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Austria in Transit: Displacement and the Nation-State

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On 27 August 2015, the drive-by photograph on the cover of this issue was sent as a tweet by the News International Editor of UK broadcaster Channel 4 with the text: ‘Just drove past truck on A4 in Austria with 50 dead refugees inside. Terrible smell of death as we passed.’¹ In fact, the abandoned lorry, discovered just hours before on the hard shoulder of the motorway between Neusiedl and Parndorf in Burgenland, was later found to contain the dead bodies of seventy one people in total – fifty-nine men, eight women and four children.² Mobile phone records show that the Volvo truck left the city of Kecskemét in central Hungary and collected the refugees close to the municipality of Mórahalom after they had crossed the border from Serbia on foot in the early hours of 26 August. Those on board had come from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and, after being sealed into the lorry airtight, they suffocated within hours of their departure in the full knowledge of those driving the vehicle.³ Four men – one Afghani

¹ <<https://twitter.com/lindseyhilsum/status/636863756488851456/photo/1>> [accessed 20 October 2018].

² Luke Harding, ‘Hungarian police arrest driver of lorry that had 71 dead migrants inside’, *The Guardian*, 28 August 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/28/more-than-70-dead-austria-migrant-truck-tragedy>> [accessed 20 October 2018].

³ Gregor Mayer, ‘71 Tote auf der A4: Telefonprotokolle bei Prozess vorgespielt’, *Der Standard*, 24 January 2018 <<https://derstandard.at/2000072944752/71-Tote-auf-A4-bei-Parndorf-Telefonprotokolle-bei-Prozess-vorgespielt>> [accessed 20 October 2018].

and three Bulgarians – were convicted of human trafficking and received twenty-five year jail terms in Hungary.⁴ Prosecutors alleged that the group had smuggled 1,200 people from Hungary to Austria between February and August 2015, with its ringleader earning more than €300,000.⁵ The Parndorf atrocity – whose horrific scale was only but intimated in the drive-by tweet – was to change the course of the EU’s response to the increasing numbers of people attempting to cross its borders on a daily basis. When the news broke, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who at the time was attending the Western Balkans Summit just forty kilometres away in Vienna, immediately responded by declaring ‘[d]as mahnt uns, das Thema der Migration schnell und im europäischen Geist, das heißt im Geist der Solidarität anzugehen und auch Lösungen zu finden’ [that compels us to tackle the issue of migration quickly and in the European spirit, that’s to say in the spirit of solidarity and to find solutions, too].⁶ Indeed, the day before the lorry set out, the ‘Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge’ [Federal Office for Migration and Refugees] famously confirmed on Twitter that Germany was now

⁴ Boris Kálnoky, ‘Bis zu 25 Jahre Haft: Urteile im Todeslasterprozess’, *Die Presse*, 14 June 2018 <https://diepresse.com/home/ausland/welt/5447148/Bis-zu-25-Jahre-Haft_Urteile-im-Todeslasterprozess> [accessed 20 October 2018].

⁵ Anon., ‘Prozess im A4-Flüchtlingsdrama: “Die können auch alle sterben”’, *Kurier*, 21 June 2017 <<https://kurier.at/chronik/burgenland/a4-fluechtlingsdrama-erster-prozesstag-gegen-die-schlepper/271.032.748>> [accessed 20 October 2018].

⁶ Florian Gathmann, ‘Flüchtlingstragödie von Parnsdorf. Die Zäsur’, *Spiegel*, 27 August 2015 <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/fluechtlinge-71-leichen-im-lkw-die-tragoedie-von-parndorf-a-1107772.html>> [accessed 20 October 2018].

accepting unregistered refugees from Syria.⁷ And, in this context, the tragedy at Parndorf can be read as a significant catalyst in the subsequent landmark decision of the Hungarian, Austrian and German governments to open borders just one week later when – on 4 September – thousands of refugees marched from Budapest and made for Austria on foot.⁸ Buses organized by both Hungary and Austria facilitated the passage of refugees through both countries to Vienna’s Westbahnhof, where many continued their journeys north to Germany and Sweden.

In considering the forced mass displacement of the past decade, Austria’s central status as a transit state in the European context is clear.⁹ According to UN estimates, 600,000 people passed through the country between September and December 2015 on their way to

⁷ ‘#Dublin-Verfahren syrischer Staatsangehöriger werden zum gegenwärtigen Zeitpunkt von uns weitestgehend faktisch nicht weiter verfolgt’ [#Dublin procedure for Syrian citizens is at this point in time effectively no longer being adhered to]

<https://twitter.com/BAMF_Dialog/status/636138495468285952> [accessed 20 October 2018].

⁸ Georg Blume, Marc Brost, Tina Hildebrandt, et al., ‘Grenzöffnung für Flüchtlinge’, *Die Zeit*, 22 August 2016 <<https://www.zeit.de/2016/35/grenzoeffnung-fluechtlinge-september-2015-wochenende-angela-merkel-ungarn-oesterreich>> [accessed 20 October 2018].

⁹ Hazel Southam, ‘How Austria has become central to Europe’s refugee crisis’, *The Guardian*, 28 August 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/27/austria-western-europes-migration-crisis-starts-here>> [accessed 1 October 2018].

seek asylum in Europe.¹⁰ The interdisciplinary contributions gathered in this issue examine cultural responses to issues of forced migration, displacement and humanitarianism in order to consider the particularity of the contemporary Austrian case, as the country's government adopts an increasingly hard-line response to admitting and granting asylum to refugees. As the holder of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from July to December 2018, Austria has been making concerted efforts to influence European policy in this domain, a fact that underlines the international significance of its government's current stance.¹¹ The contributions in this volume consider engagements from the realms of literature, film, theatre, music and photography, often reflecting on the works' respective production contexts, in the effort to explore the spectrum of response to a fast-changing socio-political environment. In their close examinations of works that engage with particular moments, contexts and phenomena pertaining to issues of forced migration and human displacement, the articles provide insight into the challenges of the effort to document and respond in ways that do justice to the complexities of the situation and, in particular, make space for experiences all too often excluded from the historical record. As the literary scholar Agnes Woolley has pointed out, 'Oscillating between invisibility and overexposure in the public sphere, forced

¹⁰ Anon., '85.000 Asylanträge in Österreich, weltweit so viele Flüchtlinge wie nie', *Der Standard*, 18 December 2015 <<https://derstandard.at/2000027777432/Bereits-rund-85-000-Asylantraege-2015-in-Oesterreich>> [accessed 1 October 2018].

¹¹ Hans-Peter Siebenhaar, 'Österreichs Bundeskanzler Sebastian Kurz will der oberste Grenzsützer der EU sein', *Handelsblatt*, 6 June 2018 <<https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/oesterreichs-bundeskanzler-sebastian-kurz-will-der-oberste-grenzsuetzer-der-eu-sein/22649858.html?ticket=ST-1266666-IZHLmqHe2mEV5uLIK2D-ap6>> [accessed 20 October 2018].

migrants have an ambivalent relationship to the aesthetic forms that seek to represent them, one which touches on questions of communicability, visibility and ethics.¹² The issue's contributions discuss these questions in relation to the Austrian context with its particular tradition of language scepticism and biting political satire. In exploring the cultural challenges to populist polemic, as well as the ongoing commitment of NGOs, charities and private initiatives in supporting and welcoming refugees, often with little or no help from the state, the contributions offer further tentative comment on the country's legacy as a *Vielvölkerstaat*.

'What is known as the "European immigration crisis"' suggest Michael A. Peters and Tina Besley 'erupted in the mid-2000s, and culminated in 2015 with the worst crisis in immigration, and massive increase of displaced persons seeking asylum in Europe since the end of WWII.'¹³ People fleeing war zones and turbulent regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, Syria and Libya in particular, set out on perilous sea journeys across the Mediterranean to Italy and Greece, or came via overland routes through Turkey, Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary. Situated between these two major refugee routes, Austria received around 90,000 asylum requests in 2015, the third highest number of applications per capita after Hungary and Sweden.¹⁴ Austria initially worked closely with Germany to welcome refugees and the authorities, as well as NGOs, charities and citizen initiatives, provided a warm reception and material assistance to those arriving in the country. On a visit to

¹² Agnes Woolley, *Contemporary Asylum Narratives: Representing Refugees in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke and New York, 2014), p. 3.

¹³ Michael A. Peters, Tina Besley, 'The Refugee Crisis and the Right to Political Asylum', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47 (2015), pp. 1367-1374 (p. 1369).

¹⁴ <https://www.bmi.gv.at/301/Statistiken/files/2015/Asylstatistik_Dezember_2015.pdf> [accessed 20 October 2018].

Westbahnhof on 11 September, Austrian President Heinz Fischer summed up the public mood by suggesting that, in the country's reception of refugees, 'Rot-weiß-rot zeigt sich hier von der schönsten Seite' [red-white-red is showing itself at its best].¹⁵ Just one month later, however, the Minister of the Interior Johanna Mikl-Leitner of the centre-right *Österreichische Volkspartei* [Austrian People's Party, ÖVP] took a strikingly different line in an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* when she called for 'eine Festung Europa' [a Fortress Europe] to be constructed as quickly as possible in order to control access and guarantee public safety.¹⁶ As time went on, the number of asylum claims made in Austria remained high with over 42,000 submitted in 2016.¹⁷ This provoked increasing uneasiness across the political spectrum and the country rapidly began to pursue a more restrictive asylum policy, proposing stronger border controls and caps on numbers of asylum applications. The far-right *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* [Austrian Freedom Party, FPÖ], in particular, insisted on the economic motivation of many migrants, suggesting that so-called 'Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge' ['economic refugees'] should not be entitled to claim asylum.¹⁸

¹⁵ Anon., 'Flüchtlinge: "The President of Austria" am Westbahnhof', *Die Presse*, 11 September 2015 <https://diepresse.com/home/innenpolitik/4819192/Fluechtlinge_The-president-of-Austria-am-Westbahnhof> [accessed 20 October 2018].

¹⁶ Oliver Georgi, "'Wir müssen an einer Festung Europa bauen'", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 October 2015 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/johanna-mikl-leitner-zu-oesterreichs-plaene-in-fluechtlingskrise-13880650.html>> [accessed 26 October 2018].

¹⁷ <https://www.bmi.gv.at/301/Statistiken/files/2016/Asylstatistik_Dezember_2016.pdf> [accessed 26 October 2018].

¹⁸ Anon., 'HC Strache: Wien darf keine weiteren Anreize für Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge bieten',

Spring 2016 saw international controversy, as the Ministry of the Interior funded an advertising campaign in Afghanistan that sought to deter would-be asylum seekers and high-profile politicians expressed support for building a fence to seal the border with Italy, a proposal that was ultimately blocked by the Italian government.¹⁹ Austrian politicians further styled themselves as key players in European efforts to close the so-called Balkan route, which led from Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece, though western Balkan states such as Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia, all three of whom announced in March 2016 that their borders were shut to irregular migration.²⁰ The polarisation of public debate led to an internal political crisis that brought the resignation of Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann (SPÖ) in May 2016 and contestation of the Austrian presidency by far-right candidate Norbert Hofer (FPÖ) in the same year. The nationalistic tenor of much campaign rhetoric provoked comparisons with events in the country during the 1980s, when anti-immigrationist rhetoric was rife with the rise of Jörg Haider and the FPÖ.²¹ Following the narrow victory in

10 March 2016 <<https://www.fpoe-wien.at/news-detail/artikel/hc-strache-wien-darf-keine-weiteren-anreize-fuer-wirtschaftsfluechtlinge-bieten/>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

¹⁹ EURACTIV with Reuters, ‘Italy and Austria reach agreement to keep Brenner Pass open’, *EURACTIV*, 29 April 2016 <<https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/italy-and-austria-reach-agreement-to-keep-brenner-pass-open/>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

²⁰ Marie North, ‘Faktencheck: Wer hat die Balkanroute geschlossen?’, *Kurier*, 9 October 2017 <<https://kurier.at/politik/inland/wahl/faktencheck-wer-hat-die-balkanroute-geschlossen/274.540.009>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

²¹ Joachim Riedel, ‘Unterwegs in die dritte Republik’, *Die Zeit*, 22 May 2016 <<https://www.zeit.de/2016/22/oesterreich-wahl-bundespraesident-norbert-hofer->

December 2016 of independent candidate Alexander van der Bellen after this long-contested presidential campaign, a further shift to the right came in December 2017, with the election of a coalition government between the ÖVP and the FPÖ, headed by Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) as Chancellor and Heinz-Christian Strache (FPÖ) as Vice-Chancellor. In his previous role as foreign secretary, Kurz had spearheaded efforts to close the western Balkan route, making further controversial calls to close the EU's external borders with such ominous declarations as '[e]s wird nicht ohne hässliche Bilder gehen' [it won't work without ugly pictures].²² From the outset, the Kurz government loudly proclaimed its intention to clamp down on immigration, with the Chancellor stressing 'Wir sind viel zu attraktiv für Flüchtlinge und Migranten in unseren Sozialsystemen' [in our provision of social care, we are much too attractive to refugees and migrants].²³ In January, Strache proposed housing refugees in former barracks and Interior Minister Herbert Kickl (FPÖ) announced: 'Wir wollen möglichst restriktive Asylpolitik' [we want the most restrictive asylum policy possible].²⁴ A cap on the total number of asylum seekers accepted in Austria has been in place since 2016 and, in 2018,

[veraenderung](#)> [accessed 25 October 2018].

²² Silke Mühlherr, "Es wird nicht ohne hässliche Bilder gehen", *Die Welt*, 13 January 2016 <<https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article150933461/Es-wird-nicht-ohne-haessliche-Bilder-gehen.html>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

²³ 'Kurz: unsere Sozialsysteme sind viel zu attraktiv für Migranten', *Der Kurier*, 24 March 2016 <<https://kurier.at/politik/inland/bundestkanzler-kurz-kuendigt-reform-des-ams-an/400010712>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

²⁴ Anon., 'Kickl hält Idee von Asyl-Grundversorgungszentren für richtig', *Der Standard*, 18 January 2018 <<https://derstandard.at/2000072533022/Kickl-haelt-Idee-von-Asyl-Grundversorgungszentren-fuer-richtig>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

this figure was set at 30,000.²⁵ In April 2018, the cabinet approved a package of measures which included those to seize migrants' mobile phones, to deport minors who commit crimes, to charge asylum seekers up to €840 for processing their asylum claims, to prohibit asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected from leaving the district in which they are living and to extend the length of time required to become a citizen for those who receive asylum from six to ten years.²⁶ These measures were implemented on 1 September 2018 to widespread condemnation from organisations working to promote rights for refugees and asylum seekers who spoke of 'unverhältnismäßige, massive Grundrechtseingriffe' [disproportionate, crass infringements of basic rights].²⁷

In recent months the Austrian government has made further concerted efforts to set the agenda regarding refugee policy on the European level. Austria assumed its six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union in July 2018 with the motto 'A Europe that Protects'.²⁸ And, in his first address at Strasbourg on 3 July, Sebastian Kurz immediately foregrounded issues of 'security and the fight against illegal migration', suggesting that 'the protection of the European population must be our uppermost priority and we need a

²⁵ https://www.bmi.gv.at/301/Statistiken/start.aspx#pk_2018 [accessed 25 October 2018].

²⁶ Anon., 'Austria plans to toughen asylum policy, ease deportations', *Deutsche Welle*, 18 April 2018 <<https://www.dw.com/en/austria-plans-to-toughen-asylum-policy-ease-deportations/a-43446419>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

²⁷ Anon., 'Asylverschärfungen treten per 1. September in Kraft', *Der Standard*, 31 August 2018 <<https://derstandard.at/2000086462665/Asyl-Verschaerfungen-treten-per-1-September-in-Kraft>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

²⁸ <<https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/european-foreign-policy/european-policy/eu-presidency-2018/>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

paradigm shift in migration policy. Stronger focus must be placed on the protection of our external borders, as a basis for a Europe without internal borders.²⁹ A follow-up summit was held in Salzburg on 20 September 2018 at which Austria called for a European cap on the number of refugees, as well as greater cooperation with north African states such as Egypt.³⁰ Subsequently, at the conference of European Migration Network on 4 October 2018, the Austrian Minister of the Interior and the Danish Minister of Integration presented a vision paper for reforming EU member states' policies on asylum and protection.³¹ Despite their stated concern to protect the most vulnerable migrants, foremost amongst their proposals were initiatives to minimize opportunities for applying for asylum in Europe, to reduce irregular migration and to establish disembarkation platforms and deportation centres outside the EU.³² On 31 October, citing concerns about sovereignty, Kurz renounced a major UN pact on migration. This 'Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration' sets out a

²⁹ Sebastian Kurz 'Speech by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz during the EP plenary session in Strasbourg', 3 July 2018 <<https://www.federal-chancellery.gv.at/-/speech-of-federal-chancellor-sebastian-kurz-at-the-european-parliament>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

³⁰ Anon., 'Österreich fordert europäische Obergrenze für Flüchtlinge', *Die Zeit*, 15 September 2018 <<https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2018-09/asympolitik-reformplaene-oesterreich-europaeische-obergrenze-fluechtlinge>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

³¹ <<http://uim.dk/filer/nyheder-2018/vision-for-a-better-protection-system-in-a-globalized-world.pdf>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

³² For a critique of these proposals, see: Martin Ruhs and Mikkel Bars, 'Reforming Europe's Refugee Policies: Austrian-Danish Plan will not work', 11 October 2018 <<https://www.euronews.com/2018/10/11/reforming-europe-s-refugee-policies-austrian-danish-plan-will-not-work-view>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

‘cooperative framework’³³ for addressing international migration and more precisely defining the rights of migrants that further aims to reduce the pressure on countries with large numbers of migrants and to promote the self-reliance of newcomers. Kurz’s announcement triggered a wave of further withdrawals by EU states including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Italy, Poland, Switzerland and Slovakia, although the pact went on to be signed by 164 countries in Marrakech in December 2018.³⁴ Just days later, violence broke out when over five thousand far-right demonstrators marched on Brussels in protest at the pact.³⁵ Whilst it remains to be seen what consequences and concrete policy changes will ensue from Austria’s dogged interventions, it is clear that the hard line on immigration being taken by the current government seeks to make its impact felt on a pan-European level.

Research is already emerging on the relation between contemporary political discourse on immigration in Austria and that from the 1990s and 2000s, when a huge increase in support for the far-right FPÖ under the leadership of Jörg Haider led to the party’s election to coalition government with the ÖVP in early 2000. As Michael Boehringer’s contribution to this issue points out, Paul Scheibelhofer has suggested that in the post-2015 situation, politicians ‘took up and reframed existing notions about foreign masculinity to create

³³ ‘Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration’, 11 July 2018 <<https://www.un.org/pga/72/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2018/07/migration.pdf>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

³⁴ Eline Schaart, ‘Under far-right pressure, Europe retreats from UN migration pact’, 30 November 2018 <<https://www.politico.eu/article/migration-un-viktor-orban-sebastian-kurz-far-right-pressure-europe-retreats-from-pact/>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

³⁵ ‘Brussels protest over UN migration pact turns violent’, 16 December 2018 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-46585237>> [accessed 16 December 2018].

gendered, racialised and classed images of racial difference.³⁶ Scheibelhofer's work argues that such negative images have been invoked 'to shift the dominant perspective away from an empathic view on the experiences, struggles, needs and rights of refugees and re-establishing a securitising view.'³⁷ Cultural Studies scholars have engaged extensively with how writers, artists and intellectuals responded to the political climate in Austria during the 1990s and 2000s and their work provides a primary framework for the concern in many of the contributions to this issue to document artistic endeavours to resist such calculated political attempts to reframe humanitarian issues around asylum as a security topic. Allyson Fiddler, for example, has stressed that the FPÖ's 1999 election success 'produced a huge wave of political self-reflection in Austria, both among the general population and in the books, interviews, essays, and works of literature of many of Austria's most high-profile writers and intellectuals.'³⁸ Fiddler highlights in particular the emergence of 'works of literature and film from the late 1990s and early 2000s that thematize issues of social and racial integration' and question 'a homogenous Austrian identity as they voice a commitment to a more plural understanding of twenty-first century Austrian society.'³⁹ Wiebke Sievers has done important work in tracing the modern emergence of 'immigrant writing' in the Austrian context,

³⁶ Paul Scheibelhofer, "It won't work without ugly pictures": images of othered masculinities and the legitimization of restrictive refugee policy in Austria', *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies*, 12/2 (2017), 96-111 (p. 96).

³⁷ Scheibelhofer, "It won't work without ugly pictures", p. 106.

³⁸ Allyson Fiddler, 'Shifting Boundaries: Responses to Multiculturalism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century', in *A History of Austrian Literature*, ed. by Katrin Kohl and Ritchie Roberston (Rochester, N.Y., 2006) pp. 265-89, (p. 265).

³⁹ Fiddler, 'Shifting Boundaries', p. 266.

examining the institutional framework and political context in the 1990s when Austrian publishers beginning to show an interest in authors from refugee backgrounds who were expressing ‘opposition to mechanisms of political and cultural exclusion’.⁴⁰ As Principal Investigator of *Literature on the Move*, a major research project on the literature of migration funded by the Vienna Science and Technology Fund (WWTF) and based at the Austrian Academy of Sciences from 2013-16, Sievers has long highlighted the need to combine sociological and aesthetic approaches in considering transnationalizing tendencies in contemporary Austrian cultural production.⁴¹

Almost twenty years after the first ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in Austria, then, this special issue offers an appraisal of Austrian cultural responses to the contemporary era of forced mass displacement. Focusing on historical and contemporary debates and representations, the nation’s place and self-understanding are assessed in a Europe caught between loudly proclaimed humanitarian tradition on the one hand, and the rush to protect its borders on the other. In its choice of title, the issue acknowledges the ground-breaking English-language sourcebook *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration 1955-200*, taking up that study’s call to consider how migration changes a nation through the often-contested presence of different groups of people whose respective ‘transnational ties [...] challenge the very idea of a territorially bound nation-state.’⁴² In the case of this issue of *Austrian Studies*, which was

⁴⁰ Wiebke Sievers, ‘Writing Politics: The Emergence of Immigrant Writing in West Germany and Austria’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34/8 (2008), 1217-35 (p. 1230).

⁴¹ <http://www.litmove.oew.ac.at/downloads/Proposal_Literature_on_the_move.pdf?PHPSESSID=55acdf512a76a49a207c6c5197095cf9> [accessed 16 December 2018].

⁴² *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration 1955-2005*, ed. by Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling and Anton Kaes (Berkeley, 2007), xvii.

conceived at a time when hundreds of thousands of people were passing through southern and central Europe, the term ‘transit’ takes on further significance in denoting not only the presence of a migrant population within the nation state but signalling a condition of incredible precarity, of people at once in motion and stuck in limbo, devoid of rights or legal recognition in those geopolitical spaces they have been forced to move through.⁴³ We heed Edward Said’s ‘Reflections on Exile’ (1984), which stress the scale of exile in the twentieth century ‘with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers’ and that warn that ‘exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience first hand; but to think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as “good for us.”’⁴⁴ By examining cultural engagements with human displacement in literature, cinema, theatre, music and the visual arts, the contributions collected in this issue consider the possibilities – as well as the limitations – of the arts in documenting and communicating geopolitical experiences of persecution and transit in this central European space. Building on existing intercultural readings of Austrian texts, a key focus falls on issues of linguistic displacement, multilingualism and translation in the context of Austria’s disputed language borders.⁴⁵ We

⁴³ See Deniz Göktürk, ‘Transit’, in *Das Neue Deutschland. Von Migration und Vielfalt*, ed. by Özkan Ezli and Gisela Staupe (Constance, 2014), pp. 111-14.

⁴⁴ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London, 2001), pp. 171-84 (p. 174).

⁴⁵ See Monika Shafī, *Balancing Acts: Intercultural Encounters in Contemporary German and Austrian Literature* (Tübingen, 2001); Sandra Vlasta, *Contemporary Migration Literature in*

follow the Austro-Slovenian author Maja Haderlap, who – in her Klagenfurter Rede zur Literatur [Klagenfurt Address on Literature] of 2014 – underlines the need to pay attention to the political circumstances of a writer’s shift into another language, to linguistic histories and power relations, and the extent to which any decision for or against a language is always inscribed in a societal and political process. Contemplating seismic political and territorial shifts in this speech, Haderlap insists on the imperative to speak from the periphery in an age of high-speed global technology, since it is on the margins that upheavals and ruptures are perceptible in society, politics and culture.⁴⁶

The contributions collected here were developed from papers delivered at a three day workshop held at King’s College London from 31 August – 2 September 2016, which combined academic panels with a public programme of film screenings and discussions in an effort to ensure a research-contribution to urgent contemporary debates.⁴⁷ On day one, the

German and English: A Comparative Study (Boston, MA, 2015); Wiebke Sievers, *Grenzüberschreitungen: ein literatursoziologischer Blick auf die lange Geschichte von Literatur und Migration* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar, 2016).

⁴⁶ Maja Haderlap, ‘Im Licht der Sprache: Klagenfurter Rede zur Literatur’, 1-7 (p. 1) <http://archiv.bachmannpreis.orf.at/bachmannpreis.eu/presse.bachmannpreis.eu/d/11012-1/haderlap_rede.pdf> [accessed 24 October 2018].

⁴⁷ This workshop was very generously supported by the Austrian Cultural Forum London, the Ingeborg Bachmann Centre for Austrian Literature and Culture at the Institute for Modern Languages and Research, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and Department of German at King’s College London, and the AHRC-funded major research project, ‘Language Acts and Worldmaking’. Invaluable administrative support was provided by the Arts and Humanities Research Institute and professional services staff in Modern Languages at King’s.

cultural programme focused on responses to the current situation in the Mediterranean. The filmmaker Jakob Brossmann joined us to discuss his award-winning documentary *Lampedusa in Winter* (2014) which focuses on Italy's southernmost island community and its struggle for basic infrastructure as it seeks to support those who arrive there following perilous crossings from North Africa.⁴⁸ In the evening, the acclaimed Austrian composer Thomas Larcher joined Grammy-winning producer Michael Haas to discuss extracts from Larcher's symphony *Kenotaph* [*Cenotaph*, 2015-2016], dedicated to those who drowned crossing the Mediterranean.⁴⁹ On day two, the focus fell on the issue of unaccompanied minors and set out to address issues linking the UK and Austrian contexts. The workshop hosted a photography exhibition by Marion Trestler of portraits of those who came to the UK as part of that landmark intervention in the late 1930s, the *Kindertransport*, when thousands of refugee Jewish children were brought from Nazi Germany, and its annexed territories in Austria and former Czechoslovakia without their parents on temporary travel visas.⁵⁰ Some of these survivors attended the corresponding academic panel on the Saturday afternoon, which included a talk by Markus Priller detailing his work with Red Cross Austria on *projektexchange*, an initiative aimed at promoting intercultural encounters and understanding

⁴⁸ Jakob Brossmann, *Lampedusa im Winter* (2015)

<<http://www.taskovskifilms.com/?film=lampedusa-in-winter>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

⁴⁹ <<http://www.thomaslarcher.com/en/2016/05/15/symphony-no-2-kenotaph-2015-2016/>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

⁵⁰ For further details of Marion Trestler's multi-media photographic, film and book project entitled *Vienna to London Passage to Safety: Emigré portraits in photographs and words*, please see her home page: <<http://www.mariontrestler.com/work/projects/vienna-london-passage-safety/>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

in the Austrian context, in particular through work with schools.⁵¹ In the evening, a public screening of documentaries about unaccompanied minors took place at the Institute for Contemporary Arts as part of the ‘Crossings’ series supported by the British Film Institute and in partnership with the Goethe-Institut.⁵² The director Nina Kusturica travelled from Austria to show her award-winning 2009 documentary ‘Little Alien’ about unaccompanied minors on the journey to Europe.⁵³ Kusturica was born in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 1975 and has lived in Vienna since the beginning of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992. The ICA panel further comprised the filmmaker Sue Clayton, who showed an extract from her latest film, ‘Calais Children: A Case to Answer’ (2017),⁵⁴ and Charlotte Jamieson from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children’s [NSPCC] Child Trafficking Advice Centre, who talked about the situation on the ground in the UK.⁵⁵ On day three, there was a preview film screening for workshop participants to close the event. We showed the final film project of the iconic Austrian director Michael Glawogger – *Untitled* (2017) – which was finished by his long-term collaborator, the prize-winning editor Monika Willi,

⁵¹ <<https://www.rotekreuz.at/migration-suchdienst/integration/projektexchange/>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

⁵² <<https://archive.ica.art/whats-on/season/crossings-stories-migration>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

⁵³ Nina Kusturica, *Little Alien* (2009) <<http://www.littlealien.at/>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

⁵⁴ <<http://calais.gebnet.co.uk/>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

⁵⁵ A link to the panel discussion can be found on the ICA website:

<<https://www.ica.art/whats-on/crossings-little-alien-discussion>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

after he fatally contracted malaria during its filming in Liberia in 2014.⁵⁶ Willi joined us for the first UK screening of the film in advance of the premiere at the London Film Festival in October 2017.⁵⁷ Glawogger had suggested that the project, which documents what was to be his final journey through Italy, the Balkans, North and West Africa, was intended ‘to give a view of the world that can only emerge by not pursuing any particular theme, by refraining from passing judgment, proceeding without aim. Drifting with no direction except one’s own curiosity and intuition.’⁵⁸ The film raises crucial questions about the privileged situation of the white European filmmaker in its straightforward call for uninhibited movement, but in this primary insistence on passage, it might also be seen to emphasize what the philosopher Thomas Nail has described as an imperative to ‘understand *society itself* according to movement’.⁵⁹ Nail’s 2014 study sets out to develop ‘a theoretical framework that begins with movement instead of stasis’ in order to develop a political theory that ‘allows us to *diagnose the capacity of the migrant to create an alternative* to social expulsion.’⁶⁰ Nail highlights the need to stop conceiving of the migrant as ‘*a failed citizen*’ and, instead, to ‘understand the material, social and historical conditions under which something like the migrant has come to

⁵⁶ <<http://www.glawogger.com/untitled.html>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

⁵⁷ Jordan Cronk, ‘*Untitled* review: Michael Glawogger’s posthumous cine-soul odyssey’, 14 September 2017 <<https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/untitled-michael-glawogger-cine-soul-odyssey>> [accessed 26 October 2018].

⁵⁸ <<http://en.lotus-film.at/films/untitled>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

⁵⁹ Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford, CA, 2015), p. 4.

⁶⁰ Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant*, pp. 3-7.

exist for us today.’⁶¹ His study provides a useful frame for many of the contributions collected here in highlighting the wider political stakes of cultural engagements that take seriously the migrant as ‘a subjective formation that anyone may become’, prefiguring ‘a new model of political membership and subjectivity still in its early stages’.⁶²

In compiling this issue, my concern has been to retain elements of the dialogic character of the events and discussions that took place in London. To this end, the articles collected here are framed by two transcriptions of conversations with contemporary artists from the Austrian context, firstly the composer Thomas Larcher and, by way of conclusion to the issue, the writer Alma Hadžibeganović. As Martin Brady stresses in his introductory remarks to the conversation between Thomas Larcher and Michael Haas, their opening exchange on the first evening of the workshop raised questions about the encounter of global, political issues and matters of aesthetic form, questions about the limits of representation and expression in the face of humanitarian crisis, fundamental questions that were to recur throughout our three days of discussion. Brady identifies in Larcher’s compositional style a purposefully and persistently pluralist approach that offers not only a reinterpretation of symphonic forms but incorporates musical echoes from across the globe to devise an accessible and inclusive musical idiom. For the wide-ranging conversation about the broader relationship between music and politics in an age of mass displacement, Larcher finds a highly informed interlocutor in Michael Haas, the acclaimed producer and author of *Forbidden Music*, a ground-breaking monograph on the Jewish composers and musicians banned by the Third Reich and the consequences for music worldwide.⁶³ In their discussion,

⁶¹ Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant*, pp. 3-4.

⁶² Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant*, pp. 16-17.

⁶³ Michael Haas, *Forbidden Music: the Jewish Composers Banned by the Nazis* (Yale, CT,

Haas points out parallels between 1938 attempts to differentiate between refugees and economic migrants, which relegated Jews to the bottom of the hierarchy, and contemporary discussions that seek to draw similar distinctions. In relation to *Kenotaph*, a work Larcher composed at the height of the refugee crisis, Haas probes Larcher's formal choice of the symphony – understood as a quintessentially Austrian medium – as a musical identity that was also adopted by exiled composers in the post-1945 period seeking some form of Austrian return. Indeed, the ambivalent relationship to the pre-war period and the displaced legacy of the Third Reich are issues that recur throughout the volume, forming a clear point of reference in many of the artistic works under discussion and their urgent concern to warn of the dire consequences of the rapid, global rise of the right.

Wiebke Sievers' article touches on a number of these issues in its historical overview of immigrants who became writers in the post-1918 Austrian context, focusing on issues of mono- and multilingualism. Sievers summarizes the findings of her *Literature on the Move* project which adopted a literary field approach influenced by Pierre Bourdieu to identify four broad phases of monolingualism in the modern Austrian literary field and question positivist assumptions that a shift towards multilingualism forms the automatic consequence of increased immigration to Austria since the 1960s. Sievers is concerned to differentiate the Austrian situation from that in Germany between the 1960s and the 90s, underlining the nationalization of the literary field in Austria during the 1970s and public invisibility of writers of immigrant origin until the 1990s. To do so, she discusses the cases of Elias Canetti, Vladimir Vertlib, Dimitré Dinev, Anna Kim, Julya Rabinowich, Tomer Gardi and Fiston Mwanza Mujila to consider how these writers positioned themselves and were positioned by publishers, critics and academics in relation to monolingualism and multilingualism. Her

2013).

contribution traces the intricacies of writers' individual relationships to their different languages and further highlights the role of institutions and their ability to lend official recognition to texts written in other languages, underlining that immigration does not necessarily generate multilingual literature or an increasingly diverse literary field. The role of Austrian institutions and policy on cultural production is also thematized in Monika Mokre's contribution which discusses *Homohalal* (2018-18), a theatre project developed by Ibrahim Amir and Tina Leisch together with refugee activists and other artists, that emerged out of the Refugee Protest Camp Vienna. As the biggest self-organized protest of asylum seekers and sans-papiers in Austria, the Refugee Protest Camp formed a landmark case that succeeded in drawing together a wide range of actors and activists to mobilize sections of the general public otherwise uninvolved with the refugee movement from October 2012 until October 2013.⁶⁴ Mokre gives an account of her experiences as a political activist who witnessed the collaborative theatre project first-hand to raise challenging questions about issues of representation, voice and agency in relation to artistic projects with refugees.

The capacity of theatre texts to devise modes of voiced intervention is also central to those contributions by Áine McMurtry and Jane Wilkinson. McMurtry examines recent writings by the contemporary writer and theatre maker Kathrin Röggl, who problematizes first-person modes of witnessing as inadequate within populist media culture, where those who are genuinely oppressed slip through the cracks. Instead, using theoretical work by the Italian sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato on the production of subjectivity under capitalism, the article identifies Röggl's project to devise a 'text in transit' able to engage with diffuse power structures at the threshold of detectability. The spectral presence of the

⁶⁴ Monika Mokre, *Solidarität als Übersetzung: Überlegungen zum Refugee Protest Camp Vienna*, ed. by Andrea Hummer (Vienna, 2015).

iconic Austrian author Ingeborg Bachmann facilitates its central interpretation of *die unvermeidlichen* [the unavoidable, 2011] as a theatre text that critiques and unmasks the workings of disembodied political systems through the voice of the simultaneous interpreter. Issues of voice – specifically in relation to monologicity and dialogicity – also drive Jane Wilkinson’s consideration of the crisis of hospitality in Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Schutzbefohlenen* [Charges, 2013/15]. Wilkinson examines how this post-dramatic text by the Austrian Nobel laureate foregrounds the incompatibility of unconditional hospitality as the ethical response to the stranger in need with forms of conditional hospitality determined by self-interest and enshrined in the laws of individual states. Her article probes Jelinek’s textual juxtaposition of the state’s treatment of those involved in the Refugee Protest Camp with the cases of Russian celebrities fast-tracked to Austrian citizenship, arguing that its dialogic-monologic form allows Jelinek to reframe the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ as an acute crisis of hospitality.

Christine Ivanovic further traces the cultural legacy of both the Refugee Protest Camp and Jelinek’s text in her interpretation of ‘translational literature’ in the writings of Peter Waterhouse, a term she understands to denote ‘an open-ended dialogue’ or ‘*dia-lingual* process that observes, describes and collectively experiments.’ As well as Waterhouse’s magnum opus (*Krieg und Welt*) [(War and World), 2006], a German-language prose text that contains extended passages in English and Russian, Ivanovic discusses a multilingual translation and performance project of *Die Schutzbefohlenen*. This work, titled *Die, should sea be fallen in*, was realised collaboratively by Waterhouse, his literary translation initiative Versatorium and refugees in Vienna at the height of the Protest Camp movement. For Ivanovic, this ethico-political project that was never published or recorded as a definitive text is to be read as an alternative form of translation that questions the very status of literature in the public sphere. Waterhouse’s work also forms the subject of Eleonore De Felip’s

contribution, which interprets his most recent novel *Die Auswandernden* [Those Emigrating, 2016] through Marie-Laure Ryan's 'possible worlds' theory. De Felip examines Waterhouse's translingual engagement with Vienna as a site of multiple cultural and political transformations through the story of Media, a young asylum-seeker from the Caucasus. The narrative focuses on the relationship between Media and the first-person narrator, an older male Austrian citizen, as she negotiates the inhumane language of official reports and protocols, asylum verdicts, asylum appeals courts and new 'prisons' in the south of the country, awaiting the outcome of her case. De Felip reads the friendship at the centre of the narrative as a homage to the ability of transnational individuals to mobilize their linguistic resources to create new nexuses of meaning and to forge new linguistic relationships.

The transformative potential of intercultural and intergenerational relations recurs at the centre of Edward Muston's contribution on Vladimir Vertlib's novel *Lucia Binar und die russische Seele* [Lucia Binar and the Russian Soul, 2015]. As an Austrian author who was born in Leningrad, Vertlib is understood by Muston to have carved out a progressive literary space for transnational subjects within an increasingly ethno-nationalist context. The article examines the novel's portrayal of a single apartment building in Vienna as the intersectional site for different subjects and experiences, exploring new forms of local belonging which are shown to provoke a decentring and, ultimately, reorientation of the city's native inhabitants. Further modes of decentring – particularly those pertaining to constructions of the subject – are discussed in the contributions by Michael Boehringer, Geoffrey Howes and Hajnalka Nagy, all of whom consider recent prose narratives that treat the gender politics of displacement and unequal global power relations. Heeding Lyndsey Stonebridge's call for an interpretation of modern literature that focuses on the type of subjectivity that emerges in the

cracks between nation states, the articles examine a range of different transit figures.⁶⁵

Boehringer takes as his focus Martin Horváth's novel *Mohr im Hemd, oder wie ich auszog die Welt zu retten* [Moor in a Shirt, or How I Set out to Save the World, 2012], which he suggests adopts a humorous approach to chart the experiences of its protagonist Ali, an underage black refugee claimant, in order to deliver its trenchant critique of Austrian society's structural racism and sexism. Building on Tom Cheesman's interpretation of 'Ali' figures as 'a key site for cultural and political struggle for Turkish-German writing',⁶⁶ the article explores intersections of racialized identity, hypertrophic masculinity and patriarchy in the novel. Ultimately Boehringer reads the text as a prescient intervention on dominant nativist and ethno-sexist discourses of exclusion which have been on the rise over the past decade. Howes, in turn, offers a critical interpretation of Sabine Gruber's novel *Daldossi oder das Leben des Augenblicks* [Daldossi or the Life of the Moment, 2016], which charts the experiences of Bruno Daldossi, a retired war photographer based in Vienna, and his journey to the European island outpost of Lampedusa. The article uses Stonebridge's work on imaginative humanitarianism to question the narrative effort to establish moral sympathy through a traumatized male protagonist. Applying critical insights from the field of crisis photography, Howes argues that descriptions of a Mediterranean crossing and Daldossi's photographs reveal the possibilities of moral sympathy more compellingly than the tale of Daldossi himself. In Julya Rabinowich's *Die Erdfresserin* [The woman who eats dirt, 2012], Nagy reads a transcultural contribution to a new ethics of memory for the post-migrant era. This story of a woman from Dagestan who finds herself forced to work as a prostitute in Vienna is

⁶⁵ Lyndsey Stonebridge, *Placeless People: Writing, Rights, and Refugees* (Oxford, 2015).

⁶⁶ Tom Cheesman, 'Ali Alias Alien: Mutations of the UnCosmopolitan', in *Novels of Turkish German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* (Rochester, NY, 2007), pp. 145-82 (p. 145).

shown to lay bare processes of othering that write the histories of displaced women out of collective memory. As true for Kathrin Röggla's reflections on modes of testimony, echoes of works by Ingeborg Bachmann are found to enable a dynamic dialogue with the memory culture of the nation state and its literary canon.

Further contributions to the volume provide new insights on Austrian spaces of detainment and settlement with stories of forced migration, human trafficking and asylum seeking that draw out the legally precarious and persistently indeterminate character of these experiences.⁶⁷ Sandra Vlasta examines Daniel Zipfel's novel *Eine Handvoll Rosinen* [A handful of raisins, 2015] and focuses on its portrayal of Traiskirchen Refugee Camp in Lower Austria. In Zipfel's narrative integration of juridical terminology and of asylum law, Vlasta reads an original contribution both to contemporary literature on flight and migration and to a modern Austrian literary tradition of engagement with the language of law and bureaucracy. For his discussion of emerging filmmakers from backgrounds of migration in Austrian cinema, Nikhil Sathe examines three key works, Arash T. Riahi's *Ein Augenblick Freiheit* [A moment of freedom, 2008], Sudabeh Mortezaei's *Macondo* (2014) and Umut Dağ's *Kuma* (2012). The article considers how the films address experiences of migration from different perspectives, namely those of refugees seeking entry, of people adjusting to their new asylum status, and of an immigrant's reception by second-generation immigrants. By centring their films outside Austria or in its peripheral spaces – such as the Macondo housing project in Vienna whose residents also form the actors in Mortezaei's film – the directors are found to counter the distortions of populist media discourse in redefining what must be understood as Austrian cinema. Tobias Heinrich's contribution similarly focuses on filmic works by new-generation directors, using theoretical approaches by Bhabha and de Certeau to analyse the

⁶⁷ See Woolley, *Contemporary Asylum Narratives*, p. 3.

relation of migration and space. His article discusses four films – Barbara Albert’s *Nordrand* [*Northern Skirts*, 1999], Nina Kusturica’s *Little Alien* (2009), Ed Moschitz’s *Mama illegal* (2011) and Arman T. Riahi’s *Die Migrantigen* [*The Migrumpies*, 2017] to examine how these works question dichotomies such as inside and outside, home and abroad, unsettling spatial certainties in their journeys across geographical, cultural and political borders.

To close the issue, two articles have been chosen whose explicitly dialogic character reflects the political commitment to interaction and exchange that drives many of its other contributions. The first is Iga Nowicz’s interview with Alma Hadžibeganović, a writer born in Bosnia and Herzegovina who, at the age of twenty in 1992, fled the war for Vienna where she found herself a refugee. Nowicz provides a short introductory account of Hadžibeganović’s biography and oeuvre, highlighting the author’s current neglect despite her early acclaim on the Austrian literary scene. In their conversation, Hadžibeganović considers formal and thematic concerns in her work which treats questions of female agency, hegemonic power relations between Western Europe and the Balkans, and conflicting interpretations of the Bosnian war. The complex interplay between political participation, literary creativity and writing in a second language are discussed in the context of the author’s marginalized status as a refugee in Vienna in the 1990s. The final article of the issue is by the art historian Diane V. Silverthorne and it discusses the multimedia project *Vienna-London Passage to Safety: Émigré Portraits in photographs and words* (2017) by the Austrian-born and London-based photographer Marion Trestler. Silverthorne formed a long-term interlocutor during Trestler’s work on this project which tells the stories of twenty-one Austrian Jewish refugees who came to Britain in the inter-war period, many as part of the Kindertransport. The article draws on theories of post- and traumatic memory associated with the writings of Marianne Hirsch and Dominick LaCapra to examine the role of the artist as ‘secondary witness’ concerned not with dramatic retellings of tragedy and survival but with

contested and new identities, and the often-unstable relationship with nations of birth and adoption. Trestler began her project to document the lives of child refugees from the 1930s at a time when few could have predicted just how urgent its driving preoccupations would become. Silverthorne reads in this future oriented dimension of the postmemory work ‘a forward-looking interpretation of the past’.

The seventeen interdisciplinary contributions to this volume thus treat pressing contemporary engagements with issues of transit and displacement from musical, performance, literary, filmic and photographic perspectives. They document and analyse attempts to find aesthetic forms for traumatic histories and losses that defy representation, as well as to devise means of testimony which render visible people and experiences excluded by – and from – the dominant culture. By focusing on the specific situation in Austria, the issue takes an underdiscussed case in the European context. Not only did Austria form a crucial geo-political site at the height of events in 2015 but the Austrian government has, ever since, sought to push its anti-immigrationist agenda on the international political scene. With the latest plans for disembarkation platforms and deportation centres outside the EU, the hard-line programme of the Kurz-Strache coalition sets ever-new targets in its neo-colonialist encroachment on the Global South. Clearly in this political environment, positivist claims about the redemptive power of art are highly problematic. In the face of the apparatus of detention and of state ideologies around language that prove of devastating consequence for asylum seekers, the nuances of literary language – as pointed out in a number of the contributions here – are impotent. Yet, nonetheless, in this deeply hostile climate, the imperative to hold to account forms of language and image-making for their forced exclusions remains paramount.

In accordance with our policy of making our contributions accessible to readers with limited German, an English translation of quotations from primary literature is provided, usually in square brackets after the original text, with titles of works and organizations translated on their first appearance only. Unless otherwise indicated, these translations are by the authors of the articles.