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Defining Migration Writing

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Abstract: With a view to extending and enriching the vibrant, ongoing debate about migration and literature, this article makes an attempt to define »migration writing«. Using three perspectives – the *theme-oriented*, *ethnic-oriented* and *text-oriented* approaches – the paper examines the concept of »migration writing« in relation to other literary terms. Therefore, the starting point for the discussion is a brief comparison of migration writing with autobiography, travel writing and postcolonial literature. Then some useful comparisons are made to other related literary concepts, such as exile literature, refugee literature, foreigners' literature, guest worker literature, Kanake literature, »allochthonous« literature, ethnic literature, minority literature, diasporic literature, hyphenated literature, multicultural literature, intercultural literature, émigré literature/emigrant literature, immigrant literature, migrant literature, the literature of migration. From these concepts, there emanates what I call »migration writing«.

The label is used by me as a term for a whole variety of different types of literary and non-literary texts that have been published since the 1990s. These texts either tackle the topic of migration or emerge from the experience of migration (but not necessarily address the subject of migration). It is also not necessary for the author to be a migrant: it is enough that his or her work is inspired or influenced by the experience of migration and is imbued with a vision of cosmopolitan, transnational, hybrid society and the globalised world. Given the large scope of this definition, it seems best to define the genre as a constellation of many different types of text which are connected to one another by a set of characteristic features. Some of these features include: the real-life nature of the writing, creolization and multilingualism in the text, references to multiple cultures and/or geographic locations, impact of the Internet and online communication on the structure of the work, common themes and motifs.

The article ends by illuminating the research potential of migration writing. Among other things, it gives highly informative accounts of migration experience, exposes the stereotypical representations of migrants, gives piercing insights into migrants' host and home cultures, explores the issues of identity, nationality, borders and belonging, provides alternative knowledge about current social and cultural transformations. Acting as a counterweight to the dominant narra-

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tives, migration texts often make visible the phenomena that are unintentionally ignored or wilfully excluded from the mainstream public discourse. Consequently, they provide alternative knowledge that can be a useful research material in all kinds of areas, such as sociological, political, economic or culture studies.

Keywords: migration writing, migrant literature, multilingualism, transculturalism, defining a literary concept

1 Exploring the Notion from Different Angles

When one of the speakers talked about the idea of ›home‹ in migration narratives during the 2017 conference organised by Cultural Literacy in Europe and the Polish Academy of Sciences, a person in the audience asked casually: »What is migration writing?« I had been seeking an answer to this question long before it was posed at the conference but the explanations I had come across seemed either incomplete or slightly confusing. Different terms, such as diasporic literature, exile literature, emigrant literature, immigrant literature, migrant literature, migration literature and many others that are mentioned in this text tend to be used interchangeably. Does this mean they are synonymous? If so, is ›migration writing‹ just another label to describe the same set of ideas?

This article attempts to answer the above questions by formulating a definition of ›migration writing‹ and examining the term in the wider literary context, viewing it not in isolation but in relation to other literary concepts. The touchstone for this endeavour was a study of theory in autobiography, travel writing and, most of all, postcolonial literature. The books *Autobiography* by Linda Anderson, *Travel Writing* by Carl Thompson and *The Location of Culture* by Homi K. Bhabha, among other work, were very useful in tracking down analogies between the abovementioned concepts and migration writing. For instance, the blending of fact and fiction is a feature that migration writing shares with life writing and travel books; and a hybrid form, structure and style are the characteristics that it has in common with postcolonial literature. However, along with the remarkable similarities, there also came to light some crucial differences: for example, not all migration writing is autobiographical or takes place in a colonial setting and, obviously, not all autobiographies and postcolonial literature deal with migration. The comparisons that were made with other types of writing do however prove helpful in drawing out specific features of migration writing.

The same comparative method was used with other concepts, such as guest worker literature, multicultural literature, migrant literature and the like. These notions are actually at the root of migration writing. They are like threads which,

gathered and woven together, have given rise to the concept of migration writing. Following this logic, they are viewed here as strands or, more precisely, as literary trends and movements in migration writing.

While every effort has been made to provide a transparent and consistent explanation of ›migration writing‹ in this article, attentive readers will doubtlessly detect some flaws. Some critics may find the term too inclusive. Since it is intended as a hypernym, it covers a wide range of diverse texts, embraces a number of concepts and straddles different disciplines. In consequence, the proposed definition may seem overly extensive and porous. Yet, its inclusiveness is also a strength and constitutes a great opportunity: the wide framework facilitates the bringing together of a plethora of texts that illuminate and investigate various dimensions of migration experience in a comprehensive way. Also, it enables the connection and synthesis of multiple strands of knowledge, often from different academic fields, situating ›migration writing‹ in the wider literary and social context. As a result, this broad, multipronged approach leaves the readers with a deeper understanding of migration writing than any mode of analysis that is confined to one discipline or perspective.

The brunt of the criticism can be directed at the fact that this broad approach inevitably imposes a perfunctory treatment of the concepts referenced in the article. The literary terms, such as ›exile literature‹, ›hyphenated literature‹, ›émigré literature‹ and many others, which are in fact complex and involve a lot of overlap and contradiction, may seem to have a clear-cut meaning and boundaries as they are presented below. For instance, the analysis of ›émigré literature‹ is almost entirely focused on the authors' ties to their homeland while their relationship with the host country or the cosmopolitan dimensions of emigrant writing are hardly acknowledged. This narrow and exclusionary interpretation of ›émigré literature‹ is a premeditated manoeuvre in order to distinguish it from ›immigrant‹ works. Likewise, social concepts, such as ›globalisation‹ or ›voluntary migration‹, are themselves the subject of simplification that may raise justified objections. However, this simplification, possibly even oversimplification, of literary and social terms has been applied deliberately in order to highlight – as lucidly as possible – the aspects that are of central importance in ›migration writing‹.

When defining ›migration writing‹, it is useful to explore the concept from three angles: the theme-oriented, ethnic-oriented and text-oriented perspectives. In the *theme-oriented approach*, the origin of the writer is not important. The migration writing can be authored by anyone who has, in one way or another, been affected by migration: it can be a migrant, their spouse, relative or friend, the descendant of the migrant (second or third generation migrant) or a local writer. After all, migration impacts not only the lives of migrants, their families

and friends but also the existence of people who live where the migrants pass through or settle. What is significant is that the material has been inspired by or relates to the experience of migration. The emphasis in the *theme-oriented approach* is placed on the topic and content of writing.

By contrast, the *ethnic-oriented approach* places the writer's cultural origin at the centre of attention. What counts is not the subject of the book, as in the case of the theme-oriented approach, but the author's ethnicity and cultural heritage. Any content is eligible as long as the work is produced by a migrant. The topic of migration is given a varying degree of prominence in these narratives: it can figure greatly and be the object of direct and sustained consideration; it can be one of the motifs in the book; it can be a framework – perhaps a few sentences at the beginning and end of the text; it can be a starting point for a series of the writer's reflections unrelated to migration; it can be just a prism through which the author interprets the world. The assumption is that the work is written by a migrant and is born from his or her experiences; but it does not have to deal with memories of migration or assimilation, in fact, some of the texts may not address the topic of migration at all.

The third approach is *text-oriented* and focuses on what kinds of text should be classed as migration writing. Can maps, photos and illustrations published by migrants be classified as ›migration writing‹? How about graphic novels or comic strips that engage with the topic of migration? Should we include in the category digital forms of migrant writing, such as their Facebook or Instagram posts, Twitter poems, YouTube videos, website content, etc.? Some critics may oppose the classification of these pieces as ›migration writing‹ because it extends the term to such extent that the label may refer to potentially an unlimited range of texts. As a result, it may lose any descriptive or explanatory value. On the other hand, it seems sensible to subsume these visual and digital texts into the category of ›migration writing‹ because they construe representations that often work in similar ways and with similar effects as the representations offered in the written text of a novel, poem or reportage. Therefore, it may be both appropriate and useful in some contexts to include visual and digital depictions into the broader category of migration writing.

As the three approaches to migration writing described above prove, the concept has fuzzy, flexible boundaries that encompass a whole array of texts. Therefore, it seems most fully defined by its diversity of structure, tone, style and form.

2 The Roots of Migration Writing

Within the large, generic, all-embracing term that is ›migration writing‹, one may talk with greater precision of specific strands or literary trends and movements, such as (1) exile literature,[1] refugee literature,[2] foreigners' literature, guest worker literature,[3] Kanake literature;[4] (2) ›allochthonous‹ literature,[5] ethnic literature,[6] minority literature,[7] diasporic literature;[8] (3) hyphenated literature,[9] multicultural literature,[10] intercultural literature;[11] (4) émigré literature/emigrant literature,[12] immigrant literature,[13] migrant litera-

1 Siegfried Mews explores the roots and development of the concept in ›Exile Literature and Literary Exile: A Review Essay‹ (1992).

2 In ››Refugee Literature‹: What postcolonial theory has to say‹, Claire Gallien traces a definition of ›refugee literature‹ back to Corina Stan who in »her close engagement with Jenny Erpenbeck's (2017) novel *Go, Went, Gone*, [...] makes a case for refugee literature as a body of prose texts by and about refugees, which represent migration as part of a shared world« (Gallien 2018a, 723; cf. Stan 2018).

3 For an insightful discussion of ›foreigners' literature‹ and ›guest worker literature‹, see Máiréad Nic Craith's ››Migrant‹ Writing and the Re-Imagined Community: Discourses of Inclusion/Exclusion‹ (2015).

4 Liesbeth Minnaard mentions the use of the term ›Kanake‹ in ›Literature of Migration: Aesthetic Interventions in Times of Transformation‹ (Minnaard 2009, 61). Dirk Uffelmann talks about the label in ›Self-orientalisation in Narratives by Polish Migrants‹, noting that the term is »derived from an extremely pejorative swearword used mainly for Turks living in Germany« (Uffelmann 2011, 109).

5 On the increasing interest in ›allochthonous literature‹ in the Netherlands, see Liesbeth Minnaard's ›Literature of Migration: Aesthetic Interventions in Times of Transformation‹ (2009).

6 For a study of ›ethnic literature‹, see John M. Reilly's ›Criticism of Ethnic Literature: Seeing the Whole Story‹ (1978) and Berndt Ostendorf's ›What Makes Ethnic Literature ›Ethnic‹‹ (1985).

7 See ›What Is a Minor Literature?‹ by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, translated by Robert Brinkley (1983).

8 In her 2020 article ›Diaspora and Diasporic Literature: Condition to Consciousness‹, Bhawana Pokharel ponders on the definition of ›diasporic literature‹ and the development of the term in the ongoing academic debate in Nepal and worldwide.

9 For an introductory discussion on ›hyphenated literature‹ in Germany and the Netherlands, see Liesbeth Minnaard's ›Literature of Migration: Aesthetic Interventions in Times of Transformation‹ (2009).

10 On ›multicultural literature‹ see Krishna Bista's ›Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults‹, (2012).

11 For a definition of the concept see Katie Petersen's intervention on ›Intercultural Literature‹.

12 On ›émigré literature‹ see Halina Filipowicz's ›Fission and Fusion: Polish Émigré Literature‹ international avant-garde« (1989).

13 See Linda Norberg Blair's explanation of ›immigrant literature‹ in *The Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*.

ture,[14] the literature of migration[15] and so forth. Such multiplicity of genres suggests that the attempt to describe and find appropriate terminology for different kinds of migration writing has been a prominent topic of scholarly discussions. In the face of such variety, I have tried to frame the labels by finding some points of convergence. The result is an arrangement of four groups, which are marked off above. Even if the characteristics of these concepts overlap, each of them carries a slightly different meaning. When taken together, they interpenetrate, extend and explain the notion of ›migration writing‹.

The first cluster of terms places the emphasis on by whom the text is written. The author is a ›foreigner‹, ›exile‹, ›refugee‹, ›guest worker‹ or ›Kanak‹ (a person of Turkish, Kurdish, Arab or other Middle Eastern descent living in Germany). What seems important is the fact that the writers are outsiders. Even though they might be socially, linguistically and economically integrated, the authors are situated outside the local mainstream because of their roots. This is why some scholars and critics discredit these categories, pointing to their shallowness and political and ethical limitations. For example, Liesbeth Minnaard draws attention to the irony that underpins the problematic juxtaposition of ›guest‹ and ›worker‹ (2009, 60) in the term ›guest worker literature‹. This combination raises vitally important questions: Should the migrant who seeks a career and future in a particular place be considered merely a guest? Can a refugee be given a temporary status of a ›guest worker‹? No sooner are these questions answered than another one suggests itself: Are the works produced by long-term migrants and asylum-seekers classifiable as *Gastarbeiterliteratur*? This is only a sample of difficulties that the abovementioned categories can cause. No wonder then that many migrant writers try to transcend this slot-rolling classification which, inevitably, may lead to reductive, distorted, congealed and sometimes biased interpretations of their creative work. Central to these interpretations is the tendency to overlook the aesthetic complexity of their writing in favour of strongly referential readings that either politicise their works or reduce them to social evidence.

The second set of labels makes use of the adjectives such as ›allochthonous‹, ›ethnic‹, ›minority‹ and ›diasporic‹. Implicit in this choice of words is the recognition that the writers belong to a self-enclosed community, which is limited in numbers and not native to the country. It marginalises the writers and subjects them to the process of ›othering‹. The result is that both the authors and their creative work may be ethnicised and relegated to the periphery of the host coun-

14 On ›migrant literature‹ see Charlotte Kessler's ›Migrant Literature or Migration Literature – And Why Does It Matter?‹ (2017).

15 Fatemeh Pourjafari and Abdolali Vahidpour analyse ›the literature of migration‹ in their 2014 article ›Migration Literature: A Theoretical Perspective‹.

try's culture. By underscoring the foreignness and exoticism of ›allochthonous‹, ›ethnic‹, ›minority‹, ›diasporic‹ texts, the labels describe them as a contained category separate from and opposing to national literature. What is thereby accentuated in this set of terms is the relation between the ›national‹ and ›foreign‹.

The same relationship is pivotal in the third grouping. However, unlike the previous categorisation, which puts foreign works in opposition to national literature, this classification suggests a successful fusion of the two. The authors of ›hyphenated‹, ›intercultural‹ or ›multicultural‹ works are, to a lesser or larger degree, bi- or multicultural. In their texts, they often translate natives to migrants and *vice versa*. Their writing is immersed in their native and host cultures, being a credible blend of two or more traditions. The permeation of one culture by another forces the writers to explore identity issues. In the very act of writing, the authors analyse and reformulate both their individual and group identities. Their investigations into identity construction help them invent new, alternative conceptions of home and belonging. What follows is that the authors of ›hyphenated‹, ›intercultural‹, ›multicultural‹ texts disrupt the existing understanding of national literature. In a number of today's countries, literary texts are increasingly produced by multicultural writers who live in multi-ethnic communities. If ›national‹ writing is created in multicultural societies, the logical deduction is that it becomes, inexorably, multicultural. This obviously challenges the traditional division between the ›national‹ and ›foreign‹ literatures and reinvents the ways in which nationality is imagined and represented. Consequently, from the ›hyphenated‹, ›intercultural‹, ›multicultural‹ texts there emerges a broader, more inclusive understanding of what one may consider as ›national literature‹.

The terms ›émigré literature‹, ›immigrant literature‹, ›migrant literature‹ and ›the literature of migration‹ have been gathered in a separate, fourth set. This is because they mark the major stages in the development of the concept of ›migration writing‹. The labels focus on the figure of newcomer and, as Graeme Dunphy argues, illuminate the stages of the migrant's integration in their new society. Just like Máiréad Nic Craith, Dunphy believes that the changing terminology reflects the relationship between the migrant and his or her host community. The ›emigrant‹ is a homeward-oriented outsider, the ›immigrant‹ – often second-generation migrant – is an individual that has developed a close affinity to host culture, and the ›migrant‹ is a bi- or multicultural member of a nomadic community (often nomadic intelligentsia). Each of these migrant types shows a different attitude not only towards his or her host but also towards his or her home countries and cultures.

When it comes to emigrants, the research by various scholars, such as Dorota Kołodziejczyk, Halina Filipowicz, Jerzy Jarniewicz or Wojciech Wyskiel to name a few, illustrate how émigré authors create an imagined homeland in order to allow

the members of their diaspora to continue to participate in the life of their native country. With this attempt to sustain contact with their homeland goes the mission to fight for their country's independence or its other political and social causes. In their works, the writers are expected to respond to national matters, emphasising the connection between the individual and nation. They act as »remote-control tools« (Kołodziejczyk 2018, 93) that sustain a bond between individuals and their native land. One of their tasks is therefore to disseminate and maintain knowledge of their home culture and language among diaspora members; another is to boost their countrymen's morale and expose hidden or censored information, »serving as a voice of freedom, hope, and direction for those left behind« in the native land (ibid., 94). Committed to these duties, the writers set up literary centres, associations, journals and publishing houses abroad. Since they tend to write in their native tongue, it concludes that the audience for most of their writing is their fellow countrymen. These authors will often produce works of the high-brow kind that are read mainly by a native elite in both the diaspora and home country. Their texts are immersed in their native culture rather than in their new milieu and tend to explore themes of political exile, trauma of displacement, the situation in their country of origin, the difficulties of settling down in the new place, and representations (often critical) of the host society. Separated from their homeland, the writers have a tendency to lapse into nostalgia and sentimentalism. For all of these features, one may describe émigré writing in a simplified way as national literature written outside of the author's homeland.

What distinguishes the ›émigré‹ from ›immigrant‹ texts is that immigrant writers reject the role of national bards or intellectuals who are under a moral obligation to be involved in the political life of their country of origin. The motives behind the immigrants' decision to remain in the host country do not have to be strictly political. In their literary works, there is a shift of emphasis from the theme of separation from one's homeland to the process of assimilation in the country of residence. The writers explore the loss of identity which emerges from living in-between two cultures. Attention is given to the (un)translatability of cultures and languages and the relationship between imperial centre and colonial periphery. It is often the case that immigrants end up developing a deeper affinity with their place of residence than with their country of origin. Therefore, the issue of locality takes on extra significance: rather than an entire country, immigrants take for their home a known and specific place, be it a village, town, city district, and the like. Characteristically, these immigrant texts, or at least a significant number of them, are produced in the local language, which might not be the author's mother tongue but his or her second (or even third) language.

If emigration/immigration is driven by compulsion, migration is often said to be undertaken of one's own volition. Obviously, drawing a line between a forced

and a voluntary relocation is a highly debatable point. In his book on *International Migration*, Khalid Koser describes ›forced migrants‹ as people who were compelled to leave their home country due to conflict (e. g. civil war, international war), persecution (because of one's race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, political opinion), environmental disaster (drought, flood, earthquake, famine, etc.) (Koser 2007, 16 sq.). If migration is undertaken for reasons other than those listed above, it is generally considered voluntary. Therefore, moving abroad in order to work, join one's spouse or enter university are examples that fall into this category of uncompelled relocation. However, Koser is quick to point out that the distinction between these two types is very dubious. In reality, few migrations are purely voluntary or forced. To prove his point, he gives the example of a person who was made redundant and moves to another country to find a job. Economic migration is presumed to be voluntary. However, if the employee was fired because of their race or religion, it may be argued that the person has fled for political reasons (ibid., 18). A similar ambiguity, says Nicolas Van Hear, marks the displacement of a person who leaves a country which is simultaneously experiencing economic distress and violent social upheaval (Van Hear/McNeil 2011, 01:30). This person's moving to another country will be at once motivated by economic and political reasons. To acknowledge this complexity of motives, the concept of ›mixed migration‹ was introduced in the early 2000s. The term embraces all kinds of migrants: »refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities« (Mixed Migration Centre n.d., 1). Despite the recent, justified tendency to combine forced and voluntary displacement into one category, it is helpful in some cases –analysis of emigrant, immigrant and migrant literature being one of the instances – to distinguish these two types of migration.

In their paper ›When is Migration Voluntary?‹, Valeria Ottonelli and Tiziana Torresi set down four criteria that should be fulfilled for migration to be recognised as voluntary. The first prerequisite is non-coercion, which means that one's decision to move to another place must not be caused by any kind of physical violence or psychological pressure such as threats, intimidations or deception. The second requirement is that the migrant comes from the position of ›sufficiency‹. What Ottonelli and Torresi understand by ›sufficiency‹ is the fulfilment of fundamental human needs, such as food, shelter and personal safety, and of basic social necessities, such as capability to sustain familial ties or share a common culture (2013, 798). But since this definition leaves a lot of room for interpretation and depends very much on the culture and the standard of living accepted as decent in the given country, the authors provide further clarification. Namely, migrating to another place of one's own free will often involve the worsening of the migrant's life quality rather than its improvement, at least in the short run.

The third necessary condition listed by Ottonelli and Torresi is the existence of an exit option at the moment when the decision to relocate is made. It means, among other things, that the migrants are able to return to their country of origin or move to another destination if they wish to change their situation. The final requirement is that the migrant has sufficient information of what he or she is choosing. This is violated when people are tricked into moving by someone who exploits their lack of knowledge, like for example in the case of trafficking. All in all, migration is considered voluntary when it is part of a life plan that is freely and consciously undertaken by the migrant. Therefore, the reasons behind this type of migration often involve goals such as buying a house or car, paying for the child's higher education, starting a business, finding a more suitable or better-paid job, receiving health care, moving to a country that recognises gay marriage, studying abroad, etc. (Ottonelli/Torresi 2013, 806; Zhou 2020). Ottonelli and Torresi argue that these »goals do not respond to basic needs, but to a hope of advancement and comfort that cannot be achieved within the domestic economy« and/or social order (2013, 806). The migrants are eager, but only temporarily, to sacrifice their happiness, comfort and social life with the aim of improving their living standards and/or social standing.

This voluntary context is what distinguishes ›migrant literature‹ from ›émigré‹ and ›immigrant‹ writing. As Carine M. Mardorossian argues in her article ›From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature‹, the movement from ›exile‹ to ›migrant‹ writing reflects »the change from an epoch of revolutionary nationalism and militant anticommunism which produced exiles to an epoch of capitalist triumphalism which makes various migrant experiences possible« (2002, 17 sq.). The result is that, as Graeme Dunphy contends, migrants begin to »manage two cultures confidently« (2001, 21). They evince proficiency in their native and host (and often some other) cultures and languages, viewing their multiculturalism as an asset rather than liability. The intimate knowledge of two or more cultures often translates into multicultural and multilingual texts intended for international audiences. What makes migrant literature even more inclusive is that it comprises of high-brow as well as middle-brow and low-brow texts. Unlike émigré literature, which is aimed mainly at elites, migrant writing finds favour with large audiences. Therefore, the reader will find among migrant books a whole variety of texts: from poetry collections and memoirs to crime stories and romance novels.

By comparison with ›émigré‹, ›immigrant‹ and ›migrant‹ literatures, the centre of gravity in ›the literature of migration‹ shifts from the figure of writer to the content of his or her literary work. In the words of Rebecca L. Walkowitz, the term includes all texts »that are produced in a time of migration or that can be said to reflect on migration« (2006, 533). Svend Erik Larsen rephrases the same idea when he writes that the label »embraces all literature written under cultural

conditions defined by flows of migration, no matter the origin of the author« (2016, 509). Both scholars argue it is enough for the author to be involved intellectually with the issues of migration and transculturalism: he or she does not have to be a migrant to produce the literature of migration. What is essential, however, is that the writer's work is imbued with a vision of cosmopolitan, transnational, hybrid society and globalised world. This vision determines the style, language and themes of the writing. The result is that whether a work is classified as ›the literature of migration‹ depends on the content, the characteristics and the reader's interpretation of the work; the writer's background is deemed irrelevant, even if it impacts the reception of the work.

3 What Is Migration Writing?

From the above concepts, there emanates what I call ›migration writing‹. The label is used by me as an umbrella term, within which one can talk about different strands or literary trends and movements, such as the abovementioned exile, refugee, guest worker, Kanake, allochthonous, ethnic, minority, diasporic, hyphenated, intercultural, multicultural, émigré, immigrant, migrant, migration literatures, and so forth. In comparison to ›migration literature‹, which in some countries (for example in Italy) denotes creative works only (Ganeri 2010, 437), ›migration writing‹ is a broader term that includes both literary and non-literary texts. It spans a wide thematic and tonal range from political commentaries to spiritual quests. Some of the migration texts discuss the topics with sophistication and gravity, others take a humorous or sensational view on the issues. In effect, the label embraces a spectrum of what one can consider high-brow, middle-brow and low-brow literature. It covers essays, memoirs, diaries, novels, short stories, poems, dramas, etc.

Therefore, when one discusses literature and migration, it seems essential to provide a time frame. Otherwise, as Margherita Ganeri shrewdly remarks, the term would be too broad and include all works concerned with the movement of people since the ancient times. The scholar argues persuasively that:

> [...] if we consider migration a literary theme, as many have done, we should also admit that a specific field of inquiry called migration literature would cover nearly all the literary histories of all times. Because every author who writes or has written in the past, in wide or limited ways, about migration experiences, should be included in it. As a theme, migration is not only relevant and widespread in itself; it is also historically relevant in almost all the European literatures both modern and ancient, because of the history itself of Europe, and not only of Europe. The so called »great human diasporas« require specific approaches

> regarding the various forms of migrations in the historical long-term courses and recourses. It is true that only in the last two-hundred years specific claims of personal, ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity entered the arena of social discourse, as many claim, but this is still a very large span of time. A wide chronological ground must certainly be taken into account in any discussion about literature and migration [...]. (Ganeri 2010, 437 sq.)

Ganeri suggests the beginning of ›migration literature‹ in Italy should be dated to the 1990s as this was the time when Italian migration writing began to be the subject of literary study. The first extensive anthology of prose, poetry and drama works by Italian-American authors, titled *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana*, was published in 1991. Six years later, Armando Gnisci, a prominent expert on migrant literature, started his large-scale research project *Basili* (Banca dati scrittori immigranti in lingua italiana), the enterprise aimed at tracking down and investigating Italian literature written by migrants (ibid., 438).

Albeit for a different reason, I would say that the same span of time can be ascribed to ›migration writing‹. Since the processes underpinning globalisation compel contemporary migrations and those, in turn, inspire migration writing, then it seems reasonable to link the appearance of ›migration writing‹ with the emergence of the concept of ›globalisation‹.

In his concise yet comprehensive introduction to *Globalisation*, Manfred B. Steger arrives at the following working definition of the term:

> Globalisation refers to a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant (Steger 2003, 13).

In the accompanying commentary, Steger stresses that globalisation is a multidimensional and uneven process. What he has in mind when he makes this statement is that, on the one hand, the analysis of this complex phenomenon, rather than reduced to the merely economic aspect, should embrace other important angles, such as political, cultural, ideological and environmental dimensions of globalisation. On the other hand, it must be remembered that populations in various parts of the world are affected by the intensification of global connections and interdependencies in very different ways. Generally speaking, the global South enjoys less access to, and fewer benefits from, the global networks than the economically advanced countries of the global North (Steger 2003, 13–15). In consequence, the existing asymmetrical power relations are preserved. It does not mean, however, that the global North is left unscathed by the inequality and negative ramifications of globalisation. As a matter of fact, in their report for Oxfam, Diego Alejo Vázquez Pimentel, Iñigo Macías Aymar and Max Lawson

arrive at a conclusion that 82 % of all wealth created in 2017 went to the 1 % of the wealthiest billionaires, who are, by the way, mostly men. To put it in perspective: »The three richest people in the US own the same wealth as the bottom half of the US population (roughly 160 million people)« (Vázquez Pimentel/Macías Aymar/Lawson 2018, 10). According to the researchers, women, ordinary workers and small-scale food producers across the world profit the least from globalisation. The fruits of international connections seem to be mostly reserved for a global elite (ibid., 1).

Apart from the impacts of globalisation, Steger observes that another contested topic in academic debates is when the acceleration of global connections started. In other words, when did globalisation begin? He examines different intellectual currents and goes in his analysis as far back as the pre-historic period (10,000 BCE – 3,500 BCE) during which the long-running dispersion of human species across all five continents was finally achieved. In the pre-modern period (3,500 BCE – 1,500 CE), Steger notes, the invention of the wheel in Southwest Asia allowed for more efficient transportation of goods and people. And the development of the alphabet in Mesopotamia, Egypt and central China facilitated the coordination of social activities and resulted in the formation of empires. In the early modern period (1500–1750), the monarchs of Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, France and England encouraged the exploration of new lands, their colonisation, and the development of interregional markets. Corporations like Dutch and British East India grew in size and stature, profiting from intercontinental economic transactions. Fed by a steady supply of goods from the colonised regions, the Western countries grew in wealth and power during the modern period (1750–1970). Then the 19th-century advancement of science and technology led to innovations in transportation and communication. If the development of railways and mechanised shipping set the stage for the 20th-century air transport, the invention of telegraph was a prelude to the devising of telephone, radio and television. During the 20th century, colonial competition, mass migration and urbanisation intensified interstate rivalry. It culminated in two world wars (Steger 2003, 17–36). By the end of World War II, the United States in alliance with the United Kingdom held a conference for the economic powers of global North in Bretton Woods in 1944. The conference laid foundations for the establishment of three key international organisations: the International Monetary Fund that administered the international monetary system; the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (later known as World Bank) which initially provided loans for rebuilding post-war Europe but was later expanded to finance projects in the developing countries across the world; and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade that facilitated and enforced multilateral trade agreements; GATT was replaced by World Trade Organisation in 1995 (Steger 2003, 37 sq.).

The funding of global institutions has visibly strengthened worldwide exchanges and networks. In *The Age of Migration*, Hein de Haas, Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller distinguish four periods in post-war globalisation: 1945–1973; 1973–1989; 1989–2008; 2008–present. Among other things, the researchers argue that the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the start of the »era of ›neoliberal‹ globalization« which is characterised, among other things, by »market triumphalism, economic deregulation and accelerated globalization of trade and finance« (de Haas/Castles/Miller 2020, 17). The end of Cold War, the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and destabilisation of ›strong states‹ in Africa and Asia led to increased international migration. The subsequent economic growth and demographic aging stirred demand for migrant labour in North America, Europe and East Asia while the Persian Gulf turned into a popular destination for workers from South and Southeast Asia.

Haas and his colleagues' observations and Steger's historical outline, which are only briefly and selectively summarised above, raise awareness that the processes of globalisation have been happening for centuries and so the phenomenon can be considered as old as humanity. However, as Steger asserts in his 2014 article which he co-wrote with Paul James, ›globalisation‹ as a concept was rarely used until the 1990s. It was only then that the term became immensely popular in both public and academic discourses (James/Steger 2014, 419). The journalists and scholars began to use it to talk about the changes they were observing in various fields such as business, economics, humanities and social sciences. As a result, ›globalisation‹ came to signify »the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-space and world-time« (ibid., 425). Previously, the term carried a different meaning. Exploring its uses between the 1930s and 1970s, James and Steger observe the word ›globalisation‹ was applied, among other contexts, »in education to describe the global life of the mind« and »in international relations to describe the extension of the European Common Market« (ibid., 417).

Beginning as an obscure idea in the late 1980s, the concept of globalisation grew into everyone's consciousness almost overnight. It became a source from which many other phenomena sprang, ›migration writing‹ being one of them. Therefore, even though this claim is made from a Eurocentric point of view, it seems quite legitimate to acknowledge the 1990s as the beginning of ›migration writing‹.

To sum up, ›migration writing‹ in the most general sense is a term for a whole variety of different types of literary and non-literary texts that have been published since the 1990s. They either tackle the topic of migration or emerge from the experience of migration (but not necessarily address the subject of migration). It is also not necessary for the author to be a migrant: it is enough that his or

her work is inspired or influenced by the experience of migration and is imbued with a vision of cosmopolitan, transnational, hybrid society and the globalised world. In consequence, the author of ›migration writing‹ can be a migrant, but also their spouse, relative or friend, the descendant of the migrant (second or third generation migrant) or a local writer.

Given the large scope of this definition and diversity of form, language, style, tone and themes of migration writing, the best way to define the genre is to see it as a constellation of many different types of text, which are connected to one another – not by conformity to a single, prescriptive pattern but – by a set of resemblances. That is to say, there is an array of features that allow one to classify a text as ›migration writing‹ and each individual work manifests a different selection and combination of these characteristics. Some of the features that mark out the genre include: the real-life nature of the writing (the story appears to have basis in real-life events and the author's first-hand experiences); creolization and multilingualism in the text; references to multiple cultures and/or geographic locations; impact of the Internet and online communication on the structure of the work; common themes and motifs (for example, locality *versus* globalism, community *versus* nation, exploration of belonging and identity issues, comparison of the home and host countries and cultures, living in a multicultural community, intercultural relationships, creation of new traditions and heritage, revision of gender roles and the like).

4 The Research Potential of Migration Writing

As mentioned above, one of the features typical of ›migration writing‹ is its real-life nature. The fact that the authors tend to constantly refer to actuality and use first-person narration conveys the impression that the events depicted in their books are based in reality and stem from the authors' first-hand experiences. Obviously, this apparent authenticity and factuality of migration writing can be misleading. Even if the writer describes real-life events and has a good memory, he or she rarely remembers things in a neat and linear chronology and recounts them accurately. Therefore, the authors – not so much reconstruct their experiences as – construct a fictionalised rendering of migration. What they offer are individual and subjective depictions of the events, which are presented selectively, adapted, exaggerated and often interwoven with scenes that are entirely the product of imagination. Of course, the extent to which the authors exaggerate or fabricate events in their account can vary greatly. At one end of the spectrum, there are those writers who lean towards reportage and journalism. At the other

end, there are those who have literary aspirations or are entertainment-oriented. As a result, migration books strike a very different balance between informing and entertaining the readers.

Although less evident, the influence of publishers and editors is equally significant. As Amy Burge notes in her informative essay on ›What can literature tell us about migration?‹, the publishing industry wields control over what is published and circulated. Writers often have to adjust the content of their books to the needs and expectations of the market. It is also not uncommon for migrants and refugees to produce texts as part of projects run by social and political organisations. Therefore, there might be a rift between what the authors would like to and what they are asked to write about.

Anyone who wants to analyse migration writing in terms of authenticity and what ›truths‹ it reveals must undoubtedly bear in mind the above limitations. On the other hand, every single text is always to some extent a constructed, crafted artefact, which does not necessarily discredit the information the narrative provides. Not everything in migration writing is fabricated or embellished and the books do provide some useful knowledge. Both non-fiction texts, such as a reportage or diary, and the literary works, such as a novel, drama or poem, give highly informative accounts of migration experience and offer a glimpse of the contemporary history. It is an awareness of this that makes the narrator in Jacek Ozaist's novel *Wyspa obiecana* [The Promised Isle] to make the following, perhaps slightly portentous but nevertheless incisive, remark:

> I am co-writing the contemporary history of Poland, which kids will read about the same way we read about uprisings and wars. The time will show if our emigration is a historical phenomenon that can be compared to the exodus after World War II and after the declaration of martial law; or perhaps it is something even larger, epoch-making. After all, it is said that 20 % of population has left the country, which is no fewer than several million people. (Ozaist 2015, 130)[16]

In casting himself in the self-appointed role as a chronicler, Ozaist's narrator records and interprets the events in which he participates. This way his personal experiences and subjective reflections become part of the national (or even world) history. Not unlike other migrants' works, his writing constitutes a sort of socio-historical archive.

16 Współtworzę nową historię Polski, o której kiedyś dzieciaki będą czytać, jak my czytaliśmy o powstaniach i wojnach. Czas pokaże, czy nasza emigracja to zjawisko historyczne, porównywalne z ucieczkami po II wojnie światowej i stanie wojennym, czy też o wiele większe, wręcz epokowe. Przecież słyszy się, że w kraju ubyło ok. 20 procent populacji, a to już liczba wyrażana w milionach.

By offering a mediation between fact and fiction, migration writing tends to provide a blend of literary pleasure and useful information. The texts convey an image of migrants' host and home countries, shaping the readers' perception of and attitudes towards those places and their inhabitants. As the authors capture human interactions in everyday life, they often try to prompt interest in the Other, explaining the culture of nationals to migrants and *vice versa* and forming new traditions and common heritage in local communities. This, in turn, problematises the question of belonging and national identity – or more precisely – of what it means to be British, English, Irish, Polish, local, foreign, migrant, Catholic, etc. Propelled by changes to migrants' economic status, religious life, language capacity and awareness of their ethnicity, migration writing re-defines their individual, collective and national identities. The texts often contain the most brilliant explorations of identity issues and elucidate the impact of globalising cultural processes on identity formation. In their attempt to challenge the ingrained assumptions about migration and migrants, many authors, though obviously not all, try to encourage their readers to think in new, ›other‹ ways about such notions as nationality, borders, belonging or home.

For those very reasons, migration writing can provide comprehensive material for research in all kinds of areas, such as sociological, political, economic and culture studies. The research potential of migration writing is already acknowledged by those who use it as research tools in a variety of projects engaging with diasporas. The sceptics, however, raise a vital question as to whether these texts have any significant impact on the existing reality.

In her elaboration on this issue, Amy Burge adduces evidence from a range of scholars, such as Viet Thanh Nguyen (2018), Claire Gallien (2018b), and Agnes Woolley (2014) (cited in Burge 2020, 20 sq.). Quite reasonably, Nguyen exposes the limitations of migration writing by pointing out that the world is not simply changed by literature. For a transformation to become possible, the readers have to undertake real actions to alter the conditions in which they live (ibid., 20).

By contrast, Woolley and Gallien see literature as a major impetus for change. They draw attention to the fact that migration writing raises awareness about the lives of those voiceless in society (ibid., 20). It documents and reflects on events that are often excluded from the mainstream discourse and that otherwise would remain invisible to the public; it exposes and dissipates the stereotypical representations of migration and migrants; it invites the readers to evaluate critically the contemporary social, political and economic concerns from a global, rather than a national, perspective; it gives an insight into current cultural transformations. Acting as a counterweight to the dominant narratives, migration texts make visible phenomena that are marginalised or deliberately kept away from the public. They record aspects that history and cultural memory tend to uninten-

tionally ignore or wilfully exclude, providing alternative knowledge about social and cultural transformations brought about by migration. By disrupting the existing beliefs of the national, the works broaden the meaning of what one considers his or her heritage and may help communities shape a new, common culture. Also, although it may seem overly optimistic and sound like wishful thinking, Woolley argues migration narratives may be charged with the subversive power to create a more equitable future for those represented in them.

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