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“The Importance of Refugee Literature in the EFL Classroom.”

*“A Practical Guide to the Selection and the Teaching of Refugee
Literature for and about Young Adults”*

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Foreword

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------|--|
| CLT | Communicative Language Teaching |
| CEFR | Common European Framework of Reference |
| EFL | English as a Foreign Language |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| L2 | Second Language |
| YAF | Young Adult fiction |
| YAL | Young Adult literature |

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Introduction

The ultimate aim of this diploma thesis is to investigate the importance of refugee literature for today's EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. The reason why I chose to particularly analyse this topic within the field of Young Adult literature (YAL) is not only because I am very fond of the genre myself, but also because I am soon becoming a language teacher and I am aware of the impact that literature can have on pupils. Reading is not only one of the most important skills when it comes to acquiring a foreign language, it is also an important tool in shaping the way in which young people perceive the world. Therefore, literature appears to be the right tool to deal with highly current and delicate topics such as immigration and refugees. Belbin (134) is also convinced that "[r]eading is a crucial skill in our society" and that "[r]eading imaginative works, ones that allow the reader to see the world from other people's point of view, is invaluable in adolescents' journey into adulthood".

At the heart of my thesis will be the analysis of three novels which are concerned with refugees. In spite of the fact that only two of them, *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah and *Home of the Brave* by Katherine Applegate, are officially labelled as Young Adult fiction, I consider all three books appropriate pieces of literature for the second language (L2) classroom. By re-defining the notion of YAL in chapter one, I aspire to justify why Emma Jane Kirby's *The Optician of Lampedusa*, and other texts which are not primarily aimed at adolescents, should also be included in the EFL reading curriculum. Since it is immensely difficult to ultimately define the genre of YAL, I will also try to determine various criteria that make a book a YA novel.

In the second chapter, I will be concerned with the question: *Why* is it important and imperative to teach refugee literature for and about young adults in today's EFL classroom? At first, I will strive to define central terminology such as *refugee literature*, *refugee*, *migrant* or *asylum seeker*. Afterwards, I will focus on the role of culture in the L2 classroom. By particularly referring to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and to the Austrian curriculum, I hope to be able to show why refugee literature should not be neglected in EFL teaching. Due to the fact that more and more refugees are coming to Austria, I will also briefly discuss which benefits refugee literature has for refugee pupils in EFL classrooms.

In chapter three, I would like to investigate *how* refugee literature can be best taught in the L2 classroom. I will be concerned with the way in which EFL teachers can select appropriate multicultural literature for their pupils. This will involve a discussion of valuable selection principles and a list of useful guidelines. Moreover, this chapter is supposed to provide strategies and activities which should assist teachers in coping with refugee literature.

The next three chapters will be focusing on the thorough analysis of the primary literature. The main questions will be 1) whether the novels hold up to the YA criteria set in chapter one, 2) whether they are adequate samples of refugee literature, and 3) in how far they will be of value for the EFL reading curriculum. Moreover, in the course of the chapters, I will try to detect similarities as well as differences by comparing and contrasting the books.

Chapter 1: Redefining Young Adult Fiction

As already mentioned, in my thesis I will have a closer look at three novels which deal with refugees and which I consider suitable to be dealt with in a second language classroom. The reason why I emphasized my personal response in this context is because one of the three books I chose for analysis is a piece of work that has not been officially labelled as YAL. The label Young Adult literature is very hard to define. Much discourse has been going on about the question: *what is Young Adult literature?* In my diploma thesis, I will also discuss parameters that make a book a YAL novel. I will compare and contrast certain viewpoints on this issue and most importantly, I will try to re-consider and to re-define the notion of YAL.

In his article, Connors (70) poses the question whether literature is generally constructed or found. In other words, Connors strives to find out whether or not readers take an active part in the construction of literature. He quotes Fish (109), who argues that definitions of literature might not be fully subjective; however, they are strongly dependent and socially shaped by the interpretative community to which we belong and grew into (qtd. in Connors 70). According to Connors, Fish concludes his argument by realising that “the way different interpretative communities read texts is subject to change over time [...], what a group of readers acknowledges as literature can also vary” (qtd. in Connors 70). Therefore, what makes a text literary and what counts as literature is defined and agreed upon by a certain community. Furthermore, literature is produced by a particular way of reading (Fish 97 qtd. in Connors 70). In a broader sense, the members of the community thus take part in the process of actually creating literature (Fish 97 qtd. in Connors 70). In 2003, Singer and Smith investigated two different groups of students in the teacher training program at a private and at a public university. Both groups were provided with the same YA text. The study revealed “that what readers bring to a text is of major importance in determining how they will respond” (Hayn, Kaplan and Nolen 179). Even if they only examined college students I consider their findings of value to this diploma thesis. Pupils’ prior knowledge and personal experience shape their way of understanding what they read. If indeed literariness is constituted by the readers’ perception of and their attitude towards a certain piece of writing, it should be possible to re-imagine and consequently re-define the genre of YAL in a completely new way (Connors 70). This adds, of course, to my argument and my wish to re-define YAL. Connors (70) points out that by viewing YAL in a different light, people might finally realize that due to the genre’s high level of craftsmanship, with its multitude of layers, it can be as aesthetically appealing as classic literature.

Moreover, Connors (70) encourages teachers to challenge pupils' perception and perspectives on YAL. By applying interpretative exercises, teachers should help their pupils to "discover [and appreciate] depth, substance, and artistry in [YA] texts" (Connors 70). A very important question in this process is "What is 'Literature'?" (Connors 71). Students should explore a text from scratch. Connors (72) further explains that when dealing with this particular question readers will "construct their own criteria for evaluating literary merit, as opposed to relying on the judgments of those in positions of authority". For this thesis, the question what literature actually is, might be a bit too broad. Yet, I find the basic idea behind this method highly interesting and valuable. If pupils or even adults were asked what YAL is to them, they might, indeed, come up with their own definition, free of any preconceived notions about the genre. Students of literature are by no means free of such preconceived attitudes. I myself, when starting to concern myself with the topic, immediately assumed that YAL is literature for teenagers, it should be concerned with topics that are interesting to them and it should involve language that is fairly simple. Moreover, I caught myself assuming that YA novels are always short. In the following sections I will elucidate on these hypotheses and by doing so I hope to come up with parameters which shall help to understand the notion of YAL, or perhaps re-define it.

1.1. Age of the target readership

The term YAL has been debated for decades. A lot of confusion about the labelling of children's and Young Adult books is still going on. In 1983, Samuels wrote an article which was concerned with YA novels in the classroom. Judging from the article's introduction one could be led to the assumption that Samuels (86) would define YAL as books "specifically written for adolescents". In fact, the label 'adolescence' is relatively young. It is quite a recent invention and so are the terms 'adolescent novel' or 'Young Adult novel' (Shadiow 49). One of the major concerns in the article by Hayn, Kaplan and Nolen is to examine the current status of research within the field of adolescent literature and YAL deriving from empirical data rather than text analysis, book reviews or author interviews. Interestingly, they clearly decided to distinguish between these two terms. Hayn, Kaplan and Nolen (177) state that "[t]he use of both terms reflects the dichotomy in the field over appellations". This clearly hints at scholars' difficulties to arrive at categorical definitions for these specific genres. However, in this thesis 'adolescent literature' shall be used synonymously with YAL due to the fact that most of the literature reviewed did also not distinguish between these two terms.

Crowe (*What is YAL?* 121) takes a similar stance as Samuels (86) by arguing that “YAL restricts itself to literature *intended* for teenagers”. To him, YAL comprises all literary genres after 1967 aimed at and marketed to what he considers to be young adults (Crowe, *What is YAL?* 121). Very often, Young Adult Literature gets confused with classics. Pupils are often likely to believe that the classics like *Great Expectations*, *The Great Gatsby* or *Julius Caesar* which they had to read in school are to be equated with Young Adult novels. Here, Crowe (“*De Facto*” 100) applies the term “*de facto* young adult literature”. Moreover, he objects to students’ leaving school in the belief that literature of the classical canon is YA literature just because they had to read it in their teenage time. Pupils “must encounter and read fine literature that is produced for them” (Crowe, “*De Facto*” 101). So, this shows that books which were not primarily intended for teenagers turned out to be frequently read by them and are thus often considered ‘classics’ of YAL. But what exactly does that mean? When is a book particularly written for teenagers and more importantly, who exactly is considered a teenager? These are questions which will be investigated and dealt with in this section.

In his article, Crowe (*What is YAL?* 121) also strives to find out what YAL is and how it can be used in class. He defines the term ‘young adult’ as someone who is “old enough to be in junior high school, usually grades seven through twelve” (Crowe, *What is YAL?* 121). Belbin (134) is even more specific by stating that YAL is usually aimed at age 12 to 15. Nilsen and her colleagues are other scholars who are concerned with the question what YAL actually is. They initiate their argument by saying that usually young adults are “those who think they’re too old to be children but who others think are too young to be adults” (Nilsen et al. 1). The authors further expound their definition by stating that the term ‘young adult’ comprises “students in junior high as well as those graduating from high school and still finding their way into adult life” (Nilsen et al. 6, 8). When it comes to defining YAL, Nilsen et al. (8) explain that it is “anything that readers between the approximate ages of twelve and eighteen choose to read either for leisure reading or to fill school assignments”. In the first chapter of their book about understanding young adults and their literature, Nilsen et al. (3) also try to find out what YAL is and they would also define it as a certain kind of literature which is published for adolescents aged between 12 and 18. Nevertheless, Crowe (*The Problem with YAL* 146) somehow refutes his own assumption about target age groups by stating that “[t]eenagers naturally want to be seen as adults, so any label that marks them- or the books they read- as something less than adult is repulsive to them.”. Belbin (134) claims that a major problem for YAL writers is that they have to publish works “for an audience that [they] want to disappear”. Very often, readers of YA novels quickly grow out of it (Belbin 134). One of the most difficult tasks for authors of

YA fiction is thus to motivate and to keep their audience reading (Belbin 134). What actually keeps them reading will be elucidated in further detail in the following sections. Moreover, Belbin (136) also speaks about ‘category confusion’ with regard to the labelling of children’s and YA books. He critically notes that the reason for this confusion is mainly due to the fact that there is no clear term for novels written for 11 to 14 year - olds (Belbin 136). “There is usually no term for novels aimed at 11-14s, which regularly creates category confusion. In the US, novels aimed at 10-12s, which most closely corresponds to this age group, are referred to as ‘middle grade fiction’” (Belbin 136). Very often, it appears to be quite simple to define what an adult is. Due to the fact that childhood is structured into various stages which range from infants to teens, defining the term ‘child’ is a lot more complicated and often not precise enough - “just as imprecise is the term “children’s literature” (Crowe, *What is YAL?* 120). Moreover, Crowe (*The Problem with YAL* 146) remarks that “[t]he label, whether it happens to be “YA” or something else, exists mostly for marketing”.

In libraries, all the various types of non-adult books are often to be found on the same shelves as children’s literature. Yet, there have been some attempts to better categorise and classify children’s books with regard to the various childhood stages. Crowe (*What is YAL?* 121) names for instance: “juvenile, middle grade, adolescent, young adult, etc”. Unfortunately, some of these terms are interchangeable and ambiguous, which leads to further confusion about the exact meaning of YAL (Crowe, *What is YAL?* 121). A lot of people tend to rely on highly respected and well distinguished children’s literature prizes, for example, the Newbery Awards, and choose literature for their children, teenagers or pupils accordingly. Sometimes this can also add to the misconception of the term YA literature (Crowe, *What is YAL?* 121). The ALA (American Library Association), which considers the Newbery Awards to be very prestigious “uses the term “children” in a general sense” (Crowe, *What is YAL?* 121). This means that some of the books that are awarded with the Newbery Medal for children are often more suitable for older readers. Consequently, this contributes to further confusion about the ultimate definition of YAL. In order to avoid confusion in this thesis, there will be no distinction between ‘adolescent literature’ and ‘Young Adult literature’. The novels that have been chosen for analysis are not likely to be suitable for children younger than 12. Therefore, books specifically aimed at children shall be of no concern in this paper.

Another aspect that is frequently discussed with regard to the categorization of YAL is its connection to adult literature. Even though YA fiction cannot be equated with adult fiction, the boundaries between those two frequently tend to blur. The closeness between these two genres

often leads to something that Belbin (141) calls the ‘crossover’. Due to the fact that such a crossover would reach a very broad audience, i.e. adults and teenagers alike, it is often regarded as “the publisher’s holy grail” (Belbin 141). This involves huge sales and a lot of profit but to Belbin (141), writers should never aim at a crossover on purpose. In general, the marketing and selling process of YAL appears to be crucial when it comes to distinguishing between YAL and adult literature. For Belbin (136), writing for a grown-up audience differs from writing for young adults since YA Fiction very often involves so-called ‘gatekeepers’. Belbin (136) further specifies this term by explaining that gatekeepers are not part of the original target audience, for instance, teachers, parents, editors or librarians, who nonetheless play an important role in the selling and thus, render it quite challenging to deal with more controversial aspects of the everyday teenage life. Apart from this, there are other factors which have to be considered when determining the difference between Young Adult books and literature aimed at grown-ups. In his article, Belbin goes back to the 1970s, when YA fiction “first became fully formed” (Belbin 141) and mentions Robert Cormier’s novel *The Chocolate War*, which was originally aimed at an adult audience but was, in the end, considered more of a YA novel. In this context, Hipple (5) claims that the latter is always dependent on one’s own definition. He thereby refers to *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, who originally aimed this book at adults. However, due to the fact that it is read by numerous adolescents all over the world and due to its teenage protagonist, it is, after all, considered a YA novel. Protagonists, topics and a book’s appropriateness for the classroom are also decisive factors in the distinction between YAL and adult literature. Belbin (141) concludes by arguing that both genres have never been strictly defined and their definitions have often changed over the last decades. In fact, the author is convinced that the definitions have been too loose.

So far, the way in which YAL differs from children’s books or adult books has been discussed. The age of the target readership seems to be decisive in the categorisation of YAL for most of the authors and scholars mentioned. However, this cannot be the only parameter which determines what YAL means. At the *Turning Point* conference, which was organized by Belbin in 2002, most of the participants agreed “that YA fiction is fiction that is aimed at readers who are chronologically teenagers as well as having a reading age of 13+” (Belbin 142). Nevertheless, the author voices certain doubts about this definition. He explains that many authors, booksellers and publishers abroad would not go along with the phrase ‘chronologically teenagers’. Belbin also points out that some of the speakers at the conference were of the opinion that YA fiction should, first and foremost, provide teenagers with a “place for reflection and [an] escape” during the very challenging life period of adolescence (Belbin 141). Instead

of defining YA fiction by referring to a particular age group, a specific protagonist or a certain set of topics, Belbin (141) focuses more on how a story is narrated. He states that “if a story about young adults is told in hindsight, through a mature adult mind, [...], then it’s an adult novel. But if it’s narrated through a young adult consciousness- even if the narrator is sophisticated, or unreliable – then it’s a Young Adult novel” (Belbin 141). A YA novel which would very well substantiate Belbin’s viewpoint here is *Refugee Boy* as its main character is immensely mature in the way he perceives and describes the world around him.

After having reviewed numerous articles on the subject, it became obvious to me that the age of the targeted readership seems to be a factor in determining what YAL is. There appears to be some agreement among scholars that this genre is usually aimed at teenagers aged 12 and older. However, age cannot and is not the only determining criterion in arriving at an ultimate definition of YAL. After all, Hipple (7) correctly claims that YAL deals with similar if not the same themes as any other ‘substantial literature’, regardless of the age of the target readership. Many of the authors referred to in this section also brought up important aspects such as adolescents’ interests, and the relevance of content and themes, which all help to keep the target readership interested in reading. The next sections will be dedicated to these characteristics.

1.2. Content & Relevant Themes

A major concern at the 2002 Turning Point conference was to arrive at a definition for YAL. One of the 200 participants, Dr. Alison Waller, pointed out that no academic consensus is existent on the definition of fiction for young adults (Belbin 140). Another participant at the conference, who has started as a YA author himself, Melvin Burgess, argues that “a true teenage literature would be one that teenagers go out and buy themselves” (Belbin 140). This leads to the question: what prevails upon young adults to purchase a certain book? In the course of my research, factors such as age or protagonists have been frequently debated without a clear and general consensus. One aspect, however, has been brought up by almost all of the authors in the field. It is the fact that YAL should be concerned with topics that are relevant to the readership, their interests and their everyday lives.

Brown, Mitchell et al. (6) define YAL as literature which “is written *about* teenagers, *for* teenagers, and within contexts that mirror the world of teenagers”. Salvner (110) strongly agrees with them by explaining that YA novels “are about adolescents and for adolescents”. It should be composed in a way that makes young adults see their own lives and experiences as being

reflected in the various plots, characters and major conflicts involved. Brown, Mitchell et al. (7) also mention Robert Lipsyte, who appears to be such an influential author in the field because he refers to relevant issues in young adults' lives. By doing so he prevails upon his adolescent readership to reflect on what concerns them, their anxieties, choices, relations and opportunities in life. Monseau and Salvner (xii) have a similar opinion as they think that "students become involved *in* the literature as a result of the connections they make between their experience and the text". Thus, the contexts and conflicts in YAL should be reasonable, realistic and familiar to the target audience. Of course, one could easily refute this argument by asking why so many successful YA novels are fantasy books then? I believe that even in fantasy books, teenage readers are confronted with a multitude of topics that are highly relevant to them. Again, *Harry Potter* could be used as an illustrative example here. Just because the story is set in a magical world, or just because the protagonists are fighting dragons does not mean that the characters do have to face the usual coming-of-age problems, just like normal teenagers who live in the real world.

In addition, Brown, Mitchell et al. (12) argue that a primary characteristic "of YAL is its capacity to adapt to the ever-changing world of adolescents". Common themes like the search for identity or family problems might reoccur and persist; however, the ways in which young adults cope with these issues are bound to change and YAL has had to adapt accordingly (Brown, Mitchell et al. 12). Crowe (*What is YAL?* 121) as well as Belbin (143) view YAL as warm-up to classic literature. The latter uses the metaphor of a bridge which underlies the idea of transition between children's fiction and adult fiction. Pupils who are not 'natural swimmers' need the assistance of teachers and educators to help them to get from one end of the river to the other. Samuels (87) points out that a lot of teachers back in the 1980s already considered YA novels as "a transitional form of literature" with the purpose of responding to the developmental and emotional needs of its adolescent readership. Hazlett (qtd. in Brown, Mitchell et al. 6) also particularly highlights YAL's "developmental appropriateness" for young adults. According to this author, YAL should even be preferred over classical literature in the classroom as it better conforms to "adolescents' maturity and cognitive development" (Hazlett 156 qtd. in Brown, Mitchell et al. 6). However, one aspect that is striking about this quotation is that Hazlett uses the term 'cognitive development' in a very general sense here. It cannot be assumed that children and teenagers, even if they are of the same age, are on an equal level in terms of cognitive development. In fact, this can strongly vary, ranging from relatively childish to a very mature state of mind. As argued in the previous section, this shows once more that age cannot be considered a reliable category in determining YAL.

It is quite obvious that if the content of a book is not interesting or relevant to its intended readership, people are very probably not going to read it. Hipple (3-4) takes a very interesting stance on this matter by claiming that themes, and in consequence, content, determine literature. Themes are what keep us reading (Hipple 4). They are the “underlying philosophy embodied in the work” (Hipple 4). This underlines once more how important the choice of the appropriate and relevant themes in YAL actually is. According to the Alan Review of 2014, the following themes seem most commonly dealt with in YAL: “social pressures, bullying, eating disorders, familial strife, and identity crises” (Brown, Mitchell et al. 6). Yet, it was Belbin (137) who claimed that it is the task of writers in the field of YA and children’s literature to diversify. This statement can, of course, be applied to a lot of characteristics, not only themes. But for now, it shall refer to the diversity of themes and topics. Brown, Mitchell et al. (7) appear to be in accordance with Belbin’s viewpoint by highlighting the diversity of themes in adolescents’ reality. Teenagers’ lives are marked by beauty and brutality alike and either one should be dealt with in YAL. A prominent point in favour of using YA fiction in class is that it usually “addresses issues relevant to adolescents” (Connors 72). Yet, the relevance to teenagers’ lives is only one of the manifold reasons for teaching YAL (Soter & Connors 66 qtd. in Connors 72). Soter and Connors (66 qtd. in Connors 72) argue that the genre’s fascination lies in the fact that it often combines complicated and timely social issues with literary sophistication.

According to Hipple (4), people who are “less familiar with young adult literature tend sometimes to believe that its thematic treatments are slight, superficial, “teenage””. In fact, YAL goes beyond the common teenage topics, such as friendship or family issues. According to Brown, Mitchell et al. (7), teachers should make sagacious use of appropriate and relevant YA (non-) fiction to render it easier for adolescents “to enter *their* [own] worlds”. In order to encourage teenagers’ reading habits and their willingness to read, educators should utilize literature that matters to their lives and interests outside school (Groenke & Scherff 2 qtd. in Brown, Mitchell et al. 7). Well respected authors in the field agree with Hipple that the topics of YAL should go beyond the common “teen angst” (Brown, Mitchell et al. 7). After some online research on the term ‘teen angst’, a clear definition has not really been found; however, the sources show agreement on the fact that ‘teenage angst’ refers to a feeling of anxiety, unrest and an inner state of trouble. In other words, YAL should not be primarily concerned with teenagers’ inner struggles but rather also deal with complex, often messy, social issues. Chris Crutcher, John Green, Robert Cormier, and many other YAL authors are writing about topics that go a lot further than the usual teenage anxiety. They refer to social problems, for example, drug use, abuse, and other topics that are nonetheless relatable and apparent in the teenagers’

world. Sometimes, their writing is even defined as unconventional, dark, yet, realistic fiction for adolescents (Brown, Mitchell et al. 12). Belbin (140) correctly points out that “YA fiction acts as a home for writers with a serious moral agenda”. In his YA novels, he also deals with darker and more controversial topics such as sex and sexuality or crime (Belbin 137). Another author who is very successful in the field of YA literature is Walter Dean Myers. By making teenagers who have to deal with poverty, racism, or inner struggle the main characters of his books, Myers renders his writing interesting to the target readership (Brown, Mitchell et al. 8). Myers’ goal is to help his young readers to adopt a more critical opinion on the world, which will consequently also lead to a better understanding of cultural and historical aspects (Brown, Mitchell et al. 9). His books provide a lot of food for discussion. Just like the other authors mentioned above, Myers wants young adults to reflect upon their experiences in life. Due to the fact that the conflicts of his books often evolve around topics like racism, it is also highly important to the author that his readership reconsiders its sense of common humanity over and over again.

Even if these are difficult and often sad topics, refugee experiences and immigration are delicate issues which are nowadays also inevitably part of the pupils’ reality and lives. I myself have already taught in classrooms where numerous children had some migration background or were refugees themselves. Consequently, I am convinced that it is also highly essential to deal with more complex and darker issues, as this is an important part when growing up. It might help to prepare adolescents for what awaits them in their future or at least, it might prevail upon them to face these problems and start reflecting on their immediate environment.

This section has demonstrated that nothing is more essential than the right choice of appropriate and relevant topics when writing books for young adults. Content is the key to motivate even the most reluctant pupils to read. Until now, we have learnt that YAL is dealing with topics relevant for a readership which is aged 12 and older. However, there are still some other aspects that need to be taken into consideration in order to come up with a proper definition of the genre.

1.3. Characters & Narration

So far, it has been demonstrated that YAL has an important moral and educational mission by dealing with themes that are not only related to common teenage problems but also issues that

are a lot more complex and delicate. Now the question is: how does YAL transport and transmit these themes to its intended audience?

A very important factor in this context is the role of characters, in particular, protagonists who are frequently seen as the transmitters of moral messages. A good YA novel does not only require themes which the target readership can identify with, but also characters to whom they can relate. Mccoach wrote an online article in which she brings up five different kinds of criteria each YA book should possess. According to her, YAL is aimed at teenagers aged between 12 and 18 and the characters within the story should usually be of the same age group, sometimes even older. The reason for this is quite straightforward. Mccoach explains that in order to appeal to and to be understandable for adolescents, authors of YAL have to “tell the story as a teen would tell it, with the voice of a teen, and the life experiences of a teen” (Mccoach online <*In* teens, not *about* teen years>). In this context, she also mentions another essential characteristic of YAL, which refers to narration and voice. With regard to this she explains that:

[t]he protagonist of a YA novel and the point of view (POV) we see the story told from is extremely important to connecting your readers with the character and story. The protagonist is either narrating the novel (in first person) or the POV is heavily close over his or her shoulder (limited third person) so we feel that the story is being told through our protagonist’s eyes. (Mccoach online <Unique voice/narration>)

Several interesting points have been made in this quotation. Firstly, Mccoach (online <Unique voice/ narration>) acknowledges the protagonist’s important role in YA fiction. The main character that is often and quite logically referred to as the ‘hero’, takes the essential position of transmitting the main message of the book since the whole story revolves around this person. Secondly, the mode of narration, i.e. the point of view from which the story is told, has an immense impact on how the readership will perceive it. In order to appeal to the target audience, readers have to be able to identify with the themes as well as with the characters in the book. After all, teenagers are primarily interested in their own lives (Kaplan 20 qtd. in Brown, Mitchell et al. 6). White’s article displays a number of parallels to Mccoach’s criteria. According to White, YAL has the task to access the adolescents’ world and culture (online <Young Adult Literature as a Key to Literacy>). In order to enter and mirror their world a YA novel has to stick to several conventions. White hereby refers to Herz and Gallo (8-9), who set the following criteria for YA novels: at the heart of the story, we find a teenage main character whose actions have a severe impact on the plot’s outcome; moreover, all of the conflicts that arise in the course of the story relate to adolescents. The events happening are told from a teenager’s point of view and are, therefore, reflecting young adults’ way of interpreting

situations and other people. The authors also point out the importance of appropriate language use, which shall be discussed in the next section.

Groenke and Scherff (xii qdt. in Brown, Mitchell et al. 6) show accordance with the previous assumptions by explaining that YAL is concerned with how young adults cope with their lives in the best possible way. Moreover, the genre values teenagers' experiences by portraying them "as capable, smart, and multidimensional" human beings (Groenke & Scherff xii qtd. in Brown, Mitchell et al. 6). This also holds true for the novels *Home of the Brave* and *Refugee Boy* since both their protagonists are depicted as highly brave and mature individuals. Again, the quotation by Groenke and Scherff also implies that YAL features, first and foremost, teenage characters.

Numerous YAL authors have understood the importance of characters to their books. For example, Lois Lowry is also a well-known YA novelist. Just like in the novels I chose to analyse in this thesis, the characters in her stories frequently have to face adults' problems, they have to defend their personal freedom and sometimes they even try to save human lives (Brown, Mitchell et al. 8). With her writing, Lowry intends to help young adults to find out what their roles in life could be (Brown, Mitchell et al. 8). Another appreciated writer of YAF is Mildred D. Taylor, whose own African- American family background motivated her to make this the main subject in numerous books of hers (Brown, Mitchell et al. 9). Reoccurring topics in her literature are racism, social justice and equality. What makes her writing so special and valuable is the fact that they display *authentic* African American characters who are fighting for their dreams despite oppression and who are brave survivors rather than pitiful victims (Brown, Mitchell et al. 9). This also strongly reminds me of the protagonists in *Refugee Boy* and *Home of the Brave*. Both boys are Africans who are strong and courageous, who fight and who succeed, and this makes these characters so powerful.

Monseau and Salvner particularly value high literary craftsmanship when it comes to designing characters in YA novels:

today's books for and about young people, taken together, display the same elements of all masterfully crafted works of fiction: complex main characters who seek to resolve conflicts of tremendous consequence to themselves and the world; vividly drawn minor characters who not only create texture in the works they inhabit, but also advance the action of those stories and serve as meaningful foils and allies for the protagonists. (Monseau & Salvner xi)

What is striking about this quotation is that Monseau and Salvner (xi) not only mention the importance of protagonists but also point to the side characters, who also contribute immensely

to a story. Speaking of a high level of literary craftsmanship, Hipple also acknowledges the way in which characters are skilfully brought to life in YAL by emphasising that “[a]uthors of adolescent novels (...) shape characters whom we love or hate or pity *but absolutely never forget*” (3; emphasis added).

Judging from what has been written about characters in YAL, it can be assumed that they are usually and most commonly expected to be young adults themselves. This is due to a very simple reason: readers have to be able to relate to these characters without great effort. Nevertheless, I have never come across a YA novel which *only* features teenagers. As argued before, the most essential aspect about YAL is that it is of relevance to its intended readership. This cannot only be achieved by the right themes and content, but also by lively and interesting characters which the readers can relate to. I want to emphasize here that this does by no means exclude adult characters. Usually grown-ups are used as minor characters in YA novels. They are teachers, parents, policemen or someone else from the adult world. Considering the novels I chose for analysis in this thesis, I would like to raise the question: what would happen if the protagonist of a YA novel was an adult? Does this automatically deprive a book of the YAL label? In my opinion, this is not the case. Just because the protagonist or the main characters are not adolescents does not mean that they are of no interest to a teenage readership or that they could not undergo some sort of *coming-of-age* development. The actual reason why I am discussing this point in such detail is because one of the novels which I chose for analysis does not have an adolescent as protagonist. Instead, it is the story of a grown-up optician.

I selected *The Optician of Lampedusa* because the protagonist’s story is extremely touching as well as relevant to today’s youth and it is told from a point of view which is not only relatable but also realistic. All of the main characters are adults and they all undergo a certain developmental process despite their advanced age. Considering all the other aspects, such as length, level of language, relevance of themes, moral agenda and mode of narration, I strongly assume that this particular book could be aimed at adults and adolescents alike. It is, without doubt, a story that everyone should read in order to understand the reality behind contemporary refugee experiences.

1.4. Language

The previous section has unveiled that characters are supposed to be the transmitters of the main message of a YA novel. However, the right use of language also takes an important role in

conveying content. In fact, no story can be told without language. In this section we shall take a closer look at the language used in YAL. When examining criteria for YA novels, I already referred to Herz and Gallo. One factor which is particularly decisive to them is language. They claim that every dialogue in YA novels has to be a reflection of the adolescents' world and their speech (Herz & Gallo 8-9 qtd. in White online <Young Adult Literature as a Key to Literacy>). As argued before, in order to keep teenagers reading, they have to be able to identify with the story and be exposed to appropriate language, i.e. language they are familiar with, renders it a lot easier to achieve this. Monseau and Salvner (xii) support this argumentation by explaining that "young adult novels are written in straightforward language that reflects the adolescent world, they can become the means through which young adult readers gain new knowledge of themselves and others". The word that appears to be most outstanding in this quotation is 'straightforward'. What exactly does this imply? In order to reformulate and clarify this, I would like to refer to Belbin (138), who argues that the language of YA novels is supposed to "be direct and story linear". Language in YAL should never be overly complicated. If it is too complex it might discourage the readers and achieve the contrary from what Brown and Mitchell (7) assumed about YAL, namely, that it helps to turn teenagers into lifelong readers. White is convinced that YAL is the key to teenagers' literacy and she points out that the right use of language is a critical factor in this process. In her opinion, YA authors should make sagacious use of *understandable* language as this will enhance adolescents' ability to interpret what they read and consequently, express themselves about it (White online <Young Adult Literature as a Key to Literacy>).

In the first section, it has already been demonstrated that the age of YA readers often ranges from 12 to 18. Therefore, the level of language proficiency might also vary among the readership. McCoach consequently advises authors of YAL to stick to simple language as "the story and characters are [already] the driving force in the story." (online <Simplicity in the prose>). Belbin (138) supports this by explaining that YAL, and especially literature for reluctant readers, involves "telling stories in simple, direct language". "Parallel storylines, flashbacks and other sophisticated narrative techniques confuse [reluctant] readers (Belbin 138)". It already demands a high level of effort for the target readers to follow a straightforward storyline (Belbin, 138). Nevertheless, I would like to point out here that there are numerous YA novels that do not fit this description and are still very successful. Once more, a perfect example in this case is *Harry Potter*. Neither the language nor the story line can be deemed simple or straightforward. In fact, these novels include a multitude of complex plotlines. Moreover, the

language style used is frequently poetic and the vocabulary is overall very advanced. Therefore, it should always be kept in mind that there are exceptions to the rule.

In my own opinion, simple language refers to vocabulary as well as to sentence structure. The readers have to be able to easily process the words and the specific syntax used. After having read numerous YA novels I came to realise that the words and sentence structure used are indeed frequently kept clear and simple. However, the language in YAL can also be extremely poetic and rich. This sounds like a contradiction but in fact this not always need to be the case. In the course of my research I have come across a number of YA novels which were marked by poetic language and yet, the story as well as the major message was always relatable and easily understandable. A novel that should be mentioned in this context is Applegate's *Home of the Brave*. This book perfectly unites simple and poetic language. Even though the sentence structure is short and simple, the author uses a lot of metaphors. Even though the language might appear to be very poetic it is still relatable and can be easily understood without great effort.

Virginia Euwer Wolff is another important name within the area of YAL. The reason why I decided to mention this author here is because for her book *Make Lemonade* she has adopted a very interesting writing style that shows resemblance to one of the novels that are being discussed in this thesis. Just like in *Home of the Brave*, Wolff utilises a lyrical, free-verse style which is quite rare and thus outstanding in YAL. Despite using a lot of figurative language, her story is accessible to the readers (Brown, Mitchell et al. 9). This reinforces my assumption that just because a book uses a lot of metaphors and lyrical stylistic devices, it does not necessarily have to be too challenging for the target audience.

As a future English teacher, selecting books for students is a crucial and difficult task. One aspect that is decisive in selecting literature for pupils is language. Especially in the English language, there is a certain literary canon that pupils should be made familiar with. Unfortunately, due to a strict and standardised curriculum and a lack of time, teachers often rather opt for classics and tend to neglect current literature. Crowe (*What is YAL?* 122), on the other hand, is convinced that modern YA books can be used to achieve the same language goals and objectives as when using classic literary works. He explains that the difference between those two genres is that YAL is of more relevance to the lives of its intended readership (Crowe, *What is YAL?* 122). Personally, I am very much in favour of Crowe's argumentation. Teachers should choose literature which is content- as well as language-wise relevant and interesting to the pupils. This might be the ultimate key to turn pupils into life-long readers.

In the late 1980s, Samuels (88) called on journals and organizations to further promote the use of YAL in class in order to support teachers in discovering the genre's "growing sophistication and popularity", which would most likely also lead to students and pupils' appreciation of YA novels.

1.5. Length

In the last section, language has turned out to be a very important component for teachers to select a certain book for their pupils. Another factor which has considerable impact on teachers' choice of literature for the classroom is length. As argued before, time and a strict curriculum are restrictive factors in this context. Nowadays, pupils are often quite reluctant when it comes to reading. Therefore, short novels are often preferred by teachers and pupils alike. After having reviewed numerous articles which tried to come up with a definition for YAL, I found to my surprise that length surprisingly did not appear to be such a prominent parameter. Except for Belbin, none of the authors suggested a specific word count for YA novels. Length can thus not be considered a fundamental point in determining YAL. Nevertheless, this section shall briefly discuss the various dimensions of YA novels.

At the beginning of Belbin's writing career, YA novels were usually not supposed to be very long. They ranged from 70,000 to 80,000 words (Belbin 133). Belbin, who has also published stories which were particularly aimed at reluctant readers, argues that stories for this readership "can be as short as 3,000 words" (Belbin 138). He finds it extremely important to point out that such books should still be considered as novels and not as short stories (Belbin 138). People back then and even these days often expect YA novels to be quite short. Of course, one could easily refute this argument by naming examples such as *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* which is not only one of the most famous YA novels ever published but also includes over 250,000 words. Despite the fact the many pupils these days are frequently quite lazy when it comes to reading, J.K. Rowling's novels achieved a huge success all over the world. Even after having done some online research about the length of YA novels no clear consensus could be found. It is extremely difficult to determine the average length of YA novels due to the fact that there exists such a huge range of various YA novels and they always appear to vary in terms of length.

Due to my practical teaching experience, I know how important time management is in today's second language classroom. Therefore, teachers rather tend to select shorter novels as class

reading. Unfortunately, language teachers often do not have the time needed to deal with long novels in class. Salvner (100) explains that due to a lack of time, teachers even tend to read no YA novels at all in class. Instead, they would rather stick with classics that have been read for decades at school. Samuels (87) substantiates this assumption by arguing that in their role as ‘transmitters of culture’, English teachers would rather prefer dealing with literary classics than with YA novels. According to Salvner (101) it is high time that teachers start to revise their curriculum in order to cover more YAL. “Aside from great storytelling, YAL offers a connection to teenagers’ lives that many of the classics lack” (Brown, Mitchell et al. 6). Using more YAL “may save the teacher time – both because the books are often relatively brief and because their closeness in experience and insight to teenagers today suggests that they might be read with less resistance and efficiency” (Salvner 107). Belbin (135) is convinced that “YA fiction [...] is connected to the pleasures of teaching”.

Personally, I have also made the experience that when dealing with longer novels in English classes, pupils often get bored and instead of reading on they will rather search the internet for a plot summary just in order to be prepared for a test. Nevertheless, I am of the strong opinion that length should not always be a decisive factor in choosing a certain book for the L2 classroom. As mentioned before, the most important aspect about a YA novel remains its content. The novel’s themes have to be interesting and relevant to the pupils. If a certain book turns out to be too long or too time-consuming in class, teachers always have the option of only reading parts in class and assigning chapters as reading homework.

1.6. Conclusion and Outlook

Without doubt, it is very difficult to determine “what fits the YAL label and what doesn’t” (Crowe, *What is YAL?* 120). There is generally a lot of confusion and misunderstanding about the terminology. What grew out of this confusion is the unfortunate misconception that YAL is frequently nothing more than cheap pulp fiction (Crowe, *What is YAL?* 120). In order to understand the genre of YAL better, I have tried to figure out a number of characteristics which help in determining YAL. With regard to the age of the target group, the literature reviewed shows agreement on the proposition that YA novels should be primarily aimed at teenagers aged between 12 and 18. While length has turned out to be a minor factor in determining YAL, themes, content and topics are highly important. Not only should the content be interesting but it should also be relevant to the readers’ lives in order to motivate and keep them reading. In terms of characters and protagonists, it is often assumed that YA novels should feature a teenage

protagonist. Indeed, this is very often the case. Nevertheless, I have argued that a YA novel does not necessarily have to evolve around a YA character. It is, first and foremost, essential that the target readership is able to understand and relate to the protagonist. With respect to this, the mode of narration, or i.e. the point of view from which the events are told, is immensely important. Even if the protagonist is already an adult, younger readers might still be able to identify with the main character as long as the mode of narration is appropriate for the readership's age and as long as the readers might still perceive some sort of character development. Language is also of paramount importance when it comes to YAL. Just like content, themes and characters, language has to be relatable and understandable for the readers. In spite of the fact that language in YA novels is frequently kept simple, it can sometimes still be poetic, rich and eloquent. Overall, however, it can be stated that language of YAL should be kept simple, direct and up-to-date.

With this chapter, I did not only want to come up with parameters to define YAL, I also wanted to re-define the notion of YAL. I strove to prove that even if a novel does not fulfil all of the requested and expected characteristics, it could still be considered a novel *FOR* young adults. Despite the fact that *The Optician of Lampedusa* might officially not count as a YA novel, it does have certain features which are characteristic of the genre. The language used in the novel might include some words which are more difficult but in general, it is not too difficult to understand. In addition, due to the fact that it offers a realistic account on the current situation that refugees have to face every day, the content is highly relevant even to a YA readership. As argued beforehand, refugees and the whole issue of emigration and immigration is part of today's world and also of our pupils' lives. With about 120 pages, the book can be considered quite short. Therefore, it would be a very reasonable choice for a class reader in an L2 classroom with restricted time and a strict curriculum. I hope that my argumentation so far, and the analysis of the primary literature in the following chapters, will justify why I chose this novel for analysis in this thesis. Despite the fact, that I find it highly important that teachers start to use more YAL in their classes, as a future language teacher myself, I would not exclusively teach YAL. There is so much more literature that can be taught in class. Newspapers, classic literature, adult fiction and a lot more can and should be included in the reading program of the L2 classroom. Wallace (68) puts it in a nutshell by claiming that “[t]he importance of a broad diet of texts cannot be overstated”. Townsend (8 qtd. in Stover & Tway 137) is also convinced that we need to view literature for young adults on a broader scale. Monseau (92) correctly argues that “[i]t's important that we teachers come out from behind the protective wall of the classics and risk

making some literary judgements of our own about the books we will use in the classroom, keeping the needs and interests of our students in mind”.

In conclusion, arriving at an ultimate definition for the genre of YAL is extremely difficult. The genre, as well as its manifold definitions, are bound to change. I would like to once more refer to Belbin (140), who claimed that “the task for [YA] authors is to write a Young Adult Literature that both reaches and transcends the Young Adult audience, with stories so captivating they keep the world reading”. Brown, Mitchell et al. (6) realised that “the future of YAL appears limitless” and Monseau and Salvner (xii) are convinced that “only through entering the world of young adult readers will we know how to encourage and direct their reading”. In the introduction I have already mentioned that reading takes a paramount role when acquiring a language. The following chapter shall be concerned with why it is crucial to teach refugee literature for and about young adults inside the L2 classroom.

Chapter 2: Why teach Refugee Literature for and about Young Adults?

In the previous chapter, I have already demonstrated that literature for and about young adults is frequently concerned with topics such as race, culture, identity, immigration and refugees. I have dedicated my diploma thesis to the analysis of three novels which are all concerned with refugees and immigration and now I would like to expound *why* it is important to teach this genre in today's language classrooms.

2.1. Terminology

2.1.1. Who is a Refugee?

First of all, it is necessary to define some of the most important terminology used in this thesis. The first question that might come to mind when reading the headline of this chapter is: what is 'refugee literature'? In order to understand what refugee literature is, it is, first and foremost, necessary to define the term 'refugee'. Nowadays, we have many terms for referring to people who live in a country in which they were not born: foreigners, immigrants, asylum seekers, migrants or refugees are only some examples of the multitude of terms that we have at our disposal. Unfortunately, and very frequently, there are also many pejorative terms which do not need to be mentioned in this thesis.

According to a CNN online article by Martinez and Marquez, there is an essential difference between refugees and immigrants. The latter are people who freely decide "to resettle to another country", whereas refugees have to flee their native country by force (Martinez & Marquez online < What's the difference between immigrant and refugee?>)

In his book, Whittaker (2) refers to the 1951 convention by the UNHCR (i.e. UN Refugee Agency), which defines a refugee as follows:

A person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.

According to the current UN Refugee Agency website, this definition did not change significantly. They explain that:

[a] refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries. (UNHCR <Who is a refugee?>)

Aside from the term 'refugee' another term is prevalent in today's media: 'asylum seeker'. Whittaker (6) argues that the meanings of 'asylum seeker' are a lot looser. The definition proposed by Whittaker (6) says that "in the eyes of authority, an asylum seeker is a person in transit who is applying for sanctuary in some other place than his native land". Judging from this definition it can be assumed that there are no real differences between the terms 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker'. In my opinion, these terms are to be used almost synonymously due to the fact that usually every refugee is also seeking for asylum. However, it could be argued that when people first come to a country in the hope of finding asylum they are all considered asylum seekers, whereas in order to obtain official refugee status they have to undergo several legal processes, as will be explained at the end of this section.

In Austria, politicians often explain that there are different types of refugees. One term that is very frequently mentioned is 'economic refugee'. I would briefly like to quote Whittaker (1) here, who explains that "economic migrants [...are] searching for a better life and prospects elsewhere" while other refugees are just "desperate to get away from persecution and discrimination". In political debates, the latter are often referred to as 'the real refugees', i.e. 'war refugees' who need our help and shelter whereas 'economic migrants' are often accused of only coming to a richer country in order to exploit its financial resources. I will not discuss this controversial viewpoint in greater detail as this is not the main topic of my thesis but I want to allow myself the personal remark that every single person should be granted the right to lead the best possible life and a country as rich and prosperous as Austria should always try to help no matter where, when or whom. I do not think that the boundaries between these two 'types' of refugees are so clear. Refugees leave their country in order to have a better and safer future. The refugees in the novels which I have chosen for analysis are by no means economic migrants. Instead they can be considered war refugees but they still come to a new country because they want a better life and better future prospects, just like people leaving their homes for economic reasons.

As mentioned beforehand, the process of becoming a refugee involves a lot of legal procedures and paper work. In her article, Stewart explains that in order to obtain refugee status, a person has to “relocate to a new country and then receive a determination from an international agency that they would be in immediate danger if they were to return to their home country” (149). After this step, the person officially obtains refugee status but still has to “wait for admittance to a third receiving country such as the United States” (Stewart 149). This sounds quite simple but in fact this is a very exhaustive, legal process which could last years. Moreover, Stewart also includes interesting statistics in her article. She explains that “51.2 million people were forcibly displaced from their homeland” in 2013, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Stewart 149). Surprisingly, only about 33%, which accounts for 16.7 million people, managed to get an official refugee status. One aspect that I find particularly interesting about the numbers she mentions is the fact that “half of the refugees resettled around the world in 2013 were under the age of 18, which is the highest number of children for the past decade” (Stewart 149). This shows once more how relevant the issue of refugees and immigration is to children and teenagers these days.

2.1.2. Defining Refugee Literature

Hwang and Tipton Hindman (46) define multicultural literature as something which “applies to all books by and about people of color”. In spite of the fact that there is no clear and official definition of the term ‘refugee literature’, it belongs to the genre of multicultural literature. Even after some online research I was not able to find an exact definition of ‘refugee literature’. This is the reason why I have decided to propose my own definition. In my thesis I will use the term ‘refugee literature’ in order to refer to texts which are written by, for, or about refugees. With this definition in mind, it can now be scrutinized *why* refugee literature should be part of today’s L2 classrooms.

2.2. Reasons for Teaching Refugee Literature

2.2.1. The Importance of Culture in the EFL Classroom¹

As I have argued in a previous paper for a class in cultural studies, the role of culture with regard to the EFL classroom has always been a widely debated issue (Weninger and Kiss 697). In this context, two questions appear to be of paramount importance: *why* and *how* should culture be taught in an EFL setting?

As a future language teacher, I strongly believe that teaching a language goes beyond teaching grammar and vocabulary. Teaching a language also means teaching this language's culture and thus, culture needs to be considered a crucial part of the EFL classroom. Refugees, immigration and war are part of every single culture and should consequently be dealt with in the L2 classroom.

Weninger and Kiss (697) were also concerned with the role of culture in language teaching; by referring to Schuhmann's (1986) acculturation model they claim that

[t]he aim of studying culture was to immerse the learner into the target-language society and culture [...and] to maximize the chances of becoming a member of the target language community and acquire the language with greater success. (Weninger & Kiss, 697)

Judging from this, Weninger and Kiss also share the opinion that culture has to assume an important place in foreign language teaching. If learners engage with the culture of a certain country they inevitably also engage with the respective country's language. Consequently, they will not only acquire cultural knowledge but they will also improve their language skills. Pourmahmoud-Hesar, Konca and Zarfsaz (68) sustain this assumption by stating that "the full mastery of a language does not [only] mean understanding rules and using the four skills [i.e. listening, reading, speaking & writing] perfectly", but it also involves "a full mastery of the culture of that language". Furthermore, according to Pourmahmoud-Hesar, Konca and Zarfsaz (69), culture comprises various elements such as "traditions, myths, values, norms, customs, legends, history, religion, civilization, and the geographical location". Each of these aspects is

¹ This section is largely based on and includes numerous direct quotes from a paper I have handed in the summer term of 2016, in the course of Ass. Prof. Dr. Michael Draxlbauer's 124267 AR Cultural/Media Studies 1/2 (AR) - Native American Celebrities

essential in order to fully understand the culture of a certain society (Pourmahmoud-Hesar, Konca and Zarfsaz 96).

The CEFR (The Common European Framework of Reference), which constitutes the basis for ‘Communicative Language Teaching’ (CLT), also views socio-cultural competence and socio-cultural awareness as essential parts of language teaching. It should be noted that CLT is also the most prominent and most commonly used approach to language teaching in the Austrian EFL classroom. The CEFR does not only emphasize the importance of culture, it also specifies that teachers should particularly teach

values, beliefs and attitudes in relation to such factors as: social class, regional cultures, tradition and social change, history [especially iconic, historical personages and events], minorities [ethnic & religious], national identity, foreign countries, states [and] peoples. (Council of Europe 103)

By exploring literature of different cultures, pupils will receive a better and broader understanding of cultural diversity and “of the society of the world as a whole” (Romero & Zancanella 29 qdt. in Stover & Tway 133). Hwang and Tipton Hindman (43) strongly agree on this by claiming that reading quality refugee literature helps children as well as adults to broaden their horizons, therefore making them more likely to reflect upon the people and world around them in greater depth. Due to the fact that we live in a multicultural society, Stover and Tway (134) see the need to define particular goals for multicultural literature lessons. By including YAL which features characters from various cultural backgrounds in the literature curriculum, Stover and Tway (134) believe that the following goals can be achieved: “[t]hrough their reading, students should be able to explore 1) issues of self-identification, 2) their relationships between themselves and others, and 3) their relationships between and among cultures”.

Hwang and Tipton Hindman (43) also aspire to encourage more educators to integrate refugee literature in their classes as this would help pupils gain a better understanding of other people and cultures. Stover and Tway (133) refer to Ehle, who is convinced that texts which help readers to adopt new and different cultural perspectives on life will inevitably enhance pupils’ tolerance level and their “appreciation of the ways of life of people from other countries”. The importance of teaching tolerance and acceptance to students will be further discussed in the next section.

2.2.2. Fight against Stereotypes and Prejudices

“Humanity is going to be a vital part of our future and we must show students how to have compassion for one another” (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 46). Bennett (1999 qtd. Hwang & Tipton Hindman 51) is of the strong opinion that the school curriculum is supposed to “value human dignity and universal rights, acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity, responsibility to the world community, and reverence for the earth”. Teaching acceptance, responsibility and respect for cultural diversity are indeed some of the explicitly mentioned goals of the Austrian curriculum. With regard to diversity and inclusion in the curriculum, the following principles are formulated:

Die Schulen stehen heute vor der Herausforderung, mit der wachsenden Vielfalt bzw. Heterogenität der Schülerinnen und Schülern konstruktiv umzugehen, sodass die individuellen Begabungen und Potenziale – unabhängig von vorgefassten Bildern, Zuschreibungen und familiären Rahmenbedingungen – bestmöglich gefördert und aktiviert werden. Es geht um individuelle und diskriminierungsfreie Lern-, Entfaltungs- und Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten von Kindern und Jugendlichen unterschiedlicher familiärer und kultureller Herkunft mit unterschiedlichen Leistungsspektren [...]. Inklusion in der Schule bedeutet - gleiche Wertschätzung aller Schülerinnen und Schüler. (BKA, AHS Lehrplan, <Diversität und Inklusion>)

This quote demonstrates that the Austrian curriculum strongly encourages teachers to increase their pupils’ awareness of cultural diversity and to teach culture in a way which does not promote stereotypes or clichés. Stover and Tway (149) put it very nicely when they say that as educators we may have the unique power of “lay[ing] the foundation for a more tolerant and peaceful world”. The reading of refugee literature exposes learners “to the effects on society of prejudice, ethnocentricity, or cultural stereotyping”; hence, pupils will “begin to wrestle with their own values and related behaviors” (Stover & Tway 148).

Gonzales (19 qtd. in Stover & Tway 135) is also of the opinion that by including literature concerned with issues and themes of relevance to adolescents from different cultures, teachers might be able to help their students to overcome negative images that they “have of themselves or that society has of them”. Stover and Tway (135) are absolutely certain that refugee literature is the perfect means to make teenagers aware of pressing issues such as racism or ethnocentricity and consequently, to help them avoid prejudices or stereotyping. In order to break down ethnical and cultural barriers in today’s society, Stover and Tway (132) recommend the use of “young adult novels by and about minorities, by and about recent immigrants [...], and even by authors from other countries who write literature for adolescents about the adolescent experience in other lands”.

In order to be able to realise and overcome prejudices which have become entrenched over numerous generations it is the teacher's obligation to promote cultural consciousness and critical reflection when it comes to teaching culture or even more so when working with refugee literature. This also involves the purposeful exposure of learners to texts which promote discussion about these stereotypes or clichés. According to Stover and Tway (139), "[s]tudents need to be exposed to [...] characters who do reflect current and historic realities, however uncomfortable those realities might be, and then they need to examine why those stereotypes exist and to confront their own stereotyping behaviors as a result". Kumaravadivelu (189) reinforces this hypothesis by explaining that "[t]he task of promoting cultural consciousness in the classroom can hardly be accomplished unless a concerted effort is made to use materials that will prompt learners to confront some of the taken-for-granted cultural beliefs about the Self and the Other".

Teachers should make it one of their most important teaching goals to help their pupils to develop into critical and self-reflective individuals. A number of authors and scholars in the field sustain this viewpoint: Weninger and Kiss (697-698) quote Guilherme (50-51), who speaks of the necessity of "critical citizenship", Risager (222), who stresses the importance of "intercultural competence of the world citizen" and Kumaravadivelu (164), who promotes the idea of "global cultural consciousness". It is explained that these various approaches do not only encourage teachers to *deal with* culture in their language classes but to do so in a critical and reflective manner (Weninger & Kiss 698). Weninger and Kiss (698) refer explicitly to Kumaravadivelu (164), who argues that it is the teacher's task to "actively encourage and facilitate the cultivation of a critically reflective mind that can tell the difference between real and unreal, between information and disinformation, between ideas and ideologies".

So far, it has been discussed that teaching refugee literature is valuable and important as it supports pupils during the process of becoming self-reflective, critical and tolerant individuals. Hwang and Tipton Hindman (51) rightly claim that "[m]ulticultural literature builds bridges. Students naturally learn that differences and rich diversity make the classroom strong". In addition, it has been argued that by learning about the culture of a certain society through literature it will be easier for pupils to acquire the respective language. However, until now, the focus was on Austrian second language learners. There is yet another very significant factor which is becoming more and more relevant in today's EFL classes – the teaching of refugee pupils. The next section will try to demonstrate why refugee literature is particularly beneficial when it comes to working with refugee children and adolescents.

2.2.3. Working with Refugees at School

2.2.3.1. Challenges and Hardships

More and more recent immigrants from other cultures are populating our classrooms (Stover & Tway 132). Stewart (150) claims that in terms of refugee settlement patterns, clear predictions are difficult to make. At the beginning, refugee families often tend to settle in cities for logistic reasons. Nevertheless, after some time, a lot of them decide to move into more rural areas, frequently because life is cheaper (Stewart 150). Therefore, Stewart (150) correctly claims that teachers should always be prepared to teach refugee children no matter where the schools are located. Hwang and Tipton Hindman (51) are also convinced that “[t]eachers must be proactive to change in meeting the needs of our growing diverse populations in school”.

Very often teaching refugees is something that teachers are afraid of. They frequently feel unprepared to teach adolescents who do not even speak the official language. It is even a bigger challenge for second language teachers. Some of the refugees might not have been able to attend a school for years due to war or financial factors. Nevertheless, Hwang and Tipton Hindman (51) argue correctly that “[s]tudents with interrupted formal education simply need an opportunity to learn basic skills and receive very skilled and intentional instruction to accelerate their learning”.

Especially, when it comes to secondary level and standardised tests, teachers find it immensely hard to teach and consider refugee students in their lesson planning. However, Stewart (150) takes a very interesting stance on this by arguing that teachers should probably reconsider and reflect on their attitude towards refugee pupils. They should not be worried about the “academic gains the students need to make” (Stewart 150) but rather, educators should view them as an opportunity to learn and grow. Hwang and Tipton Hindman (51) support this by explaining that “[m]utual respect for all individuals will allow educators and students to create an improved environment for learning”. Even the Austrian curriculum supports this by stating that:

Der Zusammenhalt in der Klasse wird dadurch gefördert, dass alle Schülerinnen und Schüler als gleichberechtigte Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer an der Diskursgemeinschaft der Klasse ihre besonderen Fähigkeiten und Stärken, zum Beispiel ihre Mehrsprachigkeit, einbringen und dafür Anerkennung erfahren. Sensibilität für die psychische und soziale Situation von Kindern mit Migrationshintergrund ist besonders wichtig. (BKA, AHS Lehrplan, <Interkulturelles Lernen>)

Adopting a new perspective on refugees might thus be the key to teach them in the best possible way. Without doubt, this proves that there is a desperate need for a description of “classroom

positions, strategies, and materials that will prompt dialogic or reciprocal learning – a way for teachers to learn from students while they learn from us” (Freire qtd. in Stewart 150). Stover and Tway (132) want to encourage teachers as well as regular students to “search for means of understanding [their] coinhabitants”. Stewart’s notion of reciprocal learning appears highly interesting to me. Teachers are no longer to be seen as the sole providers of knowledge. If they put themselves into the positions of the learners and if they were willing to learn from their refugee students’ experiences they could actually broaden their cultural and social horizon immensely. In this context, Stewart (150) argues that “[p]ositioning students’ experiences as resources for teacher knowledge provides ample opportunities for students to engage in authentic literacy activities that are transformative not only for them but perhaps even more so for their teacher”. In addition, Stewart (151) claims that one way to facilitate teachers’ learning about students’ lived experiences is to use literacy to bring “the refugee experience into the classroom”: This is where literature comes into play.

2.2.3.2. The Benefits of Refugee Literature *for* Refugee Pupils

In order to work with refugees in an effective way, it is incumbent to choose relevant reading (Stewart 157). This is particularly challenging as many refugee pupils are “lost in translation” (Baraitser 24). This means that “they are not only reading but also talking and writing in a language that may be foreign to them, one that they must try and enter in order to survive within it” (Baraitser 24). Without doubt, in order to understand and profit from refugee literature in the EFL classroom, pupils need to have, at least, a very basic command of English. If this is not the case, Hwang and Tipton Hindman (51) recommend reading out loud to the pupils. By regular and intensive exposure to texts, refugee pupils are very likely to make a lot of progress in a short time. According to Moats (2010 qtd. in Hwang & Tipton Hindman 51), “daily exposure to a variety of texts and practice would [also] help [refugee] children build reading fluency”. Realistically speaking, it will require quite some time until refugee pupils are ready to cope with refugee literature in English as it will be, most certainly, their third language. However, once the students are able to understand what they are reading they might enjoy it for various reasons. Employing literature which displays refugees’ life experiences will have a motivating and encouraging impact on the pupils’ willingness to learn, write and read (Stewart 151). As already argued in the first chapter, literature to which students can relate is easier for them to understand and also more appealing (see section 1.2.). This is of particular importance when working with refugee pupils as they most probably have troubles understanding the language and the content anyway.

Refugees and, in general, pupils who belong to minority cultures are likely to feel honoured, appreciated and validated when the teacher uses books dealing with their own culture (Stover & Tway 133). Hwang and Tipton Hindman (46) support this assumption by arguing that incorporating refugee literature in regular lessons does not only make non-refugees profit from it; it is pointed out that children with a minority background will get a feeling of recognition as soon as “their culture is acknowledged”.

According to Honigsfeld, Giouroukakis and Garfinkel (2011 qtd. in Stewart 151), refugee literature is usually not included in the traditional literary canon. However, they are convinced that “literature about the immigrant experience should purposefully be embedded in the secondary English language arts classroom because first- and second- generation immigrant students often do not have a voice in their schools” (Honigsfeld, Giouroukakis and Garfinkel 2011 qtd. in Stewart 151). After all, it is the teachers’ task to give them the opportunity to voice their story. They need to know that their individual experiences matter and that sharing them is of value to the teacher as well as to other classmates.

“In the process of *exchanging memories*, storytellers, writers and readers participate and contribute in a life-shaping act that demonstrates the willpower of sharing the burdens of trauma and guilt.” (Helff 129). In her book, Baraitser investigates in how far reading and writing can help traumatised refugee children and adolescents to cope with and overcome their trauma. Her idea is that by ‘unpacking their hearts with words’, as the book’s title suggests, young refugees can heal their tortured souls. They have to express their trauma. Baraitser (90) makes use of the ‘affective’ bibliotherapeutic approach. This has its origin in Freudian psychodynamics as it uses “the concepts of identification, projection, mirroring and insight” (Baraitser 90). The term ‘bibliotherapy’ suggests healing (Greek ‘therapeia’) through books (Greek ‘biblio’) (Baraitser 83). In order to define the goals of affective bibliotherapy, Baraitser (92) refers to Gottschalk: the use of appropriate literature

shows the reader that they are not the first to have problems, makes the reader aware that there is more than one solution to their problems, asks the reader to understand the character’s and their own motivations for their behaviour in response to their problems, helps the reader grasp their problem, provides facts needed to solve problems [and] encourages the reader to face their situation realistically. (Gottschalk 1948 in Jack & Ronan 175 qtd. in Baraitser 92)

The reason why I have included this in the current section is because it demonstrates what literature can actually help to achieve and how valuable it is, particularly to refugees.

Ultimately, literature serves “as a bridge from the ‘helpless self’ to the ‘coping self’” (Baraitser 29).

2.3. Conclusion and Outlook

In this chapter, I have tried to justify why refugee literature should be taught in the EFL classroom. It has been pointed out that culture plays an important role in language teaching. Teaching a language inevitably involves teaching culture and vice versa. Reviewed literature as well as the Common European Framework of Reference sustained this viewpoint as they also envision culture as an essential part of language teaching and stress the importance of teaching it in EFL settings. Moreover, tolerance and respect towards cultural diversity are essential goals of the Austrian curriculum. The use of refugee literature is a very sensible way to avoid or to overcome stereotypes or cultural prejudices. Finally, I briefly had a look at the work with refugees at school. It has been pointed out that these pupils will benefit in particular when using refugee literature in the course of EFL lessons. Now that it has been demonstrated *why* it is important to teach refugee literature, the next chapter should provide answers on *how* to teach this genre.

Chapter 3: How to teach Refugee Literature

3.1. Selection of Refugee Literature

One of the most difficult tasks for a language teacher is the selection of adequate literature. Rop and Rop (50) argue that even with many book guides around, the right selection of books is still a challenge. So many aspects need to be taken into consideration when choosing books for the classroom. In the first chapter, I have already hinted at general factors that are important to keep in mind when selecting YA texts. It is essential that the teacher knows the pupils. Just knowing their age will not suffice in order to find an appropriate book. First and foremost, it is highly important to know the pupils' command of language and their actual developmental status. Furthermore, the teacher should be familiar with the pupils' interests and their various cultural backgrounds. "In selecting books for use in the classroom we must pay attention to what students tell us they find appropriate and stimulating" (Stover & Tway 143). Stover and Tway (135) suggest certain criteria in order to select appropriate YA novels which are concerned with the lives of adolescents from various cultural backgrounds. This will be discussed in the following sections.

3.1.1. Tokenism

Rule number one is to avoid 'tokenism' (Stover & Tway 135). In other words, teachers should not expose their students to just one novel or just one chapter of a specific minority experience. Gonzales (18-19 qtd. in Stover & Tway 135) considers "[t]oken representation of the histories and literatures of culturally different children are inadequate attempts at engaging and inspiring students' participation in the educational process". If pupils only get to read one piece of literature about a particular topic they will most probably end up having a very restricted and biased point of view on the subject. Rop and Rop (51) substantiate this assumption by explaining that it is generally a reasonable "idea to include several books on a particular topic, representing both broad and detailed viewpoints to give students an opportunity to encounter the topic in several different ways". Stover and Tway (135) suggest to "complement books about minority and immigrant experience" with translated books from the respective country in order to render pupils "more globally literate and aware of the similarities and differences among cultures on a global scale". Glazier and Seo (2005) conducted a study in which they applied ethnographic as well as sociolinguistic methods in order to investigate data gained from

observing classroom discussions based upon multicultural YA texts (Hayn, Kaplan and Nolen 178). According to their results, utilising a *multitude of these texts* does not only enhance pupils' understanding of intracultural as well as intercultural aspects but also helps them to achieve a *broad* global perspective (Hayn, Kaplan and Nolen 178; emphasis added).

The question is how exactly can tokenism be best circumvented? In this context, Stover and Tway (136) encourage teachers to adhere to the following three goals when designing the literature program: “1) exploration of self; 2) exploration of the relationship between the self and others; and 3) exploration of the relationships among cultures – and between a culture and the novels which grow from it”. The authors further explain that in order to achieve these goals, it is advisable to organise “by themes representative of issues that cross cultural boundaries” (Stover & Tway 136). It is not recommended to select pieces of literature solely on the basis of genre or chronology (Stover & Tway 136). The major goal is to arrive at a certain degree of balance. Stover and Tway (137) also comment on the notion of balance by claiming that

[b]alance must be achieved – balance between students' need to feel validated through the experiences they read about in books and their need to learn about other worlds and perspectives; balance between teacher-made selections and student-made selections; and balance between novels selected because of the authors' excellent craftsmanship and those selected primarily because they appeal to students' interests.

Even though Stover and Tway (137) believe that it is primarily the task of “instructors, teachers, librarians, and parents” to select “the best of the books reflective of cultural diversity”, the quote above shows that they believe that students should have a say in the selection of books for the classroom as well. Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration here is, once more, the lack of time in the EFL classroom. Due to this it might be difficult but definitely not impossible to avoid tokenism. I would advise teachers to find a balance between shorter and longer texts which still complement each other content-wise. In my thesis, for example, I have selected three novels which vary significantly with regard to length. While the first novel, *Refugee Boy*, has almost 300 pages, *The Optician of Lampedusa* is only about 120 pages long. I will discuss this further in the analysis chapters.

3.1.2. Selection Criteria

According to Stover and Tway (137-138), the book *Reading Ladders for Human Relations* (Tway 5-6) provides a valuable collection of criteria that should facilitate the difficult task of selecting appropriate literature for the classroom. Altogether, there are ten guidelines which

should be kept in mind when looking for a book. As some of the proposed guidelines are very similar, I have decided to narrow the list down to eight guidelines.

- (1) Firstly, teachers should be aware of **genre-specific essentials** and select accordingly. “For fiction these are: well-developed plot, characterization, setting, theme, and style; for non-fiction: clear, logical writing and accurate information; for poetry: lyrical beauty of language or poetic statement of truth” (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 137-138; emphasis added).
- (2) Secondly, the **representation of people** in the book, both with regard to text and illustration, should be fair and positive. No one should be ridiculed or be portrayed in a negative or humiliating way (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138; emphasis added).
- (3) Thirdly, teachers should look for **books** which “are **natural and convincing** instead of contrived” (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138; emphasis added). Literature which displays “superficial treatment in solving difficult problems [that] human beings [have to] face” (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138; emphasis added) should be avoided.
- (4) In addition, it is recommended to choose books which **include appropriate illustrations** (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138; emphasis added). They are supposed to supplement or add extra content. Usually, being provided with illustrations or images also renders the comprehension a lot easier (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138; emphasis added).
- (5) Moreover, books dealing with cultural diversity must under **no** circumstances promote “**prejudices and stereotypes** into the new generation” (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138; emphasis added). Instead, they should **value and highlight what minority groups have contributed** to the history and the culture of one’s native country. **Stereotypes** with regard to **gender** are to be avoided as well (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138; emphasis added).
- (6) By reading appropriate and carefully-selected books about cultural diversity, pupils should gain a **better understanding of identity**, “an appreciation of **individuality**, and a **respect for heritage**” (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138; emphasis added).
- (7) Even though I have argued in chapter one (see section 1.1. and 1.2.) that **age** cannot be deemed a reliable factor in determining YAL, Tway (5-6 qtd. in Stover & Tway 138) considers it an important criterion. Teachers are advised to select books which cover subjects adequate to the learners’ age levels (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138).
- (8) Finally, it is essential that the book provides the readers with a **realistic and honest account** “of the human condition, including different stages in the life cycle, different life

styles, and life in different cultures” (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover and Tway 138; emphasis added). In other words, the book should include as much **diversity** as possible (Tway 5-6 qtd. in Stover & Tway 137-138; emphasis added).

3.2. Strategies

As a future language teacher, it is highly important to me that this thesis also takes a didactic approach towards refugee literature. It is not enough to talk about *why* it is important to teach this genre, or which goals could be achieved when using these books in the classroom. What also needs to be discussed is *how* to teach refugee literature. The following section will be concerned with strategies, activities and materials that could be used to efficiently cope with refugee literature in language classes.

In the didactic courses of the university’s teacher training program it is always recommended to split reading tasks into three stages – the pre-reading, during reading and the after reading stage. For each stage there are specific activities, also referred to as pre-, main and post-activities. Stover and Tway (144-146) also suggest a three-part structure when designing reading tasks. Therefore, I have tried to suggest activities for each of the three reading stages. However, numerous of the following activities could be applied in several stages.

3.2.1. Pre-activities

- (1) The first suggestion brought up by Stover and Tway (144) is **’cubing’**. This is a method which was coined by Cowan and Cowan and is frequently applied as a preparatory activity in reading and writing tasks (Richardson, Morgan & Fleener 355). This activity prepares pupils for a topic as it prevails upon them to “think on six levels of cognition” (Richardson, Morgan & Fleener 355). Each of the six sides of a cube stands for a different task. The pupils should deal with each task for about five minutes (Richardson, Morgan & Fleener 355). According to Vaughan and Estes (1986 qtd. in Richardson, Morgan & Fleener 355) “cubing can lead to purposeful reading and help develop reading comprehension”. A major merit in applying this method is that pupils will inevitably be forced to look at a certain issue from various perspectives as they have to consider all of the six sides and deal with all of the six different tasks for an equal amount of time (Richardson, Morgan & Fleener 355). Stover and Tway (144) consider this method helpful in order to find out about students’ prior knowledge or possible prejudices towards

a certain issue. In addition, it should be noted that cubing could also be used as a post-activity (Stover & Tway 144).

However, the cubing activity which is proposed in the article by Stover and Tway (144) has a slightly different design. They suggest asking students to “[w]rite for one to three minutes from each of the following perspectives, moving from one to the next without pausing to think”. They provide the learners with impulses or guiding questions such as:

When you think of a Russian [or any other nationality], a) describe; b) compare/contrast to someone from the U.S.; c) analyze [...] beliefs, historical events which shaped current behavior [...]; d) argue for or against knowing about the culture, knowing individuals representative of that culture. (Stover & Tway 144)

As can be seen here, for each task another ‘operator’ is used. According to the BMB (Bundesministerium für Bildung online <Zur Bedeutung der Operatoren im Rahmen der Aufgabenstellung aus fachdidaktischer Sicht>), operators are verbs which prevail upon pupils to conduct a certain (writing-) task. Due to the fact that learners have to respond to a variety of different tasks, their thinking operates on various levels and for each task they may need a different kind of vocabulary. Therefore, this pre-activity also encourages pupils to work on their lexicon, which might also exert a positive impact on competences other than writing or reading.

- (2) The next pre-activity that I would like to mention here is similar to cubing in that it involves “[i]ndividual [or] class brainstorming on initial impressions, on characters [...or] other aspects of the book” (Stover & Tway 144; emphasis added). Once more, this could be done at the beginning as well as at the end of the reading process in order to be able to compare in how far the students’ viewpoints have changed (Stover & Tway 144). Hwang and Tipton Hindman (47) also mention **prediction charts** (see figure 1) in which pupils could note down their initial expectations or thoughts and then revise or just compare them to their opinions after they have finished reading.

| I predicted | What really happened |
|-------------|----------------------|
| | |

Figure 1: Prediction Chart (Sample taken from Hwang & Tipton Hindman 48)

- (3) Moreover, Stover and Tway (144) are in favour of **eliciting predictions** from the pupils as a pre-activity. By talking about their expectations about certain characters or the plot,

students are already activating their prior knowledge about the topic. This is also a viewpoint which Hwang and Tipton Hindman (47) endorse. They argue that “prediction activities are excellent ways of activating students’ prior knowledge” (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 47). According to Tompkins (2015 qtd. in Hwang & Tipton Hindman 47), the eliciting of prior knowledge even has considerable impact on the pupils’ skills and motivation. Teachers should, moreover, pose “**questions as readiness before reading**” (Stover & Tway 144; emphasis added). This appears to be similar to making predictions but it is a bit more detailed. Students are asked what exactly they hope to find out about a particular location or country in which the story takes place.

- (4) There are also numerous other pre-activities which encourage learners to make initial predictions about the books they are going to read. Hwang and Tipton Hindman (47) are also convinced that prediction activities are highly valuable. In his article, Schmidt (23) proposes an interesting pre-activity for extensive reading which is called ‘**Blurb and Title Match**’. The procedure is as follows: the learners are provided with the blurbs from the novels. After having read these short book descriptions, they are asked to find the matching title of the novel. Optionally, the teacher could also show them the books’ cover pages, illustrations (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 47) or give them other passages from the book and have them match the titles accordingly. This activity could either be conducted individually or in pairs. With a rather small number of books to choose from, it may not be very wise to do this activity with the whole class. After the students have matched all titles correctly, the teacher could ask them which one they find most appealing and then let them start reading their favourite. This is very likely to have a beneficial influence on their willingness to read as they most probably feel that their opinion matters.
- (5) An activity which I consider very interesting and creative as a starter is the ‘**air bubble prediction activity**’ (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 48; emphasis added). For this activity students need air bubbles (usually they are quite cheap to buy in shops or to make them oneself, but instead of real air bubbles one could also use signs which look like bubbles or agree on a certain gesture, or on a certain exclamation like *bingo*) and dot stickers (in my opinion, it would also suffice to use a piece of paper or something similar to a bingo sheet). Judging from the cover illustration, the title or the blurb, students are asked to predict six words which they think will come up in the story. Then the teacher or someone else starts reading the first pages and the pupils have to pay attention if their predicted

words are actually used. If so, they should indicate this (either with the air bubbles or any other sign which was agreed upon) and cross it out on their list. Hwang and Tipton Hindman (48) are convinced that “this hands-on activity will become a fun attention-getter and enhance the motivation to read”. Optionally, the teacher could also award the first student who has guessed all the words correctly a small prize.

- (6) Another pre-activity option that can be found in the article by Stover and Tway (133) is having pupils write an **imaginary letter** to their best friend. The authors did not initially come up with this idea nor did they include this activity in their list of suggestions for before-reading activities. However, it was mentioned as they were referring to a research review by Ehle (Stover & Tway 133). The latter asked middle school students in Maryland to write an imaginary letter to their best friends in which they should talk about how they reacted when they learnt that their families had been transported to another country [in this case: Russia] for an indefinite amount of time (Stover & Tway 133). Afterwards, they had to read a translation of the Russian novel *Shadows Across the Sun* by Albert Likhanov (Stover & Tway 134). Once they finished the book, the students were supposed to “reflect on their initial letter and to identify what parts of it they would change now they had a better understanding of what daily life in Russia is like and how they are both alike and different from their Russian peers” (Stover & Tway 134). This can be conducted as a pre-, main- and/ or post-reading activity and it can be adapted to any culture or country. It is highly valuable as it forces learners to reflect upon their attitudes towards a certain culture and moreover, it shows in how far a book has managed to help them broaden their horizon. If students put themselves into the position of a refugee, they try to visualise the feelings and impressions of the refugee. Hwang and Tipton Hindman (47) refer to this and other similar activities as ‘**vizualization strategy**’.
- (7) According to Hwang and Tipton Hipman (47) it is also essential to **pre-teach vocabulary** which the students might need in order to guarantee a better understanding of the book’s content.
- (a) In order to (re-)activate the pupils’ topic-related vocabulary knowledge the teacher could do some ‘**quick revision games**’, as suggested by Elias (British Council online <Quick revision games>). For instance, ask the learners to take a piece of paper and tell them to quickly note down:

- ❖ Five African countries
- ❖ Five African animals
- ❖ Five reasons for leaving a country
- ❖ Five means of transport to get to another country
- ❖ Five ways to learn a new language

This activity could also be conducted in a more playful and competitive way by dividing the class into two groups. They would have to communicate and discuss in order to agree on the five things. The team who finishes first wins.

(b) ‘Word guessing games’ are usually very popular among pupils and also help to teach important vocabulary. Lavery (British Council online <Word Guessing Games>) suggests selecting five abstract nouns which are of importance to the novel. For instance: hope, fear, happiness, loneliness and freedom. Then the class is split up in teams and they get clues like:

- ❖ I am a noun but I am very important.
- ❖ I begin with the letter ‘f’.
- ❖ People in prison have lost it and want it back.
- ❖ People demand it when it is taken away by dictators.
- ❖ It is related to speech. (Samples taken from Lavery, British Council online <Word Guessing Games>)

The team who first finds out that the word is ‘**freedom**’ wins.

3.2.2. Main activities

- (1) The first main activity suggested by Stover and Tway (145) is the keeping of ‘**dialectical journals**’ or ‘**reading response logs**’. According to Neuffer (online <How to write a Dialectical Journal>), this method involves reflection through dialogue, i.e. posing questions about the primary text and arriving at answers. As they are reading the book, learners are asked to note down what they think, feel, question or predict about a specific passage. This enables students to gain a better understanding of the text and also of their own attitudes towards the issue. Dialectical journals are especially helpful when pupils are looking for clarification in a text passage.

This activity needs a grid that is divided into three columns (see figure 2). The students can either draw it themselves or the teacher provides them with a worksheet containing the chart. The left-hand column will include a certain quote or text passage from the book. In the middle column the learners should write down where to find this quote by stating

the page number and/ or the chapter. The right-hand column will be dedicated to the analysis of the quote. The readers note down their comments, thoughts or reflections about the passage. It is also important to talk about WHY students chose a particular quote (Stover & Tway 145; emphasis added). Discussing why students have selected a certain passage is also a way to make them reflect about the content.

| Quote | Page/ Chapter | Analysis (comments, questions, reflections) |
|---|------------------|--|
| "Alem stood still and let the crescendo happen around him": | Ch. 7, p. 77 | Question: What does crescendo mean? Research: musical term: getting louder Reflection/ Thoughts: Perhaps, the author used this musical term to make it easier for the reader to understand the intended feeling and tone of the situation. |

Figure 2: Example of a dialectical journal grid (Example quote taken from *Refugee Boy*)

- (2) Similar to this, pupils could also design **character charts**. They first have to figure out the main characters and then note down the information that is revealed about them throughout the novel. Collecting details about them will also help to better understand the characters' development (Stover & Tway 145). Character charts could be useful in combination with the next main activity mentioned.
- (3) **Role-play** is also an interesting main activity. It motivates the students to actively and creatively engage with the book's content and characters. Hwang and Tipton Hindman believe that when students put themselves in the position of a main character they are more likely to feel "empathy, compassion, and respect for human rights in a meaningful context" (47). When pupils are asked to perform important parts of the storyline, the teacher has the opportunity to check if the learners have understood the content. Stover and Tway (146) also provide a more detailed suggestion for a role-play activity: teachers should tell their students to make a play out of a particular text passage but due to restricted budget, they can only have one stage prop (Stover & Tway 146). Hwang and Tipton Hindman (47) make a similar role-play suggestion as they ask pupils to imagine that they had to go to a refugee camp and are only allowed to take one item (or stage prop) with them. Usually, the teacher provides the pupils with a number of different props from which they can choose. After they have agreed on one item, it is important to discuss why they have selected it. The justification of their choice is likely to reveal what and in how

far they have reflected upon the book's content. In their study about refugee literature and how to best deal with it in the multicultural classroom, Hwang and Tipton Hindman (44) considered "prediction activities such as the use of role-play and drama" as particularly valuable in order "to engage children in cultural awareness as a daily activity". It is recommended to complement this task with **journal writing** (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 47; emphasis added).

- (4) The learners' cultural awareness could also be enhanced by making them reflect upon the language used in the book. Therefore, it is suggested to create a **dictionary** which contains recurring and "important terms reflective of the other culture with translations for future readers to use" (Stover & Tway 145). Especially labels for particular ethnic or cultural groups are interesting here. If students kept a record of all these terms, labels and names they might be able to recognise them, sooner or later, in their daily language use, in the media, or even at home. Thus, this main activity does not only make learners reflect upon the language used in the book, it could also help them to think about actual language use on a broader scale.
- (5) If the teacher wanted to focus even more on vocabulary, a **vocabulary box** might be a good idea. (Cunningham, British Council online <Vocabulary Box>) Throughout the reading process the pupils and the teacher could collect words that are rare, difficult or significant and note them down on cards. One side shows a word the other side of the card contains the word's definition. The teacher collects these cards in a box and can use them "at any time to revise the vocabulary studied over weeks" (Cunningham, British Council online <Vocabulary Box>). This revision could be done in class or as a team activity. It does not only help to build up the learners' lexicon but the teacher also gets to see how much they have learnt from reading the book.
- (6) Hwang and Tipton Hindman (50) mention another very interesting activity which could be conducted during the reading process. It is called '**literature circle**'. The class will be divided into groups of six people. Each group member is assigned a certain role. The roles could be: "the questioner, the passage locator, the illustrator, the connector, the summarizer, and the investigator" Hwang and Tipton Hindman (50): the questioner comes up with questions for the group. The passage locator is responsible for finding "passages that indicate the main character's feelings at different points in the story" (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 50). Yet, for the sake of interaction I would tell the passage

locator to find passages that provide the answers to the brought up questions. The illustrator should be someone who is very creative and likes drawing as this person has to illustrate scenes from the book. The connector has to look for additional literature (books, texts, etc.) which is dealing with the same topic. This would also be a very reasonable and time-saving way to avoid tokenism. Finally, the summarizer is accountable for providing a brief protocol of the group's discussion and reflection. In other words, the complete reading and reflection process would be split up and shared in a group. This is not only highly communicative, it is also time-saving, motivating and fun for the learners. Interaction with other readers will also help to facilitate comprehension.

- (7) Another suggestion for a main activity is to find a **pen friend** in the country in which the story takes place, or from which the protagonist comes (Stover & Tway 145). Pen friends might be an interesting idea, though in the L2 classroom it might be wiser to look for English-speaking pen friends. In addition, it might be quite difficult to find pen friends, let alone *enough* pen friends for a whole class of 25 pupils, in a country at war.
- (8) Furthermore, Stover and Tway (145) consider '**comparison writing**' a useful main activity. This comprises essays in which pupils describe in how far they feel similar or different to the characters in the book. The authors also mention '**cinquains**'. These are five line poems in which students first write about "the characters and [then] move to the self" or they just dedicate their cinquain to the character development throughout the book (Stover & Tway 145). Thein (123) hereby refers to Grobman (2007), who is convinced that teachers' instructions with regard to multicultural literature are supposed to make pupils realise similarities and differences among themselves and others.
- (9) The importance of **additional readings** is also pointed out. Stover and Tway (145) consider **independent reading** outside of the classroom valuable. Students should read other books about the same country, culture or conflict while dealing with the book that the teacher assigned as a class reading. This will give the learners the opportunity to gain a broader perspective on the subject as they will be able to make comparisons between the primary and secondary literature. In the previous section, it was pointed out why it is important to avoid tokenism. Unfortunately, and as argued in the first chapter (see section 1.6.), classroom time is always restricted. If the teacher feels that they do not have enough time to cover more than one book about a specific issue in their regular literature program

then additional, independent reading at home might be a perfect alternative to circumvent tokenism. However, Stover and Tway (148) argue correctly that the most challenging task here is to make the pupils *want* to read. In the previous chapters I have already elucidated aspects which render reading more attractive to young adults, so I will not go deeper into that issue right now. In order for independent reading to work, pupils need to realise that they are reading for themselves and not to meet the teacher's requirements (Stover & Tway 146). Moreover, teachers, parents and librarians should provide the learners with appropriate literature (Stover & Tway 146). If they are surrounded by plenty of literature concerning the topic they are more likely to engage themselves into it.

- (10) According to Hwang and Tipton Hindman (47) it is also effective to apply **monitor strategies** when teaching refugee literature. Especially at the beginning of the main reading process, it might be valuable to have students read out parts of the story in class, then stop them in order to monitor the comprehension.

3.2.3. Post Activities

- (1) After having read the book, there are plenty of follow-up activities, i.e. post-activities that could be conducted. Stover and Tway (145) advise teachers to have their pupils make **collages** of their initial impressions about characters, the setting, places or attitudes before they start reading. Once they have finished the book, they should make another collage about the same aspects. This will show in how far their perceptions have changed or to what extent their presuppositions and expectations were met.
- (2) In the main activity section, it was suggested to complement the primary reading with additional books about the same culture or minority group. As a post-activity, Stover and Tway (146) also recommend having a **look at other types of media** such as newspapers, movies, songs or TV series. Especially when searching for newspaper articles, pupils have the possibility to gain a more realistic insight into our society's prevalent opinions or stereotypes about the respective culture. This hypothesis is reinforced by Hwang and Tipton Hindman (47), who consider independent research an ideal way to enhance pupils' cultural awareness. However, not all articles are about stereotypes or negative headlines. There are also plenty of unbiased articles in which learners can just collect information. For Hwang and Tipton Hindman (47) conducting individual research on the media or current newspaper articles might help pupils who were lucky enough to be born in a

peaceful country to realise the harm war can do to a person's life. They have to learn the valuable lesson that life is not always kind to everyone (Hwang and Tipton Hindman 47). Stover and Tway (146) argue correctly that this would also be perfectly suitable as a main activity.

- (3) Creating a **class newspaper** on the basis of the book's content is another proposition for a post-activity (Stover & Tway 146). Even if this is a very appealing idea which also encourages pupils' writing skills and motivation, I consider this activity to consume a lot of time. In addition, there are several open questions like how many issues and pages would this newspaper have? Is it just for this class or will other pupils at school also be able to read it?
- (4) Once more, the authors bring up the idea of a **role-play**. This time they suggest doing a role-play after the students have finished reading the book. As a main-activity during the reading process, a role-play usually deals with a particular scene or chapter. Frequently, a role play at the post-reading stage is used to let the pupils come up with and act out alternative endings of the story (Stover & Tway 145).
- (5) In order to gain a better overview and understanding of a book's content learners could also be asked to create a **timeline of the main events** that happened in the book. Students are not only asked to select the most important events, they also have to order them chronologically and explain why they have included each event (Stover & Tway 146). This activity might be particularly useful when a book is not narrated in a chronological way. However, with YA fiction, this is only rarely the case.
- (6) A **forced debate** would be another possible post-activity (Stover & Tway 146). The teacher could, for instance, pose a question like: who thinks that the protagonist is a hero? Those who agree should move to one side of the classroom, the pupils who disagree should move to the other side. The whole discussion will be guided by the teacher and everyone will be standing throughout the debate. After the discussion, the students can adapt their position accordingly in case their opinion has changed. With regard to this, Henry (2005 qtd. in Thein 123) makes an interesting point by arguing that successful instruction on multicultural literature may lead to a personal and pragmatic transformation of students.

- (7) The last post-reading exercise that Stover and Tway (146) mention is to come up with an **interview questionnaire**. Pupils should ask their colleagues or family about their opinion towards a certain minority group, a particular culture or people who are just different. Their answers could be compared and contrasted to the pupils' own attitudes.

Interesting questions for an interview questionnaire could be: (inspired by Stover & Tway 147):

- ❖ When you meet somebody from another culture, or who looks different from you, does this evoke a feeling of discomfort or fear in you? Why (not)?
 - ❖ Is it possible for someone to LEARN how to respect or how to get interested in a particular culture? How? Is the appreciation of other people an important social skill? Why?
 - ❖ Are there any books or films which you could recommend to sensitise someone to a foreign culture?
 - ❖ When you look extremely different to others you are frequently perceived as strange, eccentric or in some cases even dangerous. Is it fair that society has the power to tell us how to look, act or think? Do you have any examples for looks that you consider too extreme?
- (8) Another post activity suggestion comes from Hwang and Titpon Hindman (47). The organisation of a **service project** (e.g. concert, flea market, charity event etc.) would “empower students with responsibility, engage their compassion, and offer them the chance to affect the lives of others” (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 47). Moreover, students would help and be able to raise awareness on a broader scale.
- (9) Finally, I would like to propose a post-activity which I have designed myself. It is a board game called ‘**Fluency Game**’ (see figure 3). This is not only an activity which pupils will definitely enjoy, it also helps to test their newly gained knowledge about a certain topic and to enhance their speaking fluency in a playful manner. In the appendix, I have included a template version of the game so that it can be duplicated various times and all pupils in one classroom can play at the same time. Personally, I would split up the class into groups of four to five students. Every group needs a board template, a playing piece for each player (e.g. the students could also use erasers or coins as playing pieces), a dice,

a stopwatch (e.g. they could use their mobile phones) and a set of cards. One set includes 26 cards, 12 fluency cards, 12 knowledge cards and two joker cards (see figure 4). The questions and tasks on the cards can always be designed and adapted according to the topic the teacher wants to cover. In my case, I have created cards which have been particularly inspired by the novels that I have analysed in my thesis (see figure 4).

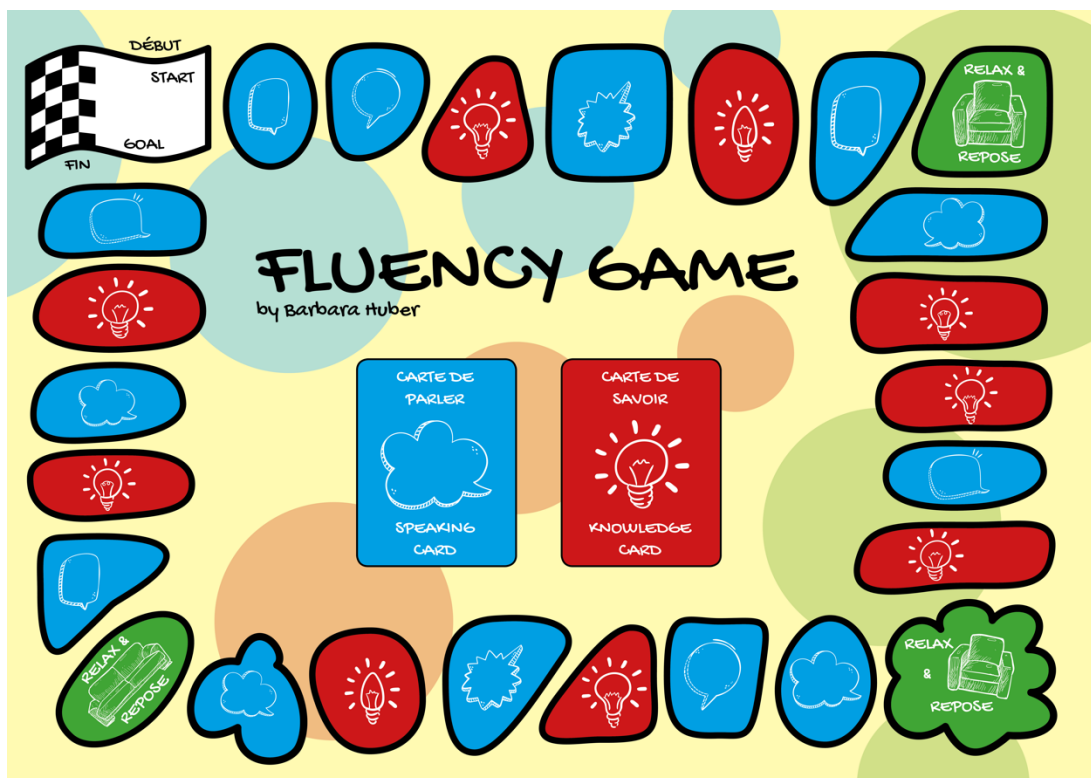


Figure 3: Fluence Game – Board Template

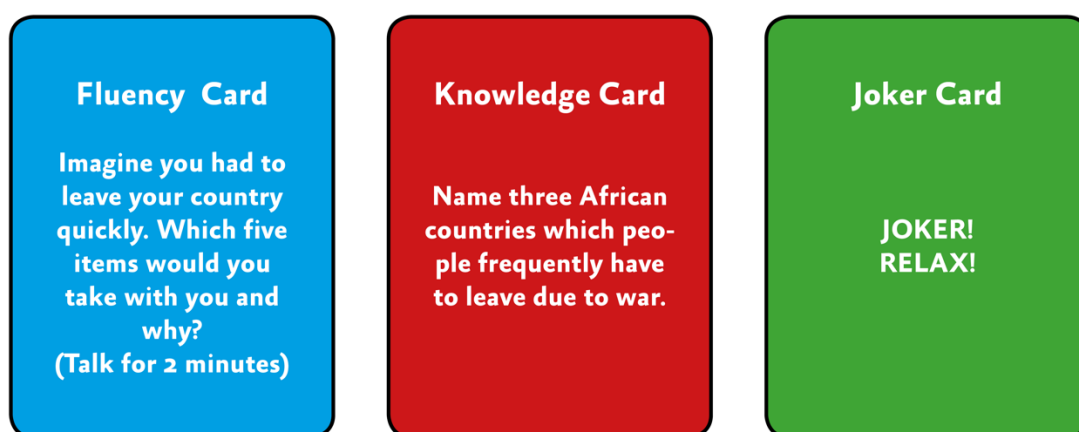


Figure 4: Fluence Game – Card types

3.2. Conclusion and Outlook

As argued above, multicultural literature is often a neglected genre in the EFL classroom. This might be due to the fact that teachers either do not know which books to choose or how to cope with them. The aim of this chapter was to provide useful guidelines and strategies for the selection and the actual teaching of refugee literature. With regard to the selection principles it has been argued that tokenism as well as didacticism should be avoided (Stover & Tway 143-144). Teachers are advised to choose books on the basis of their literary merit. Plot, settings, and characters should be portrayed in a realistic and respectful manner. In addition, multicultural books should contain an authentic account of diverse minority or refugee experiences. Hwang and Tipton Hindman (46) insist that “illustrations, gender roles, and the language of the group should be accurate to represent the culture appropriately”. Finally, it is always important to encourage and incorporate pupils’ interests, preferences and experiences in the selection process (Stover & Tway 143-144).

In addition, this chapter offers a multitude of activities for the various stages of the reading process. In the pre-reading stage, it is crucial to select activities that help learners to activate their prior knowledge about a certain topic. The pre-teaching of vocabulary is essential as well. Numerous of the suggested main activities in the during-reading stage involve written or oral interaction. Either way, at this stage, it is necessary that the teacher chooses activities which show if and how well the learners understand what they are reading. Once the book is finished, the pupils should not only reflect upon but extend their newly gained cultural and linguistic knowledge. This could be done by writing tasks, reading additional literature or via research activities.

Last but not least, I want to highlight that the selection of the appropriate activities is just as important as the right choice of literature. The wrong choice of activities might ruin what could be a potentially interesting and exciting novel. Therefore, it is crucial to know the pupils – which activities do they usually enjoy? What learner types are they? If the teacher does not yet know the learners so well or if they have never read a whole novel in class before, it might be wise to try out a broad variety of exercises to cater for various needs and interests and to find out what works best. Reading a complete book usually takes quite a while and very often, pupils end up being bored or lose interest in reading. It is the teacher’s task to prevent this by engaging the learners into various creative and communicative tasks.

In the following chapters, I will analyse the primary literature of this thesis. Moreover, I will try to justify why I consider these three novels good examples of refugee literature and adequate for the EFL classroom. Large parts of the justification will be based on the selection criteria proposed by Tway (5-6 qtd. in Stover & Tway 137-138, see section 3.1.2.).

Chapter 4: Analysis of *Refugee Boy*

4.1. Background

Refugee Boy was written by Dr. Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah, who is now 60 years old and was born and raised in Birmingham, England. On his website there is an interesting note claiming that his name has Christian, Jewish and Muslim roots. His multicultural background clearly has an impact on his fiction and poetry. Altogether, Zephaniah has published seven plays, seven novels for adults, five children's books and a multitude of poems. Zephaniah himself points out that his poems are very much influenced by Jamaican music and poetry. Topics such as racism, pollution, or animal rights are of particular importance to the author. He strongly objects to war or violence (information taken from the official Benjamin Zephaniah website).

Refugee Boy was published in 2001. One year later it won the Portsmouth Book Award (Jones 20). In the opening to his book, Zephaniah (5) explains that the main reason why he wanted to write this novel was "because [he] realised that every day [he] was meeting refugees, and each one of them had a unique and usually terrifying story to tell". He further states that the story is based upon the many refugee stories that he was told or that he experienced himself (Zephaniah 6). The author's aim was to create "a story that [...] many refugees would recognise" (Zephaniah 6).

4.2. Brief Summary

14-year-old Alem Kelo was born in Badme, in Africa. This area is considered to be part of Eritrea by some people, while others think Badme belongs to Ethiopia. Alem's father, Mr. Kelo, is Ethiopian while his wife is Eritrean. Due to a civil war between these two countries, the family has to face more and more problems, not only because of the marriage between an Ethiopian and an Eritrean but also and especially because of Alem's mixed heritage. Therefore, Mr. Kelo decides to take his son to a safer place – London. He tells Alem that they are going on a holiday trip. Unfortunately, Alem soon has to realise that his father left him in this new country all by himself with nothing but a letter. Mariam and Pamela, two women who work at the Refugee Council, come to pick up Alem from the hotel and take him to their office where he has to apply for asylum. Afterwards, he is taken to a children's care home. Due to fights and problems with

the other boys there, Alem decides to run away one night. When he realises that he has been running in circles, he returns to the care home, where he meets Mariam again. After Alem told her that he does not want to stay there any longer, she introduces him to a social worker named Sheila. The latter arranges for Alem to live with a foster family. His foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald, have one daughter whose name is Ruth. Alem likes his new home. He is even able to go to school, where he makes new friends such as Robert, Asher and Buck. As the Home Office has rejected his asylum application, Alem has to go to a hearing at court. He receives help from Mariam, Sheila and a barrister named Nicholas. Unfortunately, the hearing has been adjourned. In the meantime, Alem gets a letter from his father in which he learns that his mother has been killed. Soon afterwards, Mr. Kelo returns to England to re-unite with his son. He is arrested and has to stay at a decrepit hotel which is a detention center for asylum seekers. In the second court hearing, Alem's application for asylum is rejected again. He and his father are supposed to return to Africa. Alem has to leave his host family and moves in with his father. Alem's friends at school organise a protest campaign and a benefit gig at school as they want him and his father to stay. A petition is even presented to the local MP. They receive a lot of public attention so that Alem is granted another court appeal hearing. Shortly afterwards, Alem has to learn that his father has been shot dead in the street due to political reasons. Devastated, he comes back to the Fitzgeralds. Finally, Alem's asylum application is accepted and he is allowed to stay in Great Britain.

4.3. Methodology for Analysis

In the first chapter of this thesis, I have discussed five criteria in order to define the genre of young adult fiction. *Refugee Boy* is officially considered a YA novel. I would like to analyse this book with regard to the five criteria: *length, language, characters & narration, content & relevant themes*, as well as *age of target readership*. Afterwards, I will try to justify why I would use this novel in an EFL class by applying the eight selection guidelines suggested by Tway (see chapter 3.1.2.).

4.4. Analysis

4.4.1. Length

In spite of the fact that I have argued that length cannot really be considered a determining factor in defining YA fiction, it does play a role in teaching. The Bloomsbury edition of *Refugee Boy*, which I have used, has 297 pages. Altogether there are 27 chapters. Each chapter has a title and they strongly vary in length. Chapter 26 only consists of one paragraph whereas the ninth chapter is 19 pages long. Usually, most of the chapters are between 10 and 13 pages long. Almost 300 pages appears to be quite much for a YA novel, but due to the big font size and the clear division into chapters, the book is an easy and fast read. I would advise to divide the book into reading assignments, which are about 20 to 40 pages long. This might be more encouraging for the learners as it seems less overwhelming than 300 pages. In the chart below, I am proposing a reading plan (see figure 5). All together there would be ten assignments which could be either done in class or as homework. Of course, over weekends the teacher could also tell the pupils to read a bit more. With this reading plan the whole novel could be finished within two to three weeks, so that it would not be too time-consuming.

| Chapter | Title | Number of Pages | Reading Plan |
|---------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| INTRO | Ethiopia | 2 | In Class |
| INTRO | Eritrea | 2 | |
| 1 | Welcome to the Weather | 17 | 31 Pages |
| 2 | Alone in the Country | 10 | |
| 3 | This is War | 4 | |
| 4 | Asylum Seeking | 9 | 32 Pages |
| 5 | Welcome Home | 13 | |
| 6 | Meet the Lads | 10 | |
| 7 | The Road to Nowhere | 11 | 24 Pages |
| 8 | The Family's Fine | 13 | |
| 9 | First Class | 19 | 39 Pages |
| 10 | What the Papers Say | 13 | |
| 11 | A Way with Words | 7 | |
| 12 | Court in Action | 15 | 27 Pages |
| 13 | Loved and Lost | 12 | |
| 14 | Life After Death | 15 | 27 Pages |
| 15 | The Africans | 12 | |
| 16 | Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? | 11 | 34 Pages |
| 17 | Campsfield | 8 | |
| 18 | Real Men Cry | 15 | |
| 19 | Court Again | 9 | 21 Pages |
| 20 | This is Politics | 12 | |
| 21 | The Freedom Dance | 13 | 25 Pages |
| 22 | The Word on the Streets | 12 | |
| 23 | This is War Too | 15 | 21 Pages |
| 24 | The News | 2 | |
| 25 | Judgement Day | 1 | |
| 26 | The End? | 1 | |
| 27 | Let Me Speak | 2 | |

Figure 5: Reading Plan for *Refugee Boy*

4.4.2. Language

4.4.2.1. Language Acquisition

Despite the fact that the overall writing style of the book is kept quite simple and straightforward, some words appear quite elevated. Examples for this are: adjourn (Zephaniah

151), commemorate (Zephaniah 139), reverberate (Zephaniah 103), or mesmerised (Zephaniah 100). Alem's use of language does not exactly reflect the world and speech of adolescents. As will be discussed later on, Alem is portrayed in a very mature way. He definitely does not use the language that 14-year-old boys would usually use. Alem avoids swear words and sometimes his choice of words appears to be slightly too mature, too elevated and hence, not entirely realistic. Of course, it also needs to be taken into consideration that Alem is not a native speaker of English. He has acquired English at school in Africa and it is quite unlikely that he his teachers taught him English swear words.

Alem's command of English is surprisingly good but there are still a lot of words that he has never heard before. This is why the author mentions several methods that Alem uses to learn the foreign language. Alem's father tries to help his son improve his English by correcting him. To Alem and his father, language means integration as it is the key to better educational opportunities. Already at the airport, when Alem tries to speak in his native language, Mr. Kelo immediately says to him: "What did I tell you? From now on you must try to speak English, you must practise your English" (Zephaniah 13). This shows that right from the start of the book, Alem's father constantly encourages his son to talk in English and hence, to integrate himself. He knows how important it is for Alem to know the local language in order to be able to live in this new country. When they are talking about a man with red hair, Alem refers to him as looking burned. His father corrects Alem by telling him that the correct word would be 'burnt'. His father always urges him to ameliorate his English. After their first day in London, Alem tells his father that he particularly enjoyed the food. He claims: "I like also the food" (Zephaniah 28). His father corrects his word order. Alem is always depicted as someone who is eager to learn. "He would try to understand everything" (Zephaniah 122). Therefore, he keeps a notebook to note down and remember new phrases and words. Perhaps, in including such strategies, the author also had a didactic goal in mind. Zephaniah presumably wanted to show his readers ways to acquire a foreign language. Particularly in the ESL classroom this could be of value to the pupils.

In addition, another interesting strategy which helps Alem to cope with this unfamiliar language is mentioned. In the taxi from the airport to their hotel, Alem is reading notices on the window to practice his English. In order to facilitate the difficult words, he separates them into syllables: "No **smok-ing. Li-censed Hack-ney Car-riage. Red light in-di-cated** doors are locked. This seat belt is for your **per-son-al safe-ty.**" (Zephaniah 18-19; emphasis added). This might also be of use for didactic purposes when it comes to teaching refugees in the EFL classroom.

Breaking down polysyllabic words into smaller pieces does in fact facilitate learning and remembering those words. Hwang and Tipton Hindman (51) support this assumption by explaining that refugee pupils need exposure to activities which make them reflect about the foreign language they are trying to acquire. As will be discussed later on, Alem is portrayed as a very self-reflective character. It is thus little surprising that he does a lot of reflection on language as well. For instance, after he had gotten into a fight with a boy at the children's home, some boys ask him if he is all right. Alem wonders about the meaning of this phrase. To him, it is clear that it does not mean "are you alright", it is just a common phrase and a "gross misuse of the language" (Zephaniah 74).

In addition, Alem learns by means of imitation. At school, Alem is trying to adapt to conventions such as the addressing of teachers. By carefully paying attention to the other students, Alem figures out that when giving the teacher an answer it is expected to add 'sir' (Zephaniah 105). He adapts by imitating the other students.

Throughout the novel, there are moments when Alem has difficulties understanding people with an unfamiliar accent. For instance, at the end of the taxi ride, the driver utters: "Here you are, guvs [...] the Palace Hotel, wot a lavely little 'ous'." (Zephaniah 20). Alem and his father seem to have troubles understanding the man due to his accent. What seems to be remarkable about this quotation is the fact that it is transcribed as it was perceived by the Kelos. This puts the reader into an interesting position as it makes them understand Alem's situation better. The reader gets to experience Alem's world not only through his eyes but also through his ears, which renders it easier to identify with the main character. Moreover, Alem has difficulties understanding the Scottish receptionist due to his strong accent (Zephaniah 21). The word 'lad', which is Scottish for 'boy' or a 'male friend', seems particularly strange to Alem. He does not understand why so many people are addressing him as a 'lad'.

Indeed, a recurrent stylistic device in this novel is the fact that some English utterances are transcribed the way they are actually spoken or pronounced. Another good illustration of this technique is the first conversation between Mustafa and Alem in the children's care home. Mustafa addresses Alem by saying "Just watch *yu* back and don't *mek* him *tek* any liberties *wid yu*" (Zephaniah 63; emphasis added). Even later on in the book, there are some instances of this stylistic device, for example, when Alem is talking to two women after his bike was stolen. One woman with a very noticeable accent asks Alem: "How can you be on the streets and someone just come and *tek* your bike?" Afterwards she tells him to "*mek* sure that your mother calls *de* police" (Zephaniah 195, emphasis added). This shows that Alem still has slight difficulties in

comprehending colloquial English. Provided that the readers are also second language learners, it could be assumed that they would most probably find it difficult to understand non-standard English, too. Again, it should be noted that this stylistic device is also a strategy to create sympathy with the readers.

Despite the fact that Alem's command of English is quite decent and that it is improving every day, he sometimes gets mocked by others for his lack of language proficiency. At school, Alem has to give a presentation, when suddenly all the other pupils burst into laughter because his classmate Christopher has told Alem to use some made-up words like "*mass debate*" or swear words such as "I'm sorry, I'm just a *wanker*" (Zephaniah 135; emphasis added). Alem does not seem particularly humiliated or sad but he just does not understand why the others are laughing at him. In the EFL classroom, it might be wise to also discuss scenes including jokes and swear words like this in greater detail. Second language learners who read the book cannot automatically be expected to be familiar with these words.

With regard to vocabulary teaching, this novel is also highly recommendable when teachers want to work on vocabulary with regard to refugees. The novel provides the readers with a detailed description of the process that asylum seekers have to undergo. There are plenty of words that might be new to the learners and could be discussed. Examples for this word family are: *adjudicators, barrister, Home Office, fill in or file an asylum application form, detention center, verdict, to appeal to a court, screening, court hearing, immigration solicitor, in-country application vs. port application, etc.* Of course, as can be noted, these terms are from quite a specialised register and appear to be rather difficult at first sight. However, especially when dealing with such delicate topics as immigration and refugees, which also involve a lot of legal terminology, it is important to provide the learners with some basic, technical terms.

4.4.2.2. Language and Identity

Identity and particularly, the loss of one's identity are very important themes in this novel. Therefore, I will discuss them in a more detailed way later on. In this section, I want to briefly elaborate on the role that language plays with regard to identity. As Stover and Tway (136) correctly point out - "language determines a sense of self". The language we speak often shows who we are or who we want to be. Not without reason, Meek (xii) claims that "[l]anguage is at the heart of any discussion of national identity". Alem has a number of identities. He is half Eritrean, half Ethiopian and he is trying to develop a British identity. The protagonist is aware of his various mixed identities. Nonetheless, he never forgets about his origin and his native

culture. This assumption becomes evident considering that he still holds on to his mother tongue, Amharic, occasionally.

At the beginning, Alem frequently tries to hold on to his native language. Before Alem and his father go to sleep on their first night in England, they wish each other good night and they still use some Amharic words: Father: “Good night – Dehinaider.”; Alem responds: “Good night, Father – Dehinaider, abba” (Zephaniah 29). This appears to be the last instance of father and son using their mother tongue in a conversation. Interestingly, even Mr. Kelo’s letters to his son are in English. Even though the Amharic words in this situation are not explicitly translated, the reader can still make meaning of them. Yet, this stylistic device puts the reader in the same position as Alem and his father – some words are not translated and thus, remain foreign and unknown to us, just as some English words sound foreign and incomprehensible to refugees.

With the social worker Mariam, who is also Ethiopian, Alem also tries to speak in his native language. When Mariam tells him that he has to go to a children’s home, he replies ““Kanchi gar menor ichilallehu wey?”” (Zephaniah 51). The reader is not provided with a full translation of this sentence but since Mariam responds in English, it becomes evident that Alem asked her if he could stay with her. Once more the reader is put in a similar position as Alem, since some words remain unknown to them. The author clearly wants the readers to experience how challenging it is for a refugee to come to a new country in which he does not speak or understand the official language very well. In general, this appears to be a frequent method in refugee literature to evoke sympathy.

When Alem is finally reunited with his father after quite a while, he immediately hugs him and starts speaking his mother tongue. At the sight of his father, Alem is overwhelmed by a feeling of happiness and relief so that he automatically switches back into his native language. However, his father instantly tells him to speak English (Zephaniah 198). As previously mentioned Alem’s father wants his son to be fully integrated into this new culture and therefore encourages him to only speak English.

4.4.3. Characters and Narration

4.4.3.1. Narration

From a grammatical point of view, *Refugee Boy* is mainly written in the third person. The characters are either referred to by their names or by the use of personal pronouns such as ‘he, she, or they’. The novel is primarily narrated in a third person limited mode. Due to the fact that

the story is, first and foremost, focalized through Alem's eyes, it is a lot easier for the reader to relate to and sympathise with the main character. This type of focalization allows the readers to put themselves into Alem's position; they are provided with an insight of Alem's feelings and thoughts as well as his external perceptions. As will be pointed out in more detail in a later section, Alem is a very close observer. He pays thorough attention to people's outward appearance and their looks. For instance, "Ruth had long black hair that she let hang halfway down her back and a slim face with brown eyes" (Zephaniah 87). External descriptions like the latter help the readers to envision and imagine the characters more clearly.

However, there are also some rare situations in which we have an omniscient narrator. For example:

He put his arms around her, placing his head on her shoulder, and cried. This time he cried softly, squeezing her tightly. He had been hugged, but he had not hugged anyone since leaving Africa. Ruth could feel that he desperately needed to hold someone. (Zephaniah 165)

In this case, the narrator is omniscient because Alem cannot know what his foster sister feels. The reader is provided with more information than the protagonist.

In general, it can be stated that there are not many scenes in which Alem's inner feelings are revealed. However, the readership can relatively easily relate to the protagonist's thoughts. A good example for this is when Alem is on the train to court and he observes the people around him:

Alem wondered why the people on the train were trying so hard not to be noticed. Some would just stare at the advertisement boards as if they were trying to see through them [...]. These were the employed people, he thought, those that had left school and obtained jobs. They were not starving, they were not at war but they looked miserable. I wonder, Alem thought to himself, are they all going to court? (Zephaniah 144-145)

Not only do we learn about Alem's personal thoughts, the readers, once again, perceive the world through the protagonist's eyes. By including passages like this, the author, most probably, wants to prevail upon his readership to critically reflect on their own behaviour and their own reality. An instance of free indirect discourse can be detected when Ruth is trying to comfort Alem after the loss of his mother: "He couldn't work it out. Why was she [Ruth] being so nice to him now? Was she for real, and could he trust her?" (Zephaniah 163-164). The use of rhetorical questions in this situation reveals Alem's inner thoughts.

Most of the events in the novel are told from an external point of view. Yet, the descriptions are often so lively and detailed that it is fairly simple for the readership to deduce the character's feelings and thoughts in the respective scene. An illustrative example for a scene told from an external perspective would be: "Suddenly, Alem burst into tears and began to cry loudly. He stamped his feet up and down and began hitting the sides of his clenched fists against his thighs, causing glasses of water to topple on the table" (Zephaniah 161). In spite of the fact that it is not explicitly mentioned what the protagonist actually feels or thinks, the reader is able to infer that Alem must be sad and angry.

As I have briefly brought up in the previous section, Alem's choice of language appears to be quite sophisticated and hence, too unrealistic in some situations (for examples, see section 4.3.3.3). The language used to narrate the world through Alem's eyes does not really reflect the mind-style one would expect a 14-year-old boy to have. The question that could be asked in this regard is why does the third person limited narrator use such elevated words to express the focalizer's, i.e. Alem's thoughts and feelings? Is it to point out the character's maturity and his intelligence? Or is, in fact, the author speaking through his protagonist? In the following section the notion of maturity will be discussed in more detail.

Another remarkable aspect to note with regard to narration is the fact that in the course of the story the reader also gets to know about other characters' inner life. For instance, when Ruth is telling Alem about all of the foster children who lived at their house before, she reveals her feelings to Alem:

They come and go and I have to be nice to all of them. I have nothing against *you*, Alem; I'm just a little bit too suspicious, I suppose. And my parents, they've forgotten about me. [...] I've left school and stand on me own two feet while they help the poor and needy. Well, I'm needy too. (Zephaniah 164)

Hence, passages narrated in the first person can also be detected in this novel. The letters which Alem receives from his father are another example of first person narration. The author only included a small number of letters in order to convey what was happening to Alem's parents in Africa. Therefore, *Refugee Boy* cannot be considered an epistolary novel. Mr. Kelo's letters provoke a change of perspective. When reading the letters, the readers experience the world from Mr. Kelo's point of view. In one letter, Mr. Kelo informs his son about his mother's death.

He writes:

I am afraid that I have to tell you some very bad news. [...] Well, my son, please prepare yourself for what I have to say. This is very bad news, because darkness is now upon our family. After searching for many weeks I have just learned that your mother is no longer with us. (Zephaniah 157)

In addition, the speeches which Alem gives are also instances of first person narration. In the last chapter, *Let Me Speak*, Alem introduces himself once more and he tells his story. He explains: “My name is Alem Kelo. I live with the Fitzgeralds, my foster family [...] I am not a beggar, I am not bogus. My name is Alem Kelo” (Zephaniah 293). Furthermore, what is, particularly outstanding about this last speech is the fact that Alem directly addresses the reader. He urges them to look at him by using imperatives, “Look at me, look at all the things that I am capable of” (Zephaniah 292), and he poses rhetorical questions, for instance, “[B]ut what am I called? A refugee” (Zephaniah 292). This is, without doubt, a clever strategy to connect to the readers. By directly addressing them, the readers might get the feeling that they are actually part of the story. One of the author’s goals was to get the readers active in the refugee debate. Involving readers in the story might thus be sagacious as they will be more likely to reflect on and perhaps, reconsider their own attitude and behaviour towards refugees.

4.4.3.2. Character Mapping

In regard to characters, it has to be noted that the protagonist is a 14-year-old adolescent. There are numerous teenage characters in the story. At the children’s care home, Alem is introduced to other children and teenagers for the first time in England. His host sister Ruth is another important teenage character. At school, Alem makes friends with Asher, Buck and Robert - all of them are his age or a little older.

Nevertheless, there are also various adult characters who play an important role in the story. Alem’s parents, as well as his foster parents, are crucial characters in the novel. The social worker Mariam also plays an important part in the story. She is among the first people to support and help Alem in England. Moreover, she is a reminder of Alem’s roots as she is also Ethiopian.

The professions of the grown-ups in the books are mostly: teachers, caregivers, politicians, people who work at court or social workers. This shows that the adults in the book have one clear function: they care for and support children. The following section will contain a thorough in-depth analysis of the protagonist.

4.4.3.3. The Protagonist

14-year-old Alem Kelo is, without doubt, a versatile character. His intelligence and his ambition contribute to a very mature overall impression of the teenager. Alem's big heart and his capacity to observe and reflect upon his environment render him empathetic and sympathetic at the same time. The numerous hardships that he has to face never cause him to lose hope or strength, which is why readers, especially those with a similar destiny, are very likely to develop some sort of emotional attachment to the main character. In the following section, I will try to support these assumptions by providing direct quotes from the novel.

As mentioned before, the protagonist is always eager to learn new things. Alem is described as being very ambitious. He even wants to become an architect (Zephaniah 24). Most certainly, Zephaniah created such a determined and enthusiastic character on purpose. The author is very much against stereotypes and he knows that very often, the public assumes that refugees come to their country with the sole purpose of stealing their jobs or receiving financial aid without working at all. In this case, Alem clearly wants to study and to receive a good education in order to be able to work in his dream profession one day. By choosing a dream profession with such high social esteem, Zephaniah probably wanted the readers to re-think or change their negative opinion on refugees and their attitude to work.

Furthermore, Alem is also described as a humble person. He appreciates small things and is very grateful for what he gets, for instance, when he is given a book or when his foster sister surprises him with a CD with African music on it. Unlike many other teenagers his age, Alem is even grateful for being able to go to school.

He [Alem] couldn't understand why kids who had the opportunity of going to school would want to go into a classroom and make a lot of noise and not learn. Least of all could he understand why some kids would play truant when they had the privilege of going to school. School was preparation for the future, as far as Alem was concerned, and he had no intention of going into the future unprepared. (Zephaniah 126)

In one conversation with his friend Robert, Alem explains: "It [school] is very good, it is full with possibilities. I think the facilities are good, the building is structurally sound, and I think that the students here have great opportunity to advance, physically". Robert then answers: "'Hold on, guy! It may be good but it's not that good,' Robert said, even more playful. "We got some OK teachers and some OK girls and then there's me, but that don't make it like some kinda post university or something" (Zephaniah 123). If we examine Robert's reply it becomes evident that Alem is presented in a much more mature way. The way he speaks and *what* he

says almost sounds unnatural for a 14-year-old teenager. Alem's choice of words is, without doubt, much more sophisticated. However, the fact that Alem considers attending a school a privilege is quite a recurring motif in refugee literature. In Applegate's *Home of the Brave*, the protagonist is also very eager to receive education at school (see section 5.4.3.3.). This seems relatively understandable as many refugee children frequently did not have the opportunity to go to school in their home countries due to war or other factors.

Furthermore, Alem is a close observer, which also adds to the overall mature impression he makes. He carefully observes and then he reflects upon the things he sees, especially those he considers strange or unusual. A point in support of this claim is when Alem watches a news program featuring a factory visit by the Queen. On the show it is mentioned that meeting the Queen would make these men "the happiest people in the land" (Zephaniah 30). Alem cannot help but question this assumption and ponders on the issue of happiness. He then wonders if the Queen also visited poor people without a home. He is definitely displayed as a caring person who has a big heart. This is another way of creating sympathy with the reader. Nevertheless, I would like to remark that this passage seemed quite unrealistic and artificial. Alem, who just found out that his father left him alone in this country, is watching TV and reflecting upon social justice and happiness instead of crying or looking for help. It appears a bit unnatural to me and since this was a scene from the beginning of the book I have to admit that I found it quite hard to relate to the protagonist at first. When I read on I soon came to realise that Alem generally uses distraction as a means of coping with difficult and emotionally challenging situations. Berman (247) links this strength to maturity by explaining that "children's efforts to cope with traumatic stress are a function of maturity". Even though it appeared unnatural at first, the better the reader gets to know Alem, the more relatable his behaviour becomes.

Without any doubt, the teenager is depicted as a person who possesses incredible emotional strength. Even after he has learnt in a letter by his father that his mother has gone missing in Africa, he still stays seated at the dining table with his host family and tries to remain well-mannered (Zephaniah 119). This is undeniable proof of Alem's incredible strength. Usually, one would expect a 14-year-old boy who has just received such terrible news to be devastated, to cry or to panic. Instead, Alem tries to come up with a reasonable explanation for his mother's disappearance and assumes someone has taken his mother as a slave or as a prisoner. While his foster mother appears to be impressed by Alem's self-control, his foster sister Ruth is rather worried about it. She explains to her mother that Alem carries 'unopened baggage'. To her, he

is “like a time bomb waiting to go off” because “he’s bottling it all up, and one day he may explode emotionally” (Zephaniah 121).

Alem generally has a tendency of examining people in a thorough way. This can reach from surface descriptions of somebody’s looks to a deeper analysis of someone’s character. For example, right from the start Alem was able to detect “a deep unhappiness” in his host sister Ruth (Zephaniah 91). Alem pays close attention to his environment and particularly to the people surrounding him. On the train to court Alem observes the people around him:

Alem wondered why the people on the train were trying so hard not to be noticed. Some would just stare at the advertisement boards as if they were trying to see through them, some read newspapers or books as if they were being forced, some tried to go back to sleep, and others listened to music on their Walkman. But no one was making eye contact with him and no one smiled. These were the employed people, he thought, those that had left school and obtained jobs. They were not starving, they were not at war but they looked miserable. I wonder, Alem thought to himself, are they all going to court? (Zephaniah 144-145)

When Alem walks through London’s streets he once again has the impression that he is invisible. Back in Africa, people used to greet each other and if they did not, it was considered rude. He quickly understands that this is not out of maliciousness but it is just “the way that people [live] in London; everybody [is] minding their own business” (Zephaniah 91).

The author definitely wanted to present Alem in a more mature way than most of the other characters his age. This becomes evident when he talks to the social worker Mariam. He tells her that he was threatened and attacked by some boys at the care home. He claims that he has already encountered violence back at the schools in Africa and that he refuses to make the same experiences in England. He explains “these people [these English boys] love to fight, yes, but these people are not fighting for land, they are not fighting for justice or their beliefs, these stupid boys are fighting for chips” (Zephaniah 83). Once again, this can be read as a major moral message from the author to the readers. As I have already argued in the first chapter, protagonists are often the transmitters of moral messages (see section 1.3. and 1.4.). Zephaniah clearly uses Alem to convey his personal viewpoints.

Alem appears to be naturally attracted by other mature people. Ray Buckley, nicknamed ‘Buck’, is a school mate who seems particularly interesting to him. Just like Alem, Buck worries “about the state of the world” (Zephaniah 125). His wisdom is highly attractive to Alem. In another conversation with Buck, Alem tells him that he loves school. When Buck asks for a reason, Alem replies that the reason is education. Buck, who is also depicted as a very mature boy, then tells Alem that “[y]ou can have an education and not be educated, and there is more to education

than school” (Zephaniah 136). By creating these mature teenage characters, Zephaniah cleverly managed to prevail upon his readers to reflect upon these various moral messages.

Zephaniah clearly had the intention of portraying Alem as the hero, a symbol of hope, a strong character with strong moral values and principles. Alem’s peaceful nature is undeniable. For example, Alem strongly objects to bullying and violence as he has already made bad experiences back in Africa. When he gets bullied by a boy called Sweeney at the children’s care home he does not let himself become intimidated but still sticks with his principles and does not let him have his food despite the threats (Zephaniah 72). According to a study reviewed in Berman’s article (249), “[i]ndividuals who held strong political and ideological beliefs were more able to endure the horrors that surrounded them.” In spite of the fact that this study referred to World War II prisoners in concentration camps, this quote could also be applied to Alem and his father. After all the terrible things that happened to them, they are still not giving up, they still hold on to hope.

Lastly, I would like to bring up the speech that Alem gives during the protest march that he and his friends organise. The following speech will be a proof for almost all of the attributes that I have assigned to Alem.

My name is Alem Kelo and I really can’t understand why I am here. You see, in my homeland they are fighting over a border that is mainly dust and rocks. I really cannot understand why these people are fighting over this border. If there is to be any fighting, we should be having a nonviolent fight to get rid of borders.’ [...] ‘I haven’t come to England to become a problem. I didn’t leave the land that I love so much to be so cold.’ [...] ‘But what can I do? At the moment they are fighting and not talking. If they ever start talking, they may arrange a time to negotiate. If they do ever negotiate, they may draw up a peace treaty, they will have to agree on it, and if they ever agree on it they may sign it. But it is only a peace treaty, a peace deal, a piece of paper. What we really want is culture of peace! We must raise a new generation of peacemakers.’ [...] ‘I don’t know what else to say because I had not planned to make a speech. But I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your support. Since I have been in this country I have made some very good friends, and now I look at all of you and I feel like you are all my friends.’ [...] ‘Yes, my name is Alem. In my language Alem means “world”. I would love to see the day when there are no more refugees in the world and the world can live in peace. (Zephaniah 268-270)

This quote shows that Alem expresses himself in a very mature and sophisticated way, almost as professionally as a politician. Some might argue that this speech provokes an unrealistic and artificial hero-like image of Alem. However, as I pointed out before, the author wanted to portray Alem as a strong symbol of hope. Alem dreams of peace and a united world.

4.4.4. Content, Themes and Motifs

4.4.4.1. Culture Clash & Unfamiliar Things

According to Stover and Tway (141), “novels from other countries [pointing] out the similarities of developmental tasks and issues which exist in many cultures, [...] can be used as a springboard for discussing the role of one’s cultural heritage in making decisions and for pointing out differences that exist among cultures”. Right from the beginning of the novel, numerous differences between the British and Alem’s native culture are pointed out.

At the passport control, Alem notices that a man has red hair and seems confused. Never before has he encountered this hair colour and asks his father if something is wrong with that person. Alem says: “I think something was wrong with his hair, he looked all burned. Did you see his hair? It was red, red like the sunset, he looked hot, he looked burned” (Zephaniah 14). This shows that Alem tries to describe something which seems unusual or new to him by means of something he is already familiar with. Afterwards, Alem’s father explains that this hair colour is called ginger and that there will be a lot of English people with red hair. This appears to be the first thing that Alem learns about British culture.

There are numerous sources of wonder to Alem in this foreign country. In the first chapter, the reader learns that Alem does not even know chimneys (Zephaniah 19). This appears to be logical due to the fact that African houses usually do not have chimneys because of the hot climate. Snow is among the many unfamiliar things that Alem encounters. He wonders why “everything is so white” (Zephaniah 155). His host mother explains to him that this is called snow and that these days snow is a rare occasion in London. In this context she also brings up the issue of global warming. Once more, the author uses one of his characters to evoke a topic which is of personal concern to him.

Due to the fact that Alem has never lived in a big city so far, he is overwhelmed by London. “London was like another world” (Zephaniah 97). He compares the capital to cities he has been to so far.

Cities back home were busy with cars racing everywhere, but here it was so busy that the cars were standing still in traffic jams most of the time. The fumes emitted by the cars made Alem cough, he wondered why everyone else wasn’t coughing until he got used to it and stopped. (Zephaniah 24)

Once more, Alem compares new images to things he is already familiar with. Alem seems to be particularly taken by London’s versatile architecture. One day, Alem wishes to be an

architect himself and then “he would try to bring the old and the new together, he would try to put old features into modern buildings” (Zephaniah 24). This desire could also be read as a metaphor. It stands for Alem’s deep desire to reunite his old identity with his new British identity. I will elucidate further on this aspect at a later point.

Even with regard to noises, Alem detects differences between Africa and England. This becomes evident when Alem addresses his father and says: “Can you hear the nothing, Father? There are no animal noises – no birds, no donkeys no hyenas, nothing.” (Zephaniah 28). He observes that instead of wild animals, Britain has “wild drivers in loud cars” (Zephaniah 28). By making this comparison, Alem probably wants to hint at the fact that people in today’s fast living Western world are often behaving like wild animals. Perhaps, this could be read as another metaphorical allusion made by the author. In general, animals appear to be a recurrent motif in the novel. When Alem tries to escape the children’s home he flees and arrives at some fields. He finds some shelter in a tractor cabin, which he hopes will protect him in case any hyenas or snakes were trying to get him (Zephaniah 80). Therefore, wild animals are not only a symbol for Alem’s home, but they also represent danger and harm.

Nevertheless, interestingly, “Alem missed seeing animals that weren’t just pets” (Zephaniah 137). There are many other things that Alem misses.

[H]e missed the sounds of home, he missed the smell of its earth, the smell of its people and even the smell of cities. He missed playing outdoors; people seemed to be constantly moving from one concrete building to another. He was quick to notice that if he ran into a friend outside, they would inevitably ask where he was going. No one, it seemed, was ever just outside; the closest he could find to that was ‘going for a walk’. Back home Alem had been used to making things, here it seemed that when kids wanted things they bought them, when they broke they replaced them. He missed playing creatively. (Zephaniah 137)

The protagonist definitely has to face an inner conflict. He is torn between two countries, between two cultures and between two identities. English names as well as English music sound strange and unfamiliar to Alem. When Buck’s Indie band plays at a benefit gig, Alem and his father feel that their music and style of singing sounds as if they were mourning (Zephaniah 259). Music is “a form of celebration” to Alem’s father. English Indie music just sounds sad to him. Alem has to note down certain names because they are so difficult for him to remember (Zephaniah 122). Alem soon learns that he is not the only one who is trying hard to adapt to the British way of life and its culture. His friend Robert, whose parents come from Chile, tells Alem that they even had to change their surname from Fernandez to Fern in order to fit better into the new culture (Zephaniah 178). His parents even changed their first names. Both Robert and Alem

have problems understanding why it is necessary to give up such a large part of one's personality.

The culture clash between the African and British tradition is also particularly apparent when it comes to celebrating Christmas. Alem did not expect the vast "amount of advertising that was targeted at him, and he was quietly amused at the way [English] people celebrated Christmas without celebrating the birth of Christ" (Zephaniah 137). Christmas has a special meaning to Alem and he is still holding on to his memories of Christmas back home in Africa. In court, there is a very touching moment when Alem wants to speak up just to wish everyone a happy Christmas. Everyone has to smile because actually, Christmas has already been over but then Alem explains that on that day it is Christmas in Ethiopia and Eritrea. He further points out that people were very nice to him on Christmas Day in the UK, and "if Christmas makes us nicer to each other, we should celebrate as many Christmases as we can" (Zephaniah 152).

4.4.4.2. Reaction of Host Society & Prejudices

In the course of the novel, Alem gets to know many people and their reactions to him are quite mixed. In order to get a realistic view of the situation that refugees have to face when they come to a new country, Zephaniah has included a broad spectrum of various reactions of the host society to Alem and his father.

Not all people respond well to Alem. Sometimes he is treated like a criminal due to his outward appearance. When he tries to flee the care home, he comes across a man who shouts: "You're lucky you ain't been shot, lad. Watch out, the police will be after you" (Zephaniah 81). The shocked boy instantly realises that "he looked out of place" (Zephaniah 81). He looks like a stranger, which ultimately makes him a target.

Before being able to go to his foster parents, Alem has to undergo a screening at the Home Office. Mariam explains to him that it is an ordinary process, required by the government for asylum seekers, which is not very nice (Zephaniah 85). After the screening, Alem feels humiliated. This investigation causes Alem to feel like a criminal once more. Alem even asks if he is considered a criminal now (Zephaniah 85). Mariam tells him that the current system and the way they treat refugees is just unfair and that he is an innocent boy. Due to the fact that Mariam also had to go through the same process when she first came from Africa to England, she gets really personal about the topic. Even many years later, and even now that she is an adult she has difficulties talking about the process. The author hereby clearly wants to show that even for grown-ups this procedure is highly challenging and humiliating and it leaves long-term traces.

Mariam wants Alem to get a realistic account of the current attitude towards refugees in the UK. This is why she hands him a collection of newspaper articles which are dealing with this pressing issue.

Alem glanced at the cuttings. The headlines jumped out at him one after the other: ‘Government to clamp down on asylum seekers’, ‘Gypsies, tramps and thieves’, ‘Refugee beggars flood London streets’, ‘Government plan to build new detention centre for “bogus” refugees’, ‘Opposition party propose prison ship for asylum seekers’, ‘57 asylum seekers found dead in container at Dover’. (Zephaniah 129)

At first, Alem wonders what these headlines mean. His foster mother, Mrs. Fitzgerald, tries to explain it to him in a way that does not sound too pessimistic or too frightening. She tells him that her family is Irish by origin and when they came to the UK, starving, the country helped them. She is of the opinion that, unfortunately, influential people and institutions, such as politicians and newspapers, “will pick on people to show how powerful they are and make [everyone] forget about the real problems” (Zephaniah 129). Newspapers often lead people to think that “all the ills in the country were caused by [refugees]” (Zephaniah 130) or other social outsiders like gay people. They just need to sell the people a scapegoat. Alem then insists on keeping the folder with these newspaper articles because he wants to get a realistic idea of the media’s and hence the people’s opinion on refugees. He says: “I want to know what these people think of **me**” (Zephaniah 131; emphasis added). This indicates that Alem identifies with other refugees and that he has accepted that he is part of this group.

When the Home Office refuses Alem’s application he has to go to a hearing in a small courtroom. Alem is quite worried and frightened and feels like criminal again. He is appeased when he learns that he does not have to go through the procedure on his own. He receives support from Mariam, Sheila and a barrister who is responsible for most of the talking in court. In general, it can be assumed that people who have made similar experiences or who are often engaged with refugees, have a more positive attitude towards them and they are more likely to help them. However, this argument could be refuted when thinking back to the other boys’ reaction to Alem at the children’s home. Some of them have made the same or similar experiences as Alem and yet, they are extremely hostile to him. Their aggressive behaviour could be a result of their traumatic past experiences. Some of them might see a threat in Alem as he could take away what is now theirs. Others, in particular those who also come from Ethiopia or Eritrea, might consider Alem an enemy due to his mixed heritage. The reasons for their negative attitude could be manifold. What is much more striking here is the fact that the caregivers at the children’s home remain quite passive. I believe that Zephaniah wanted to voice

some criticism about the system and particular institutions here. He is definitely not in favour of children's homes or detention centres, which becomes noticeable by the overall tone he uses to describe these places. He makes them feel dark and cold for the reader. In contrast to this stands the little English house of the foster family. When Alem is introduced to the Fitzgeralds, he immediately feels warm and comfortable. His foster parents do their best to make him feel at home, they support him and they render it possible for him to go to school. Just like in many other YA novels, family and home are themes which are used to create a positive and comforting atmosphere, they are an anchor for the teenagers who are undergoing a difficult time. However, his foster sister Ruth, who is only a little older than him, comes across as a bit cold in the beginning. Alem even assumes that she does not like him but when he learns about his mother's death, Ruth wants to comfort him and eventually starts to open up. When Alem asks her why she suddenly is so nice to him she tells him that her parents already had nine other foster children and tend to neglect their own daughter. One of them stole things from her, violated her privacy by going into her room without asking, one attacked her while she was asleep, one thought she was a witch, and with another one she fell in love. A major problem for her is that they always leave sooner or later.

They just come and go and I have to be nice to all of them. I have nothing against *you*, Alem; I'm just a bit too suspicious, I suppose. And my parents, they've forgotten about me. I've got to be Little Miss Perfect now that I've left school and stand on me own two feet while they help the poor and needy. Well, I'm needy too. That's all, Alem. I ain't got nothing against you. It's my parents. They're good people, but they're just not good to me. (Zephaniah 164)

Zephaniah apparently does not only want to depict the challenges that refugees have to face when they come into a new and foreign family. He also wants the reader to get a realistic idea of what it means to be among the ones who help the refugees.

As mentioned before, the author strongly objects to racism and stereotypes. In his novel, he tries to teach the readers a number of lessons. A very important one is that race, ethnicity or skin colour are not decisive whether a person is good or bad. This becomes evident when Alem's bike is stolen by two boys. One of them has black skin and the other one clearly has some Asian background (Zephaniah 197). Two women who observe the crime approach Alem and ask him if he needs help. Alem remarks that they are also black and Asian.

Interestingly, Zephaniah does not only bring up stereotypes and prejudices of the host society towards refugees. He also plays with some of Alem's prejudices towards British culture. This is, however, to be understood more as a comic element than a moral message. For instance, the

way Alem speaks about the British weather makes the reader believe that it is always rainy and cold (Zephaniah 48). All over the world the miserable British weather is a very common stereotype. Another popular myth is that when a problem turns up, the first thing that British people would do is to drink a cup of tea.

According to Stover and Tway (138), pupils should be provided with a number of “young adult novels in which characters from diverse backgrounds interact realistically, reflecting both the prejudices of our society and the ability of individuals to overcome these, interacting in a more positive way and learning from each other”.

4.4.4.3. Identity

The quest for identity is a highly common theme in YA literature, just like Stover and Tway (141) say: “[i]t would seem that the questions “Who am I?” or “What is the meaning of my life?” are asked by young people all over the world”. During adolescence, almost all teenagers want to find out who they are sooner or later. This is even more complicated if the teenager is also a refugee. The latter is always confronted with the issue of mixed identity - the original, native identity and the identity they will have to adopt when immigrating to a new country. Refugees, especially when they are not yet adults, often have the feeling that they need to give up their original identity, their native culture and country. This leads to a feeling of loss, depression or forlornness. They are torn between two identities and two cultures and sometimes they end up feeling that they belong nowhere. In the case of Alem this is a bit different. As his father wrote in a letter to him, he is “the product of two countries, Ethiopia and Eritrea” (Zephaniah 32). Ever since he was born, Alem has had to deal with his mixed heritage. He has had to face hostility everywhere he goes. It was the reason why he had to flee Africa. At the beginning of the novel, the reader is provided with a touching description of the political situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Due to their ethnic background, the Kelo family is persecuted and raided in both countries. Helff (127) remarks the author’s outstanding use of the exactly, same wording when it comes to describing the protagonists’ miserable situation in both countries. This mirror sequence also makes the reader immediately understand the major dilemma which Alem and his parents have to face right from the beginning. It is the family’s and especially Alem’s ethnically mixed origin that makes him “an ultimate stranger in his own home country” (Helff 128). This shows that ‘othering’ is not only something that refugees encounter in the host country, but it is also something which they frequently have to face in their home country as well (Helff 128). This might also be the reason why it appears to be fairly

easy for Alem to adapt to and integrate himself into British culture. He embraces new cultures and he is proud of his multiple identities.

His own native culture still plays an important role for Alem and his family and friends are more than aware of this. In order to make Alem feel more at home and to cheer him up, Ruth tries to find some African CDs for him. Even though she could not find any Ethiopian music, Alem can hear the sounds of home when he listens to the recordings (Zephaniah 209). When he is finally reunited with his father, they have their first dinner back together at an Ethiopian place “to remind themselves of home” (Zephaniah 202). Throughout the novel, Alem draws comparisons between Africa and England, as pointed out in the previous section. He talks a lot about the current situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and it is pointed out that he misses his native country and the people there. The protagonist does not want to deny or forget about his roots, but the teenager is well aware of “his ‘new’ self-confident identity in British society” (Helff 128). This assumption is endorsed by the fact that at the very end of the book, Alem first talks about his bright future in Britain before he finally closes his speech by repeating his full name once more. This proves that he embeds his mixed African – half Ethiopian, half Eritrean - identity into his new British identity.

An interesting discussion about origin and identity also arises when Alem first meets Asher. I decided to include this here as it is once more a hidden, moral message from the author to the reader. When Asher learns that Alem comes from Africa - Ethiopia and Eritrea - he immediately calls Alem a ‘Rasta’, ‘a God son’ and ‘a true child of Africa’ as he comes from “Ethiopia, the motherland, the land where the gods love to be” (Zephaniah 189). Alem seems a bit confused and asks Asher where he comes from. Asher tells him that he “is an Ethiopian that happens to be born in England” (Zephaniah 189). His parents are from Jamaica but he is a Rasta and their homeland is Ethiopia. Alem, on the other hand, thinks that if he was not born in Ethiopia, he cannot consider himself Ethiopian. Asher goes on talking about the Rastafarian culture and their beliefs. They want all of Africa to be united. In the course of the discussion, Robert explains that all people should be considered Africans because “all human life started in Africa” (Zephaniah 192). This could be seen as another message from the author. He probably wants his readers to understand that all people are equal, no matter which nationality they are or how many identities they possess. Perhaps Meek (viii) is right in assuming that “[i]dentity is [just] a shifting, slithering concept, one of the words we use to distinguish ourselves from others”. The quest for identity in *Refugee Boy* is not centered around the question ‘Who am I?’ but rather around ‘Who do I *want* to be?’ and ‘What can I do to achieve this?’.

4.4.4.4. Trauma & Loss

Trauma and loss are themes that are crucial in this novel. There are two kinds of traumas which are nonetheless intertwined: trauma due to war and trauma due to death or loss. Trauma as a theme is first explicitly brought up when Alem spends his first night at the children's home. One of the boys he shares his room with suffers from terrible nightmares and cries in his sleep as he is traumatised due to his mother's leaving him.

No, please don't! I haven't done anything, Mummy. Please don't lock me in my room, I don't like it in my room, Mummy, don't, please don't!' Alem tried to stay still but Stanley got louder. 'Don't go, Mummy, please don't go, Mummy. When are you coming back? Don't leave me in here all on my own! I love you Mummy. Please don't – Mummy I'm going to jump out of the window, Mummy, come back it's dark, Mummy look – I'm going to die. (Zephaniah 65)

In order to understand why certain characters in the novel are traumatised, Zephaniah provides detailed descriptions about Alem's life before he came to England. Right at the beginning, it is described how his mother is violated and his father is beaten up by soldiers. In a conversation with Mariam, Alem explains that

[where they come from] when a woman disappears, anything is possible. They are burning down houses, they are bombing schools, there are pieces of people's bodies lying in the streets; this is war, and war is bad wherever it is. But the war that is happening in Eritrea and Ethiopia is so cruel. It is like a family at war, it is neighbour killing neighbour. We are killing ourselves as if we never want to see ourselves again, and when you hate yourself this much, anything is possible (Zephaniah 117-118).

I have already briefly talked about the way in which Alem deals with difficult situations. Usually he tries to stay calm and to distract himself with reading, watching TV, friends or school. However, during night time, when Alem has no distraction, he cannot help but reflect upon all the things that are happening in Africa, all the things that happened to him and "not a day passed without him thinking about his parents" (Zephaniah 97). Alem clearly loves and misses his family. Unfortunately, in the course of the story Alem loses both his parents. The reactions to their deaths are very touching but slightly differ from each other.

He first loses his mother and receives the terrible news in a letter by his father. It says:

[t]his is very bad news, because darkness is upon our family. After searching for many weeks I have just learnt that your mother is no longer with us. She was killed by some very evil people and left near the border. Please, son, I want you to be strong, now I need you to be strong more than ever, and your mother would want you to be strong. (Zephaniah 157)

After Alem has read the letter he has dinner with his foster family. He tries to stay strong as his father asked him to. When he gets downstairs, Mrs. Fitzgerald is very worried about him, she kisses and hugs him and calls him a ‘poor boy’. Ruth just asks if he is okay and he says ‘yes’. Everyone is quietly seated at the dining table. After a few minutes, Alem starts crying loudly and yells in his native language. He gets angry and starts hitting things until he runs upstairs. In his room he quickly tries to pull himself together and he slowly calms down. After the crying has stopped, Ruth goes to Alem’s room and tries to comfort him.

He put his arms around her, placing his head on her shoulder, and cried. This time he cried softly, squeezing her tightly. He had been hugged, but he had not hugged anyone since leaving Africa. Ruth could feel that he desperately needed to hold someone. (Zephaniah 165)

In that moment it feels as if Alem was “hugging the family he was missing” (Zephaniah 165). Without his foster family, Alem never would have never been able to deal with his sorrow and his trauma. It is moreover, interesting to see that the more time he spends with the Fitzgeralds, the more he opens up and shows his feelings as he gains trust. This becomes particularly evident when he learns that his father has been shot dead in London. This time he does not try to stay calm or self-controlled. He displays his emotions openly and immediately. He feels angry and sad. He cannot or does not want to believe the news at first but as he realises what has happened “there was an explosion of tears” (Zephaniah 284). It was his father who taught Alem that “real men feel, real men cry” (Zephaniah 219). Alem seems to have understood that it is okay to show feelings; it is okay to show weakness and most of all, it is okay and important to talk about it. This hypothesis becomes reinforced by the title of the last chapter “Let Me Speak”. In the second chapter I have already discussed that it is crucial and highly valuable for refugees to tell their story in order to cope with their trauma. Helff (125) supports this and explains that the ability to remember and share memories from the past is essential in the process of refugees’ reconciliation with their past as well as in the build-up of new, peaceful relationships. “Reading these refugee stories can help children not only to understand the different ways of life and how hard they can be, but also how they can overcome obstacles” (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 46).

4.4.4.5. Hope, Freedom and Peace

Hope, freedom and peace are essential themes of this novel. In the character section, I have already explained that Alem is a symbol of hope (see section 4.4.3.3). He does not only hope for freedom and peace in Africa, he also wants to fight for it. Already in the second chapter, a major message of the novel is revealed: “peace is better than war” (Zephaniah 33). When

Alem's friends are proposing to run a campaign in order to help Alem and his father to stay in the UK, Buck conveys a message of paramount importance. He says "[t]his planet is for everyone, borders are for no one. It's all about freedom" (Zephaniah 238).

Alem's parents were both members of an organisation called EAST: this organisation fights for peace and a united Africa, without violence or war. They want to bring the people together (Zephaniah 219). In the course of the story, Alem as well as the reader learns that it was Mrs. Kelo who had the idea of founding this organisation. After his mother's death Alem wants to pursue her dream. Alem says to his father: "I must represent Mother's ideas, I should promote her dream" (Zephaniah 219). Mr. Kelo even brings up the idea of the "United States of Africa" (Zephaniah 226). At the end of the book, the reader learns that a peace treaty between Ethiopia and Eritrea was signed on December 20th, 2000. Nevertheless, I would like to refer back to Alem's speech at the protest march in which he says that a peace treaty is nothing but a piece of paper signed by some politicians. "What we really want is a culture of peace! We must raise a new generation of peacemakers" (Zephaniah 269). Alem's father encourages his son because he strongly believes that "[p]eace is possible and peace will happen" (Zephaniah 225). This already demonstrates that Alem and his father always keep on hoping for the best, in spite of all the hardships they had to face. Even if it is particularly hard for Alem to stay optimistic after the loss of his parents, he does not give up hope as he knows that without hope, peace and freedom are not possible. The closing line - "This is not the end" (Zephaniah 297) - leaves the reader with a positive and hopeful view on the future.

4.4.5. Age & Target Readership

The last characteristic that I included in the discussion about the definition of Young Adult literature was age. In spite of the fact that age cannot necessarily be considered a reliable category in determining YAL, it is a factor that needs to be considered when selecting literature for the classroom. I would recommend this novel for the 7th or 8th form.

As I have pointed out before, *Refugee Boy* is not too demanding language-wise. There are some terms that might need further explanation but other than that, pupils aged between 16 and 18 should not face any comprehension difficulties. There are two reasons why I would rather read this book with older pupils. Firstly, even if the language is not highly sophisticated, students will need a decent and advanced command of English in order to be able to cope with such a relatively long novel. Secondly, and as the previous section has shown, the book is concerned with a number of very difficult and emotionally challenging themes like war, death, trauma or

violence. The target readership should be old and mature enough to understand and to be able to deal with these issues.

4.5. Justification

In the third chapter, I highlighted how important the right selection of literature, in particular, refugee literature is. I discussed eight guidelines proposed by Tway (5-6 qtd. in Stover & Tway 137-138). Now I would like to examine whether and in how far *Refugee Boy* can meet their requirements.

- (1) **Genre-specific essentials:** The novel includes the genre-specific essentials. It is Young Adult fiction with a well-developed plot, setting and writing style. The characters are authentic and thus relatable.
- (2) **Representation of people:** The people in the novel are portrayed in a respectful and positive manner. The refugees, in particular Alem and his father, are presented as heroes who fight for peace and a better life (see section 4.4.3.3.). No character is ridiculed or humiliated.
- (3) **Is the story natural and convincing?** As pointed out in section 4.1., the author's intention was to write a story that many refugees would recognise as they can relate it to their own experiences. Zephaniah made a lot of experiences with refugees and all of them had an impact on his writing. Therefore, I perceived the story as natural and convincing on the whole. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that especially the way in which the protagonist sophisticatedly expresses himself sometimes comes across as too mature and thus, not very authentic (see sections 4.4.3.1. and 4.4.4.3.). Even though Alem's use of language is quite elevated pupils are, most probably, not going to have great comprehension difficulties when reading this novel. As argued in section 4.4.2.1., the writing style is, in general, relatively simple and straightforward even in spite of a few 'exotic' words and legal terms (see section 4.4.2.1.).
- (4) **Illustrations:** Except for the cover page there are no illustrations or images included. The image on the cover shows a black, teenage boy, presumably Alem, who is walking along a street. The boy is walking along the middle strip of the street, which could also be a hint at his mixed identity, or it might also be understood as the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The lack of illustrations might also support my assumption that this novel is rather aimed at older pupils.

- (5) **Stereotypes and prejudices:** Negative stereotypes or prejudices are not promoted (see section 4.4.4.2.).
- (6) **Respectful understanding of identity and heritage:** Due to the fact that ‘identity’ is a major theme in the novel, pupils are inevitably asked to engage with this issue. In section 4.4.4.3. I have pointed out that Alem has multiple identities and he embraces and values them all. Cultural heritage and identity are treated with a lot of respect in the novel, which might also have a positive impact on the readers.
- (7) **Age:** This novel is most suitable for readers between 16 and 18 (see section 4.4.5.).
- (8) **Is diversity realistically promoted?** Zephaniah definitely provides a realistic and honest account of various life styles and different cultures (African, British, Rastafarian, Chilean culture, etc.). The characters in his book are not only teenagers but there are different age groups as well. *Refugee Boy* promotes diversity and respect for today’s multicultural society.

Refugee Boy did not only meet all requirements in order to be considered a Young Adult novel. More importantly, it fulfills all of the selection criteria in order to be considered valuable refugee literature for the EFL classroom. The following chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of *Home of the Brave*. I will not only apply the same guidelines in order to check whether this book can be considered a YA novel, I will also have a look if and in how far it is useful literature for the EFL classroom. Moreover, I aspire to point out parallels between the novels.

Chapter 5: Analysis of *Home of the Brave*

5.1. Background

Katherine Applegate is an American author who wrote over 150 children's and young adult books, including *Home of the Brave* in 2007. For her novel *The One and Only Ivan*, Applegate even received a Newbery Medal in 2013. She was also awarded with several prizes for *Home of the Brave*. (information taken from the official Katherine Applegate website).

Just like Zephaniah, the author of *Refugee Boy*, Applegate based her novel on personal experiences she made with refugees. She saw many refugees arrive in the USA and then she asked herself what it must be like for an African refugee to arrive in such a cold county (Applegate 263). "Every time I stepped into that exquisite, dangerous Minnesota cold, it seemed unimaginable to me that people could move to such an impossibly different place [...]" (Applegate 252).

One of Applegate's major goals was to show that "[y]ou don't have to be a refugee to feel lost" (Applegate 251). The author wants to show that everyone might feel out of place sometimes. The important thing is to know that other people feel the same way and that many people are willing to help: "if you're lucky, someone will reach out a hand when you're most alone and say, "I've been lost, too. Let me help you find your way home"" (Applegate 251). The author is convinced that everyone should feel obliged to help (Applegate 253). The author clearly wants to animate the audience to get informed and act accordingly (Applegate 266-267).

When she saw people help refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, she found inspiration to come up with the story about Kek, a refugee from Sudan (Applegate 252). The underlying inspiration for the protagonist derived from all of "the stories she has heard about the Lost Boys of Sudan" (Applegate 262). In Sudan, the Lost Boys were orphaned and abandoned due to the civil war between 1998-2003.

She absolutely loves coming up with fictional stories. "Fiction [...] makes immigrants of us all. But it's just as true that fiction helps us find our place in the world. A good story well-told is a compass in your pocket. A map to home. A light, always glowing, in a dark and mysterious harbor" (Applegate 253).

4.2. Brief Summary

Back in Sudan, the protagonist named Kek used to live with his parents and his brother Lual. The family is part of the Nuer tribe. In the Second Sudanese Civil War between 1983 and 2005, his father and brother were killed. After an attack on the refugee camp, he and his mother stay at, they have to flee. Unfortunately, Kek's mother falls down, is in danger of being shot, and tells her son to leave without her. Despite feeling guilty, Kek does what he was told to do. He is transported to America, Minnesota, to live with his aunt and cousin who left Africa a few months earlier. The novel is split up into four main sections. In the course of the first section, Kek arrives in Minnesota. A man from the Refugee Resettlement Centre who is called Dave is really supportive and helps Kek to settle in. For the first time, Kek notices a farm and a cow on the way to his aunt's place. When they finally make it to his aunt's small apartment, Kek's aunt is very happy to be reunited with her nephew. His cousin Ganwar, who has lost an arm in the war, still seems to have troubles dealing with the effects of trauma. Right from the start, Kek is still waiting for his mother to be found and misses his deceased family members very much. Furthermore, Kek meets Hannah, a nice girl who lives with her foster parents next door. Her natural mother has drug problems and her father left when she was a baby. Kek and Hannah soon become friends and they encourage each other in times of sadness or doubt.

In the second part, Kek has to cope with legal paper work in order to obtain official refugee status. Moreover, the protagonist starts to attend school. Luckily, his teachers, Ms. Hernandez and Mr. Franklin, who are in charge of the ESL (English as a Second Language) class, are very friendly and supportive. At his aunt's home, Kek encounters numerous problems with handling ordinary things such as the washing machine or the escalator. In addition, Kek is determined to earn some money in order to support his aunt and thus, he applies for a job at a farm which belongs to an old lady called Lou.

In the third part, Ganwar also starts working at the farm to assist Kek in his work with a cow named Gol. Whenever Kek does not work at the farm, he is either at school or he spends his leisure time with Hannah or Ganwar. Kek encounters a lot of new things and visits unknown places. For the first time in his life, he visits a zoo with his class, and he goes to a grocery store. When Kek learns that Lou is planning to sell the farm and move somewhere else, he is devastated and angry. Due to fear of loss, Kek quits his job at the farm. During the summer holidays, Kek even plans to run away as he is so upset. Fortunately, Ganwar is able to chase him down and finds him at the farm. Kek finally decides to stay and makes peace with Lou.

In part four, Kek, Hannah and Ganwar want to find a new home for Gol and so they decide to donate the cow to the petting zoo. On the way there, they cause a huge traffic jam so that the police have to be called. They escort them to the zoo, where the zoo director is skeptical at first but eventually agrees to take on Gol. Kek is extremely happy that they have found a safe place for Gol. In the epilogue, some time seems to have passed. Together with his family and friends, Kek is waiting at the airport. The last passenger who gets off the plane is Kek's mother and they are finally reunited.

5.3. Methodology for Analysis

Just like with *Refugee Boy* in the previous chapter, I will once more investigate if this particular novel holds up to the criteria for YA literature and if it fulfills the selection criteria set by Tway (see chapter 3.1.2.). The main questions will be 1) whether this is an appropriate example of YAF for the EFL classroom, 2) whether this is adequate refugee literature, and 3) in how far it will be valuable for the reading curriculum.

5.4. Analysis

5.4.1. Length

I have used the Square Fish edition of *Home of the Brave*. This version has 267 pages. Due to the fact that the book's layout reminds the reader of stanzas in a poem, there is not much text on each page. All in all, there are 69 very short chapters. They all have a title and their length varies between two to six pages. Once again, almost 300 pages appear to be quite excessive for a YA novel that could be read in a regular EFL class. Nonetheless, the chapters are really short and due to the stanza format, it is a very quick read. In comparison to *Refugee Boy*, this novel is a lot faster to read. There are four parts, each one is introduced by an African proverb, and finally there is an epilogue.

In the chart below, I am proposing a reading plan. I would recommend dividing the reading process according to the four parts of the book. Personally, I would read the first part together in class and assign the other parts as homework (i.e. three homework assignments according to the colours displayed in the plan, see figure 6). Consequently, the novel could easily be finished within two weeks.

| Chapter Title | Number of Pages | Chapter Title | Number of Pages |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--|-----------------|
| PART I | | PART III | |
| 1 Snow | 3 | 38 Cowboy | 5 |
| 2 Old Words, New Words | 2 | 39 Working | 2 |
| 3 Questions | 3 | 40 Ganwar, Meet Gol | 4 |
| 4 What the Heck | 2 | 41 An Idea | 4 |
| 5 God with a Wet Nose | 4 | 42 Field Trip | 4 |
| 6 Welcome to Minnesota | 3 | 43 The Question | 2 |
| 7 Family | 3 | 44 Apple | 3 |
| 8 Lessons | 2 | 45 Grocery Store | 3 |
| 9 Good-byes | 4 | 46 The Story I Tell Hannah on the Way Home | 2 |
| 10 Father | 3 | 47 Library | 4 |
| 11 Bed | 5 | 48 Going Up | 3 |
| 12 Brother | 2 | 49 Hearts | 4 |
| 13 TV Machine | 4 | 50 White Girl | 3 |
| 14 Night | 4 | 51 Scars | 4 |
| 15 Mama | 2 | 52 Bad News | 4 |
| 16 Sleep Story | 2 | 53 No More | 2 |
| PART II | | 54 Last Day | 5 |
| 17 Paperwork | 3 | 55 Summer | 6 |
| 18 Information | 4 | 56 More Bad News | 3 |
| 19 School Clothes | 4 | 57 Sleep Story | 3 |
| 20 Once There Was... | 3 | 58 Confession | 3 |
| 21 New Desk | 4 | 59 Running Away | 2 |
| 22 Ready | 3 | 60 Bus | 4 |
| 23 Cattle | 3 | 61 Treed | 3 |
| 24 Lunch | 3 | 62 Ganwar | 5 |
| 25 Fries | 2 | 63 Talk | 3 |
| 26 Not Knowing | 4 | 64 Changes | 4 |
| 27 Home | 4 | PART IV | |
| 28 Time | 3 | 65 Herding | 3 |
| 29 Hoping | 3 | 66 Traffic Jam | 3 |
| 30 How Not to Wash Dishes | 4 | 67 Cops | 6 |
| 31 Not-Smart Boy | 3 | 68 Zoo | 4 |
| 32 Magic Milk | 5 | EPILOGUE | |
| 33 Wet Feet | 6 | 69 Homecoming | 5 |
| 34 Bus | 4 | | |
| 35 Lou | 3 | | |
| 36 Cows and Cookies | 3 | | |
| 37 Night Talk | 5 | | |

Figure 6: Reading Plan for *Home of the Brave*

5.4.2. Language

5.4.2.1. Various Language Styles, Communication and Identity

Home of the Brave is written in free verse. As free verse is an open form of poetry, the rhyme and meter patterns are inconsistent (Abbs & Richardson 137). The patterns of stress and syllables are irregular. Different language styles can be detected throughout the novel. The author makes use of poetic, colloquial as well as the African Nuer language.

Overall, the vocabulary used in this novel is not too elevated. Only very rarely, ‘exotic’ words like “wondrous” (Applegate 105), or “geriatric” (Applegate 241) are included. The sentence structure is simple and straightforward. The sentences are mostly short and the choice of words is kept quite simple. Apparently, the protagonist did not learn any English at school. In fact, it is not even explicitly stated if Kek received any formal education at all. It is implied that he obviously did not even learn how to write. This assumption is reinforced when he decides to run away and wants to leave a note for his aunt and cousin but does not “know yet how to write many words” (Applegate 205). In the refugee camp, Kek was taught some English phrases so that he would be able to leave the camp one day. He refers to English as “the tangled sounds they tried to teach us in the refugee camp” (Applegate 6-7). He did not only learn the language but also about conventions, such as greetings. He was told that it is highly important to have a firm handshake but not to squeeze the hand too hard (Applegate 20). Kek’s command of English is, very basic. He considers himself a slow learner. He even states that he learns “word by slow, slow word” (Applegate 16).

In Minnesota, Kek attends an ESL class. On his first day at school, his teachers tell him that it is normal and okay if he does not understand much of what is said. They know that it is important not to discourage him (Applegate 70). Moreover, they tell him that in an ESL class, the pupils are all from different countries, and thus they are learning English together (Applegate 70). Due to the fact that one of the teachers, Ms. Hernandez, is also an immigrant who did not understand English when she first came to America, she understands how Kek feels and she can support him in the learning process (Applegate 70).

Kek faces great difficulties pronouncing English words. The production of English sounds feels like his “mouth just wants to chew the words and spit them on the ground” (Applegate 7). The fact that he provides such a physical and literal description renders it easier for the readers to understand what it feels like for him to acquire this new language. When he is asked lots of questions he often does not have the words to answer. He wonders if he will ever be able to communicate fluently with the Americans (Applegate 24). He seems worried as he is certain

that his “mouth is going to very sore, stumbling on words all day long” (Applegate 9). When he decides to run away he explains that he does not “want to be in a place where [his] words taste wrong in [his] mouth” (Applegate 204). When listening to his aunt speaking in English, he can notice that she also has troubles with the new language (Applegate 27). Nevertheless, and despite the fact that Kek is often not capable of understanding English, he still smiles at the people he talks to. He does not want to come across as rude.

If people are talking to him very fast he finds it extremely difficult to follow. It is like “a river of words, rushing and thundering and pushing [him] beneath the surface” (Applegate 54). Trying to understand makes him tired (Applegate 54). Dave knows that it is very hard for Kek to interact in English. In order to facilitate comprehension, Dave tries to use Kek’s words, for instance, instead of using ‘airplane’, Dave calls it a ‘flying boat’ (Applegate 10), just like Kek. In section 4.4.2.1., I have pointed out that the protagonist in *Refugee Boy* did a lot of reflection on English, which helped him to acquire this foreign language faster. In this novel, Kek also reflects upon the English language. There are plenty of words he has not yet learned. For instance, the word ‘heck’ is unknown to him (Applegate 12). He does not ask for its meaning or translation but when he sees that Dave turns around the car to go back to the cow he knows that this must be “a fine and useful word” as it gets him what he wants (Applegate 12). Another good way for Kek to remember English words is to split them up into syllables, just like the protagonist of *Refugee Boy* (see section 4.4.2.1.). Examples in this case are “so-fa” (Applegate 35), or polysyllabic words such as “plan-et-arium” (Applegate 86). In addition, it is frequently pointed out that Kek acquires new words by watching American TV (Applegate 66).

In terms of colloquial language, it needs to be noted that Kek has troubles understanding idioms. Kek refers to idioms as “English tricks” (Applegate 146). He points out that ‘field trip’ is another “English trick” because the words do not mean what they are supposed to - “there is no field” in a field trip (Applegate 146). His cousin Ganwar tells Kek that if he is wearing pajamas at school “[t]he kids will eat [him] alive” (Applegate 60). He takes this literally and is worried that Americans eat other people. This creates sympathy for Kek as his naivety is amusing to the reader. Yet, the fact that he comes across as so quixotic is not only amusing to the reader but also to the characters in the book. The things he says often make people laugh. To Kek, this is a good sign because “when a friend laughs, it’s always a good surprise” (Applegate 80). Another idiom which Kek does not understand is “you need some time to get your feet wet” (Applegate 108). Kek’s first reaction is to check his shoes. Fortunately, Dave notices that Kek does not understand the phrase and he clarifies it to him in words that are familiar to him. Kek’s

comprehension problems when it comes to idiomatic expressions are little surprising, due to the fact that he is an ESL learner. I am quite certain that these idioms would also need further explanation within the EFL classroom.

Sometimes when Kek fails to understand what people are saying he pays more attention to their mimicry and gestures. It is almost like he reads people's faces (Applegate 71). Nonverbal communication is an important aspect in the novel. There is not only communication among human beings. Due to his strong connection to cattle, Kek also communicates with the cow named Gol. Kek points out that mooing is her way of talking. Unlike him, she does not have the ability to acquire another way to talk (Applegate 16). In general, it can be stated that Kek is very eager to learn. Right from the start he tries out "his new English words" (Applegate 4). This is proof of Kek's willingness to integrate himself into the new culture. Kek clearly distinguishes between English and his mother tongue. While he views English as his new words, his native language consists of "old words" (Applegate 6). Just like Alem in *Refugee Boy*, Kek is also torn between two identities (see section 4.4.4.3.) and slowly beginning to accept his transcultural identity.

To Kek, language is like music. This becomes evident when he says: "I use my words, **my music**" (Applegate 10; emphasis added). When Kek does not understand Dave, he feels like "[h]e's like a song always out of tune, missing notes" (Applegate 7). Apparently, his aunt still sometimes speaks to Kek in Nuer language. He points out that his native language is the right way to speak "with notes where they belong" (Applegate 32). Again, there is a musical allusion in this quote. It is implied that Ganwar and Kek also communicate by using their mother tongue at home (Applegate 88). This is quite comprehensible considering that they have not been in America for a long time. Their command of English is still very basic. Thus, they prefer to speak their native language in their own four walls. It gives them a feeling of being at home and at the same time they are reminded of their 'old' identity.

Even though free verse does not have a regular meter, it is not without rhythmic effects. The language used in this novel appears to be quite musical indeed. This might be the result of the use of numerous prosodic features such as rhyme, alliteration and onomatopoeia. The following quote is an example for an external, masculine rhyme: "Sometimes, it seems to **me**, a hole can be as real and solid as a boulder or a **tree**" (Applegate 39; emphasis added). When I was reading the novel, I had the feeling that the way in which Applegate employs rhyme is not very prominent; in fact, it is done in quite a subtle manner but it cleverly enhances the reading pace.

Another rhetorical device that is of importance with regard to rhythmic effects is alliteration. Especially in the chapter headlines alliterations are frequently employed, for instance: “**Sleep Story**” (Applegate 49; emphasis added), or “**Magic Milk**” (Applegate 102; emphasis added). Furthermore, instances of onomatopoeia can be identified when Gol “moos” (Applegate 16) or when “[a] car **whooshes** past” (Applegate 157; emphasis added). Here we can see that the sound of these words (i.e. moos and whooshes) imitates the actual sound of the objects they denote (i.e. a cow and a car).

The poetic language used in the novel provokes that even the most common and usual things are beautifully expressed. For instance, Dave’s grey beard has “the color of clouds before rain” (Applegate 6). As mentioned before, and as will be discussed in the next section, we perceive the events in the novel through Kek’s eyes. I consider it quite unlikely that Kek intends to make use of such a poetic language style on purpose. What is more probable is that he creates these figurative expressions as he always tries to describe new things in terms of things he is already familiar with. The numerous metaphors which can be detected right from the start reinforce this assumption. Kek refers to an airplane as “flying boat” (Applegate 3). The novel also includes plenty of similes, for instance, when Kek explains that “this cold is **like** claws on [his] skin!” (Applegate 3; emphasis added). Just like the protagonist in *Refugee Boy*, Kek compares unknown things to things he already knows. This also becomes evident when Kek is given gloves and calls them “soft things **like** hands” (Applegate 4; emphasis added). Moreover, a very outstanding stylistic device that can also be found in the novel is anthropomorphisation. Here, human traits are attributed to non-human entities, such as trees or snow. Examples for anthropomorphisation are: “**wide-armed**, good-for-climbing tree” (Applegate 13; emphasis added), or “only the **snow talks**” (Applegate 60; emphasis added).

Lastly, Applegate’s writing style is frequently marked by repetitions. Sometimes these repeated lines almost appear like a refrain in a song. A good illustration of this is chapter 8, in which the line “In my old home, in my real home” (Applegate 23-24) is repeated three times. In addition, the author also uses repetition in order to point out contrasts in a very clear manner. This becomes evident when Kek says: “I would sigh, I would laugh” (Applegate 37). The contrast between sighing and laughing highlights the protagonist’s inner turmoil.

When speaking about repetition, it should also be noted that the author often includes anaphoras, for example:

People are dancing
and singing
and shooting
and kissing (Applegate 42; emphasis added).

They're all gone, Kek.
They're all dead (Applegate 44; emphasis added).

Usually one could assume that if a novel includes so many stylistic figures it might be too demanding for YA readers. With *Home of the Brave* this is, however, not the case. The author cleverly mixes colloquial language, i.e. language that teenagers would actually use these days, e.g. “moron” (Applegate 100), with figurative language. Every now and then, the simple and short sentences are decorated with a rhetorical device and this is what renders Applegate’s overall writing style so special. Of course, when teaching this novel in the EFL classroom, it is important to have a closer look at rhetorical devices beforehand. The learners need to be made familiar with these particular stylistic figures in order to be able to detect and understand them during the reading process.

5.4.3. Characters and Narration

5.4.3.1. Narration

“When the flying boat returns to earth at last, I open my eyes and gaze out the round window. What is all the white? I whisper. Where is all the world?” (Applegate 3). This is the opening of the first chapter. The use of the first-person pronoun makes it very clear that we have a first-person limited narrative situation. The protagonist of the novel narrates his own story. Therefore, we are dealing with a homodiegetic narrator (Prince 41). Not only does he participate in the situations and events recounted, he also narrates them from his point of view. Kek is not omniscient as his perspective is limited and “subject to conceptual or perceptual constraints” (Prince 48).

Due to the fact that Kek is the focal character, the reader perceives the world through the protagonist’s eyes. This helps to identify with him. Right from the start, Applegate wants the reader to experience the things just like Kek does. Therefore, Kek gives very detailed, external descriptions of his surroundings and his immediate environment, for example, “I look around me. Dead grass pokes through the unkind blanket of white. Everywhere the snow sparkles with

light hard as high sun” (Applegate 4), or, “[w]e drive past buildings, everywhere buildings. Everywhere cars. Everywhere dead trees” (Applegate 8). When it comes to describing people’s bodily features, Kek is also very precise. In the Refugee Resettlement Centre, he has to answer the questions of a “bored lady” whose “fingernails are shiny red, the color of blood” (Applegate 53). When Kek first meets Lou, he describes that “[s]he’s wearing jeans like [his] and a big shirt. Her hair is short and silver like a fresh moon. She has many wrinkles to show her great knowledge of the world” (Applegate 118-119).

The internal perspective is pre-dominant throughout the novel. The readers are constantly provided with a direct insight into Kek’s inner state of mind, his thoughts and his feelings. Examples of internal focalization are: “I can tell that Dave has many questions. I wonder if all America people will be so curious” (Applegate 9), or, “[a]lways when I think of her I see a cloudless day blooming full, I feel warmth on my shoulders, I know hope’s embrace” (Applegate 47). Kek shares his thoughts and feelings with the readers, which establishes an atmosphere of immediacy and connection. The reader learns about Kek’s emotions in the moment they actually happen and this creates an intimate bond between the reader and the protagonist. Kek even confides his most personal memories and dreams to the reader. Chapter 16 *Sleep Story*, for instance, is fully dedicated to one of Kek’s nightmares.

In comparison to *Refugee Boy*, the narration appears to be less complex. While Zephaniah mixes first and third person narration, Applegate sticks with the first-person narrative. In *Refugee Boy*, the reader sometimes had the chance to experience events from a character’s perspective other than the protagonist. Unlike Alem in *Refugee Boy*, Kek’s choice of words does not come across as too mature or elevated for his age. Despite the poetic tone, he expresses himself by using simple words. In my opinion, Kek is more relatable than Alem. He comes across as more authentic as he uses less sophisticated language and reveals his thoughts and feelings more openly than Alem.

5.4.3.2. Character Mapping

In regard to characters, it has to be noted that the protagonist is an adolescent from South Sudan whose age is not explicitly mentioned in the book. Yet, it is stated that he will be attending the fifth grade at school so that he is probably a bit younger than the protagonist in *Refugee Boy*. There are a number of teenage characters in the story. The girl next door, Hannah, is about the same age as Kek. His cousin Ganwar is a teenager who is a few years older as he already is in the eleventh grade. Ganwar plays a central role in the novel. He can definitely be considered a main character.

The few adult characters mentioned in the story are of minor importance. The reader does not get to know a lot about them except for their names, their looks, their professions and the way in which they interact with Kek. Apart from the friendly and supportive teachers, Mr. Franklin and Ms. Hernandez, the only adults are Dave, who is like a social worker, Lou, who owns the farm, Kek's aunt and his parents. Just like in chapter four, the next section will contain a more thorough analysis of the protagonist.

5.4.3.3. The Protagonist

Applegate explains that “as he [Kek] evolved, I grew to love him. For his courage. And his good humor. And his essential optimism” (Applegate 252). If these character traits really fit Kek's character will be discussed in this section.

Kek is a tall boy, which appears to be typical for the Nuer people: “I am a tall boy, like all **my** people” (Applegate 4; emphasis added). In terms of looks, Kek himself thinks that he has “a silly face” because he has eyelashes like a girl, big protruding ears and a smile which “takes up most of [his] face” (Applegate 34).

The protagonist always tries to express himself in a polite and well-mannered way. He does not want his words to “sting like an insect” (Applegate 118). “I smile to say I understand although I do not” (Applegate 6) – so he tries to stay polite even if he does not comprehend a word. In order to show his gratitude for Dave's help Kek also smiles: “I smile to show my thanking” (Applegate 25). Kek assumes that smiling and laughing is a good way to demonstrate that somebody is polite (Applegate 68).

Moreover, Kek is depicted as a very humble person. In the small African village where Kek was born, life was a lot more simplistic. In comparison to Western countries, the life standards he was exposed to could almost be described as primitive. In his village, they did not have electricity or running tap water. When first sees a stove in his aunt's apartment in America, he refers to it as “cooking fire” (Applegate 32). In addition, Kek calls the toilet “the magic water pot” (Applegate 33). He is quite astonished to have a toilet inside the house. His aunt's flat is quite small by Western standards; he even has to share a room with his cousin, but to Kek it still has many rooms like a kingdom (Applegate 32). The fact that Kek comes across as so modest and a bit unworldly definitely creates sympathy for him. When he gets his very own desk at school he is delighted. He explains that he does not have enough cattle to pay for the desk. He is extremely happy and grateful when he learns that education is free in America (Applegate 69). As already pointed out in section 4.4.3.3 of the previous chapter, in refugee

literature the opportunity to go to school is often considered a privilege. Due to war, Kek was prevented from receiving formal school education. In the refugee camp, they sometimes had a teacher but the children did not go to school on a daily basis.

Kek's humble nature is also highlighted when he first goes to the cafeteria. While Hannah thinks that the meat tastes bad, Kek says everything looks and smells fine (Applegate 78). He appreciates the "gifts of food" (Applegate 77). This might be due to the fact that he is very familiar with the "hurt of hunger", he explains that "[h]unger is like a wild dog gnawing on a dry bone, mad with impatience but hoping still" (Applegate 150). Again, figurative language is used to make this suffering more relatable and perceptible to the readers. The detailed description renders it easy for the readers to put themselves into Kek's position. The novel also reveals shocking details about the refugee camp in Africa. There was a time when Kek had to wait in a line for nine hours just for a handful of corn (Applegate 146).

In addition, books are very precious to Kek. When he is told that he is allowed to borrow books from the library over summer he feels that being "trusted with such precious gifts is a great honor" (Applegate 191). His mother is illiterate, but she always dreamed of owning a book as it is like "a magical present"; "a door waiting to be unlocked" (Applegate 160). This proves that Kek and his family are even grateful for the smaller things in life. In Africa, there were hardly any books and in America, Kek is overwhelmed by the exuberance of books to choose from (Applegate 161).

Kek is highly grateful for things that people in Western or European countries would take for granted. Kek, on the other hand, is overwhelmed by the wealth and luxury of American people. When Hannah first takes Kek to the grocery store he cannot believe the size of that building. He believes that "[t]here isn't enough food in the world to fill such a building" (Applegate 155). This shows that Kek is not used to such huge amounts of food as it is a rare good in Africa. Being exposed to such luxury makes Kek cry (Applegate 156). He feels that he has not deserved such a luxurious life or such precious gifts like a soft bed or warm food (Applegate 151) when other people are still freezing or starving. Kek has a big heart. He is very kind and generous. When Ganwar starts working at the farm Kek is willing to share his salary (Applegate 143) as Lou cannot afford to pay them both. Kek wants to repay his cousin for sharing his house and room with him. Reading this novel will most certainly force its readers to critically reflect upon their own lifestyles and to learn to appreciate the things they have more. This is, without doubt, one of the lessons that Applegate wanted to teach her readership.

The protagonist is portrayed as the eternal optimist who does not give up hope. Even if it is uncertain where his mother is, Kek remains positive (Applegate 10). He is sure that “[s]he will come” (Applegate 10). Nevertheless, Dave and his aunt do not want Kek to get his hopes up too high. They try to stay realistic. In comparison to Kek, Ganwar is a lot more pessimistic. Once, Kek believed he could fly so he jumped off a tree. Despite a troublesome landing and some scars, he still thinks that “the flying part was fun” (Applegate 45). Ganwar just tells him that some things will remain impossible, he cannot make himself a bird (Applegate 46). Ganwar even tells his cousin that everyone of his family is dead. Kek explains that he would like “to hate Ganwar for his words. But [he is] too weary for anger” (Applegate 44). Kek still holds on to hope even if his cousin calls him “crazy” for being so optimistic (Applegate 45). According to his aunt, “Kek finds sun when the sky is dark” (Applegate 27). However, it is sometimes hard for Kek to stay entirely optimistic. There are moments in which he “cannot find any sun” (Applegate 27). When he learns that the Refugee Resettlement Centre has still not been able to retrace his mother and that the refugee camp in Adrica has been attacked again, Kek is not sure “whether to feel, hope or fear” (Applegate 58-59). He is almost about to give up hope, which becomes evident when he says “a man knows when he’s defeated” (Applegate 197). Fortunately, his friend Hannah and Dave encourage him and tell him that there is still a chance and that he needs to stay strong (Applegate 197).

Kek has a favourite song which his father often sang to him before he went to sleep. In this song we learn a lot about Kek. In the lyrics it says:

[t]he crocodile snaps; Still Kek swims. The feet bleed; Still Kek dances. The calf vanishes; Still Kek searches. The sandstorm blinds; Still Kek laughs. My stubborn Kek, my willful son, if you tell me you can dance with the wind, if you tell me you can sleep with the lion, if you tell me you can harvest the stars, how can I doubt you, my son? (Applegate 30)

This song definitely shows that Kek’s father was very proud of him and that he believed his son to be a fighter. He describes him as strong and brave. The fact that the word ‘still’ is always repeated is also a sign that no matter what comes, Kek does not give up and he does not lose hope. He has a strong mind and he is very ambitious. In fact, Kek’s ambition is also pointed out when he talks about his dream to become a pilot one day. “I’d like to fly such a boat one day myself” (Applegate 10). The protagonist in *Refugee Boy* wants to become an architect. It is striking that both protagonists are planning on pursuing a career in professions with such a high social esteem. It is pointed out that Alem as well as Kek are very ambitious and eager to learn. This becomes clear when Kek cannot wait to “begin [his] learning” (Applegate 67) on his first

day at school. Moreover, he is always working hard. It gives him a feeling of pride and manliness to earn his own money. This hypothesis is reinforced when he buys chocolate for Hannah and cannot resist but tell the cashier that he is paying with the money he earned himself (Applegate 169).

The previous sections, as well as this analysis, have demonstrated that there are a number of parallels between the protagonists of *Refugee Boy* and *Home of the Brave*. Yet, in comparison to Alem, Kek comes across as relatively immature and naïve.

5.4.4. Content, Themes and Motifs

5.4.4.1. Culture Clash: Old vs. New Life

The opposition between the protagonist's old and new life is already perceptible when looking at the title of the second chapter *Old Words, New Words*. Kek is obviously torn between two languages, two lives and two identities. Just like Alem in *Refugee Boy* it is quite hard for the boy to leave his former life behind. When Kek first arrives in America he describes the environment in a relatively negative light; everywhere he looks he sees cars, dead trees and buildings blocking the sky (Applegate 8). Kek thinks that America is ugly and “needs endless horizons and emptiness” just like the landscape he was used to in Africa (Applegate 208). He even asks Dave: “How can you live in America? It burns your eyes!” (Applegate 4). It is pointed out that Kek, as well as Alem in *Refugee Boy*, is particularly troubled by the cold. Kek is certain that “[t]his America is hard work” (Applegate 5). Back at the Refugee Camp, Kek was told that “America [was] heaven on earth” (Applegate 25). His cousin Ganwar, who has great difficulties to integrate himself, does not agree with this assumption. Nevertheless, Ganwar refers to America as “a good land” (Applegate 44). He acknowledges that “[t]here's great freedom” in this country (Applegate 44).

Kek frequently draws comparison between his old life in this small village in South Sudan and his new life in Minnesota. His native country and culture is definitely represented in a romanticised and idealised way. According to Watkins (74), a certain kind of nostalgia is often involved in describing “landscapes of home and homeland”. While life in his village was very calm, everyone seems to be in a hurry in America (Applegate 232). Kek still envisions South Sudan as his real home (Applegate 23) where he felt safe. When he is told that he has to lock the door whenever he leaves the apartment he thinks back to when his father was protecting the house and the family so that locking was not necessary (Applegate 23). It is quite ironic that in spite of the fact that Kek had to flee his native country due to war, he points out that he felt

safer back home. Later on, Kek admits that he does not miss Africa at its current state, but he misses “the time before the pain”, i.e. before war (Applegate 208). Back in his village, his family did not need electricity as “the sun gave [them] light, and the stars watched [them] sleep” (Applegate 24). Kek highlights that in his old, real home “[they] were a family, and [their] laughter kept [them] warm. [They] didn’t need a magic switch on a wall” (Applegate 24). This implies that his family did not need electricity in order to feel warm; all they needed was their love. Once again, Kek’s past appears to be like a perfect dream world. The notion of ‘feeling at home’ is, without doubt, a very important motif in the novel. This also becomes obvious when Kek’s aunt makes African food for them. Kek is immediately reminded of the dinners he used to have with his family back in the Sudanese village. When Kek, his aunt and cousin are enjoying their dinner together, the protagonist explains that they “eat simply, with tastes and smells of home, and [they] talk with the words and sounds [...] sweet in [his] mouth” (Applegate 39). He uses positive and comforting language to describe this special moment. However, considering the opposition between old and new life, it also needs to be pointed out that Kek enjoys the American food very much too. He likes the strange new smells and tastes (Applegate 79).

Apart from food, music also plays a very important role in Kek’s native culture. The Nuer people preserve and pass on their stories in their songs. Their communication takes place via music and storytelling and thus, music accounts for an essential part of their identity. It is their most important source of entertainment as they apparently do not have any TV, radio or internet access. In America, on the other hand, Kek spends a lot of time in front of the TV set. Not only does it distract him and his cousin from their traumatic experiences, it also entertains them. However, when he listens to American music on TV he has the feeling that it sounds “like a sick animal” howling; he funnily remarks that his “ears wanted to run away” (Applegate 131). This is also something that has been brought up in *Refugee Boy*. Alem and his father did not enjoy listening to the unusual English music sounds at all (see section 4.4.4.1.).

Indeed, there are a lot of unfamiliar things in the new country. Dave tries to encourage Kek by telling him that it will require quite some time to adapt to this new place. “Things are very different here” (Applegate 25). When Kek first sees traffic lights he compares it to “a baby sun”, “a light hung high in the air” (Applegate 9). Once more, his language comes across as highly metaphorical and poetic. Another source of wonder is chocolate milk. It is quite amusing and endearing when Kek is surprised that there are cows in America that are able to produce this kind of milk (Applegate 105). A bell is “a button that makes music happen” (Applegate

117). As pointed out in the language section, he describes new, unknown things by means of things and words he already knows.

Another remarkable aspect is that the Nuer people are apparently used to a different concept of time. This assumption is reinforced by the way in which Kek talks about time: “[t]ime passes, the kind they call *weeks*” (Applegate 164). The fact that the word ‘weeks’ is in italics shows that this word is most probably new to Kek. There are also numerous American customs, like the celebration of Valentine’s Day, which are unknown to Kek. When Hannah explains what Valentine’s Day means she also brings up that her birthday is in the same week. Kek reveals that he does not even know his exact birth date (Applegate 167). He tells his friend that they do not really celebrate birthdays in Africa like this. He just knows that he was born “in the time you [Americans] call summer” (Applegate 168). Once again, this formulation supports the argument that the Nuer people have indeed a different understanding and concept of time. Kek highlights the culture clash by remarking that “sometimes [Hannah] finds [his] ways as strange as [he] finds hers” (Applegate 168).

Money and work also appear to be new concepts to Kek. In the Nuer culture cattle are like their currency. The number of cows owned was a sign of how wealthy someone is. Life in the USA is expensive. Therefore, his aunt has to work to get money and make a living. The idea of night shifts appears particularly awkward to Kek (Applegate 40).

On the one hand America is a cold and strange place to Kek, but on the other hand it also provides freedom and security. This assumption becomes reinforced when Kek watches the gazelles at the zoo. He wonders how they made it to this “strange, cold world” (Applegate 147). He notices the way in which they are flicking their tails as they check their environment for danger. Kek points out that even if they might not be aware of it yet they are safe there (Applegate 147). This could be understood as a reflection of Kek’s attitude towards America. Even though he felt cold at first, he is beginning to understand that this new country means security for him.

In America, the most ordinary things seem to present a challenge for Kek. For example, when his aunt tells him to wash the dishes he puts them into the washing machine. Due to a translation problem, Kek assumes that the washing machine is able to wash clothes and dishes alike (Applegate 97). This is a highly comic moment for the reader and thus creates sympathy for Kek. Moreover, when the protagonist first comes across an escalator, the “magic silver staircases” that melt away (Applegate 165) frighten him. However, when he is reunited with his mother at the airport he is not afraid to use them anymore. While his mother also seems to

be frightened by these unusual stairs, Kek wants to demonstrate that there is no need to be afraid. This is an illustrative gesture to demonstrate that Kek is no longer afraid of the new country and his new identity (Applegate 248). He appears to accept his new life as he even tells his mother “welcome home” (Applegate 249).

The more time Kek spends in America, the more he starts to like his place. He is excited about going to school, he likes the food and he makes new friends. He gains trust into this new country and thinks that maybe one day he might even like this place (Applegate 87). The fact that Kek always tries to use his best English words are proof of his willingness to adapt to the new lifestyle (Applegate 26). Kek’s aunt also knows that he is a very determined boy. She says that “he’s a good boy. He will try hard to make his new like work” (Applegate 27). For older people like his aunt, it is a lot more challenging to adapt to “new ways” and to learn “new words” (Applegate 90). When he tries on his new clothes for school he wonders if he looks like an “America boy” now (Applegate 62). At school, Kek is also familiarised with the concept of democracy. His teacher tells him that in America, decisions are made upon the basis of voting (Applegate 135). His willingness to adapt to this new system is also highlighted when he lets the class help him come up with a name for the cow. In chapter 27 titled *Home* Kek refers to his aunt’s place as ‘home’ for the first time.

5.4.4.2. Cattle

Cattle play a crucial role in the Nuer culture. As the Nuer People are herders (Applegate 29), cattle provide them with economic and financial security. It is their profession, their currency. “In my old home back in Africa, cattle mean life. They are the reason to rise with the sun, to move with the rains, to rest with the stars. They are the way we know our place in the world” (Applegate 14). Taking care of the cattle is thus one of their major tasks in life.

When he first sees a cow in America it immediately reminds him of home. He instantly asks to stop the car. Kek thinks that this must be a very brave cow as she is standing in the cold snow (Applegate 11). Even if “she is not the most beautiful of cows” (Applegate 13), according to Kek, he admires her and is very happy to stroke her. “[A]nd yet to see her here in this strange land makes my eyes glad” (Applegate 13). What is interesting here is the personal pronoun. The unnamed cow is immediately referred to as ‘she’ instead of ‘it’. This underlines the animal’s importance to Kek. When the protagonist realises that Dave does not love cattle as much as him, he pities him (Applegate 12). Nevertheless, Dave is aware of the importance of cows to African people. He once helped an African to settle in America and he taught him that

“[a] cow is God with a wet nose” (Applegate 15). This saying makes Kek laugh. This marks the first time the boy really and honestly can laugh in the new country.

Kek has, indeed, a very emotional connection towards cows. He honors them and cares for them. In addition, cattle remind him of his father. This might also be the reason why he immediately bonds with the first cow he sees in America. It is very touching when he thinks that “for a moment I hold all I’ve lost and all I want right there in my hand” (Applegate 16). He names the cow Gol which means ‘family’ in the Nuer language. Gol gives Kek a feeling of comfort and security. He points out that Gol “shelters [him] like a warm wall” (Applegate 137). Kek pities Americans for not loving cows as much as he does because even if they have pets, if they never love a cow they “will have lived just half a life” (Applegate 170). The cow symbolises work, income, wealth and family. It seems understandable that when lacking these things, life will be quite sad.

When Kek learns that Lou is planning on selling the farm he becomes very angry (Applegate 180). He does not want to lose Gol, or i.e. his family, again. As the sole thought of losing his family once again is too painful Kek wants to quit his job and just leave. He screams: “I hate it here! [...] I want to go home!” (Applegate 180). At school, when he is referred to as cowboy again, he gets very upset as it reminds him of his loss (Applegate 182). He just wants to suppress his anger and sadness and does not want to talk about it.

The protagonist comes across as a real specialist when it comes to cattle. He knows a lot about these animals as his father has taught him how to herd and care for them. Kek always used to talk and sing to cows even if the other children mocked him for it (Applegate 122).

The farewell between Kek and Gol is very touching. Kek’s parents always told him that “[i]f you can talk, you can sing, [i]f you can walk, you can dance” (Applegate 216). Once again, a proverb is used to transport a valuable lesson, namely, that once you are able to cope with the simple things, everything is possible. When Kek says goodbye to Gol, he tells her that “if she can moo, she can sing” (Applegate 242) in order to comfort her. Then Gol goes off “to her new land to begin again” (Applegate 242). This time Kek appears to have adopted a more positive attitude towards the new beginning and the new country. He no longer seems to be frightened by the thought of a new beginning. This is a clear demonstration of his character development.

5.4.4.3. Reaction of the Host Society

When Kek arrives in the United States he receives a lot of help and support. Especially Dave, who works at the Refugee Resettlement Centre, is extremely supportive. He picks Kek up, gives

him clothes, and takes him to his aunt. At first, Kek is really overwhelmed by all of the questions he is asked by Dave. He wonders “if all America people will be so curious” (Applegate 9). At first, he feels like he and Dave “are like a cow and a goat, wanting to be friends but wondering if it can ever be” (Applegate 7).

Hannah, the girl who lives next door, is particularly nice and welcoming to Kek. When he feels overwhelmed by all of the unfamiliar things in America Hannah tells him that she will help him until things get easier (Applegate 106). Particularly at the beginning, the support of friends is important to facilitate integration. Kek is surprised and impressed by Hannah’s willingness to help him. He even asks her why she is so friendly and helpful: “How come you’re so helping to me?” (Applegate 106). Hannah responds that she is familiar with the feeling of not knowing things and this is why she wants to help him (Applegate 106).

The teachers at school are particularly welcoming and friendly to Kek. Ms. Hernandez even greets him in his native language (Applegate 67). At his first day in the ESL class, the teachers want the students to mark their home countries on a map. Kek draws a bull. When the others see the bull they start to make moo sounds and everyone is laughing. Kek wonders if they are possibly laughing at him but he does not really mind as they seem to have a good time together (Applegate 75). Most of his classmates appear to be very nice to Kek. Two of his ESL classmates, Jaime, a boy from Guatemala and Nishan, a girl from Ethiopia, even join Kek and Hannah at the cafeteria.

Before the ESL class, Kek has to attend another course which he does not really enjoy. This might be due to the fact that some of the other pupils in this group are mocking him. One day he receives a mean drawing showing a skeleton (Applegate 152). A boy shouts “[h]ungry Kenya?” in a hostile way. “His voice has knives in it” (Applegate 153). The boy holds a half-eaten apple in his hands. Despite his harsh tone, Kek tries to remain polite and explains that he was from Sudan and not from Kenya. This also shows that Kek’s native identity matters very much to him. Afterwards the boy throws the apple at Kek but it does not hit him and falls on the ground. As Kek does not want the fruit to be wasted he wants to throw it back to the boy and accidentally hits his nose (Applegate 153). Kek is proud that he is such “a fine thrower” (Applegate 154). He receives a detention slip from the teacher. Instead of realising that this is a sort of punishment he considers it an honor as he was the only one who got selected by the teacher (Applegate 154). Once more, his lack of knowledge and his naivety amuses the reader and creates sympathy.

As already mentioned, not all people respond well to Kek. Due to the fact that he is black he also has to face racist commentaries. When he is giving chocolate to Hannah some boys pass by, and yell at Kek to “[l]eave the white girl alone” (Applegate 171). When Kek takes the city bus to visit the cow he is surprised that he has to pay as the school bus is free. Kek notices that his confusion caused the bus driver to give him “a face that says stupid-new-to-this-country-boy” (Applegate 113). Due to his lack of language proficiency, Kek might perceive hostile looks as even worse than mean words.

Nevertheless, and in comparison to *Refugee Boy*, the protagonist is not treated like a criminal by local authorities. When Kek causes an enormous traffic jam by trying to bring Gol to the zoo, the police are informed. The police officers are not at all hostile towards the teenagers. Instead they are really friendly and so impressed by Kek’s idea that they decide to help him (Applegate 234).

5.4.4.4. Family

Kek very much defines himself via his family. He explains: “I have my father’s will, my brother’s eyes and my mother’s light” (Applegate 47). Family is a central theme in the novel. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that Kek names the cow, as mentioned before, ‘Gol’ which is Nuer language for ‘family’ (Applegate 134).

There are several instances in which Kek compares Dave to his father. The social worker is not as tall as his father (Applegate 6). “Dave isn’t like my father at all. But it’s been good to have someone watching over me, even just for a while” (Applegate 28). Kek misses his father deeply. Before his father’s death, his protection felt like “a soft blanket on a night when the wind howls” (Applegate 28). Kek’s father was a well-respected herder in the village. The protagonist particularly praises his father’s strong and deep voice. Kek explains that “it was his voice that made him a rich man among men. His voice was deep, like a storm coming, but gentle, like the rain ending” (Applegate 29). Kek clearly admired and loved his father. As I have pointed out before, music is crucial to the Nuer culture. Kek’s father was a very good singer. “No one knew more songs than my father, and no one sang them with a voice as clear and sure” (Applegate 30). The father is depicted in a very caring and loving way. He even sang his sons to sleep (Applegate 30).

Chapter 12 is fully devoted to Kek’s older, deceased brother Lual. To Kek, Lual always appeared to be more of a father figure than a real brother. He is described as tall and strong and very sensible. There were times when Kek played tricks on his brother because it annoyed him

that Lual would always tell him what to do (Applegate 37). Now he regrets this immature behaviour. He would give everything to get him back (Applegate 38).

Kek does not consider his aunt and cousin his “truest family” (Applegate 8). He perceives it as “a strange pain to be with those you belong to and feel you don’t belong” (Applegate 35). His true family is his parents and his brother. Nevertheless, when Kek arrives at his aunt’s place, he remarks that his “old life is waiting on the other side” of the entrance door (Applegate 19). His aunt’s reaction when she is reunited with her nephew is very warm. She cries, hugs and kisses him in a very welcoming way (Applegate 20). Kek knows that his aunt has a very difficult past, she is “a woman of many sorrows, carved to a sharp stone by her luckless life” (Applegate 22). Kek compares her to his mother and points out that she is not like her. Nonetheless, Kek has to start crying as he can see his mother’s eyes in his aunt’s look (Applegate 22). He has an idealised image of his mother, “whose laughter is like bubbling water from a deep spring” (Applegate 22). To Kek, his mother “is like newborn sun”, fresh with promise”, “[e]ven her laughter has sun in it” (Applegate 47). Kek mentions that whenever he thinks of his mother, he sees “a cloudless day blooming full”, he can “feel warmth on [his] shoulders” (Applegate 47). It is thus little surprising that the author has also created a warm and sunny atmosphere when Kek’s mother finally arrives at the airport: “The sun streams through the glass window. red and gold with the day’s last sighs, so bright I have to shade my eyes” (Applegate 247). However, I would like to remark that something about the reunion scene strikes me as slightly unrealistic. When Kek’s mother walks through the door she greets him in English, she shouts: “My son!” (Applegate 247). I find it hard to believe that the mother’s first words are in English and that she would not greet her son in their native language after such a long time. Perhaps the author also wanted to point out the mother’s willingness to adapt to the new culture. Kek, on the other hand, is speechless. He cannot find the words neither in his old language nor in his new language (Applegate 248).

When Kek is reunited with his cousin Ganwar in America the greeting is not as intimate as with his aunt. Ganwar gives him a handshake (Applegate 20). To Kek, this gesture appears strange. He thinks that he and his cousin “are like two calves in the clouds pretending we know how to fly” (Applegate 20). Ganwar tries to be friendly and assures his cousin that he is welcome in their American home. Yet, Kek doubts if Ganwar really means it. Nevertheless, Kek admires his older cousin very much. He reminds him of his brother Lual. He and Ganwar were best friends. Moreover, Kek respects Ganwar very much as he has already undergone the Gaar ritual. This will be further elucidated in one of the next sections. Ganwar is tall and he is already a

man by Nuer standards as he has his six markings on the forehead. The fact that he lost an arm in the war does not diminish Kek's feeling about his cousin. Kek tells his cousin: "What another man takes two hands to do, you can do with one" (Applegate 140). However, Ganwar is mature enough to understand that life in America will always be hard for him. The markings on his forehead might also add to the fact that Ganwar cannot find a job in America. To other people, these six huge scars might appear dangerous. This assumption becomes reinforced when Ganwar explains: "it will never be right for me here, Kek. I have this-he holds up his stump of an arm- and I have the *gaar*. It's worse for me. I'll never fit in" (Applegate 216). When Dave urges Ganwar to get a job in order to support his mother financially, he says that he "didn't come to this country to sweep the floors" (Applegate 109). This is in harsh contrast to Kek, who cannot wait to find a job and to work in order to repay his aunt. Kek admires his cousin and vice versa. Ganwar is impressed when Kek tells him that he took the initiative and found a job (Applegate 124). He is impressed that his younger cousin "made the luck happen." (Applegate 140). Ganwar is depicted as someone who is very proud. He is not willing to take on Kek's charity (Applegate 143) when he offers to share his salary with him. In the epilogue, the reader learns that Ganwar has found a girlfriend (Applegate 245). This might be a hint that Ganwar is finally starting to accept his new life and trying to integrate himself.

The author evokes different concepts of family. Hannah, for example, lives with a foster family as her natural mother has a drug problem and her natural father left when she was a baby. When Kek does not know what a foster family is, Hannah explains that "[y]ou stay with them when your real family is messed up" (Applegate 103).

5.4.4.5. Trauma & Loss

Just like in *Refugee Boy*, trauma and loss are themes that are central to this novel. Kek and his relatives clearly suffer from war-related trauma. This assumption is supported by the fact that Kek as well as Ganwar have sleeping difficulties despite their comfortable beds (Applegate 43). Both boys are troubled by their memories of war. Ganwar tells his cousin that "even when you travel far, the ghosts don't stay behind. They follow you. You come here [to America] to make a new life, but the old life is still haunting you" (Applegate 44). No matter where they go they are always accompanied by their past. Kek for instance, frequently relives the night of his father's and brother's killing his dream. He can still hear the guns and the screaming of that night (Applegate 49). Ganwar explains that "the war is older than [their] fathers were. The war is forever" (Applegate 126). The night Kek witnessed the murder of his father and brother, Ganwar lost his arm. His missing arm will be an eternal reminder of war. The way in which

Kek talks about this incident clearly shows how highly traumatic this experience was for him as well: “[t]he night Ganwar lost his hand was the night I lost my father and brother, the night of men in the sky with guns, the night the earth opened up like a black pit and swallowed my old life whole” (Applegate 21).

The fact that he misses his family very much is particularly pointed out when Kek highlights that carrying “them, unseen as wind, is a heavy burden” (Applegate 149). The more Kek is reminded of home, the more he has to think about all the things he has lost (Applegate 39). Kek describes a feeling of loss and emptiness: “I feel holes where my mother, my father, my brother should be, my uncle, my aunt’s husband, and their other children, too- two girls, younger than Ganwar” (Applegate 39). He feels a deep pain “as real and solid as a boulder or a tree” (Applegate 39). Kek’s traumatic experiences also cause psychosomatic symptoms. He mentions that sometimes the pain is so strong that he suffers from stomach ache. Moreover, he is troubled by a tight knot in his heart (Applegate 64). In this context, Berman (245) very fittingly explains that the “[s]eparation from family members after migrating to a new country has consistently been identified as a threat to the health and well-being of refugee youth”.

At first, it is very hard for Kek to speak about the killing of his father and brother, especially when talking to strangers. When Hannah wants to know how Ganwar has lost his arm Kek briefly explains what happened that night. Nishan, who also listens to Kek’s story, can relate to him as he has made traumatic experiences as well. Kek begins to realise that he is not alone with his traumatic past and that there are people who understand him (Applegate 83). Hannah is shocked as she listens to the story. She cannot understand why Kek thinks he “was lucky to see” how his father and brother were killed (Applegate 83). Nishan, however, is aware of what Kek is trying to say- knowing is always better than not knowing. Nishan points out that “[n]ot knowing [...] is the hardest” (Applegate 83). The support and understanding of others in the immediate environment might also have a very positive impact on the healing process of traumatised refugees.

The more Kek gets to know Hannah, the more he starts to trust her. He opens up and reveals more stories about his past. There are numerous instances when Kek brings up memories he made in the refugee camp. What appears to be remarkable here is the fact that he does not become very emotional when he talks about these terrible experiences. In fact, his descriptions come across as almost dry and analytical. Being exposed to war and violence on a daily basis might indeed result in apathy, i.e. in a lack of emotion and concern. On the bus ride back from the grocery store, Kek starts talking about something that happened during his time at the camp.

His story is about a dying baby whose mother was about his age (Applegate 158). The baby would refuse to drink milk as it was too weak, so it died (Applegate 159). The story leaves Hannah speechless (Applegate 159). This demonstrates that children who grew up in the Western world, and who never even had to personally face such horrors, are shocked and almost traumatised by the sole thought of war experiences like this.

In another one of Kek's sleep stories, he brings up more memories of the time at the camp. This time he is concerned with the night when he had to leave his mother behind. The camp was under attack and when they tried to run away, his mother fell down and told him to escape without her. He gives a very detailed description of the attack. He even imitates the gunfire by means of onomatopoeia (Applegate 198). This makes this terrible memory even very accessible to the reader: "[t]he gunfire is almost gentle at first –pop-pop-pop, and then it gets closer and the world goes crazy with fear" (Applegate 198).

Kek even finds it enormously difficult to talk openly to his cousin about the past. He knows that Lual's death was an incredibly traumatic loss for Ganwar. This becomes evident when Ganwar turns completely silent and upset when he hears Kek's laughter. It reminds him of Lual, who was his best friend and like a brother to him. This is also the reason why Kek tries not to evoke the past in conversations with Ganwar. None of them dares to speak about that horrifying night (Applegate 33).

According to Berman (249), the denial and repression of painful memories is "a common response to trauma". It is, thus, little surprising that Kek also tries to suppress his feelings and his thoughts eventually, especially when it comes to his mother. It is still uncertain where she is and thinking about all the terrible things that might have happened to her is like going to a "black place" in mind (Applegate 84). When he is confronted with the thought of his missing mother he loses his appetite (Applegate 84).

Distraction is often a common method to cope with traumatic experiences. Sometimes Kek and Ganwar try to distract themselves from their memories by watching TV. Despite the fact that Kek is astonished by the many colours and stories the TV set has to offer, he knows that the people on TV "cannot fill the holes in the room" (Applegate 42). Another distraction for Kek is work. He enjoys his job at the farm because when he is working his "mind doesn't travel where it shouldn't go" (Applegate 136). In order to take his mind off, Kek also enjoys listening to somebody else's stories. They are like an escape from the cruel reality.

This section has shown that throughout the novel, the notion of trauma and loss overshadows Kek's new life in America. It is, thus, immensely remarkable that Kek is still able to remain optimistic and that he holds on to hope, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

5.4.4.6. Hope & Freedom

It has already been pointed out in section 5.4.3.3. that Kek is a very optimistic person. Dave tries to be honest with Kek and tells him that the Refugee Resettlement Centre does not know where his mother is, or if she is still alive. However, Kek tells Dave that his mother is fine (Applegate 10). He does not give up hope. Kek is used to hearing that he is not supposed to get his hopes up too high (Applegate 101). Nonetheless, he holds on to hope and stays positive. When Hannah is upset about her natural mother, Kek is the one who tries to cheer her up and tells her to stay optimistic. He tells her that “[I]f life changes. So [she] must hope” (Applegate 104).

Hope and freedom are two motifs that are closely linked in this novel. The notion of being able to live in a free country provides the characters with hope for their future. Ganwar even points out to Kek that “[t]here's great freedom” in this country (Applegate 44). Kek's aunt also states that it is a great gift to be able to be free in America, to walk through the streets without fear and to be able to select your own leaders (Applegate 90). Kek obviously agrees with his aunt as he claims: “I didn't know there would be so many tribes from all over the world. How could I have imagined the way they walk through the world side by side without fear, all free to gaze at the same sky with the same hopes” (Applegate 148). Kek is sure that his parents would be astonished if they were able to experience so much freedom and hope. The importance of freedom is also highlighted when Ms. Hernandez brings a cake with the Statue of Liberty on top to school (Applegate 186). Mr. Franklin lights the candle which can also be understood as a symbol of hope. Many words are written on the cake. It is an excerpt from *The New Colossus*, a sonnet by Emma Lazarus (1883). These words are also to be found on a bronze plaque on The Statue of Liberty. It says: “[g]ive me your tired, your poor, [y]our huddled masses yearning to breathe free, [t]he wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door” (Applegate 188). As the ESL pupils are not yet able to understand and interpret this stanza, Ms. Hernandez explains that these words mean that America is also *their* country, now and forever (Applegate 188). All immigrants are welcome, and they should feel accepted in their new home. However, Kek poses himself the question why he “should have the freedom to hope while [his] brother and father sleep in bloodied earth” (Applegate 150). He feels guilty that he is able to live in a free country. He

cannot understand why he is given the chance to enjoy the privilege of hope and freedom while his beloved ones had to die.

Towards the end of the novel, Kek reflects upon the notion of hope. He claims that

[h]ope is a thing made only for people, a scrap to hold onto in darkness and in light. But hope is hard work. When I was a child, I hoped to fly. That was a silly, easy wish. Now my wishes are bigger, the hopes of a man, and they take much tending, like seedlings in rough sun. Now I hope to root to this good, hard land forever. (Applegate 246)

This quote already hints at a certain transformation that Kek has undergone during his time in America. It does not only demonstrate his ambition to make his new life work, but it also shows that Kek has adopted a more mature, but still positive, perspective on life. While Ganwar thinks that his younger cousin is “still a crazy little boy”, Kek himself believes that he is not a little boy anymore (Applegate 36). He wants to be seen as a man. He explains that being optimistic was easier for him when he was a child, before he came to America (Applegate 223). This proves that he sees himself as a man now.

5.4.4.7. Coming-of-Age & Manhood

As has been pointed out in the previous sections, Kek is undergoing a huge character development in the course of the novel. The reader watches the protagonist as he is growing up and becoming a more mature and self-reflective individual. The way into manhood is thus one of the major themes in this novel.

There are times when Kek considers himself a coward and unmanly. Kek often does not think of himself as a strong fighter like his father or brother used to be (Applegate 61). Kek regrets that he will never have the ‘gaar’. This is a special ritual that has already been mentioned in the previous sections. It is a coming-of-age ceremony in which the village elder uses a razor to cut six lines across a boy’s forehead (Applegate 261). These six markings symbolise manhood in the Nuer culture. Kek will never have the initiation ceremony and consequently thinks that he will never become a full man (Applegate 175). Ganwar tells him that he is lucky not to have been scarred like him. He explains that in America, one does not need scars to be considered a man. It only requires “a fine car and a house with many bathrooms” (Applegate 176). This implies that in the American culture, being a grown-up man is defined by means of material status symbols and not by rituals. Yet, Kek still does not feel like a real man as he has not been brave and been tested like his cousin (Applegate 176). Ganwar, however, points out that Kek has been tested and that he has been brave, too. He was in the refugee camp all by himself and

he came to America on his own. Ganwar concludes by stating that “[i]t doesn’t take a knife in the hand of a village elder for you to prove yourself” (Applegate 176).

There are a number of situations in which Kek is close to crying. When Kek unintentionally destroyed his aunt’s dishes he feels so sorry that he almost starts crying. However, he thinks that “[a] man must show strength in the presence of a woman [Hannah]” (Applegate 99). This shows that he already wants to see himself as a man and act accordingly. Crying is a sign of weakness. Kek has a very stereotypical image of men’s and women’s tasks. After he broke the dishes he says that “perhaps this is my punishment for trying to do the work of a woman” (Applegate 100). Hannah, who comes across as a very strong-minded and self-confident girl, immediately calls Kek a ‘moron’ and tells him that, in America, “a woman can do anything a man can do” (Applegate 100). Men obviously have a superior position in the Nuer culture. When Ganwar cannot find a job, he says that “real men don’t do menial work” (Applegate 109). When Ganwar tries to take away Kek’s hope by telling him that his mother is most certainly dead, Kek has to cry but he hides it. He does not want to agree or to come across as weak and unmanly (Applegate 46).

The fact that he had to leave his mother behind during the attack makes him a coward in his own eyes (Applegate 202). His cousin, however, tries to make him feel better by pointing out that he only did what he had to do in order to survive. “Even a brave man can’t stop a bullet” (Applegate 202). Ganwar explains that they all had no other choice but to run and, all of sudden, both start to cry (Applegate 202-203). Perhaps, with this scene, the author wanted to highlight that it is no shame to cry. One of the novel’s major messages is that even real men are allowed to display their feelings in public.

5.4.5. Age & Target Readership

Home of the Brave is a novel that is suitable for various learner levels. In terms of vocabulary, this book is not very demanding. Yet, language-wise the author uses a lot of stylistic devices that need to be discussed before reading and during the actual reading process. Due to its poetic language style, this novel might be most suitable for readers aged between 16 and 18, respectively the 6th to 8th form. Furthermore, just like *Zephaniah*, Applegate evokes difficult topics such as war, death, trauma and violence. Younger readers might find it hard to cope with the literal and detailed descriptions of horrifying events included. In spite of the fact that the protagonist is younger than the target readership which I am proposing, seeing the world through Kek’s eyes will still be interesting to readers aged 16 and older.

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, there are many parallels between *Home of the Brave* and *Refugee Boy*. Consequently, including both books in the reading curriculum of one class would be a wise way to prevent tokenism. The pupils would be able to compare and contrast the protagonists' similar stories and thus get a broader understanding of the refugee perspective.

5.5. Justification

Once more, I will apply Tway's guidelines in order to justify whether and why this book would be a wise choice of refugee literature in the EFL classroom.

- (1) **Genre-specific essentials:** *Home of the Brave* provides the genre-specific essentials for a YAF novel. The story is marked by a plot that is developed in a slow but very relatable manner. The writing style is clear and linear. The characters as well as themes and motifs are described in a detailed way.
- (2) **Representation of people:** None of the characters in the story are humiliated or ridiculed. The people are depicted in a respectful way. With regard to immigrants and refugees, the representation is particularly positive.
- (3) **Is the story natural and convincing?** As already discussed in section 5.1., Applegate's inspiration for this novel derived from her personal experiences with refugees, and from real-life stories. The author tries to make her story accessible to the reader by creating authentic characters. In comparison to *Refugee Boy*, the language used by the teenagers comes across as more natural (see section 5.4.2.1.).
- (4) **Illustrations:** Just like in *Refugee Boy*, no illustrations or images are included. The cover page shows a young, black boy with a huge smile. Most likely, this is supposed to portray the protagonist. He is standing in front of a cow. This already hints at the importance of cattle for the story (see section 5.4.4.2.). The fact that this book does not provide any additional illustrations might also support my claim that the target readership should not be too young.
- (5) **Stereotypes and prejudices:** Negative stereotypes or prejudices are not promoted but they have been detected in the course of the story (see section 5.4.4.3.).
- (6) **Respectful understanding of identity and heritage:** As has been argued in this chapter, 'identity' can be considered one of the central themes in this novel. Just like Alem in *Refugee Boy*, Kek is also torn between his old life and his new life, and thus between two identities. Due to the fact that this is a first-person narrative, the reader is often provided with an internal perspective on the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. Consequently, the

readers are also inevitably forced to reflect upon the notion of identity and gain a better understanding of it as a result. In section 5.4.4.1., it has been pointed out that the protagonist often refers to his old life in Africa in an idealised and romanticised way. Cultural heritage is, therefore, treated with a lot of respect.

- (7) **Age:** This novel is most appropriate for readers aged 16 and older (see section 5.4.5.).
- (8) **Is diversity realistically promoted?** Without doubt, *Home of the Brave* praises diversity (see section 5.4.4.6.). This hypothesis is reinforced by the way in which Kek talks about his multicultural ESL class: “Sixteen people with 12 ways of talking” (Applegate 73). Their faces have “all the colors of the earth” but they are still “sitting at the same desks, wanting to learn the same things” (Applegate 73). The idea behind this is that they are all one. Ms. Hernandez’s speech on the last school day when she tells her class: “[l]ike so many immigrants before you, I know you all help make this country a better, stronger place” (Applegate 185). Applegate definitely strives to present various life styles and different cultures in a realistic and respectful manner.

As has been demonstrated in the fifth chapter of this thesis, *Home of the Brave* meets all of the requirements in order to be regarded as a Young Adult novel. Furthermore, the last section proved that this novel can be considered an adequate choice of refugee literature for the EFL classroom as it fulfills all of the selection criteria.

Chapter 6: Analysis of *The Optician of Lampedusa*

6.1. Background

The Optician of Lampedusa was written by Emma Jane Kirby in 2016. She is a BBC journalist who delivers “news reports from the world’s hotspots. Her dispatches for Radio 4’s *PM* Programme from the frontline of the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean won her plaudits and an international prize” (Stanford, online review). In the acknowledgements at the end of her book, Kirby explains that, originally, her “book started as a report for BBC Radio 4’s *PM* programme” (Kirby 117). The author personally thanks the optician of Lampedusa, Carmine Menna and his wife, Rosaria, for sharing their story and for agreeing to publish a recount of their most traumatic experience in life.

According to Stanford (online review), this novel is not only ambitious, it is also important as it “goes far beyond the voyeurism of 24-hour news”. Just like Zephaniah and Applegate, Kirby wants her readership to become active, to receive accurate information on the European migrant crisis and to act accordingly. As will be demonstrated in the course of this chapter, the way the author writes about the optician’s story can be understood as a wake-up call for the readers. Stanford (online review) agrees with this assumption by stating that “Emma Jane Kirby challenges us to do more than cry”.

6.2. Brief Summary

One October day in 2013, the optician and his wife Teresa decide to go on a sailing trip with their six friends: Gabriele, Francesco, Matteo, Maria, Giulia and Elena. Francesco owns the 15-metre long, wooden fishing boat called ‘Galata’ which has been constructed for a maximum of 10 passengers.

They were the first on the scene of a terrible ship accident. A ship which was smuggling hundreds of migrants from Africa to Italy had sunk. The optician and his friends manage to save the lives of 47 people, 46 men and male teenagers and only one woman. Apparently, more than 500 people died in the open sea. When the boat is completely overcrowded, the group goes back to the mainland, where they are hoping for help from other boats and the legal authorities

to rescue the other survivors. Their call for help is refused. They are told that it is too late anyway and that it is illegal to bring these refugees on Italian soil.

Afterwards, the book focuses on the aftermath of this terrible event. It is discussed how the saviors and the survivors cope with their traumas. The optician and his friends are trying to establish contact to the survivors, who have been put into Lampedusa's local refugee camp, i.e. the reception centre. When they are planning on paying them a visit, the police refuse them entrance. As the public media attention for this accident grows, the optician and the other saviors are invited to an official ceremony where they are able to meet the rescued refugees again.

6.3. Methodology for Analysis

Unlike the two novels discussed before, *The Optician of Lampedusa* is not to be considered a perfect example of YA fiction. Firstly, it is a non-fictional account based on a true story. Only the names of the characters have been altered (e.g. the optician's wife, who is called Teresa but in real life her name is Rosaria). In the first chapter, I have already mentioned that even though this book does not count as a classic YA novel, it certainly includes a number of features which are characteristic of the genre. In the current chapter, I will scrutinize to which YAF criteria (i.e. *length, language, characters & narration, content & relevant themes*, as well as *age of target readership*) this book can actually hold up. Moreover, Tway's guidelines for the selection of refugee literature (see chapter 3.1.2.) will be applied in order to prove whether and in how far *The Optician of Lampedusa* is a valuable choice for the EFL classroom.

6.4. Analysis

6.4.1. Length

In comparison to the other two novels, this book is by far the shortest one. With only 116 pages *The Optician of Lampedusa* is a very fast read. There are 12 chapters, a prologue and an epilogue. None of the chapters has a title. Their length varies between 6 to 13 pages. Thus, the chapters are fairly short as well. I consider it quite realistic that it will not take longer than a week to finish reading this novel in class. In fact, the discussion of the novel will probably require more time than the actual reading process. Considering the restricted time in EFL classes, this book might be a very attractive choice as it is really fast to read. As opposed to the

other novels discussed in this thesis, I have decided that it is not necessary to propose a detailed reading plan in this case. Personally, I would just split the reading up into two assignments (see figure 7) – first assignment: prologue until chapter 7, second assignment: chapter 8 until the epilogue.

| Title | Number of Pages |
|------------|-----------------|
| Prologue | 2 |
| Chapter 1 | 7 |
| Chapter 2 | 11 |
| Chapter 3 | 8 |
| Chapter 4 | 6 |
| Chapter 5 | 7 |
| Chapter 6 | 7 |
| Chapter 7 | 13 |
| Chapter 8 | 11 |
| Chapter 9 | 11 |
| Chapter 10 | 10 |
| Chapter 11 | 8 |
| Chapter 12 | 13 |
| Epilogue | 2 |

Figure 7: Reading Plan for *The Optician of Lampedusa*

6.4.2. Language

6.4.2.1. Various Language Styles and Non-Verbal Communication

There are a number of interesting aspects with regard to language in this novel. Just like Applegate in *Home of the Brave* (see section 5.4.2.1.), Kirby cleverly mixes various language styles such as poetic language, colloquial language and some Italian words. In her book, the author also highlights the importance of non-verbal communication as the crew and the refugees do not share a common language. This is an aspect that has not been brought up in the other two novels due to the fact that the refugees there were always able to communicate in English. It should be noted that in the other books, English was also the official language of the countries they immigrated to. In this case, the official language is Italian.

In comparison to the other two novels the language is much more elevated. The author sometimes uses words which are so sophisticated that even I had to look them up. For instance: “vacuous” (Kirby 7), “bevelled” (Kirby 8), “endearing” (Kirby 25), “dirge” (Kirby 27).

“stoically” (Kirby 35), “vertebrae” (Kirby 66), “tarmac” (Kirby 66), “fissures” (Kirby 67), “prurience” (Kirby 80), “unfathomable” (Kirby 83), “bereft” (Kirby 90), “fretful” (Kirby 94), “inane” (Kirby 104) and “finicky” (Kirby 22). Interestingly, the author adds the meaning of this word here: the optician is mocked for “being so finicky and precise, wanting everything done just so in a very particular way” (Kirby 22). The fact that this novel is more demanding in terms of vocabulary also becomes evident by the use of the optician’s special, professional terminology: “retinoscopes and ophthalmoscopes” (Kirby 14). Perhaps such special optic terms have only been included in order to show how much the optician values his job or to make the recount more detailed and more authentic. Of course, considering this aspect it can be questioned if this novel is actually an appropriate choice for EFL learners then. Personally, I still think that *The Optician of Lampedusa* can be read in class provided that the learners are older, and that their command of English is quite advanced. Particularly for this book, it is important to pre-teach difficult vocabulary (for pre-activity ideas see section 3.2.1.).

Concerning the poetic language style, it can be noted that, just like in *Home of the Brave*, various stylistic devices have been employed. Numerous similes and metaphors can be found throughout the text, for example: “The optician saw the black dots come into focus. **Bodies were flung like skittles across the sea’s glassy surface**, some bobbing precariously, some horizontal and horribly heavy” (Kirby 27; emphasis added), or when the protagonist points out that the water resembles “[s]plintered cobalt and turquoise **as bright and smooth as cheap jewellery**” (Kirby 4; emphasis added). The continuous use of metaphorical language, e.g. the sea was ‘thick with bodies’” (Kirby 45) contributes considerably to the overall poetic impression of Kirby’s writing style.

Furthermore, personifications can also be detected in the novel. For instance: “Nature recognizes that Lampedusa will always be gentle with whatever washes up here” (Kirby 4). In this quote, nature, as well as the island, are endowed with human characteristics. In the next example the boat is personified as it cuts “drunkenly” (Kirby 37) through the waves. This could also be seen as a metaphor indicating that the boat was very unsteady.

It seems as if repetition is frequently employed to make certain scenes more intriguing and more emotionally touching: “You see, I thought I’d heard seagulls screeching. Seagulls fighting over a lucky catch. **Birds. Just birds**” (Kirby 1; emphasis added). In the following example, the word ‘almost’ as well as the sentence structure are repeated: “**Almost** everyone was crying. [...] **Almost** no one spoke” (Kirby 42; emphasis added). Kirby also uses alliterations to put emphasis

on a particular situation. When the optician describes how he and his friends were operating while saving the refugees in the water he points out that they functioned like machines: “saving, sorting and securing” (Kirby 31; emphasis added). In this case, the alliteration makes their acting sound almost mechanical.

What renders Kirby’s writing style so particularly interesting is the combination of poetic and colloquial language. Sometimes even swear words are included. For instance, when the optician thinks to himself: “What kind of fish would be on the surface of the water, **idiot**?” (Kirby 27; emphasis added) or when he asks himself “[w]here the **hell** was the coastguard?” (Kirby 35; emphasis added). The insensitive way in which the refugees are treated by the authorities when they arrive at the mainland makes the optician furious, so he yells: “You have no **damn** idea what these people have just been through!” (Kirby 43; emphasis added). Swear words are not randomly used, they are, first and foremost, added to express the protagonist’s anger. In addition, just like in *Home of the Brave* (see section 5.4.2.1.), the author also includes idioms like being “[t]hick as thieves” (Kirby 13).

Another interesting aspect about language is that the author sometimes includes Italian words which are not translated. They are standing out of the text as they are highlighted in italics: “*dammuso*” (Kirby 3), the name of the boat “*Galata*”, “*sardinella*” (Kirby 9), “*aperitivo*” (Kirby 9), “*passeggiata*” (Kirby 16), “*Buone vacanze!*” (Kirby 18), “*primo piatto*” (Kirby 18), “*carabinieri*” (Kirby 63), “*arancini*” (Kirby 86). For some of these words, e.g. ‘dammuso’, there is no exact English translation. Perhaps, the author highlighted these Italian words to remind the readers that the optician does not speak English. Most probably, he told his story in Italian and it was Kirby who translated it into English.

Except for gestures and non-verbal communication, the optician and his friends are not able to interact with the refugees. This is particularly highlighted when one of the survivors on deck “was weeping and moaning to himself in a language that they didn’t understand” (Kirby 30). Matteo is the first one who tries to speak a few words in English. He asks one refugee who is incredibly hysterical what he wants and tells him that he might be able to help him if only he could tell him in very slow English (Kirby 32). This evokes the idea of English as a *Lingua Franca*. Perhaps, Kirby also wants to emphasize with this story that in order to be able to help, it would be recommendable to possess a basic skill of English.

When the optician comes across the only surviving woman and realises that she is giving herself up he feels the urge to encourage her to keep fighting in the water but he knows that “it was futile to plead in Italian” (Kirby 33). Maria and Teresa also start to cry out to her. Even if this woman did not understand what they were saying, she certainly understood what they were trying to say by *how* they said it. Their gestures and their crying voices helped her to use her remaining strength to hold on to the rubber ring. On board of the *Galata*, the woman shows her gratitude by thanking Teresa in English. This is why they suppose that she speaks or at least understands a bit of English. Consequently, “[i]n their own patchy English and with much sign language, they showered her with questions” (Kirby 34).

The optician curses “the fact that he [does] not speak English or whatever language they spoke” (Kirby 73). He really wants to communicate with them, in order to exchange his feelings and thoughts. “He felt helpless - He had no common language with which he could reassure these desperate people, and even if he had, he thought bitterly, what could he tell them?” (Kirby 44). The protagonist wishes to be able to assist the refugees in the bureaucratic process but he cannot do so due the language barrier (Kirby 73).

As they are unable to communicate in the same language, they use gestures to express their feelings and thoughts (Kirby 111).

It didn't matter they didn't share a language. They seemed to understand how worried *Galata*'s crew had been as to how they were faring. Some gave them the thumbs-up sign to assure them they were OK, then inclined their head on their open palm to indicate they were just very tired. (Kirby 74)

This demonstrates the importance of non-verbal communication between saviors and survivors. “The survivors [after the service] spoke urgently in their own language and in snatches of English, clutching at them, clinging to them. He understood nothing except the words ‘thank you’. But he could sense what they wanted to say” (Kirby 82). Even if people do not share the same language and despite comprehension difficulties communication is still possible.

In the end, when they are all reunited at the first anniversary of the shipwreck, the survivors have prepared a gift for the crew. The eldest one of them has even learnt a few English words to express their gratitude (Kirby 109). Moreover, he also tries to reveal each refugee's past (Kirby 109). It felt like “doing a difficult crossword puzzle with everyone chipping in and guessing the answers to the clues” (Kirby 109). For the optician it was very difficult to follow the conversation (Kirby 109).

In the other novels scrutinized in this thesis, language acquisition was a big topic. In *The Optician of Lampedusa*, this aspect is only briefly discussed. Just like in *Home of the Brave* (see section 5.4.2.1.), the sounds of the new foreign language appear strange to the refugees and they do not find it easy to produce the respective sounds, in this case the Italian rolled- r (Kirby 74). The optician tells “them his name and they [roll] the strange syllables around their mouths shyly, tasting the sound” (Kirby 74). Just like in the other novels, language and identity are closely connected. “They began to pray in their own language, half chanting, half singing” (Kirby 111). The musical aspect about their language is also pointed out.

6.4.3. Characters and Narration

6.4.3.1. Narration

The book starts with a prologue in the first-person narrative. In the opening line the reader is directly addressed: “I can hardly begin to describe to you what I saw as our boat approached the source of that terrible noise. I hardly want to. You won’t understand because you weren’t there” (Kirby 1). Obviously, this is a homodiegetic narrator who was involved in the events himself. The protagonist also directs questions at the readers: “[d]o you understand what I’m trying to say to you? Maybe it’s not possible for you to understand because you weren’t in that boat. But I was there and I saw them. I still see them. Because it’s still happening” (Kirby 2). These instances of direct addressing help to establish a personal relationship between the reader and the protagonist. The author cleverly uses this in order to transmit one of her major moral messages: the European migration crisis is still happening; everyday numerous people have to face the same destiny as the refugees in the optician’s story. It is thus high time to get active.

In the prologue, the narrator, who is also the protagonist, provides an outward description of what he sees: “I had never seen so many people in the water. Their limbs were trashing, hands grasping, fists punching, black faces flashing over then under the waves” (Kirby 1). Later on, the reader also finds out about the protagonist’s emotions and thoughts in that moment: “They were all drowning. I **thought**: how do I save them all? I can still **feel** the fingers of that first hand I seized” (Kirby 1; emphasis added). The combination of outward descriptions and the revelation of feelings renders it quite easy to relate to the main character. We perceive the world and this traumatic event through his eyes as he is the focal character.

Another interesting aspect is that the narrator, i.e. the protagonist, also introduces himself to the readers. When he is overwhelmed by the large number of people in the sea he wants to rescue, he explains: “There are too many of them. Too many of them and I don’t know how to do this.

I'm an optician; I'm not a lifesaver. I'm an optician and I'm on holiday and I don't know how to do this" (Kirby 2).

In terms of narrative structure, it is also remarkable that the author has decided to already give away the story's peak in the prologue. The reader neither knows who the narrator is nor when and where this terrible occasion took place. This definitely creates suspense. The reader might, very probably, be keen on reading on in order to find out what has happened to whom. The author is working a lot with the notion of suspense. This also becomes apparent when looking at the ending of chapter two: "It was a funny time of year, October. The beginning of the end, really" (Kirby 20). First the reader has this feeling of security, as a pleasant evening among friends is described, but something bad is yet to come.

After chapter one, the narration mode changes into a third-person narrative. Already the first line of chapter one makes this clear: "[t]he optician of Lampedusa is running" (Kirby 3). Still, the story is told from the optician's viewpoint. Descriptions from actions and feelings are also taking turns in the third-person narrative: "The optician looked at his watch and felt panic rise up in his throat" (Kirby 35). Detailed and illustrative depictions of sights and actions manage to make the readers feel as if they were also on the Galata that night: "Bodies, swollen with seawater, were slapped down rudely and heavily one by one like cuts of meat" (Kirby 37).

In the epilogue, the reader is exposed to a first-person narrative situation once more. Just like in the prologue, the narrator directly addresses the readership by posing questions and by referring to them with the personal pronoun 'you': "**You** ask me why I don't give interviews. **You** ask me why I don't like to tell this story? But if I still cannot believe it really happened, how can **you**?" (Kirby 115; emphasis added). The epilogue is almost exclusively told from an internal perspective as the optician shares his feelings and thoughts, as well as the effects of trauma on him and his friends: "Whenever I have a tough period now in my life, I always go back to that scene on the sea. In my hands I feel again the grip of those naked, desperate people who were so close to the end. And I say to myself: you have a little house, you have your little business, you have a little family. You are not in the water" (Kirby 115).

As mentioned before, there are a lot of rhetorical questions. For instance: "How could it be possible that Italy put the law above human lives?" (Kirby 36). Sometimes it is not entirely clear if these are the questions posed by the protagonist or rather by the author. It appears as if she directs these questions at the readers in order to make them reflect on their behaviour. At the end of chapter 5, it seems as if the author is again speaking directly to the reader. "**You** can

see very clearly that it isn't over for the optician. He is still searching, still scouring and still desperate to save lives" (Kirby 41; emphasis added). This makes the reader feel like an observer of the whole situation.

Not only in terms of language but also with regard to narration, this novel appears to be more complex and demanding than the other two novels. When using this book in class it is thus inevitable to make the pupils aware of the various narration modes and their effects on the readership.

6.4.3.2. Character Mapping

In comparison to the other novels, *The Optician of Lampedusa* is particularly outstanding due to its characters. Unlike the books before, the protagonist is neither a teenager nor is he a refugee. It is a grown-up man in his fifties who works as an optician. One of the reasons why I definitely wanted to include this novel in my thesis is also because this is refugee literature which is not written from a refugee's perspective. Consequently, it broadens the readers' understanding of the whole migrant situation. The readers might find it even easier to identify with a non-refugee like the optician. In addition, this book might be particularly helpful in reflecting on one's own attitude towards refugees.

Not only the protagonist but also all the other main characters are grown-ups. There are only a few teenagers among the refugees but their role is not central to the story. Despite the fact that the protagonist is an adult, it needs to be pointed out that he undergoes an impressive character development throughout the novel. In a broader sense, this could be compared to the coming-of-age process that the teenage protagonists in the other novels undergo, too. Even if the optician is a lot older than the target readership of an EFL classroom, the readers can still identify with the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. This may be due to the fact that the major event, i.e. the rescue mission after the shipwreck, is also a completely new situation to the protagonist. Just like in the preceding chapters, a detailed analysis of the main character is to follow in the next section.

6.4.3.3. Protagonist

The optician was originally born in Naples but he has been living on the island for about 25 years. The protagonist is depicted as a very ambitious character. When he moved to Lampedusa he wished "to construct a new and more meaningful life" (Kirby 7) on the island. Basically, this is the same motive that refugees have when they are coming to a new country: they want to obtain a better life (see section 2.1.1.). This might also be the reason why the optician can relate

to the refugees' motives. He assumes that "they would have expected only laughter and jobs, safe homes and freedom" in Europe (Kirby 79). Nonetheless, the optician is not naïve. He is aware that this is not the reality, as will be discussed later on.

The protagonist is the owner of a little shop which he runs together with his wife Teresa. Moreover, he is the father of two sons, who have both left Lampedusa to pursue their studies somewhere else in Italy. It is very clear that the optician is extremely proud of his children. He enjoys talking about their success and achievements whenever he is with his friends. The protagonist comes across as someone who is very orderly and hard-working. When he is doing something, he does it with full devotion. The optician is sportive and takes good care of his looks and outward appearance. "He likes to push himself, to feel his body working. He's always been slim and fit. Years ago, he'd enjoyed the physical discipline of his military service, and although he is in his late fifties now, he won't let anything slip" (Kirby 4). The primary reason why he works so hard is to guarantee his family a good life (Kirby 6). Despite being very concerned about his fitness and outwards looks, the protagonist cannot be deemed particularly vain. Letting himself go was never an option for the optician. He is convinced that one can get "nowhere in life without discipline" (Kirby 12). Everything is about "[d]iscipline and damn hard work" (Kirby 12). This might also be the reason why his costumers consider him an honest man (Kirby 15). The optician feels very humbled about this compliment. He knows that as an optician, it is important to be trustworthy as there is a certain kind of intimacy about this profession (Kirby 15). His costumers are putting their eye-sight into his hands. He is well aware of his responsibility. The optician always dreamed of becoming an optician one day as "he has always been fascinated by sight, by how and what people see" (Kirby 5). He is, indeed, a close observer and enjoys analysing other people. Even when having dinner with his friends he cannot help but observing them. He scrutinises people as if they were placed under a microscope (Kirby 15) and does not even realise that his staring sometimes makes people feel uncomfortable.

In addition, the protagonist likes to have everything under control. Without doubt, he is a perfectionist. He has "become famous for his exactness and precision" (Kirby 4). Things need to be in order for him. The optician is known to be a list-maker (Kirby 14). Already at the beginning of the book it is stated that "[b]eing master of himself, his own time, managing his own little world- that's what he likes" (Kirby 6). This might also be the reason why he is so devastated when he realises that it is impossible to rescue all the refugees as they are simply too many (Kirby 2). It makes him feel guilty and angry that he cannot do more and that he is not the master of the situation. He is definitely not a man who likes to display his emotions in

public. When the crew and the survivors have to part after the ceremony the optician feels out of control and overwhelmed by his emotions again (Kirby 81). He is even frightened by this “roar of the emotion inside him” (Kirby 81). He admits that “he had no idea that such profound depths of sorrow existed. He could never imagine feeling such an acute sadness” (Kirby 82). The optician feels helpless: it was a “heart-wrenching pervasive sadness that he could do nothing” (Kirby 81).

Just like the protagonists of the other novels, the optician is definitely portrayed as a humble person. One of the novel’s major messages is also that we should be grateful for the small things in life and that we should always be aware of what really matters. This hypothesis is reinforced when the optician explains (as already quoted before):

[w]henver I have a tough period now in my life, I always go back to that scene on the sea. In my hands I feel again the grip of those naked, desperate people who were so close to the end. And I say to myself: you have a little house, you have your little business, you have a little family. You are not in the water. (Kirby 115)

Before this terrible event he loved the sea (Kirby 4). “How he loved the sea! The immensity of it! He’d always found being on the water so restorative” (Kirby 21). “He’d always respected the sea, [...] he always felt a sense of kinship whenever he looked out at its sparkling surface. Now he sensed its hostility – or at least its ambiguity – knowing how stealthily and purposefully it had sucked down so many lives into its depths” (Kirby 43). Before, he appears to have led a perfectly idyllic life with his wife. Similar to Kek’s romanticised visions of Africa (see section 5.4.4.1.), the optician’s descriptions of the landscape of Lampedusa and the sea sound idealised and evoke the idea of a lost paradise.

[E]ven though today is the first day of October, it [the sea] would still be warm and welcoming. Out on the boat with his wife Teresa, he watches dolphins and sometimes sperm whales swimming in the tranquil waters. They often swim themselves at the paradisiacal Rabbit Beach where the bleached sands radiate heat. (Kirby 4)

The optician absolutely adores his family, especially his wife. He thinks that she has a big heart and a lot of class (Kirby 17). She has a “childish sense of innocence”, which renders her endearing, but “her openness also [leave] her vulnerable” (Kirby 25). The protagonist is highly protective of the ones he loves. When the crew and the refugees are sailing back to the mainland on the highly overcrowded Galata, the optician is not primarily concerned about his own life. What he worries about most is the life of his friends and of his wife, in particular (Kirby 38).

When he first encounters the people in the open sea his first thought is: “Oh God, no. Please God, no” (Kirby 27). Very quickly, “the optician [has] understood that he would have to choose who would live and who would die” (Kirby 28). “Faced by hundreds of people in the water, the optician is compelled to play God. He chooses which outstretched arm to grab and then watches as those he rejects sink beneath the surface” (Stanford, online). He develops an unusual kind of optimism in that moment. However, the optician cannot be described as particularly optimistic, as opposed to the protagonists in the other novels. He still tries his best to hold on to hope. When he still sees people in the sea the only thing he can think of is: “Don’t you die! Don’t you dare to die!” (Kirby 37). “It would be unthinkable to stop. It would be madness!” (Kirby 39). The protagonist can definitely not be considered a religious person. Even if he does not believe in God, he starts praying when he sees the shipwrecked people: “The optician found himself praying silently to a God he didn’t believe in” (Kirby 33). This shows that in a moment of shock and despair people frequently hold on to a faith they do not even believe in. The optician also points out that he is enjoying the ceremony for the ones he could not save. It feels “holy and pure and unique” to him (Kirby 78). In that moment, even the optician clasps his hands together and starts praying (Kirby 79). Praying together also appears to have a healing effect on the optician: “[s]o they joined hands – all of them – and stood in a line, looking out across the sea. And when the refugees began to pray again, he did not feel uncomfortable” (Kirby 112).

Throughout the novel, the optician’s huge personal development is highlighted. This terrible event makes him reflect upon his own life, his own behaviour and his attitude towards refugees. Now he thinks that his lifestyle and his daily routine are absurd: “The pathetic unimportance of his routines and the insignificance of his work compared with his morning when he had really known he was alive! This morning had actually mattered” (Kirby 47). There are more important things to life than work. From now on,

[h]e would never forget the feel of all those slippery wet hands in his. The power ripped through his own sinewy back as he willed the survivors from the water. He had never felt so alive in his whole life – he could feel vitality sparking, flaring, flashing through his nerves and muscles and he wanted – no, he needed – to make those dots in the water feel it too. (Kirby 32)

He suddenly feels an incredible guilt. His house is 15 minutes away from the local refugee camp. Why did he never act before when the problem was just in front of him all along? (Kirby 59). “[H]e could [no longer] ignore the fact that the waving hands [have] always been visible to him. They [have] waved in the water, yes, but they [have] also waved from the reception centre, from the church steps and from the roadside where he [has] jogged past them, blindly”

(Kirby 98). This can be understood as a critique of our society as a whole: are we all blind or ignorant? Every day, refugees die in front of our eyes. What do we do to prevent this? Do we act at all?

“The TV, the papers – they’re saturated with news about migrants; it’s all they talk about. There was something else on the radio the other day about some more drowning off the coast of Sicily. Seven or eight of them, was it?” (Kirby 7). The fact that the optician cannot even recall the exact number of refugees who died is proof of how little concerned he was about the topic at first. Even Matteo is starting to realise how careless he has been of the migrant crisis until now. The week before the accident he heard in the news that 13 refugees drowned off Sicily’s coast (Kirby 77). He points out to the optician that so far, he “barely registered the news. [He] barely gave them a thought” (Kirby 77). Just like the optician, he developed a sense of guilt. Yet, the protagonist does not only feel guilt because he did not care enough beforehand. He also feels guilty because he could not rescue everyone. He troubles himself with the question if he has really done everything possible (Kirby 46).

Even after the accident, the optician cannot give up on the ones he saved. He wants to be back with them and find out who they are (Kirby 47). The optician refuses to sit still and just watch while innocent people have to die. Very poetically, he compares their faith as well as his own faith to a reckless card game. Even if “[t]he cards [have] been dealt out already” and even if there was “no reshuffling of the pack” (Kirby 103), he has decided to play out his hand. The protagonist does not want to “sit out the game and simply watch” (Kirby 103). This tragedy makes him realise the magnitude of the migrant problem. He becomes, indeed, a lot more self-reflective, which is supported by the many questions he asks himself: “How many more migrant boats were secretly beached on its [the sea’s] bottom? How many more desperate people had given their last breath to its mighty waves?” (Kirby 43). He starts reflecting upon “all the other shipwrecks he knew had already occurred off Lampedusa’s coast” (Kirby 46). Before this has happened, he switched off the radio when there were news about drowning refugees (Kirby 46). The optician’s growing sense of self-reflection also becomes evident when he mentions his father, who always used to tell him that “there is a thick black line above and below which we can measure ourselves and our behaviour and against which we can evaluate what is right and what is wrong” (Kirby 46). Indeed, the optician always tries to calculate his actions and priorities against this line (Kirby 46). This internal meter is a metaphor for his inner sense of responsibility. “He checked his life against that bar. And now the line didn’t seem straight or constant any more. It was wavy and intermittent and he could no longer see his position in

relation to it. The certainty was gone” (Kirby 46). He has learnt that history always repeats itself when he remembers his father talking about the war (Kirby 56). The optician compares the naked bodies on board of their boat to the people from his father’s stories about the concentration camps in World War II (Kirby 56). The past cannot be locked away. Terrible things are still happening and people are dying for no reason every day. This is one of the essential moral lessons of this book.

“By the time the optician’s boat had arrived back on Lampedusa, he was being hailed as a hero. He refuses the label. He is, he knows, part of a collective failure of humanity on the part of Europe towards these desperate migrants” (Stanford, online review). Other people tell the optician that he and his crew were brave to save these migrants (Kirby 50). They even get applause in the local café and are celebrated for their courage in the newspaper (Kirby 61). Nevertheless, the optician points out that he is not a hero: “I’m an optician; I’m not a lifesaver” (Kirby 2). He explains: “I’ve failed. We’ve all failed. Us, Italy, Europe – all of us” (Kirby 61). This is a critique of the European system. The protagonist is not the only character who emphasizes his dissatisfaction with the way in which refugees are treated when they come to Europe. Even the local gravedigger asks why Europe is only doing the minimum for the refugees. He asks why they are not doing more to end this tragedy (Kirby 70). Why does everyone act as if these migrants were “no one’s problem” (Kirby 70). How long will it take for Europe to stop debating and start acting? (Kirby 99). How many more people need to die? This book is not only a wake-up call for the readers. Even more importantly, Kirby seems to particularly voice criticism of politicians and public authorities.

The state funeral promised at the official ceremony for the dead is nothing but a “grand gesture of a guilty conscience” (Kirby 71). While Maria is naïve enough to believe that this is a sign that something might change, the optician is more cynical and assumes that it is only to make a good impression in the media (Kirby 71). Indeed, there are many public occasions and gatherings particularly organised for refugees on Lampedusa. The optician avoids them as he considers them hypocritical. He despises the thought of people acting like they regret that shipwrecks like the one he experienced are still happening, but no one would do anything about it anyway (Kirby 106). All these empty promises made by the EU and Italy just make him angry (Kirby 107). What annoys him even more is the fact that he is not even allowed to help. At the refugee camp, the optician and his friends are denied entrance unless they work for an NGO, as no members of the public are allowed there (Kirby 51). Interviews are prohibited as well (Kirby 51). They are apparently afraid that the poor conditions at the camp will become public in the

media: broken toys, dirty clothes with holes and in general, a lot of trash lying around (Kirby 54). It almost seems like a prison, with a wired fence around and numerous police officers who are constantly patrolling outside.

One of the most interesting aspects about this novel is the fact the optician's real name is never revealed throughout the story. He is the protagonist, the focal character and yet, he remains anonymous. According to Stanford (online review), "Kirby tells it as a moral tale, following events through the eyes of the fastidiously ordinary optician never named in the text and thereby transformed into an everyman". This hints at the idea that everyone can help and that everyone is involved in this problem. In general, when reading the book, it sometimes feels like a preparatory guide on how to act in such a horrifying situation. Immediate action is required. In that moment, "not a second [can be] wasted with debate over who should perform what function, who should stand where" (Kirby 29). "[T]here [isn't] time for emotion" (Kirby 30). The way in which the optician and his friends are operating is not only teamwork- it seems as if they are working together at a "factory conveyor belt, saving, sorting and securing" (Kirby 31). The protagonist points out that "[i]t was as if [...] they had been purposefully selected for this task – as if all their lives they'd been subconsciously practising for this day" (Kirby 31). The message behind this is that in extreme situation people will automatically figure out what to do anyway. Once more, the author appears to use the protagonist to demonstrate that *everyone* can help.

6.4.4. Content, Themes and Motifs

6.4.4.1. Reaction of Host Society

When discussing the other novels, this section always contained an analysis of the host society's reaction towards the protagonists. Yet, and as mentioned before, the main character is not a refugee in this case. This section will focus on how the inhabitants of Lampedusa react to the rescued refugees as well as towards migrants in general.

At the beginning of the book, the optician remarks that 20 years ago, there were fewer migrants so that he could make his way through the streets of Lampedusa without that much effort (Kirby 7). Nowadays, "[b]ig boatloads arrive now in a constant stream – whole families; women and children too, poor things" (Kirby 7). This shows that the optician feels particularly sorry for the women and the children. Before the accident he notices that "almost every day [...] he sees the buses leaving the port packed with newly arrived migrants. They hang out by the supermarket

opposite his shop and he sees crowds of them cluster around the church” (Kirby 5). However, they do not really concern him as he “has other things on his mind” (Kirby 9). When the optician “jogs past some young Africans crouched on the roadside, fiddling with their mobile phones” (Kirby 6), he cannot help but wonder: are they really that poor if they are able to afford a mobile phone? Nevertheless, the optician greets them politely. He notices the rubbish around them and immediately supposes that they are responsible for it (Kirby 6). It almost seems as if the optician has a number of prejudices with regard to refugees. Due to the many migrants, policemen are patrolling all around Lampedusa. Of course, this does not make a very positive impression on the tourists (Kirby 63). “The migrants, he thinks, are hardly a positive tourist attraction and many holidaymakers have chosen Sardinia over Lampedusa” (Kirby 8). The optician is very glad that he is not reliant on the tourist trade with his business (Kirby 8). Yet, and as mentioned in the preceding section, the optician’s attitude towards refugees changes quite rapidly.

After the shipwreck, the optician starts questioning the policemen’s use. What are they doing the whole time if they are not helping? (Kirby 60). One police officer at the refugee camp even tells them that they cannot just come in and talk to the “illegal immigrants” (Kirby 55). Again, they are not seen as people who need help and support but rather as criminals. The optician cannot relate to this attitude at all. He is convinced that if these policemen had been on the Galata that night, they would be acting differently now. When their boat arrives at the port, a large number of police and uniformed officials is awaiting them (Kirby 43). The refugees, as well as the crew, are frightened by the guns and the loud sirens. The optician is angry as he cannot understand why these traumatised people are treated like criminals (Kirby 43). As the analysis of *Refugee Boy* has shown, asylum seekers are very frequently considered criminals and treated accordingly (see section 4.4.4.2.).

Just like in the other novels before, a lot of people react negatively to migrants. One of the optician’s older costumers tells him that the “[d]amn migrants [are] ruining Lampedusa” because “they’d driven away trade” (Kirby 100). He even criticises the charity events for refugees. He explains that “[e]very concert held on the island is a fundraiser for the migrants, every newspaper story that mentions Lampedusa is about the migrants” (Kirby 100). The costumer thinks that the migrants should not be Lampedusa’s main problem (Kirby 101). This implies that the older citizens are especially hostile towards refugees. Refugees are not seen as human beings but as a problem.

In addition, at the scene of the shipwreck not all people are as helpful as the optician and his friends. Eventually, two other boats come round but they stop as soon as they realise that there

are black people in the sea. They are too afraid to intervene due to the strict Italian laws concerning the aiding of illegal immigrants (Kirby 36). Later on, when the optician notices the coastguard approaching, he is very glad to see the professionals. He assumes that they will help them transport the migrants to the main land so that their crew would still be able to continue the rescue mission (Kirby 38). Unfortunately, they are told to finish and that the rescue mission is over (Kirby 39). The coastguard explains that such a move would be forbidden by the protocol (Kirby 40). The fact that there exists a protocol also shows that this is not an uncommon situation for these “professionals”. Every day, the law is put above people’s lives. When the coastguard tells the crew to stop their rescue mission they become furious. A heated discussion begins. Even Maria and Elena join in (Kirby 39). Matteo argues furiously with the other ship’s captain (Kirby 40). Francesco swears at them (Kirby 40). The optician finds their reaction absolutely incomprehensible, it is pure madness to him (Kirby 40). He is also angry and starts yelling at them aggressively (Kirby 40).

The optician is realistic enough to know that Europe cannot take in every person who is looking for a better life (Kirby 90). Yet, he is convinced that there needs to be a better way (Kirby 90). If they already knew what these poor people had to go through, i.e. war, persecution, dictatorships, why would the government insist on these obsolete rules (Kirby 90). To him, it seems like a sinister selection, again it is a feeling of playing God who decides who may live and who will die (Kirby 90). This can also be understood as a message from the author. She criticises this selection process (Kirby 90). Why do they have to undergo such a long and unsafe procedure if everyone knows about their terrible past anyway? (Kirby 90). The optician remarks quite ironically that “[i]t was like a sinister selection test: manage this deadly assault course successfully and bingo! You’ve earned yourself a place in Paradise” (Kirby 90).

6.4.4.2. Trauma, Shock & Loss

In no other novel has the notion of trauma been so present and perceptible throughout the story as in this one. Kirby does not only point out the effects of trauma on the optician and his friends, she also provides her readers with a very detailed description of the trauma the refugees have to face. The author discusses the causes and consequences of trauma and also the way in which the characters cope with it.

Already at the beginning, the protagonist seems to reveal how traumatised he is by what has happened to him and his friends: “I can hardly describe to you what I saw as our boat approached the source of that terrible noise. I hardly want to” (Kirby 1). He finds it very hard to speak about what has happened to him and his friends. In fact, the optician claims that he

never even wanted to share this story (Kirby 2). He cannot forget what he saw in that night and relives it over and over again in his memories: “I was there and I saw them. I still see them. Because it’s still happening” (Kirby 2). The optician describes the horrifying event in a very detailed and touching manner. “[F]rom every direction, voices shrieked in panic” (Kirby 30), “[t]he ocean resonated with the primitive screaming, the terrible sound bouncing off and under the water, gargling and rupturing. The optician recognized it as the music of the dying, the final dirge of the drowning, played out right in front of their boat” (Kirby 27). “Salt water and shock had wrecked their intestines and they were retching and defecating all over deck” (Kirby 31). Some of the survivors even “drifted in and out of consciousness” (Kirby 31). The protagonist “[looks] at the jumble of wretched survivors crouched on the deck, partially draped in seat covers, in his own old T-shirts and shorts, sobbing for their death. The deck [is] awash with their vomit, tears and faeces” (Kirby 36). One of the refugees “sobbed like a baby, rocking himself” (Kirby 30). This is a clear demonstration of how traumatised they actually are. It is the optician’s wife who immediately understands that what these poor people need most is protection. She is “mothering and comforting” them (Kirby 42) by giving them clothes, food, water and most importantly, a feeling of security.

Some of the refugees no longer have the strength to be rescued. They are giving up due to exhaustion and because they are very obviously suffering from an immense trauma. The best example for this is the only woman who has survived the shipwreck. When the optician watches her, as she no longer has the ability to catch a rubber ring: “it [is] clear she [is] giving up and [is] going the same way as the corpse she clung to” (Kirby 33). Finally, they manage to rescue her even though it seems as if she had no desire to be rescued (Kirby 33). On deck, it soon becomes clear that this woman is completely traumatised. She is particularly frightened by the male crew members and humiliated to be naked in front of them. The optician feels that “they [are] hurting her just by looking at her” (Kirby 34). It is not unlikely that she has made some terrible experiences with men before the accident. Very often, if women cannot afford to go on such a ship they are raped by the smugglers in exchange (Kirby 87). When Teresa hands her a towel she is very grateful and even thanks her in English and takes her hand (Kirby 34). To the saviors’ astonishment, the woman does not cry or weep whereas Teresa and Maria are weeping openly (Kirby 33). She sits up straight and remains almost impassive (Kirby 33). The optician tries to understand her and asks himself whether she is too proud or too broken to show her emotions (Kirby 33). Eventually she manages to speak a few words and reveals that the dead body she left behind was her brother. As already mentioned, the optician is a very close observer. He remarks that “[h]er suffering [seems] so vast and intensely private that he [feels]

almost fearful as he watched her” (Kirby 42). Even at the service the only girl they saved still seems traumatised and frightened as soon as any man approaches her. The optician wants to hug her but he knows that she is too terrified (Kirby 75). The girl only allows the women to embrace her (Kirby 76).

There is trauma on both sides: “[a]lmost everyone was crying. [...] Almost no one spoke” (Kirby 42) on the boat. “The original shrieks of terror had been replaced by a doleful sobbing that made the optician’s heart ache” (Kirby 42). The optician “could feel his body was running on empty. But rather than this physical fatigue, he felt acutely that something fundamental inside him had fractured and had splintered away. Something had gone from him, had been lifted out of him and lost” (Kirby 42-43). “It was as if he’d left a part of himself back in the waves with those he had not been able to save” (Kirby 46). This is also another proof of his transformation. When the optician comes back home he even has to cry as he is taking a shower (Kirby 45). He feels guilty to comfort “himself under hot water” (Kirby 46). He is a man who is not afraid to cry. There is no shame in crying (Kirby 64). “It seemed respectful to cry” (Kirby 64). This also reminds us of the other novels in which crying is promoted as a legitimate way of coping with one’s feelings (see sections 4.4.4.2. and 5.4.4.7.).

The optician as well as his wife have to face sleeping difficulties as “the last three days [were] the most emotionally intense experience of [their] entire life” (Kirby 82). “Teresa’s suffering [is] truly terrible. She [wakes] up choking, not able to breathe, sobbing and clutching at imaginary figures” (Kirby 84). Sometimes she even suffers from panic attacks so bad that they have to go to hospital (Kirby 84). According to the doctor’s diagnosis, she suffers from “a deep shock” (Kirby 96). There are even nights when Teresa sleepwalks (Kirby 84). The optician cannot forget the horrifying images either. Even during the day time, the images haunt him and the grief just does not disappear (Kirby 85). It feels “like a cine film on a loop” (Kirby 85). The optician tries to distract himself by returning to his usual, daily routine (Kirby 47). By doing so he hopes to “glue back together his fragmented sense of order” (Kirby 47). Another way to take his mind off is doing sports. He runs to clear his head (Kirby 62), to forget about the horrifying event and at the same time he also seems to run away from the horrors on his mind and in front of his eyes.

The optician and his friends share the effects of trauma this terrible event had on them quite openly (Kirby 84). Gabriele also suffers from insomnia, he is constantly pale “and his denim-blue eyes [look] bleached and faded” (Kirby 84). Francesco, Matteo and Elena are facing

troubles due to their anger. This is why Elena even has problems at work and Matteo even breaks up with his girlfriend (Kirby 84). Giulia and Maria are feeling a deep sense of depression (Kirby 84). Usually, both women are very much concerned about their outward experience. Now, their looks reflect their emotional struggles. “Giulia’s wayward hair had become unkempt and wild” (Kirby 84).

Teresa needs a whole year to show the first signs of recovery. On the first anniversary of the shipwreck, the optician even listens to his wife singing joyfully in the bathroom (Kirby 104). For the first time in a year, he notices a “lightness in her movements, almost joy” (Kirby 104). The fact that her friends Maria and Gabriele have returned to Lampedusa after the winter break has also helped her to recover (Kirby 104). However, even one year after the tragedy the optician and his friends still feel uncomfortable out on the open sea (Kirby 105). On the first anniversary of the shipwreck, the crew and three of the survivors sailed out on the sea to honour those who could not be saved. It was the first time after the accident that they were together on the *Galata* (Kirby 105). They are all nervous and afraid that history could repeat itself (Kirby 105). This shows that they are still coping with the effects of trauma.

6.4.4.3. Family

In the other novels, the protagonists had to face the loss of family members (see sections 4.4.4.4., 5.4.4.4. and 5.4.4.5.). In this book, the optician and his friends appear to gain new family members. When they save the refugees, they give them a chance, they give them a life, just like parents. “The people he [the optician] had rescued were on the brink of existence. And when he had held their hands in his, when he had watched them take their first breaths on *Galata*’s deck, he knew he had touched the very essence of life” (Kirby 56). He is their anchor. When they looked him in the eyes he knew that “they had chosen to live” (Kirby 56). “One of the teenagers took the optician’s hand and held it over his breast so that the optician could feel the thumping of his heart. [...] The optician understood the message. You gave me life, he was saying. You gave me life” (Kirby 74). One of survivors explains on deck of the *Galata* one year later: “[he] was dead. But [t]here - he swept his arms across *Galata*’s deck - [t]here he was reborn” (Kirby 112).

The image of reaching out an arm and holding hands is frequently employed in this novel. The gift the survivors prepared for the crew is a simple drawing displaying “a grasping hand coming out of the water and being met above by another hand which clasped it in a fierce grip. It was the summary of their history” (Kirby 109). Once more, the holding of two hands is a symbol of

help and it also accounts for the deep, emotional bond between the saviors and the survivors. When the optician grasps the hand of the first refugee he “never held anyone’s hand so tightly before - the intimacy of the gesture with a naked total stranger had made him wince” (Kirby 29). The protagonist is clearly surprised that “he [...] felt something strangely primeval in him, something almost like love. He [...] wanted to hold the adolescent, to hug him to him in the same way he has done with his own sons when they were frightened or in trouble” (Kirby 29-30). “The force of that hold! My hand in a stranger’s hand, a bond stronger and more intimate than an umbilical cord” (Kirby 1-2). This demonstrates that right from the start he felt a connection almost as close and strong as to his sons.

When they are reunited at the hangar for the service, the survivors run to the crew like “primary school children meeting their parents at the end of the school day” (Kirby 73-74). When they have to leave them at the camp he feels like he has lost them all again. This shows they have established a deep bond. “‘They’re our...they’re my...’ He stopped abruptly. What were they to him? They could not be described as friends; he did not even know their names or where they came from. Yet he felt a bond with them that went way beyond a friendship” (Kirby 55-56). Right from the start, Teresa protects the survivors like an animal: “Teresa [has] pushed forward to *Galata’s* bow, protecting her charges with her own body like an animal might do” (Kirby 44). They are like her children. When Teresa is separated from the survivors she becomes “hysterical with grief” (Kirby 44). When watching the refugees on deck, it soon becomes clear that they feel very ashamed as they are naked. They are trying hard to cover and hide their private parts (Kirby 30). Teresa notices one particular boy and sensitive as she is, she immediately understands that he really needs some clothes so that she hands him a shirt of hers (Kirby 30). This shirt also has a special symbolic meaning in the end as this boy has kept it in order to honor and remember Teresa’s kindness and help (Kirby 109).

As Francesco is the oldest out of the eight crew members, the survivors assume that he is automatically the owner of the boat. They kiss his hand and call him “father” (Kirby 74). “When they’d eventually parted, [...] they’d hugged each other fiercely, like brothers” (Kirby 45). When they say good-bye after their one-year anniversary, the optician, his friends and the survivors “[part] with smiles and bear hugs, sure of each other, like family” (Kirby 112).

6.4.4.4. Identity

In the other two novels the notion of identity was always discussed with regard to migrants being caught between two identities (see sections 4.4.4.3. and .5.4.4.1.). In this case, the

refugees have to face a complete loss of identity due to a European migration system in which they are nothing but numbers, faceless bodies who appear to be nobody's problem. The dead refugees are clearly robbed of their identity.

The survivors, the relatives and the public are promised a proper state funeral in order to honor the ones who drowned (Kirby 89). Not long after the public announcement, “[t]he state funeral that had been promised [...] had been downgraded to a ‘solemn ceremony’” (Kirby 89). Shockingly, the survivors did not even receive an invitation (Kirby 89). The ones who died are spread across various cemeteries all over Sicily (Kirby 89). The fact that the drowned refugees are treated like faceless bodies becomes evident at the service ceremony, when the optician notices two toddlers in caskets who were given numbers as their names were still unknown (Kirby 77).

One day, the optician goes jogging and passes by the local cemetery where he meets the gravedigger. To him, the shipwrecked refugees are more than faceless bodies and this is why he tries to remember them even if he does not know their name (Kirby 69). There is one grave inscription even saying: “[h]ere lies the body of an unknown – Drowned off the coast of Lampe – Believed to be from the Horn of A – He was aged around twenty” (Kirby 69). The wording “believed to be” or “aged around” shows that the person who wrote this inscription did not know the deceased. It almost seems as if these people have never existed. The dead bodies are just packed in sacks and taken to any cemetery which still got some sites for graves left (Kirby 64). He does not want to make it come across as if these people never existed (Kirby 64). He wanted to pay them the last respect. That is the least he can do. Seeing these poor souls packed in variously coloured plastic sacks “was a gruesome tessellation of death” to the optician (Kirby 65). He is sure that these people are not just anonymous corpses in sacks, they have family, people waiting for them (Kirby 66). “In life they had been robbed of a future and in death they’d been robbed of an identity” (Kirby 66).

One of the survivors has eventually written an email to Francesco in which he explains that they are currently “in a big holding camp in Sicily” where each of them received a number (Kirby 95). Camps and numbers are causing the optician a bad conscience (Kirby 95). According to Gabriele's research, in that year, about 13,000 asylum-seekers came to Italy (Kirby 75). “Until now it had just been a random, meaningless figure, an empty statistic. Yet here they were before them, flesh and blood, bone and gristle [...] Names not numbers! Names!” (Kirby 75). To the optician and his friends, they are much more than nameless numbers. The optician has a very respectful attitude towards the dead bodies; he thinks that “[i]t

[feels] so ugly [...] not to stop and retrieve the dead” (Kirby 31). Some days later, relatives of the allegedly dead come to Lampedusa to check whether their missing family were on the drowned boat (Kirby 85). Weeks after the accident, a woman comes to Lampedusa in order to find out if her missing cousin was among the survivors. She shows a picture of her to Francesco and the optician. When the latter sees the photo, he points out that this girl does “not look like a pitiful refugee, she just [looks] ordinary – the type of good-looking girl you [pass] on the street all the time. She [has] just been born in the wrong place” (Kirby 91-92). He does no longer see bodies or people without faces in refugees: they are human beings. They are “[s]omebody’s wife, somebody’s brother, somebody’s son” (Kirby 37).

Not only the dead refugees are deprived of their identity. Those who survive also appear to be confronted with the loss of their identity. At the ceremony, Maria notices that the only surviving girl has deep burns on top of her fingers and asks her who hurt her (Kirby 76). The girl only responds, “No fingerprints, please” (Kirby 76). Maria is shocked when he sees her finger cups. She had read in the papers that occasionally refugees destroy their finger prints in order to circumvent an EU regulation according to which “refugees must claim asylum in the first country they arrived in” (Kirby 76). As there are few jobs for migrants in Italy, most asylum-seekers would rather go to a country further up north (Kirby 76). This incident demonstrates how far these desperate people are willing to go just to have a better future. They are even willing to give up their identity.

6.4.5. Age

Judging from what has been discussed in this chapter it is quite clear that *The Optician of Lampedusa* is definitely more suitable for older readers. I would recommend this novel for pupils who are at least in the 7th form. The language level is more sophisticated than in the other novels. This is particularly due to Kirby’s use of elevated vocabulary. Moreover, the author provides very detailed and dramatic descriptions of the current refugee situation and thereby also evokes a number of difficult topics, such as rape or violence. Consequently, it might be wise to read this novel with older students as younger ones might find it very challenging to cope with such difficult topics.

As already explained before, Kirby did not particularly aim her novel at young adult readers. Nevertheless, I still consider this book as valuable for the EFL classroom. Especially in combination with the other two novels, it would make a perfect reading plan and it would avoid

tokenism. As pointed out in the previous sections, the protagonist as well as the way in which the story is narrated make it relatable, even for younger readers.

6.5. Justification

- (1) **Genre-specific essentials:** *The Optician of Lampedusa* is, without doubt, a non-fictional story which excels at clear and logical writing. Moreover, this book provides its readers with accurate, first-hand information (see section 6.1.).
- (2) **Representation of people:** The characters in this novel are neither ridiculed nor humiliated. On the contrary, especially the main characters are presented as brave heroes. The refugees in the story are depicted as poor individuals who are very grateful for any help they can get. The author uses a respectful tone in order to describe the migrants.
- (3) **Is the story natural and convincing?** Due to the fact that this is the only non-fictional novel analysed in this thesis, it appears to be quite understandable why it comes across as much more authentic and realistic than the others. Kirby based her book upon a true story. It was told and published in order to make people aware of a huge problem (i.e. the migrant crisis) and to encourage them to act accordingly.
- (4) **Illustrations:** In the previously examined novels, I could not find any images or illustrations in the books, except for the title page. This is also the case with *The Optician of Lampedusa*. In fact, the illustration on the blue hard cover of this novel gives away even less than that of *Refugee Boy* or *Home of the Brave*. When looking at the cover, one might perceive it as an allusion to the blue sea. In section 6.4.3.3., I have already pointed out how important the sea was for the optician before the accident. The white dots could perhaps be interpreted as the refugee clusters in the open water. Once more, the lack of illustrations supports my claim that this book is rather aimed at older readers. The very simple front cover layout might have been chosen on purpose. Kirby wants her story to be heard. Readers should fully concentrate on the main moral messages and not get distracted by additional images.
- (5) **Stereotypes and prejudices:** Stereotypes and prejudices are brought up (see section 6.4.4.1.) but they are definitely not promoted. If anything, this books clearly fights against any sort of prejudices with regard to refugees.
- (6) **Respectful understanding of identity and heritage:** As has been argued in section 6.4.4.4., ‘identity’ can also be considered one of the central themes in this novel, just like in *Refugee Boy* or *Home of the Brave*. However, the notion of identity in Kirby’s book

differs as it is rather related to identity loss. In *The Optician of Lampedusa*, identity appears to be treated as a very valuable good which is not to be taken for granted, especially in the case of refugees. This story will inevitably motivate the readership to reflect on the notion of identity and what it means to be deprived of it. In comparison to the other novels, Kirby hardly focuses on the refugee's cultural background or heritage. This might be due to the fact that the migrants are not the main characters of this book.

- (7) **Age:** This novel definitely requires an older and language-wise, more sophisticated readership. I would not recommend reading this book with adolescents younger than 7th graders (see section 6.4.5.).
- (8) **Is diversity realistically promoted?** In the first chapters of the book it does not seem as if diversity was actually being promoted. In fact, judging from the protagonist's attitude towards refugees (see section 6.4.3.3.), one might assume that the inhabitants of Lampedusa are rather skeptical of refugees. After the terrible shipwreck, the protagonist has completely overthrown his former opinion on the migrants and adopted a more tolerant attitude. From this moment onwards, people from other cultures appear to be treated in a more positive way. Stanford (online review) argues very poignantly: "A bond is created between the rescuers and rescued, and it grows in the weeks and months ahead, transcending every linguistic, economic, political, social, racial or religious divide. There is no them and us, no looking the other way." Consequently, diversity is promoted in this novel.

In spite of the fact that Kirby's novel cannot be considered a traditional sample of YA literature, it still includes many of the characteristics which are typical of the genre. The language, the narration and the fact that there are rarely any teenage characters in this story might refute this argument. Yet, and as discussed in this chapter, with adequate preparation and additional explanations concerning vocabulary and narrative modes, this book might be a valuable piece of refugee literature for the advanced EFL classroom. This hypothesis is reinforced considering that all of Stover and Tway's selection guidelines are met. Most importantly, I strongly think that this novel is a perfect supplement to *Refugee Boy* and *Home of the Brave* because it allows readers to see the refugee situation from a different perspective.

Conclusion

In the first chapter of this thesis I have tried to re-define the notion of YAL. In order to do so, I have sifted out five criteria from secondary literature, such as: *length, language, characters & narration, content & relevant themes*, as well as *age of target readership*. In terms of age of the target readership it has been argued that YA novels should usually be aimed at adolescents between 12 and 18. Length did not seem to be a major factor in determining YAL. However, due to time restrictions in the EFL classroom it is an aspect that teachers often take into consideration when selecting literature. The primary criterion for valuable YAL includes content, themes and motifs. If the content of a book is of relevance to the readers' lives, they will be more likely to keep and enjoy reading. The pupils should be able to identify with the story and the characters in the novel. In YAL, the story is often told from the protagonist's perspective. Therefore, it is frequently assumed that the main character should also be a teenager. However, I have demonstrated that YAL does not compulsorily have to evolve around an adolescent protagonist. Even if the main character is older than the intended readership, they might still be able to relate to his viewpoint and behaviour. In this case, the keyword is character development, as has been argued in chapter one as well as in chapter six. Especially when considering the topic from a didactic, linguistically-oriented position, language appears to be of paramount importance in YAL. Pupils have to be able to understand and to relate to the language used. Usually, vocabulary and sentence structure are kept relatively simple within this genre. Nevertheless, and as has been corroborated when scrutinizing the primary literature, YA authors also tend to employ language that is poetic, rich and sophisticated.

In chapter two, I have provided a number of reasons why refugee literature should definitely assume an important place in EFL teaching. By taking reference to the CEFR and the Austrian curriculum, it has been demonstrated that language teaching also involves teaching the respective culture. Students should be confronted with stereotypes and prejudices in order to reflect upon their own attitude on other cultures. Hope (302) argues quite adequately that "children's literature about the refugee experience is an ideal context for sharing the stories, feelings and fears that many children have had to deal with in their relatively short lives, and expose stereotypes and media myths at the same time". Teachers need to provide the learners with appropriate literature which will help them to develop tolerance and respect towards cultural diversity. Since the scope of a diploma thesis is quite restricted, it was only possible to elucidate the value of refugee literature *for* refugee pupils very briefly.

The third chapter depicts a practical guide on how to select and teach refugee literature. One of the purposes of this chapter was to figure out useful guidelines and strategies for the right selection of texts. In order to avoid tokenism, learners should be offered more than one piece of literature on the same topic. Consequently, they will adopt various perspectives on a particular issue, which will help them to broaden their horizons. Furthermore, when selecting literature, teachers should pay close attention to the way in which characters and main topics are dealt with. It is essential that characters as well as cultures are depicted in an authentic and respectful manner. In addition, the pupils' command of language, their age, their developmental status and their preferences are also factors that need to be taken into consideration. Chapter three also provides a variety of activities which are useful for the three main stages of the reading process. Pre-activities are supposed to help learners activate their prior knowledge on a topic. In this stage, the pre-teaching of vocabulary or certain stylistic devices is also inevitable. Main activities mostly evolve around written or oral competences. In the during-reading stage, it is essential that teachers check if their pupils actually understand what they are reading. As soon as the reading process is terminated, learners should be given opportunities to secure and extend their recently gained cultural and linguistic knowledge.

Chapter four is fully devoted to the in-depth analysis of *Refugee Boy*. By looking at the five defining criteria of YAL, it has been investigated if and in how far Zephaniah's novel can be considered appropriate for adolescents. The novel's length might appear a bit excessive to teachers and pupils alike. Yet, with a clearly structured reading plan, as proposed in section 4.4.1., this book can definitely be dealt with in the EFL classroom. With regard to language, I have pointed out that the overall writing style is kept quite simple and straightforward. Some more elevated terms might need further explanation but other than that, students should not have to face any comprehension difficulties. What appears to be a bit problematic is the protagonist's use of language as it frequently comes across as too mature and thus not authentic. In terms of characters and narration, it can be stated that the half Ethiopian, half Eritrean protagonist named Alem is a teenager who has to flee Africa due to war. He is portrayed as a strong character, who fights for his dreams and who is adapting to British culture quite quickly. The author intended his protagonist to be a symbol of hope and freedom as well as a brave hero. The story is mostly narrated from Alem's point of view in the third person. Interestingly, we sometimes also find instances of an omniscient narrator or scenes in which another character's feelings and viewpoints are revealed. Thus, the narration in this novel appears to be slightly more demanding than in the second novel *Home of the Brave*. Concerning content, four prevalent themes and motifs have been discussed: culture clash & unfamiliar things, reaction

of host society & prejudices, identity as well as trauma and loss. Due to the novel's length, the fact that it requires a certain command of language competence, and its emotionally challenging topics like war or violence, the target readership should be at least 16 years old. I find it most appropriate for the 7th or 8th grade. When measuring the book against Tway's selection guidelines for refugee literature, it turned out that *Refugee Boy* is, indeed, a valuable piece of refugee literature for the EFL classroom as it promotes diversity and respect for cultural heritage and refugees.

In the following chapter I have focused on the investigation of *Home of the Brave*. Once more, I have had a look in how far this novel holds up to the YAL criteria. Length-wise, this book is similar to *Refugee Boy*. Yet, it is written in a unique stanza-like format which is why it will be faster to finish. Applegate's writing is marked by the combination of three different writing styles: poetic language, colloquial language and the Nuer language. Despite the frequent use of rhetorical devices, the overall language used is quite simple and comprehensible. With regard to character and narrative mode, I would like to highlight once more that the narration is less complex than in the other novels. Throughout the book, the author sticks with first person narration, which is also one of the main reasons why readers are easily able to identify with the protagonist Kek. Just like in the previous novel, the main character is an adolescent who comes from Africa and has to leave his country because of war. In comparison to Alem, Kek does not speak English very well. While Alem is depicted as an extremely mature character, Kek comes across as a bit naïve and unworldly. What they do have in common is their optimism and their never-ending hope. A multitude of topics has been detected in this novel. Apart from themes such as culture clash, identity, reaction of the host society, trauma & loss, hope & freedom, I have also elaborated on the notion of family, cattle and the coming-of-age process. Alem as well as Kek are confronted with a mixed identity. They are torn between their old and their new life. In the host country, not all people respond well to them. Moreover, they have to discover and deal with unfamiliar things, which frequently presents a challenge for them. I would recommend reading this novel in the 7th or 8th grade as it also covers difficult topics. Due to the fact that cultural diversity is praised and that characters are portrayed in a realistic manner this book is a great choice of refugee literature for the L2 classroom.

In the last chapter I have scrutinized the *Optician of Lampedusa*. This novel differs greatly from the other two books for various reasons. Firstly, it is a lot shorter than the other novels. Secondly, it is non-fiction as it is based on a real story. Moreover, the main character is neither a refugee nor a teenager. The language is overall more sophisticated as the author uses more

‘exotic’ words. Just like Applegate, Kirby also uses a lot of stylistic devices which render her writing quite poetic at times. It would be a wise idea to read *Home of the Brave* before this book, as the learners will be already made familiar with detecting and understanding the effects of certain rhetorical devices. Even though this novel was not primarily aimed at a teenage readership, I am convinced that young adults will still enjoy and comprehend it. It is a perfect example of today’s refugee literature and thus a valuable text for the EFL classroom. It provides its readership with a different perspective on the migrant situation. I have argued that students are probably even more likely to identify with the protagonist of this story as they are no refugees either. Similar to *Refugee Boy*, this novel also mixes narrative modes. The prologue as well as the epilogue are first-person narratives whereas the main chapters are told from the third-person perspective. In both cases, the protagonist is also the focal character. Despite all differences, *The Optician of Lampedusa* deals with topics that also occur in the other novels. I have discussed themes like family, identity, trauma, shock and loss, as well as the reaction of the host society.

In my diploma thesis I have demonstrated that even if a novel is not a perfect example of YAL, it can still be dealt with in the EFL classroom. Moreover, I have highlighted the use and importance of refugee literature for L2 acquisition. Hwang and Tipton Hindman (43) correctly assume that “experiences of refugee children must be embraced, enhanced, and celebrated through multicultural education in today’s classroom” (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 43). Chris Kearney (8 qtd. in Hope 303) explains that “[t]he world is in the classroom. It can only be translated into new cultural webs if we enter into dialogues and explore people’s lived experience”. In spite of all the differences between the three novels that I have chosen for analysis, they all have certain moral and didactic messages in common. All of the authors call on their readers to:

- Get informed and become active.
- Open your eyes. Do not be ignorant of things that are still happening.
- Participate and help.
- Be grateful for the small things in life.
- Value peace and education.
- Do not take family or friends for granted.
- Never give up hope.
- And most importantly: respect yourself and others.

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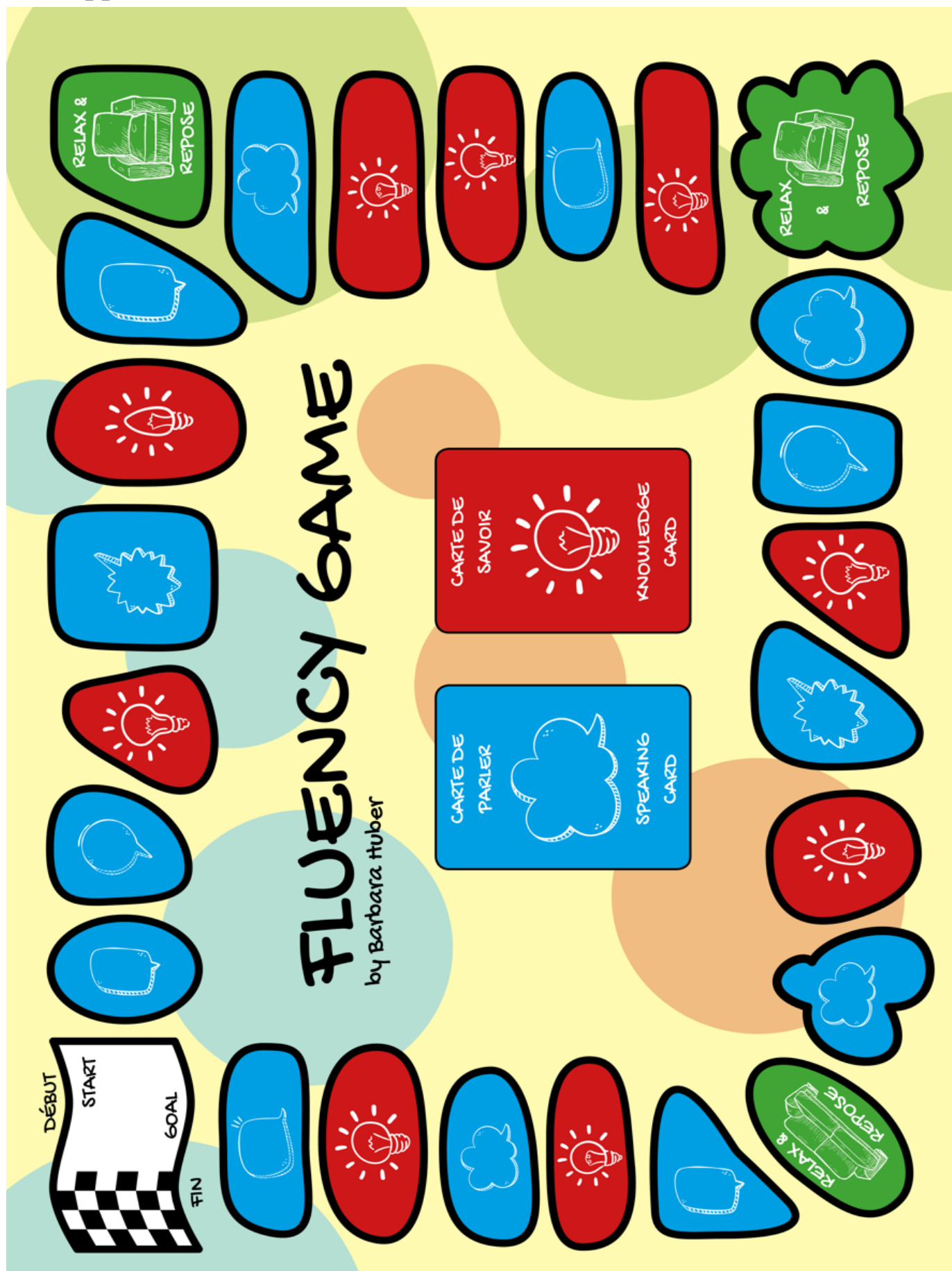
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Appendix



Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Diese Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Wichtigkeit von Flüchtlingsliteratur im Fremdsprachenunterricht. Eines der Hauptziele ist es zu erläutern, warum dieses Genre so pressant und essentiell in der heutigen Zeit ist. Außerdem sollen praktische Tipps zur Auswahl und Verwendung von Flüchtlingsliteratur gegeben werden. Im Zentrum dieser Arbeit steht die Analyse von drei Romanen, die sich mit der Flüchtlingsthematik befassen. Zwei der Bücher, *Refugee Boy* von Benjamin Zephaniah und *Home of the Brave* von Katherine Applegate, sind Paradebeispiele für Jugendliteratur (Young Adult Fiction). *The Optician of Lampedusa* von Emma Jane Kirby ist im Gegenteil dazu kein klassischer Jugendroman. Um dennoch rechtfertigen zu können warum auch dieses Buch ein wertvoller Text für den Englischunterricht wäre, musste zunächst das Genre *Young Adult Fiction* genauer beleuchtet werden. Es wurden fünf Charakteristika (Alter und Zielleserschaft, Charaktere und Erzähltechnik, Länge, Inhalt und Motive sowie Sprache) aufgestellt und diskutiert. Diese fünf Aspekte dienten auch als Basis für die Untersuchung der Primärliteratur. Nach der genauen Analyse von Kirbys Buch hat sich herausgestellt, dass es zwar deutlich anspruchsvoller in Hinsicht auf Sprache und Erzähltechnik ist, aber mit genügend Vorentlastung dennoch ein attraktives Buch für den Fremdsprachenunterricht ist.

Im zweiten Kapitel wurde zentrale Terminologie definiert. Es wurde erläutert *WARUM* Flüchtlingsliteratur heutzutage im Englischunterricht behandelt werden sollte. Durch eine verstärkte Auseinandersetzung mit multikultureller Literatur werden Jugendliche auch automatisch dazu angeregt sich mit Themen wie Identität, Stereotypen gegenüber anderen, Verlust und Trauma auseinanderzusetzen. Eine Vielzahl an Sekundärliteratur hat gezeigt, dass die Schülerinnen somit auch mehr Respekt und Toleranz für andere Kulturen entwickeln.

Im dritten Kapitel wurde vor allem behandelt *WIE* man Flüchtlingsliteratur unterrichten könnte. Ein wesentlicher Aspekt hierbei ist die adäquate Selektion. Deshalb wurden hier acht Richtlinien als Hilfestellung für Lehrpersonen bei der Auswahl formuliert. Diese Richtlinien wurden auch bei der Analyse der Primärliteratur herangezogen. Im Anschluss wurde eine Vielzahl an Aktivitäten für den Umgang mit diesem Genre angeführt. Es ist empfehlenswert den Leseprozess in drei Etappen aufzuteilen. Praktische Beispiele für Übungen sollen Lehrerinnen als Inspiration dienen und ihnen den Umgang mit dieser Literatur erleichtern.

In den folgenden drei Kapiteln wurde jeweils einer der Hauptromane untersucht. Anhand der fünf Kriterien für Jugendliteratur konnten Vergleiche zwischen den Romanen angestellt

werden. Während die ersten beiden Romane ungefähr 300 Seiten hatten, schlägt Kirbys Werk nur mit ca. 120 Seiten zu Buche. In Bezug auf Sprache hat sich gezeigt, dass vor allem Applegate und Kirby sehr viele poetische Elemente in ihrem Schreibstil einbauen. Selbst wenn das dritte Buch sprachlich etwas anspruchsvoller ist, werden Schülerinnen ab der 7. Klasse kaum Probleme haben es zu verstehen. Auch die Protagonisten der jeweiligen Romane wurden analysiert und verglichen. Dies stellte vor allem dahingehend eine Herausforderung dar, weil der Hauptcharakter im dritten Buch ein erwachsener, italienischer Optiker ist während hingegen die anderen Protagonisten Flüchtlinge im Teenageralter sind. Die Parallelen zwischen den jugendlichen Protagonisten sind markant. Dies ist mehr als verständlich da beide eine ähnliche Geschichte erlebt haben und auch beide in ein englischsprachiges Land geflüchtet sind. Im Hinblick auf Erzähltechnik war auffällig, dass Zephaniah und Kirby zwischen Erzählungen in der ersten und dritten Person abwechseln. Somit ist ihr Erzählstil komplexer als Applegates Stil, der nur in der ersten Person erzählt wird. Die Geschichten werden fast ausschließlich aus der Sicht des Protagonisten wiedergegeben, was es dem Leser einfacher macht sich mit ihm zu identifizieren. Bezüglich Inhalt habe ich auch versucht Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede aufzuzeigen. In allen drei Büchern werden Themen wie Identität, Verlust, Trauma, Familie, interkulturelle Begegnungen, Frieden, Hoffnung, und Diversität behandelt. In Bezugnahme auf die Selektionsprinzipien des zweiten Kapitels habe ich versucht zu rechtfertigen warum jedes dieser Bücher Eingang in unsere Klassenzimmer finden sollte. Abschließend bleibt zu sagen, dass alle drei Romane ähnliche moralische Ansätze vertreten. Sie vermitteln den Leserinnen dieselben didaktischen Botschaften, nämlich:

- Informiert euch und werdet aktiv.
- Verschließt nicht die Augen vor Dingen die tagtäglich stattfinden.
- Helft euren Mitmenschen.
- Seid dankbar für die kleinen Dinge im Leben.
- Wertschätzt Frieden und das freie Recht auf Bildung in unserer Gesellschaft.
- Seht Familie und Freunde nie als selbstverständlich an.
- Gebt die Hoffnung nie auf.
- Und am wichtigsten: respektiert euch selbst und andere gleichermaßen.

Abstract: English

The term ‘refugee literature’ refers to texts which are written by, for, or about refugees. The aim of this diploma thesis is to investigate the importance of refugee literature for today’s EFL classroom. At the heart of this thesis lies the analysis of three novels which are concerned with refugees. Even if only two of them, *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah and *Home of the Brave* by Katherine Applegate, are officially labelled as YA fiction, I consider all three books appropriate pieces of literature for the EFL classroom. By re-defining the notion of YA literature, I aspire to justify why Emma Jane Kirby’s *The Optician of Lampedusa* should also be included in L2 teaching. Moreover, the primary literature will be scrutinized with regard to five characteristics determining YAL: *length, language, characters & narration, content & relevant themes*, as well as *age of target readership*. This will demonstrate in how far the selected books can be considered YA novels. This thesis also takes a didactic approach towards refugee literature. Teachers will be provided with guidelines on how to select adequate refugee literature for their learners. In total, eight guidelines have been formulated: *genre-specific essentials, representation of people, natural & convincing writing, illustrations, stereotypes & prejudices, respectful understanding of identity, age and promotion of diversity*. All of the three primary novels have fulfilled these guidelines and can thus be considered valuable examples of refugee literature for the EFL reading curriculum. Furthermore, numerous useful activities for the reading process are suggested.

Abstract: German

Flüchtlingsliteratur bezieht sich in erster Linie auf Texte, die von, für und über Flüchtlinge verfasst werden. Das Hauptziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es festzustellen, ob und inwiefern Flüchtlingsliteratur für den Englisch Fremdsprachenunterricht nützlich und wichtig ist. Im Zentrum dieser Arbeit befindet sich die Analyse von drei Romanen, die sich alle mit der Flüchtlingsthematik auseinandersetzen. Auch wenn nur zwei der Werke offiziell als Jugendliteratur betrachtet werden, *Refugee Boy* von Benjamin Zephaniah und *Home of the Brave* von Katherine Applegate, halte ich alle drei Bücher für adäquate Literatur im Fremdsprachenunterricht. Um rechtfertigen zu können warum auch Emma Jane Kirbys *The Optician of Lampedusa* eine Daseinsberechtigung im Englischunterricht hat, musste zunächst das Genre der Jugendliteratur (YAL) neu definiert werden. Fünf Aspekte zur Bestimmung von Jugendliteratur formuliert: Alter und Zielleserschaft, Charaktere und Erzähltechnik, Länge, Inhalt und Motive sowie Sprache. Die Hauptromane werden auch hinsichtlich dieser Aspekte analysiert. Außerdem soll diese Arbeit auch einen wertvollen Beitrag zum didaktischen Umgang mit Flüchtlingsliteratur leisten. Es werden Richtlinien zur Auswahl und dem Umgang mit den Texten angeführt.

Non-plagiarism declaration

To the best of my knowledge, I hereby declare that this thesis does not involve plagiarism. Direct quotations as well as paraphrased passages taken from any other author have been properly credited and all sources used have been included in the bibliographical references.

Wien, 2018.