will look at texts by writers living and working in Great Britain and Austria, i.e. Monica Ali, Anna Kim, Timothy Mo, Caryl Phillips, Hamid Sadr, and Vladimir Vertlib. These texts, despite their different contexts, often show great similarity in the motifs they deal with, such as: language and language learning, identity and the search for identity (expressed for instance by cooking, eating and food), and depictions of the new homeland.

Migration literature – defining the context

Migration, i.e. a long-term transfer to another place, is not just a contemporary phenomenon. Also authors have always been moving, be it voluntarily or involuntarily, and so have texts. Movement and migration has been a topic of literature since its emergence. Even still, today the aftermath of the end of colonialism, the long-term effects of guest worker programmes, the collapse of communism, crises and wars, as well as societal and political discourse have all made migration a major topic in literary works. Thus, nowadays migration literature, defined as literature on migration, forms a (sub-)genre in many literatures, as I would like to show in an exemplary manner for migration literature in English and German.

Migration has had a major effect on the society both in Austria and in Great Britain as well as in other European countries. Nevertheless, officially Austria only decided with hesitation upon a broadly positive politics with regard to its culturally and ethnically mixed society. As a result, the idea of a population that is culturally and linguistically homogenous is still prevalent in many parts of Austrian society. However, past and present immigration to Austria has also had an effect on literature, even though this has been acknowledged and reflected upon only recently. This effect is twofold: on the one

hand, immigration has brought writers to Austria. On the other hand, immigration has become a topic of many literary works.

With regard to the first issue, it has taken literary studies some time to acknowledge the fact that authors have immigrated: literature written by (im)migrants such as Elias Canetti, Franz Kafka, and Franz Werfel is often referred to as Austrian literature. In addition, more recent immigrants (i.e. immigrants who arrived in the second half of the 20th century) such as Milo Dor and György Sebestyén are usually perceived as Austrian writers. Only from the late 1990s onwards, have immigrants such as Hamid Sadr, Zdenka Becker, and Serafettin Yildiz been received as authors who have immigrated to Austria and who have chosen a language other than their first, in other words, German, for their literary works. As I have shown elsewhere, the majority of immigrant authors, however, have published their works from the beginning of the new millennium onwards[2]. Surely, Dimitré Dinev's novel *Engelszungen* [Angels' Tongues] is one of the most prominent examples of this development which I called a new trend in Austrian literature[3]. His novel quickly became a bestseller and was received very positively by literary critics in Austria and abroad[4]. By now, authors whose first language is not German are increasingly recognised, for instance by being awarded literary prizes such as the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis (Emine Sevgi Özdamar in 1991, Terezia Mora in 1999, Olga Martynowa in 2012, and Katja Petrowskaja in 2013)[5].

Recently, literature by immigrants has also been acknowledged in other national contexts and has become a thriving topic of literary studies. For instance, in Great Britain a growth in positive recognition can be similarly observed, although it developed here much earlier. In 1981, when Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* won the Booker Prize, something new in British fiction seemed to take off. This newness concerned a number of issues, but most certainly the fact that an Indian-British writer's book dealing with contemporary Indian history was recognized as one of the most important literary works in Britain. This development paved the way for other immigrant authors such as Kazuo Ishiguro, Hanif Kureishi, Timothy Mo, Sam Selvon, or Zadie Smith, that by now are an unquestionable part of British fiction[6]. The British (English) literary landscape has thus changed; already in 1992 Feroza Jussawalla ironically stated that "English recipients of England's most prestigious literary prize, the Booker Prize, are virtually an endangered species, as in recent years the prize has gone to writers from Australia, New Zealand,

India, Trinidad, and South Africa”[7].

So far, research on literature and migration has mainly taken into account what I have above called the first effect, that is, the majority of studies depart from the authors’ biographies and thus establish a corpus of texts by immigrant writers. Many of these studies have resulted in very useful insights. However, such an approach is at the same time always in danger of being criticised for its biographical perspective and for grouping authors, who apart from an experience of migration (which is often a very individual one), do not have many things in common. In fact, many of the authors themselves have protested against being labelled as migrant writers and instead ask critics and readers to concentrate on their texts rather than on their biographies[8]. This is not to say that the studies in question have not concentrated on themes and motifs in the texts. On the contrary, there are a huge number of analyses that aim to establish similarities with regard to content (and form) in works by immigrant writers. However, most of them do not concentrate on texts that share the topic of (im)migration as the main common theme but use the authors’ biographies as selection criteria. Thus, what I have above described as the second effect of immigration on literature, namely immigration as a topic of literary texts, has up to now hardly ever been dealt with. I intend to close this research gap and present a corpus of texts of migration literature, or rather, texts that deal with the experience of migration. The focus is thus on the texts and their main theme rather than on the authors’ biographies. In fact, the idea of migration literature enables the inclusion of texts by authors who themselves have not migrated. My main thesis is that texts of migration literature can be considered a genre as they share a number of features with regard to content and form. The experience of migration described in the texts brings with it similar themes and motifs that occur in the texts, even though their form might vary. This is true also beyond linguistic and cultural borders, i.e. migration literature exists in various languages and various cultural contexts, a fact which supports the idea of a genre in its own right. In this study, I am interested in analysing the similarities, variations, and differences of the themes and motifs in migration literature.

But why study migration literature as a genre? What do we gain from literary descriptions of processes of migration and, furthermore, from the analysis of personal accounts of (fictitious) experiences of migration? Fiction and consequently also fictional literature has

a number of functions. It helps us to get a better understanding of the world, as Umberto Eco says[9]. According to Gottfried Gabriel we can gain insight through literary texts as opposed to non-literary texts they make readers reflect[10]. This process of reflection, the act of interpreting literary texts is a way of gaining knowledge via literature. Furthermore, in particular ways, literature can be used as a sociological source, especially when it comes to gaining information on subjective and emotional impressions [11]. Thus, reading and interpreting literature on migration can help us to better understand the phenomenon of migration, it tells us something about how migrants experience the processes involved, it gives us information on how migration feels for the second and maybe even the third generation. It furthermore tells us about societal, political, and medial reactions on migration and the effect they have on those personally affected. Texts describing experiences of migration furthermore sensitise us to the possible problems and difficulties immigrants are confronted with. Thus, migration literature can probably give us more insight into the individual aspects of the phenomena of migration than any sociological study. Or, at least, often these literary texts give very similar insights. A study of migration literature can furthermore tell us about the formal aspects of this genre. How do reoccurring themes and motifs vary, how do they occur in different topics and how are they aesthetically shaped by (very) different authors? My analysis combines both issues and deals both with the content and the formal aspects of the selected texts.

In order to support my idea of a universal genre of migration literature, I propose a comparative approach and concentrate on two national contexts where the works in question were composed and to which they refer, namely Great Britain and Austria. This restriction of my corpus does not imply a comparison along the lines of two nation states and their respective national literatures, a category which has been questioned and undermined by migration literature, but instead a comparison along the lines of (1°) two societies with different, but to some extent also similar histories of immigration, and (2°) of two (or more) languages chosen as literary languages, often by authors who are non-native speakers and (3°) of various texts with individual stories of migration which, however, also reveal common features. Also, it seemed challenging to confront texts that were produced in a context with high awareness of postcolonial discourse with texts from a context where such a discussion is relatively new.

The motif of language in migration literature

In texts on migration, the reflection on language – a constituting element of any literary text – is often closely connected to the experience of migration; a change of place brings with it a change in language[12].Thus, in texts on migration, language and language acquisition are common motifs and strategies of dealing with language(s) have to be found and renewed constantly. What is more, translation (in a linguistic sense, but also cultural translation) becomes part of everyday life and is realised in the texts, for instance, in the depiction of the second generation as linguistic and cultural translators.

When migration and language change are experienced by a family or a group of people, the generation gap is often expressed on a linguistic level. While the first generation often struggles to learn the new language, the children are able to deal with an additional language more easily: They speak their parents' language (often still perceived as the first language, even though speakers only have limited competence in it as the language is used primarily with family and friends) as well as the language of the new home[13]. The latter is often learned at school, although this situation is a tricky one as starting school in a language different to one's first language can lead to severe problems, such as learning disabilities. On the one hand, the experience of the children's acculturation can lead to a bigger gap between the generations in the situation of migration. On the other hand, however, in their role as translators the children may become a link between their parents and the new homeland; they can help enable their parents to adapt their identity to the situation in migration. These changed roles of children and parents also underline the parents' nonage in migration, which because of their lack in language competence is often ascribed to them. When parents depend on their children as middlemen, they give up their authority as parents and hand it over to their children respectively[14].

This linguistic aspect of the generation gap is expressed differently in migration literature: the children become translators for their parents, conversations are held in different languages, code-switching is documented or the characters comment on their feelings towards different languages. In my analysis of Anna Kim's *Die Bilderspur* [The Trace of Images] I will focus on protagonists who become translators, while in the reading of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, the different ways of dealing with language between mothers

and children, daughters specifically, will be of interest[15].

Anna Kim's *Die Bilderspur* deals with the relationship between a daughter and her father in a new homeland. It is composed both linguistically, as well as with regard to contents, in a rather associative way, and is full of plays on words. The daughter, who is the first-person narrator, as a child takes on the role of translator for her father. He depends on "K. wie Kind" (p. 10) [C. like child], the daughter defends him against "die Fluten des Fremdseins" (p. 10) [the floods of foreignness] that he is confronted with, and she accompanies him "als Schattenspion, Heimlich-Übersetzer, Wanderstab" (p. 10) [as shadow-spy, secret-translator, walking stick]. More than just a daughter, to him she is an indispensable support in daily life, but he prefers that her help not be visible to others. Thus, her role as a translator is an invisible and secret one, even though the father rests with all the weight of his life in migration on her vital support.

> Wir kreisen uns auf den Teppich, Edith möchte blinde Kuh spielen, Vater der Erste im Ring. Er hüpft auf angewinkelten Beinen mit verbundenen Augen im Kreis, dreht sich nach allen Seiten, den Kopf gegen die Erde geneigt, um die Balance zu halten. Man lacht und kichert, ruft Regeln, die er nicht versteht, dennoch bleibt sein Gesicht mit Grinsen verziert; ich schummle die Übersetzung zwischen das Kreischen, helfe bei Fallen und Fällen, nennt er mich sein Sprechrohr […]. Man lässt ihn weitere Minuten das Kreisrund sprengen, bewirft ihn mit Fetzen von Wörtern, die er versteht; das Grinsen erstirbt, bevor man die Lust am Spiel verliert, das der Fremde mit Fremdsein verdirbt. (p. 10-11)
>
> [We circle onto the carpet, Edith wants to play Blind man's buff, father is the first one in the ring. On bent legs he jumps in a circle, blindfolded, turns in all directions, his head bent towards the ground in order to keep his balance. The others are laughing and giggling, they call rules which he does not understand, still his face remains decorated by a grin; I smuggle the translation in between the screeches, help with traps and cases, he calls me his mouthpiece […]. They let him blow up the circle for some more minutes,

> throw shreds of words which he understands at him; the grin dies away, as long as they are still in the mood to play, a game which is spoilt by the foreigner being foreign.]

The first-person narrator is a gentle translator; she is aware of the loss of authority that her father experiences due to their changed roles so she tries to put in “die Übersetzung [der Regeln] zwischen das Kreischen” (p. 10) [the translation [of the rules] between the screeches] to help her father “bei Fallen und Fällen” (p. 10) [with traps and cases]. The situation seems to be uncomfortable and excluding, particularly before the translation – the father smiles although he does not understand anything, and the others are shouting at him without understanding his reaction. He, however, trusts in his child and the help he is going to get from her, as she in her role as a translator knows what the father understands and where he might have problems. Therefore, his face remains “mit Grinsen verziert” (p. 10) [decorated by a grin], because he knows that he is going to be helped.

However, the ‘floods of foreignness’ prove to be stronger: They are not part of the foreigner, but are in the heads (the “Kopfbänken” (p. 11) [head benches/banks]) of the others, from where they form waves. The waters flood the father, his smirk disappears and the game is abandoned before it is spoiled by “der Fremde mit Fremdsein” (p. 11) [the foreigner being foreign]. The translator has failed, she was not quick enough, she was not understood fast enough. The ‘other’, i.e. the foreigner, renders both communication as well as entertainment impossible. After this negative experience of translation, father and daughter resort to their language of images, which is also characterised by a process of translation: spoken language is being transferred to images by the father and his daughter. A painted word or an understanding glance from the father enables the small family to regain their balance in their own, private language.

However, the daughter is more and more aware of the fact that her father is not fluent in a language which has now become her first language, and she slowly gives up her vital position as a careful translator to her father, especially after he leaves her several times in order to return to his homeland. These partings, which happen more and more, leave

behind the daughter in her role as a translator because her skills are no longer needed. At the same time, she loses the only partner who she can communicate with in both the language of images, and the father's first language.

Left to herself, she turns even more to the language of the new country as it becomes necessary to her to master this language in order to be able to construct her identity. At the same time, she becomes more critical towards her father, whose lack of *Heimat* [home] becomes obvious in his inaccurate language.

In Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* there is a woman at the centre and her two children represent the second generation (not taking into account Nazneen's first child who dies as a baby). The latter feel more part of the new than the old homeland. Subsequently, the family loses their common cultural background; the children get to know traditions and values different to those of their parents and thus reflect on their parents' way of life, which is no longer the only option for their own lives16.

At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist Nazneen stays mainly in her apartment in Tower Hamlets, a London district populated in large part by immigrants from Bangladesh. Staying at home, however, is not Nazneen's decision but her husband Chanu's. He also opposes to his wife learning English – he feels there is simply no need for it:

> 'I would like to learn some English,' said Nazneen.
> Chanu puffed his cheeks and spat the air out in a *fuff*. 'It will come. Don't worry about it. Where's the need anyway?' He looked at his book and Nazneen watched the screen. (p. 28)

Nazneen's friend Razia starts to learn English because of her children who are growing up in Great Britain: "'Do you know why I'm going to learn English?' said Razia […]. 'So that when my children start telling dirty jokes behind my back, I'll be able to whip their

backsides.’” (p. 59) Although expressed in a casual way, Razia’s desire to learn English and be competent in the language, in the end is really the hope to be able to stay in contact with her children. She knows that her children are growing up as Britons and that she has to take the initiative if she wants to continue to be with them in this new home country.

Eventually, Nazneen manages to learn English. This is a very slow, and long process, in which she learns the language via her environs, watching television, and of course with the help of her children once they start going to school. Just like Razia, Nazneen chooses to follow her children into their life in the new home country. Here, as in Kim’s texts, the first generation participates and benefits from the second generation’s language competence, although Ali’s protagonist, by actively and conscientiously learning the language, takes more initiative than the father in *Die Bilderspur*.

In her depiction of Chanu, Monica Ali describes a different reaction to the generation gap in migration and again uses the motif of language for doing so. When the two daughters, Shahana and Bibi, learn English at school and begin speaking it to each other, Chanu decides to ban speaking English at home. This ban becomes clear to the readers mainly in situations where it is breached, i.e. situations in which English is spoken, or rather, written. In one of the first scenes where the ban is mentioned, Chanu is testing a new computer he has bought and writes a sentence in English: “Dear Sir, I am writing to inform you.” (p. 158) He is so happy about the positive experience of having installed the computer correctly and having written a correct English phrase that he continues to speak in English: “It all comes back so quickly” (p. 158), he says more to himself than to his family. Only Shahana’s reaction makes the readers aware of the fact that English is not usually allowed: “We are not allowed to speak English in this house” (p. 158) she says to her mother. Even though Nazneen does not agree with the ban, she leaves it to her daughter to discuss the issue with Chanu. Thus, Shahana speaks to him in English more and more, until her opposition hits its peak when she corrects Chanu:

> ‘What is the wrong with you?’ shouted Chanu, speaking in English.
> ‘Do you mean,’ said Shahana, ‘“What is wrong with you?“’ She blew her

fringe. ‘Not “the wrong“’(p. 165)

This allows Shahana to show the absurdity of the ban: Although she speaks English just as well if not better, than her supposed mother tongue, she is not allowed to speak it at home, whereas her father every now and then tries to demonstrate his apparent status in the new home country by using English himself, though at times incorrectly. Chanu tries to express his social role as an integrated immigrant, who is at the same time aware of his roots and traditions, but he restrains his daughters from identifying themselves with their new homeland at home. His language ban seems even more rigorous, and at the same time arbitrary, in light of the fact that he has earned certificates from various institutions by taking evening classes (such as a correspondence course, an IT Communications course and a course on nineteenth-century economic thought, though it remains unclear whether he actually attended the course, see p. 32) and therefore feels superior to his colleagues at work and, particularly, to the bigger part of the (uneducated) immigrants from Bangladesh. It seems as if Chanu perceives his own multilingualism as enriching, but at the same time is aware of the potential dangers it brings with it, such as becoming distanced from one’s culture and traditions. He wants to protect his family from this process. Therefore, he does not openly ban his wife from attending an English course, but by expressing a negative opinion of the idea, he still prevents her from doing it. This is the same reason why he bans English at home.

Identity and the search for identity in migration literature expressed by cooking, eating, and food

Everyone Eats is the title of E. N. Anderson’s study on eating and culture and he sums it up in a nutshell: everyone has to eat in order to survive, therefore everyone in one way or another is occupied with food[17]. Besides these physiological requirements, eating is a cultural practice strongly charged with symbols, messages, and meanings. It can convey information on status, gender roles, ethnicity, religion, identity, and other cultural constructions. It can also be a symbol of solidarity within a group, be it the family or

bigger communities such as villages, ethnic groups, or nations. Thus, in the representation of eating, cooking, and food in literature, often the focus is not on their physiological necessities, but rather on their symbolic and cultural meanings. Literary depictions of eating and descriptions of dishes and meals have highly symbolic value, and can reveal a lot about the characters' identity or their search for it. In migration literature, this becomes particularly apparent as the necessity for a re-negotiation of identity is often a main topic that is discussed via food and eating. Accordingly, in my reading of the texts I will analyse how identity and the search for identity is linked to food and cooking.

The relationship between food and identity is multifaceted: Eating is part of our identity; food, by being consumed, becomes part of ourselves and can therefore be regarded as an essence of identity. In his well-known study *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* [*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*] (first published in 1979), Pierre Bourdieu mentions that eating habits are one of the things that are the most difficult to change: "And it is probably in tastes in *food* that one would find the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning, the lessons which longest withstand the distancing or collapse of the native world and most durably maintain nostalgia for it [18]". Alois Wierlacher shares this opinion when he writes that "die sozialen oder erlernten Aspekte des Ernährungsverhaltens eine größere Zähigkeit oder Konstanz [besitzen] […] als die biologisch-natürlichen Aspekte oder Körperfunktionen" [the social or learnt aspects of food habits are more durable or constant […] than natural biological aspects or bodily functions] and summarizes this statement as follows: "der Magen gewöhnt sich leichter als der Kopf an neue Speisen" [it is easier for the stomach than for the head to get used to new dishes…][19].

These observations are particularly relevant in a situation of migration because not only is there a transfer to a different place but there is also a change of the cultural surroundings, including food and drink. In such a situation, holding onto familiar meals and beverages might help someone come to terms with their new surroundings and allow them to hold onto their identity, or at least renegotiate it. It can also help to acquaint others, such as the second generation, with one's home[20]. Eating and food can trigger memories and emotions. Physical contact with familiar ingredients can symbolize a contact with the former homeland. Just like certain dishes, ingredients can also become

highly symbolical through the process of migration. In a new homeland, cooking can also be a realm where new things are tried out and adopted. By mixing, new blends can be created in the borderland of migration, creations which can be part of the old or the new, or both, or neither.

These processes are also reflected in literary texts describing experiences of migration. In her essay on the motif of cooking in contemporary Indian-American literature, Bettina Friedl stresses that these texts feature a number of characters “die sich kochend und essend von der Kultur der Umgebung abheben und damit ihren Außenseiterstatus erkennbar etablieren” [which by cooking and eating set themselves apart from the culture of their surroundings and thereby establish their position as outsiders in a distinct way][21]. Friedl argues that the writers use “die Darstellung der Esskultur […], um ethnisch nicht dem *mainstream* zugehörende Lebensweisen zu entwerfen” [the depiction of eating habits in order to compose ways of living different from the mainstream][22]. To her, the literary descriptions of food are “Metaphern für die Wahrnehmung und Begutachtung des jeweils Fremden, für die gescheiterte oder erfolgreiche Fusion der Kultur des Herkunftslandes mit der amerikanischen Kultur oder für das Verständnis der eigenen Diaspora-Situation” [metaphors for the perception and appraisal of the respective unknown, for the failed or successful fusion of the culture of the former homeland with American culture or for the comprehension of one’s own situation of diaspora][23]. In a similar way, it is my aim to show how the presentation of food, cooking, and eating is used in migration literature to depict or to emphasize identity and the search for identity. In a situation of migration identity is questioned and changed. Migrants have to find a ‘new place’ – in a spatial, social, and temporal way. Food might help in this situation of change as it can create a sense of stability.

In the following, the meaning of cooking, eating, and food in the context of identity formation in migration will be investigated in Timothy Mo’s *Sour Sweet*, where the protagonists’ Chinese takeaway represents a possible identity in migration, and in Vladimir Vertlib’s novel *Letzter Wunsch* [Last Wish], where a scene at a Rabbi’s dinner table is symbolically charged and again food and cooking serve to underline (Jewish) identity[24].

In Timothy Mo’s novel *Sour Sweet*, three different generations try to cope with their new lives in migration. Mo uses food, eating, and cooking in various ways as key metaphors

for the experience of migration. The Chen family comes from China and their traditional dishes as well as the hybrid world of Chinese restaurants and Chinese takeaways in London are the background (or rather the basis) for their story of migration told in the novel. Besides the traditional meals that the Chens eat and some traditional English dishes (which they hardly ever try), food served in London's Chinese takeaways, which are neither English nor Chinese, is primarily represented in the text. By putting this particular culinary realm in the spotlight, Mo creates a culinary world that nobody really feels a part of. Its dishes are not part of anybody's tradition, thus, a borderland of new hybrid dishes is created. The Chens, however, cannot claim this new realm as a new identity in migration as it remains distant to them. This is because they were not involved in its creation but rather adopted the main features of Chinese takeaways and continued traditions foreign to them.

Being hassled by his colleague Roman Fok – he presses Chen for money in order to pay back what the mafia-like Hung family had given for his father – makes it easier for Chen to give in to Lily's idea of having a restaurant of their own, a plan which she has been saving money for. They decide to rent a house in a rather shabby suburb of London (Chen prefers it to be as far away from the centre as possible) where they can live and also set up their business. The design of the restaurant reflects Lily's ideas of what an English Chinese takeaway should look like:

> Ideally, the front should have been all glass, an expanse of unimpeded visibility […]. But this would mean knocking down part of the wall between their two windows and then reglazing at prohibitive expense. […] They would have to have a counter, though. No take-away business worth the name could function without one of those. […] There was already a serving hatch in the wall between kitchen and front room and Chen took the little door off its hinges altogether. They put the flat's gas stove in the kitchen, together with a ring which ran on a huge, dented bottle they had acquired secondhand. On this they would heat their wok.
> 'Chairs,' Lily said suddenly. 'Where will they sit?' And of course, that was

> what take-aways had too, chairs. As important as the counter, really. (p. 99)

The Chens do not arrange the takeaway according to their own taste or the way restaurants in China are furnished, but aim at copying the idea of an English Chinese takeaway. Therefore a counter is important and chairs have to be provided. Similarly, when it comes to the menu the Chens do not decide for themselves what dishes they would like to serve, but instead copy what is being offered in similar places. Chen finds out what is being served in other takeaways and, consequently, the Chens offer "a stereotyped menu, similar to those outside countless other establishments in the UK" (p. 111)[25]. Some of the dishes are described in the text:

> 'Sweet and sour pork' was their staple, naturally: batter musket balls encasing a tiny core of meat, laced with a scarlet sauce [...]. 'Spare-ribs' (whatever they were) also seemed popular. So were spring-rolls, basically a Northerner's snack, which Lily parsimoniously filled mostly with bean-sprouts. All to be packed in the rectangular silver boxes, food coffins, to be removed and consumed statutorily off-premises. (p. 111)

The meals sold by the Chens remain alien to them: the food is soaked in funny red sauces, some of the dishes remain a complete mystery to them, such as "'spare-ribs' (whatever they were)" (p. 111). They would never eat this food themselves and cannot comprehend their English customers' taste: "English tastebuds must be degraded" (p. 111), is their judgement[26]. Rather than 'food', the dishes are merely a substance the Chens earn their money with. They certainly do not have anything to do with their own traditional food: "it bore no resemblance at all to Chinese cuisine" (p. 111). Chen already

had this impression when he was working at the restaurant in China Town. There, the food from the tourist menu remained a mystery to him, it "[…] was rubbish, total *lupsup*, fit only for foreign devils" (p. 21). Similarly, the Chens now serve 'lupsup' (Cantonese for 'rubbish') in their own takeaway. In addition, the food is packed in small containers that remind Lily of coffins. Thus the Chens' relation to the food becomes even more distanced, as does their relation to the clients, who eat from these sterile coffins[27].

At the same time, the Chens would never offer the food they eat themselves to their customers as it is too different from what they seem to like. The only thing that seems authentic to the Chens themselves is the most simple and pure dish: boiled rice. This is quite ironic, as Susanne Reichl mentions in her analysis of the novel, since rice was imported to Great Britain as one of the first 'oriental' dishes and therefore was integrated into English cuisine quite early[28]. Therefore, to the English customers it is probably the least Chinese dish, whereas to the Chens it is the most authentic one.

To Chen, who cooks at the takeaway, the kitchen at times becomes an "alchemist's magic laboratory" (p. 145) in which he seems to be at the mercy of his own creations rather than the other way round:

> So sweat-soaked, chronically thirsty, perpetually harassed, sometimes reduced to utter despair by the consequences of momentary neglect of a saucepan's contents, Chen orchestrated his instruments to the best of his abilities. (p. 144)

Cooking is very stressful for Chen – among all these alien dishes, which he does not prepare to his own taste but according to set culinary standards, he struggles to preserve his own identity. This seems to be even more difficult than when he worked as a waiter. Then, he was at the mercy of dishes prepared by others, now it is he himself who is forced to cook them and he is hounded by the smoke, the noises, and the smells in the kitchen. They are alien to him, they do not have anything to do with his personal life story, and he struggles to control the ingredients in the pots.

For the Chens, the opening of their own restaurant is a potential opportunity for the creation of something new by using elements both from their old and their new homeland in their situation of migration. The family, though, chooses not to create something new and instead continues a tradition which does not include their personal experience of migration. They continue the tradition of Chinese-English cuisine that was introduced by Chinese sailors who had retired in the city long before the Chens came to London[29]. Of course, back then these dishes were also newly created and are therefore a hybrid invention. They are the result of an adaptation of the Chinese cuisine mixed with the tastes of the new homeland, Great Britain. The menu of the Chinese takeaway is therefore a new cuisine that cannot be called either English or Chinese, but has elements of both. However, this 'hybrid tradition' does not have very much to do with the Chens' personal search for identity in the new homeland. The dishes the Chens offer in their takeaway remain an abstract idea in the sense that the family cooks what, according to them, should be served in a Chinese takeaway in London and what they think their customers expect.

Although food and eating are not very prominent in Vertlib's novel *Letzter Wunsch*, they do play an important role in key scenes of the plot. Vertlib uses the description of common meals as well as of people eating on their own in order to emphasize the protagonists' characters, and also as a means of structuring the text. Besides several shorter comments on eating and places of eating, respectively, there is one central scene in the novel (chapter two, part IV) where a meal becomes a social event and is used to represent (a particular kind of) Jewish identity. In it, the first-person narrator Gabriel Salzinger is invited by Salomon Rosenzweig, the rabbi of the local Jewish community of Gigricht, the small fictitious German town where the novel is set, for dinner at his house. Vertlib uses the depiction of the dinner to represent the rabbi's Jewish identity, to stress his explanations on Judaism, and to structure the conversation and illustrate the rabbi's dominance in it, respectively. Furthermore, the conflict between Salzinger and Rosenzweig is rhetorically being carried out via cooking and food, thereby again and again referring to Jewish identity.

The title of the novel refers to the last wish of Gabriel Salzinger's father. He asked to be buried in the Jewish cemetery next to his wife, but when Gabriel eventually organises the funeral, the orthodox community denies this wish. They argue that the person who

organised Gabriel's father's and his grandmother's conversion to Judaism was part of a liberal religious movement. The current community of Gigricht, however, is orthodox, and therefore does not officially recognise Gabriel's relatives' conversion. Thus, as a gentile, Gabriels's father cannot be buried in the Jewish graveyard. Gabriel Salzinger hopes to be able to speak to the rabbi about this problem at the dinner, but it turns out not to be an occasion to talk about these issues. Instead, the rabbi uses the dinner as an opportunity to demonstrate real Judaism to Salzinger, a non-believer, in order to convince him that his father's last wish is not legitimate.

The topic of migration in the novel is closely linked to Jewishness. The Jewish community of Gigricht, like those of many other places in Germany, has grown considerably during the past years due to *Kontingentflüchtlinge* [quota refugees] from the former Soviet Union: since 1991, Jews from states of the former Soviet Union have the possibility to immigrate to Germany. This immigration is also the reason for the current orthodox orientation of the community depicted in the novel; thus the community is not a continuation of the former local tradition. Like in other works, Vertlib discusses Jewish identity in Europe today in this novel, and focuses on what it means to be a non-religious Jew in Germany in the context of newly arrived orthodox Jews[30].

The scene at the rabbi's dinner table combines aspects of what Alois Wierlacher in his seminal study on food on German literature calls solidary meals, but in the end can be identified mainly as a meal of conflict[31]. According to Wierlacher, solidary meals serve to create a feeling of community between the eaters, who often meet for the first time at the occasion. The atmosphere and the conversation rendered possible by the meal are at the centre. Cultural and social barriers are neutralized; therefore, solidary meals can take place between protagonists from different social classes and origins. Typically, simple (but not inferior) food is served/eaten, although with solidary meals the actual dishes are not of particular importance. In meals of conflict, on the contrary, a problem is at the centre of the meal. The eaters are usually adult persons who are in conflict with each other; their disagreement is depicted and narrated via the meal, which often consists of meat and rich dishes[32].

Wierlacher states that in the examples he analysed for his study on food in literature, kitchen and domestic work are not described[33]. In contrast, in Vertlib's novel the preparation of the meal is illustrated in detail. The rabbi himself – watched by the first-

person narrator Salzinger – prepares the spaghetti and he starts doing so by reciting a prayer before cutting the onions and the courgettes. In the course of the preparation of the meal, Rosenzweig is depicted as being authentic, that is in particular as being consistent with Jewish tradition and the kosher meal. Wierlacher reads the “Vorbereitung einer Mahlzeit als Wärmequelle intersubjektiver Beziehungen” [preparation of a meal as a source for warmth for intersubjective relations], which also implies that the meals to follow are usually solidary or family meals[34]. Therefore, in the present scene, the fact that the rabbi cooks himself can be read as a demonstration of his well-meant intentions. Salzinger should feel at home as cooking in front of the guest is supposed to create a relaxed and intimate atmosphere. At the same time though, the rabbi is depicted as being closely linked to his faith, as expressed by the kosher way of preparing the meal and by the rabbi commenting on it.

When eating in a private context, the cook usually determines the menu. This is also true for the scene in Vertlib’s novel. The dishes – fish soup, spaghetti, and crème caramel de luxe – are decided on by the Rosenzweigs, although with slight adaptations: the spaghetti à la Rabbi, a recipe created by Rosenzweig himself, has to be slightly altered as Salzinger stated earlier that he was allergic to tomatoes. This adaptation shows that although it is Rosenzweig’s intention not to give up his point of view, namely that Gabriel’s father cannot be buried in the Jewish cemetery, he tries to create an atmosphere at the dinner table in which both parties can get closer. However, the fact that he is not only the host but also the cook of the meal enforces his power over the conversation and one more time stresses his firm standpoint.

Rosenzweig does not only explain the preparation of the spaghetti to Salzinger, but he also describes another recipe, this time a more exotic one, which he uses to illustrate the multifacetedness of the kosher cuisine. This description serves to show the importance that cooking has for the rabbi, and to illustrate the Rosenzweigs’ Jewishness and their awareness of Jewish traditions, as explained by a few details. For instance, Mrs Rosenzweig tells Salzinger how difficult it is for the family to buy kosher groceries. They have to order them in Frankfurt and some of them are rather expensive. Mr Rosenzweig underlines that it is a challenge to cook exotic dishes in a kosher way. This seems to be a particular hobby of his, as confirmed by the present he gives to Salzinger at the end of the evening: a book entitled “Fernöstliche Speisen, garantiert koscher. Von Rabbiner Dr.

Salomon Rosenzweig" (p. 302) [Dishes from the Far East, absolutely kosher. By Rabbi Dr. Salomon Rosenzweig], a book he has written himself. By seemingly random remarks and small talk such as these, the discourse on Jewish life in contemporary Germany is continued throughout the scene and is closely linked to Salzinger's situation. Comments made by Salzinger as a narrator emphasize this direction of the conversation, for instance when he describes the bottle of olive oil which Rosenzweig uses: it is labelled "mit den hebräischen Lettern Kaf, Schin und Resch – für koscher" (p. 291) [with the Hebrew letters Kaf, Shin, and Resh]. Later, Salzinger himself parallels Rosenzweig's cooking skills and his faith. When the rabbi describes the recipe step by step and in great detail, his enthusiasm is also expressed by his facial expression and his gestures. His eyes are shining with joy and he starts to gesture in an excited and enthusiastic way. Salzinger shares his silent comment on this with the readers: "Ich frage mich, ob der Rabbi mit derselben Begeisterung das Morgengebet spricht und die Thora studiert" (p. 292) [I ask myself whether the rabbi recites the morning prayer and studies the Torah with the same enthusiasm].

Salzinger steadily becomes more impatient during the preparation of the meal; after all, he accepted the invitation above all in order to be able to fulfil his father's last wish. When the rabbi eventually takes the hot pan from the kitchen stove, Salzinger tries to fight his "immer stärker werdende Wut" (p. 293) [growing anger]. In this way, cooking – a contemplative process for the rabbi – becomes a test for Salzinger, and makes him become more cynical all the time. Eventually, he tells the rabbi "'Es wäre schade, wenn Sie für mich Ihre koscheren Lebensmittel verschwenden, die Sie extra aus Frankfurt kommen lassen müssen" (p. 292) [It would be a pity to waste your kosher groceries, especially delivered from Frankfurt, on me] – a rather ironic comment on the Rosenzweigs' devoutness.

Depictions of the new homeland

In her study of literature in the context of migration, Azade Seyhan interprets the texts in question as "unauthorized biographies of the nation[35]". She reads works by Ana Castillo, Aysel Özakin, and Emine Sevgi Özdmar as "act[s] of writing the nation outside the nation[36]" and focuses on the depiction of the nations left behind and the protagonists' strategies to preserve a memory of the homeland they left behind. In this way, 'looking

back' becomes a critical reflection of the homeland's history, culture, and society which enables the narration of an alternative history. Often though, these motifs serve as a contrast to the depictions of the 'new homeland' and therefore can be read in comparison to them. In fact, Seyhan underlines this aspect when she says: "Writers who have become chroniclers and agents of the modern history of migrations and displacement fortify us with insights about our own culture(s) […][37]". The foreigner has the opportunity to perceive a society's identity through its history and reflect on it; at the same time he is reflecting his own identity and history. In this way, the foreigner becomes a unique bearer of collective memory: in their mind, histories and memories mix and blend – that of the new land, that of their homeland, and that brought about by the experience of migration. They are all reflected upon, partly in a foreign language, and thus become a new basis for the collective memory and give a new shape to it. Acknowledging this of course implies that the dominant society also allows for such processes and appreciates them.

In this way, texts of migration literature also become alternative histories that suggest alternative identities. 'History' in this context does not only refer to a distant past, but also includes the present which can be read as history's mirror. In the foreigner's mind histories and memories mix; thus the new homeland is not necessarily seen as an opposition to the homeland left behind, but rather, many of the texts work towards a deconstruction of the dichotomy between the two. In this section, I will use the term new homeland to refer to the country where the protagonists immigrate to.

Leslie A. Adelson reads texts by German-Turkish authors as "touching tales[38]". Thus, she formulates an alternative model to the migrant being between two worlds. Rather than describing two opposite worlds, she argues, German-Turkish texts talk about the similarities and connections between them. 'Touching' thus primarily refers to these points of contact (the term however plays with the emotive meaning of the word). The 'tale' in "touching tales" stands for both 'story' and 'history'. For instance, Adelson shows how in the texts in question a connection between the holocaust and Turkish history, as well as the history of Turkish immigration to Germany, is established. The magnifying glass of the authors in question makes visible hitherto unknown points of contact between the various historical events and the chronicles of history/histories. In this way, these texts enable an alternative way of coming to terms with the past and offer new

insights on key moments of history, while at the same time, they develop ideas for post-national societies.

In a similar way, Isabel Santaolalla argues that texts of “non-white British writing” define a “new Britishness[39] ”. She cites Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi as examples of authors who in their works search for new definitions of Britishness both on a stylistic level as well as with regard to contents. A. Robert Lee chooses Hanif Kureishi, as well as David Dabydeen, and Mike Phillips as examples for authors who establish “new, hybrid styles” in British literature[40]. According to Lee, these authors stress the “changing regimes of race and culture in British society[41]”. Mainly, but not only, because of their discussion of actual society does Lee call their texts thoroughly British.

In this section, I give examples of the depiction of the ‘new homeland’ in texts by Caryl Phillips and Hamid Sadr. The first one deals with touching tales from different historical periods. In his novel *The Final Passage*, Caryl Phillips shows the connection between the common colonial past of Great Britain and the Caribbean, and the situation of Caribbean immigrants in London in the 1950s[42]. Motifs such as the weather and climate, traffic, contacts to the locals, and experiences of racism are topics in Caryl Phillips’ *The Final Passage*. The community of immigrants is described in this work as well; apart from the main protagonist’s experiences other characters also come into focus. Thus, the text can be read as one possible version of numerous stories of immigration[43].

The new homeland, a term I will use to refer to England as the country where the protagonists immigrate to, is perceived differently by the various protagonists in the novel. While the main female protagonist, Leila, comes to Great Britain with the intention to start a new life there, her husband Michael sees his time in England only as a phase in his life. These attitudes change throughout the course of the text: eventually, Leila decides to return to the Caribbean and Michael, on the contrary, feels more and more comfortable in England. However his coming to terms with the country distances him from his family at the same time. Thus, to Leila ‘home’ does not carry the common meaning of the word since the new homeland never really becomes a ‘home’ to her.

Phillips’ novel is not structured in a chronological way; it is divided into five parts and starts with “The End”, the departure to England, followed by “Home”, a description of the protagonists’ life on the island, “England”, a part set in Great Britain, “The Passage”, the

account of the arrival in England, and finishes with the chapter “Winter”, which is also the chronological end of the narrative. The first part begins with the protagonists waiting on a small Caribbean island for the departure of a ship to England, where Leila, her husband Michael, and their baby boy Calvin hope for a different future and a better life. The ship they are going to board is called the SS Winston Churchill, a choice of name, as Bénédict Ledent states, which stresses the economic moment (and importance) of the immigration which at the time was still furthered by Britain[44]. Only in the fourth part of the novel, in the chapter called “The Passage”, however, is Leila’s arrival in Great Britain depicted:

> On the fifteenth day the wind died and Leila saw land; the high and irregular cliffs of England through the cold grey mist of the English channel. She clasped together the collar of her light cotton dress and shivered. Overhead a thin fleet of clouds cast a bleak shadow across the deck, and the sluggish water swelled gently, then slackened. Leila stood at the front of the ship with six or seven more. Nobody spoke. It was still early and they waited, as if trapped in a glass case, while the other voyagers were still getting up, or feeling sick, or sleeping. (p. 137)

In this scene, after two weeks the passengers see the country they have chosen as their new homeland for the first time. The first sentence of the quotation, which is also the beginning of the new chapter, reminds one of the topos of the flood as described in the Bible[45]: after the flood the water starts to dry up and Noah’s Ark strands on Mount Ararat. Eventually, he and his family see land. Although Leila’s journey is much shorter than Noah’s, there are similarities between the two. In the Biblical story, the waters of the flood become a strong symbol of the divide between the old and the new life of mankind with God. In Phillips’ text, the water that the ship crosses during the journey marks the divide between Leila’s life on her native island and her new life in Great Britain. On her arrival, she looks ahead, into a new future. It seems as if she has a new life before her, just like Noah and his family.

Although Leila arrives in a place where she hopes to be able to lead a better life, with more opportunities both for her and her family, and where she will finally be able to see her mother, who immigrated to England some time earlier, her first glance of England is characterised by negative impressions. The adjectives used in the passage cited above are negative throughout. England's contours are "high" and "irregular" and the kind of landscape – cliffs – are repellent rather than inviting. The water is described as being "sluggish" and the descriptions of meteorological phenomena are negative too: there is a "thin fleet of clouds" which casts a "bleak shadow". There is nothing positive in this first perception of England. Accordingly, the small group of passengers in the scene are unable to speak or move, but feel trapped and doomed to wait[46]. They are at the mercy of these negative images of the new homeland.

Leila's first impressions after leaving the ship are rendered as indirect comparisons to the memories of the homeland left behind. The ideas she had when waiting in the harbour of the small Caribbean island for the ship to cast off form a contrast to those at the arrival in England. Before the departure, Leila's surroundings are described in the following way:

> At 6.30 the harbour had been a blaze of colour and confusion. Bright yellows and brilliant reds, sweet smells and juices, a lazy deep sea nudging up against the land, and looking down upon it all the mountains ached under the weight of their dense vegetation. Leila watched as the women sold their food, cursing, pushing, laughing. (p. 9)

It is a colourful world full of noises and smells which Leila, just before her departure, seems to experience intensely one last time. The scene is characterised in a positive way, by means of the adjectives ("bright", "brilliant", "sweet", "lazy", "deep", "dense"), nouns ("colour", "yellows", "reds", "smells", "juices", "vegetation"), and verbs ("nudging up", "pushing", "laughing") used. The structure of the sentences reflects their content: there are enumerations that reinforce the impressions with every added element, and there is a strong use of positive adjectives. Structure and content together form a harmonious picture of an intense, positive world. At Leila's arrival in England, the immediate surroundings of the harbour are again described:

> Leila looked at England, but everything seemed bleak. She quickly realized she would have to learn a new word; overcast. There were no green mountains, there were no colourful women with baskets on their heads selling peanuts or bananas or mangoes, there were no trees, no white houses on the hills, no hills, no wooden houses by the shoreline, and the sea was not blue and there was no beach, and there were no clouds, just one big cloud, and they had arrived. (p. 142)

Here, many elements of the description of the harbour on the native island are evoked: the mountains and hills, the women with their goods, the beach and the sea, respectively, and, most of all, the colours (and, with them the smells, implicitly by way of the missing peanuts and bananas). Stylistic features are also repeated: the long enumeration again serves to enforce the impression, however, this time its effect is different. Although the same semantic elements are used, their absence, their non-existence change the statement into a negative one. In this way, England is described as a place where everything that existed on the island is lacking, therefore, it is perceived as a place of absence. This impression is reinforced by the fact that apart from the bleak and overcast sky, the reader does not find out what Leila actually sees. Her arrival in England, therefore, is not so much a first impression of the new homeland, but rather a memory of the island left behind, which in comparison seems to be a place of wealth and plenty.

In the novel *Der Gedächtnissekretär* [The Secretary of Memory], however, the focus is on the past of the new homeland[47]. Here, elements of a community's collective cultural memory are discussed and then presented from an alternative point of view. To be precise, Hamid Sadr's protagonist deals with the end of the Second World War in Vienna. The choice of the protagonist already ensures an alternate perspective on history; Ardi is a young student in 1990s Vienna who has immigrated from Iran. Due to his Persian roots, he obviously has a different cultural and historical background. Recent works by other authors have used similar techniques, thereby bridging narratives of the past and the present, in particular approximating experiences and histories of the Second World War

and the present situation of immigrants, which is another example of Adelson's 'touching tales'[48].

In Sadr's novel, Ardi is mentally and physically overwhelmed by the time of the air raid warnings and bombings. Eventually these historical events become just as real to him as the contemporary city. Sadr's novel at first glance seems to be another depiction of the final days of the war. Soon though, readers realise that they are being confronted with a shifted perspective, with a different and much more varied outlook. This alternative dimension is characterised by the choice of the protagonist and first-person narrator, i.e. a Persian student of chemistry, Herr Ardi [Mister Ardi; nearly an anagram of the author's name]. Though he has lived in Austria for some time and studies and works there, he is not very familiar with the historical period of the Second World War in Austria. His different cultural and historical background becomes the starting point for a process of coming to terms with the final days of war in Vienna, as well as with the war in general.

Ardi works as a "Gedächtnissekretär" [both a secretary of memory, as well as memory's secretary] – a newly coined expression created by Ardi's employer, Mr Sohalt, a former member of the NSDAp. This job includes comparing photographs of the destroyed city Mr Sohalt took at the end of war with the actual city. According to Ardi, the volume Sohalt has in mind consists mainly of "Fotos, die ihm angenehm waren; also Bilder von einer zu Unrecht angegriffenen Stadt" (p. 130) [photos that suited him; that is, pictures of a wrongly attacked city]. For Sohalt, the city is at the centre, but unlike Maurice Halbwach's description of the 'memory of things[49]' that reflects an image of humankind, Sohalt divides the city from its inhabitants. It is up to Ardi to bridge this separation again. The memory of the city that he discovers is much more complex: buildings and objects are not only symbols, but turn out to be full of personal memories which they pass on to Ardi.

Thus, during his work, Ardi is confronted with Sohalt's memory, with that of the city, and eventually, with his own memory which begins to take him not to his home in Persia, but to the Austrian (post-)war period. This method of remembering events he has not experienced himself also starts to influence his present life. With every photograph he deals with, Ardi slides deeper into an increasingly dominant past. Eventually, when walking through the city, he is surrounded by a Vienna at the end of the war and loses the present altogether:

> In die Fotos vertieft, merkte ich nicht, dass das Plätschern des Wassers verstummte und die Taube, die vorher ihre Federn ins Becken getaucht hatte, wegflog; auch das Traben des Fiakerpferdes war nicht mehr zu hören. […] Mit dem Durchblättern der Notizen beschäftigt, verdrängte ich die Stille, doch als ich aufblickte, war der Platz in seine Kriegstage versetzt; zertrümmert wie im Bild. Weil der Weg zum Schottenstift durch Ziegelbrocken bedeckt und nicht mehr begehbar war, machte ich einen Umweg und ging vorsichtig, als ob nichts geschehen wäre, zur Teinfaltstraße zurück. (p. 26-27)
>
> [Immersed in the photographs I did not notice that the ripple of the water had stopped and the pigeon that earlier had dipped its feathers into the basin flew away. Also the carriage horse's trot could not be heard any longer. […] I was busy leafing through the notes and thus blocking out the silence, but when I looked up the square was transferred back to the days of war, it was destroyed just like in the picture. As the path to the Scottish Abbey was covered by bricks and therefore impassable, I made a detour and carefully, as if nothing had happened, walked back to Teinfalt Street.]

Furthermore, Ardi is forced to actively remember in order to overcome the silence of Sohalt's selective memories, as well as those of the people to gain a more complete and probably truer picture of the final days of war in Vienna. In the end, Ardi is unable to see and experience the city in the present, but starts to see soldiers of the German Wehrmacht (the unified armed forces of Germany from 1935 to 1945), and later, Russian soldiers or people fleeing to air-raid shelters for protection. He senses the fear and horror, hears the alarms, and feels the blasts and detonations. Ardi's process of appropriating history does not end well: the pictures and visions eventually flood his brain and he cannot protect himself any longer from a past which is not his own but rather is that of his surroundings. In coming to terms with his environs, he is forced to reconcile with its past too. In this sense, the novel tells touching tales since it connects memory and the present/reality.

At the same time, the text documents life as an immigrant in 1990s Vienna.

Conclusion

In this paper, I defined migration literature as ‘literature on the topic of migration’ and thus suggested to turn over a new leaf in research on literature in the context of migration. Accordingly, I presented an analysis of texts on experiences of migration independent of the authors’ personal background and focussed on the themes and motifs in the texts in order to suggest that migration literature can be regarded as a sub-genre that exists in various literatures and languages and in various cultural and societal contexts. I suggested several themes and motifs (language and language learning, identity and the search for identity expressed by cooking, eating and food, and depictions of the new homeland) for my readings of selected texts by Monica Ali, Anna Kim, Timothy Mo, Caryl Phillips, Hamid Sadr, and Vladimir Vertlib. These are to be understood as a selection only; I do not intend to reduce texts of migration literature to these themes and motifs. Examples for further themes and motifs are, for instance, the alternative, unauthorised historiographies told in the texts, the role of genealogies, of family histories[50], and the role of the second (and third) generation that in this study was only looked at with regard to their role as linguistic and cultural translators.

The analyses of the theme of language in the texts show that language and language learning as well as the loss of language and the confrontation with a new language (or several) are reoccurring motifs in migration literature. The focus on the realm of food, cooking, and eating showed how these aspects are used to construct the characters’ identity and to negotiate a changing (hybrid) identity in the process of migration. The analysis of the depiction of the concrete locations of migration, in particular of the new homeland the migrants immigrate to, has revealed differences that can be attributed to the different national contexts the protagonists migrate to, and to the respectively varying experiences of migration.

Finally, migration literature is always a political project also. It is part of a process of newly defining culture and literature, and works towards their transculturalisation and transnationalisation. The texts are not only about the presence of immigrants in a new country and their problems and difficulties, but also about the immigrants’ (cultural,

societal, political etc.) participation and their impact. If literature is understood as a means of gaining insight and a better understanding of the world, migration literature can help us to better understand the phenomenon of migration. It can tell us about how people experience migration, be it the first, second, or third generation. It delivers insight into the societal, political, and medial processes involved and the effects they have on people. The literary texts in question thus can probably tell us just as much if not more about the personal experiences of migrants than any sociological study could. The individuality of the texts in question, as well as of the protagonists and their stories of migration, are one of the messages migration literature conveys: migration is a phenomenon that consists of millions of individual stories, as many as there are migrants in fact. Migration literature, in a nutshell, familiarises us with many of these stories and gives us ideas for how political and societal challenges can be met.

1 .

For instance, Seher Cakir, Dimitré Dinev, and Julya Rabinowich have opposed the term used in this way. See Meri Disoski, ‘Ich mache Literatur und Punkt!’, *dastandard.at*, 15 February 2010 <http://dastandard.at/1265851881267/Interview-Ich-mache-Literatur-und-Punkt> □ accessed 12 November 2015); interview with Dimitré Dinev in September 2003. In: Friedl, Angelika. *Der Literaturpreis „Schreiben zwischen den Kulturen“ Ein Literaturprojekt zur Förderung des Dialogs zwischen und über Kulturen*. Vienna: M.A. thesis, 2003, p. 18; see also the interview with Dimitré Dinev on fm5: http://www.fm5.at/Dimitré%20Dinev%20im%20Gespräch/ (accessed 17 March 2008); Julya Rabinowich, ‘Dann hätten wir bald viele Würstelstand-Literaten’, *derstandard.at*, 19 November 2008 <http://derstandard.at/1226396889022/Interview-Dann-haetten-wir-

bald-viele-Wuerstelstand-Literaten> (accessed 12 November 2015). Similarly, Salman Rushdie calls the label Commonwealth literature a ghetto, see Salman Rushdie, 'Commonwealth literature does not exist', in Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-91* (London: Granta Books, 1992) [1991], p. 61-70.

2 .

See Sandra Vlasta, 'Passage ins Paradies? – Werke zugewanderter AutorInnen in der österreichischen Literatur des 21. Jahrhunderts', in *Zeitenwende: Österreichische Literatur seit dem Millennium, 2000-2010*, ed. by Michael Boehringer and Susanne Hochreiter (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2011), p. 102-118.

3 .

See Sandra Vlasta, 'Literature of Migration: A New Trend in 'Austrian Literature'?', in *Readings in Twenty-First-Century European Literatures*, ed. by Michael Gratzke and others (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 405-430. Dimitré Dinev, *Engelszungen* (Vienna: Deuticke, 2003).

4 .

On the reception of Dimitré Dinev in the German-speaking countries see Sandra Vlasta, 'Angekommen und anerkannt? Die Rezeption des Autors Dimitré Dinev im deutschsprachigen Raum', *Aussiger Beiträge*, 6 (2012), p. 237-256.

5 .

Although, of course, all of these writers do not live and work in Austria but in Germany. However, the winner of the Bachmann prize in 2014, Tex Rubinowitz, can also be regarded as an immigrant writer: he was born in Germany and came to Austria in his early twenties.

6 .

See, for instance *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by Richard Lane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Nick Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2011).

7 .

Feroza Jussawalla, ‘Introduction’, in *Interviews With Writers of the Post-Colonial World*, ed. by Feroza Jussawalla (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), p. 3-23 (p. 3).

8 .

See footnote 2.

9 .

See Umberto Eco, *Im Wald der Fiktionen. Sechs Streifzüge durch die Literatur* (Munich: Hanser, 1994), p. 117.

10 .

See Gottfried Gabriel, *Zwischen Logik und Literatur. Erkenntnisformen von Dichtung, Philosophie und Wissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), in particular p. 10-11.

11 .

On literature as a sociological source see also Helmut Kuzmics and Gerald Mozetics who state: “Es scheint unter jenen, die sich grundsätzlich positiv zur soziologischen Qualität von Literatur als Quelle äußern Übereinstimmung darüber zu geben, daß vor allem psychische Prozesse, die Weltsicht der Menschen, ihre Erfahrungen und Gefühle literarisch oft sehr genau erfaßt werden.” [It seems that those who are generally positive about the sociological quality of literature as a source agree that in particular psychological processes, people’s world outlook, their experiences and emotions are often registered very accurately in literature.] Helmut Kuzmics and Gerald Mozetic, *Literatur als Soziologie. Zum Verhältnis von literarischer und gesellschaftlicher Wirklichkeit* (Constance: UVK, 2003), p. 31; the quotation is taken from Gianna Zocco, *The Delicate Place. Das Motiv des Fensters als Öffnung ins Innere in Erzähltexten seit 1945* (Berlin: Weidler, 2014), p. 18.

12 .

Helen O’Sullivan has recently published a book on intercultural texts that she reads as language learner narratives, see Helen O’Sullivan, *Language Learner Narrative. An*

Exploration of Mündigkeit *in Intercultural Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014).

13 .

Azade Seyhan notes this difference in language competence in migration, though she sees it rather from the parents' point of view when she states: "The immigrant parents cling to a language on which their children have only a tenuous and disintegrating hold." While the parents this way continue to have their traditions, it is up to the second generation to change both language as well as traditions according to the new place: "The burden of refashioning cultural practices to avoid embarrassment and misjudgement falls on the children.", Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), both p. 74.

14 .

Horst Hamm mentions the second generation's role of translators and the according parents' loss of credibility. However, his conclusion seems radical: "Ausländische Eltern haben meist größere Sprachschwierigkeiten als ihre Kinder, so dass Kinder oftmals Dolmetscherfunktion übernehmen. So erfahren die Kinder ihre Eltern als schwach, spüren die eigene Macht über sie und erleben, dass die geringe Achtung, die ein Ausländer in der Bundesrepublik genießt, berechtigt scheint: Selbst sie sind ja mächtiger." (Foreign parents often have bigger problems with language than their children, therefore the children often take on the role of translator. In this way, the children see their parents as being weak and they feel their own power over them. Also, they experience that the little respect versus foreigners in Germany seems to be justifiable as even they themselves are more powerful.) Horst Hamm, *Fremdgegangen – freigeschrieben. Einführung in die deutschsprachige Gastarbeiterliteratur* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1988), p. 95.

15 .

Anna Kim, *Die Bilderspur* (Graz: Droschl, 2004); Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London: Doubleday, 2003).

16 .

On the clash of “cultures and generations” in the context of migration see also: Kathy-Ann Tan, “’Caught between Worlds”: The Clash of Cultures and Generations in the Work of Monica Ali, Jhumpa Lahiri and Zadie Smith’, in *Territorial Terrors: Contested Spaces in Colonial and Postcolonial Writing*, ed. by Gerhard Stilz (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), p. 227-238.

17 .

E. N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats. Understanding Food and Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005).

18 .

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge/Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 79.

19 .

Alois Wierlacher, *Architektur interkultureller Germanistik* (Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 2001), p. 379.

20 .

See Susanne Reichl’s comment: “Food […] can provide a link to ‘home’, even for those characters who have never been in the country of their parents’ origin.“ Susanne Reichl, ‘‘Like a Beacon Against the Cold’: Food and the Construction of Ethnic Identities in Black British Novels’, in *Eating Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Food*, ed. by Tobias Döring and others (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2003), p. 177-193 (p. 192).

21 .

Bettina Friedl, ‘Indisches Essen in Iowa: Die Bedeutung des Kochens in der zeitgenössischen indisch-amerikanischen Literatur’, in *Erlesenes Essen. Literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zu Hunger, Sattheit und Genuss*, ed. by Christa Grewe-Volpp and others (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2003), p. 109-126 (p. 111).

22 .

Friedl, ‘Indisches Essen’, p. 111.

23 .

Friedl, ‘Indisches Essen’, p. 111.

24 .

Timothy Mo, *Sour Sweet* (London: Paddleless Press, 2003 [1982]); Vladimir Vertlib, *Letzter Wunsch* (Vienna: Deuticke, 2003).

25 .

With reference to Frank Chin, Ching Lin Pang calls this praxis “food pornography” and defines it as “making a living by exploiting the ‘exotic’ aspects of one’s ethnic foodways”. Chinese immigrants have to economically exploit the prejudices and stereotypical ideas which people have about them in order to be able to survive in migration. At the same time, ‘food pornography’ also means to acknowledge and to confirm the supremacy of the (in this case) white population, who accept immigrants as long as they offer “‘spicy’ and ‘exotic’ food”. Ching Lin Pang, “Beyond ‘Authenticity’: Reinterpreting Chinese Immigrant Food in Belgium”, in *Eating Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Food*, ed. by Tobias Döring and others (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2003), p. 53-70,

p. 55.

26 .

Many Chinese immigrants seem to feel in a similar way. According to Ching Lin Pang, especially the first generation of Chinese restaurant owners in Belgium “maintain an ambivalent attitude towards their customers, who could not appreciate certain Chinese ingredients. Some of them have harbored disdain for the food their customers were willing to consume.” (Pang, “Beyond ‘Authenticity’”, p. 67).

27 .

To David Chung, the almost stoic acceptance of the differences between the various eating habits in the novel also has positive aspects: “The food metaphor and imagery in *Sour Sweet* […] seems to support a plural mosaic model of the post-colonial world where adaptability and flexibility is achieved through an acceptance of differences rather than through a forced synthesis or melting-pot.” David Chung, ‘A Taste of Both Worlds’, <

http://www.postcolonialweb.org/uk/mo/food8.html> [accessed 6 September 2014] – However, to me the Chens' relation to the dishes in their takeaway seems to be characterised by a practical and economically determined approach rather than by acceptance.

28 .

See Reichl, 'Like a Beacon', p. 180.

29 .

This is not only mentioned in the abovementioned article by Pang (Pang, "Beyond 'Authenticity'"), but also in the novel itself: "The dishes were simple to cook; well within Chen's capabilities, which was hardly surprising since they had been invented by the Chinese seamen who had jumped ship or retired in East London a generation ago." (p. 111)

30 .

The construction of Jewish identity in Vertlib's works has been analysed by a number of scholars. However, they mostly deal with other topoi than food, eating, and cooking. See for instance Dagmar C.G. Lorenz, 'A Human Being or a Good Jew? Individualism in Vladimir Vertlib's Novel *Letzter Wunsch*', in *Beyond Political Correctness. Remapping German Sensibilities in the 21st Century*, ed. by Christine Anton and Frank Pilipp (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), p. 109-33 and Stuart Taberner, 'Vladimir Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*: Performing Jewishness in the New Germany', in *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Lyn Marven and Stuart Taberner (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), p. 32-45. See also Dagmar C.G. Lorenz who states that at the basis of the creation of evolving models of Jewish individualism in the works of authors like Vladimir Vertlib (and Doron Rabinovici), "lies a self-concept informed by Jewish historical narratives and an intimate knowledge of Jewish culture that does not require but includes as potentialities life in Central Europe, Aliyah, relocation to international Jewish centers, religious and political affiliation, and a secular existence". Dagmar C.G. Lorenz, 'Individuum und Individualität in den Werken zeitgenössischer jüdischer AutorInnen in Österreich', in *Zeitenwende. Österreichische Literatur seit dem Millennium: 2000–2010*, ed. by Michael Boehringer and Susanne

Hochreiter (Vienna: Praesens, 2011), p. 389-409 (p. 389).

31 .

See Alois Wierlacher, *Vom Essen in der deutschen Literatur. Mahlzeiten in Erzähltexten von Goethe bis Grass* (Frankfurt/Main: Athenäum, 1987).

32 .

Wierlacher *Vom Essen*, p. 60.

33 .

See Wierlacher, *Vom Essen*, p. 23-24.

34 .

Wierlacher, *Vom Essen*, p. 72.

35 .

Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, p. 96.

36 .

Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, p. 20.

37 .

Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, p. 158.

38 .

See Leslie A. Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), in particular p. 79-122.

39 .

Isabel Santaolalla, ‘This Island’s – Also – Mine: New Expressions of a New Britishness’, in *Nationalism vs. Internationalism. (Inter)national Dimensions of Literatures in English*, ed. by Wolfgang Zach (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1996), p. 159-167 (p. 160).

40 .

A. Robert Lee, ‘Changing the Script: Sex, Lies and Videotapes in Hanif Kureishi, David Dabydeen and Mike Phillips’, in *Other Britain, other British. Contemporary Multicultural Fiction*, ed. by A. Robert Lee (London: Pluto Press, 1995), p. 69-89 (p. 71).

41 .

Lee, ‘Changing the Script’, p. 71.

42 .

Caryl Phillips, *The Final Passage* (London: Vintage, 2004 [1985]).

43 .

This reading is supported by the fact that in recorded reports, West Indian immigrants very often refer to the same aspects when talking about their experiences in and impressions of England. For reports by West Indian immigrants on the factors mentioned see Robert Winder, *Bloody Foreigners. The Story of Immigration to Britain* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), p. 264-284 and the following volume of collected reports by immigrants: Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush. The irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: Harper Collins, 1998).

44 .

Bénédict Ledent, *Caryl Phillips* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 28.

45 .

See The Bible, from Genesis 6, verse 9 to Genesis 8, verse 22.

46 .

The speechlessness they feel also befalls Leila and Michael later in the novel, for instance in conversations between Michael and his senior or between Leila and Miss Gordon from welfare. Their answers are reduced to silent nods and gestures or they just do not react at all.

47 .

Hamid Sadr, *Der Gedächtnissekretär* (Vienna: Deuticke, 2005).

48 .

Examples for other works are: Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island*, Doron Rabinovici's novel *Ohnehin* [Anyway] and Vladimir Vertlib's narratives in the volume *Mein erster Mörder. Lebensgeschichten* [*My First Murderer. Life Stories*]. Andrea Levy, *Small Island* (London: Review, 2004); Doron Rabinovici, *Ohnehin* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004); Vladimir Vertlib, *Mein erster Mörder. Lebensgeschichten* (Vienna: Deuticke, 2006).

49 .

See Maurice Halbwachs, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1967), p. 127-130.

50 .

On intercultural family constellations cf. the following volume: *Die interkulturelle Familie. Literatur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, ed. by Michaela Holdenried and Weertje Willms (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012).