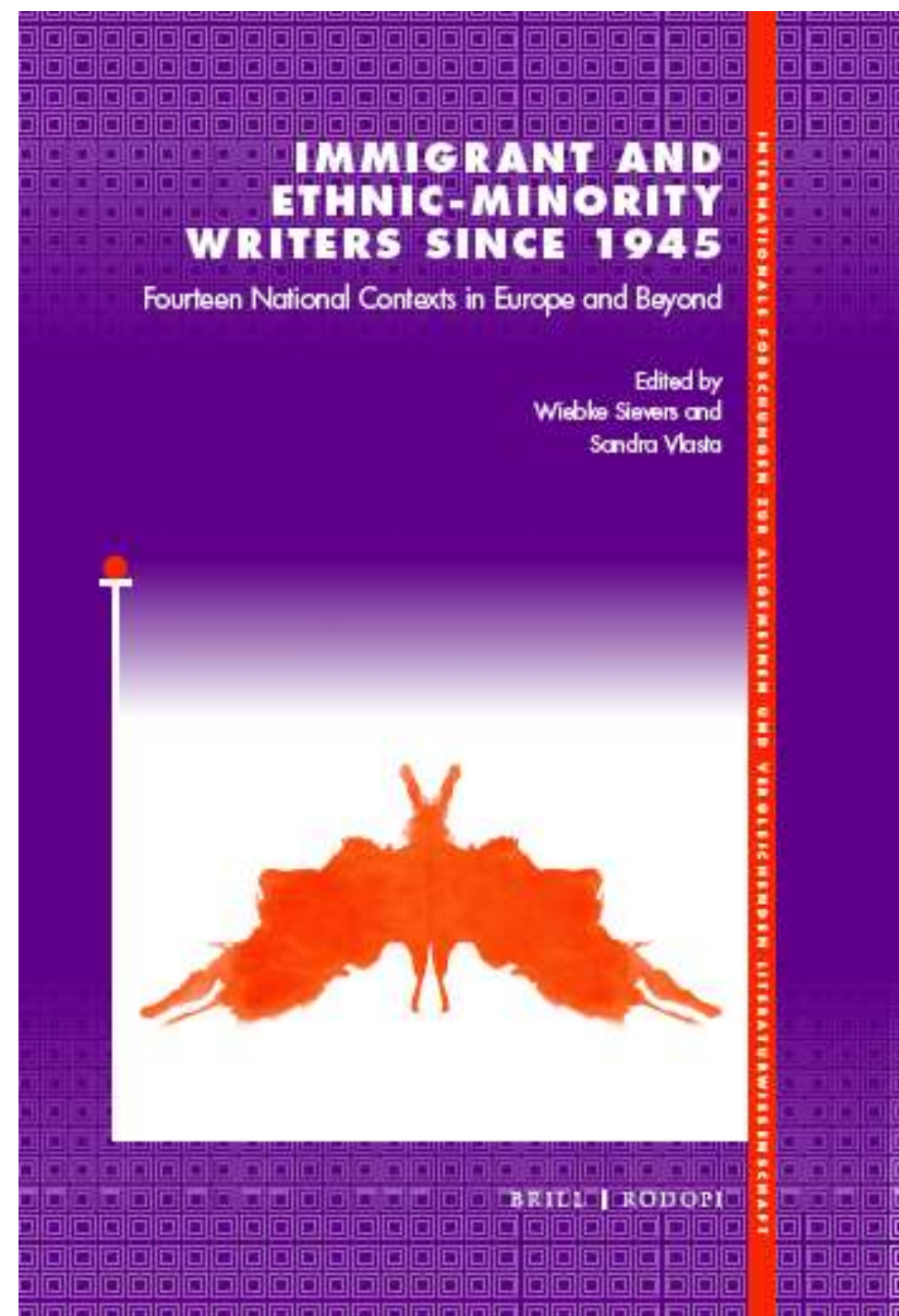


Immigrant and Ethnic-Minority Writers since 1945

Wiebke Sievers (Österreichische Akademie der
Wissenschaften)/Sandra Vlasta (Johannes
Gutenberg Universität Mainz)

Book presentation, Università di Genova,
February 26, 2019
Centro di ricerca „Polyphonie“



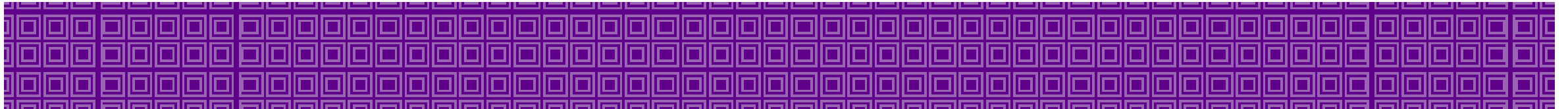
Presentation

- about the volume:
 - idea, approach, content
 - results: an international history of immigrant and ethnic-minority writing
- multilingualism and immigrant writing
 - on multilingualism in our volume
 - explaining the lack of studies on multilingualism



About the volume

- research on migrant writing
- comparative interest
- idea of "handbook" on migrant writing in different linguistic/cultural contexts



Approach

- comparative framework
- same outline for all chapters: comparability
- UN-definition of “immigrant”: “A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (twelve months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of residence.”
- first draft of chapters
- workshop with contributors
- revised chapters

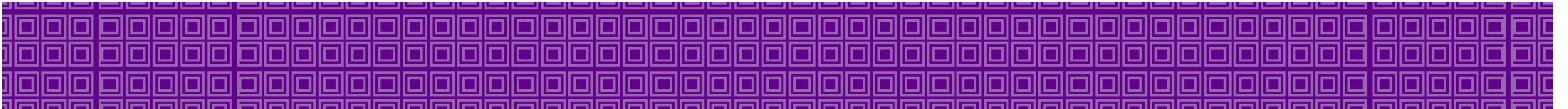


Contributors

- Australia: Sneja Gunew (British Columbia), Wenche Ommundsen (Wollongong)
- Brazil: Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, Maria Zilda Ferreira Cury (both Minas Gerais)
- Canada: Christl Verduyn (New Brunswick)
- Flanders: Sarah De Mul (Open University, The Netherlands)
- France: Laura Reeck (Meadville)
- Greece: Maria Oikonomou (Vienna)
- Italy: Marie Orton (Provo)
- Japan: Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (Nagoya)
- Netherlands: Liesbeth Minnaard (Leiden)
- Switzerland: Martina Kamm (Zurich), Daniel Rothenbühler (Bern), Bettina Spoerri (Zurich)
- United Kingdom: Sandra Vlasta, Dave Gunning (Birmingham)
- USA: Cathy J. Schlund-Vials (Connecticut)
- Austria, Germany: Wiebke Sievers, Sandra Vlasta

The volume

- studies when, how and why immigrant writing and research on it emerged and developed in 14 different national contexts
- questions different developments in different contexts
- 14 national contexts: Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Flanders, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA
- choice of national contexts



Individual chapters...

- give an overview of emergence of immigrant writing
- inform about ideologies and institutions that prevented emergence
- and about ideologies and institutions that facilitated emergence
- give information on most important writers and works
- provide information on groups of writers
- explain how interpretations of writers and their works have changed
- evaluate the impact of immigrant writing on respective field
- highlight gaps in the research

The international history of
immigrant and ethnic-minority
writing

Many Differences

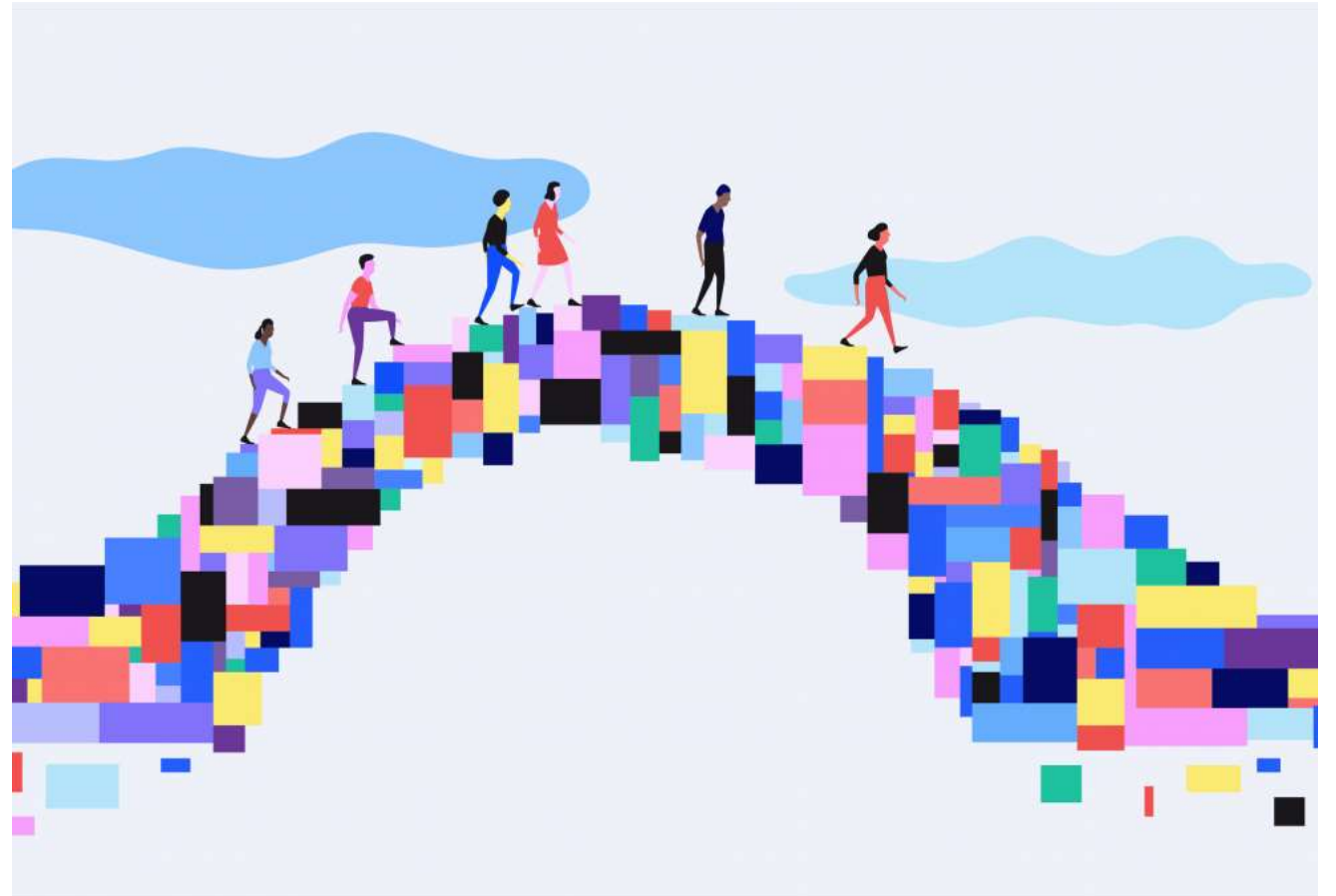
- 15 very different histories in 15 very different contexts
- When does this writing emerge?
 - US, Canada: early 20th century ↔ Flanders: early 21st century
- How long does it take for this writing to find wider recognition?
 - Germany and Netherlands: guestworker immigration countries
 - Germany: emergence in the 1970s, recognition in the 1990s = 20 years
 - Netherlands: emergence in the 1990s, almost immediate recognition



A Vanguard of Cultural Change

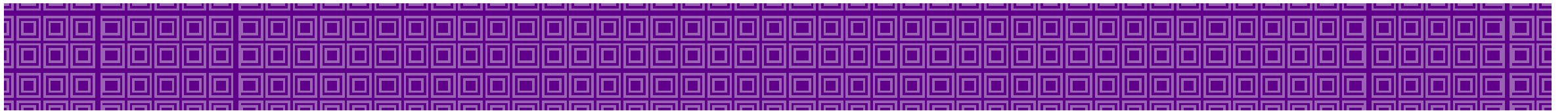
'[This anthology] is a rock on which to build the cultural revolution which is necessary to ensure that Australia's silent voices are heard.'

(Al Grassby in *English and Other Than English* 1979, 1)



A Vanguard of Cultural Change

- From White Australia to the Asian Century: Literature and Migration in Australia
- New Austria, Old Roots: Writers of Immigrant Origin in Austria
- Encountering Canada: Immigrant and Ethnic-Minority Writing
- Learning New Languages: A Literature of Migration in Greece
- The Politics of Changing National Identity: Migration Literature in Italy



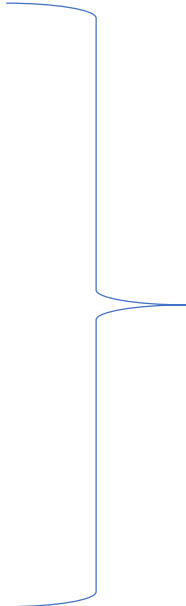
International history of recognition of immigrant and ethnic minority writing

- Begins with the civil rights movement in the US and the Black movement in the UK in the 1960s
- Spreads from there to other countries
- More successful in countries with multicultural policies



Long history of the invisibility of this writing

- 16th century: Brazil and Canada
- 17th century: United States
- 18th century: Australia
- Since the 17th century: Germany, France, UK etc. have continuously received immigration



How do we explain the long history of invisibility?

Nationalisation of literatures

United States in the early 20th century

- 1901-1920: 14.5 million immigrants, particularly from Italy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Czarist Russia
- Writers:
 - Sui Sin Far: *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912)
 - Mary Antin: *The Promised Land* (1912)
- Nativist movements against immigration
- The beginning of the canonisation of white men such as Melville as aesthetic innovators





Nationalisation vs recognition

“Melville” was constructed in the 1920s as part of an ideological conflict which linked advocates of modernism and of traditional high cultural values – often connected to the academy – against a social and cultural “other,” generally, if ambiguously, portrayed as feminine, genteel, exotic, dark, foreign, and numerous.

(Paul Lauter, Melville Climbs the Canon, *American Literature*, 66, 1, 1994, 1-24 (6))

When does change begin?

- 1948: Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 1950s: US civil rights movement – Black, Asian, Hispanic writers
- 1960s: Black Power Movement Britain – Caribbean writers
- 1970s: Strikes of Foreign Workers – Turkish writers
- 1980s: Movement against racism in France – Beurs writers
- 1990s: Movement against xenophobia in Austria, Italy – immigrant writers



International process of change: implementation of human rights

National differences in recognition

- Australia, Britain, Canada, the US, the Netherlands
 - Legal changes
 - New understanding of the community as multicultural
 - Favourable atmosphere for writers, publishers, critics, academics struggling for change
- Germany, France
 - Much longer process of recognition



Multilingualism



- Germany

- most research
- authors challenge hegemonic monolingual literature
- Galsan Tschinag (*1943): uses German to tell history of Mongolia nomad Tuvan minority
- Yoko Tawada (*1960): uses linguistic misunderstandings creatively to describe experiences of difference
- Multilingual immigrant writers rewrite monolingual paradigm
- Emine Sevgi Özdamar (*1946): uses literal translations of Turkish words to create estranged German

Multilingualism

- Switzerland
 - multilingual country
 - openness to publications in other languages: publishing houses, literary magazine *Passe-Muraille*
 - anthology *Küsse und eilige Rosen* (1998; Kisses and hurried roses): texts written in native languages, then translated into German
 - research on multilingualism of authors, both in French and German texts:
 - polyphony (Christa Baumgartner)
 - plurality of discourse e.g. in (Czech-Swiss) Katja Fusek's (*1968) texts (Renata Cornejo)
 - in Irena Brezná (*1950) and Ilma Rakusa (*1946) polyglotism manifests itself as theme, in structure and language form (Monika Stranáková)



Multilingualism

- Italy

- **Igiaba Scego** (*1974): novel “La mia casa è dove sono” (2010)
 - rewrites Roman landmarks’ relationship to Italy’s colonial past
 - rewrites and makes public repressed (colonial) history
 - draws attention to shadow of colonial practices in Italy
 - shows language mixing as result of common colonial past
- **Jhumpa Lahiri** (*1967): successful American writer
 - started to learn Italian and moved to Rome ca. 2013
 - started to write in Italian, e.g. “In altre parole” (2015)



Explaining the lack of studies on
multilingualism

Germany: from translation to multilingual writing

- 1960s and 1970s: translations
 - Giovanni Bertagnoli, *Arrivederci Deutschland!*, 1964
 - Aras Ören, *Was will Niyazi in der Naunynstraße*, 1973
- 1980s: first text in German marked by multilingual creativity
 - Franco Biondi, *Nicht nur Gastarbeiterdeutsch*, 1979
 - Carmine Chiellino, *Sehnsucht nach Sprache*, 1987
- 1990s: breakthrough of multilingual writing
 - Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Mutterzunge*, 1991



Austria: writers claiming German

- After 1945: nationalisation of the literary field
- 1960s-1980s: no writers become visible despite growing immigration
- 1990s-2000s: writers claim German as their literary language
 - Vladimir Vertlib
 - Dimitré Dinev
 - Julya Rabinowich
 - Anna Kim



Demand for recognition as native speakers

“[Emine Sevgi Özdamar] learned German as an adult. German really is the second language for her [...]. She uses this guestworker and foreigner German, i.e. a German that is not quite correct, as a style with irony and specific socio-political ideas in mind, especially in her plays. This is quite different from the subconscious resonance of another language in a correct standard usage, as I described it.”

(Wiebke Sievers (2017) Vladimir Vertlib: „Den Leserinnen und Lesern einen Zerrspiegel vorhalten“. In Wiebke Sievers, Holger Englerth, & Silke Schwaiger (Hg.), „Ich zeig dir, wo die Krebse überwintern“: Gespräche mit zugewanderten Schriftstellerinnen und Schriftstellern. Vienna: edition exil, 191-210 (200)).



Demand for recognition as native speakers



- Anna Kim: 'For me German is my mother tongue'
(Wiebke Sievers (2017). Anna Kim: „Ich wollte nicht nur Wortgeräusche erzeugen“. In „Ich zeig dir, wo die Krebse überwintern“, 81-102, 100)
- Explicitly criticizes readers who ask her how far her use of German originates in her first language Korean
(Anna Kim (2005), Die Wahrgenommene Fremde. *Ausblicke: Zeitschrift für österreichische Kultur und Sprache* 21 (2005): 34-35.)

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