

## Components of Belonging in Two Finno-Ugric Minority Literatures

### The Case of *Tibold Márton* and *The Smuggler King's Son*

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#### ABSTRACT

The topics of the present research are, in a larger sense, two multilingual and multicultural regions: the Tornio Valley in Northern Scandinavia and Transylvania in Eastern Europe. In a narrower sense, I am analysing two novels written in minority languages, a Transylvanian Hungarian novel written by Károly Molter, entitled *Tibold Márton* and a novel written in Meänkieli by Bengt Pohjanen, *Jopparikuninkhaan poika* (The Smuggler King's Son). I attempt to answer two main research questions: 1. How is the belonging of the two main characters to a different language and ethnic group presented in the analysed Hungarian and Meänkieli novels? 2. How can the borders between "us" and "them" be constructed through inclusion and exclusion and how can they be crossed at the individual level? I will thus concentrate on some aspects of the narratives of inclusion and exclusion, as represented in the above-mentioned novels.

**Keywords:** border, belonging, non-belonging, inclusion, exclusion.<sup>1</sup>

### The Research Topic and the Research Questions

During the past two decades I have conducted research on the Finno-Ugric minorities in Northern Scandinavia in comparison with the Hungarians living in Romania. My special focus has been on the construction of the language and ethnic identity of these minorities. One of my most interesting findings was the fact the Transylvanianist

1 A research grant provided by the Kone Foundation supported the elaboration of the article.

ideology of the Hungarians in Romania between the two World Wars and the idea of *Meänmaa*<sup>2</sup>, launched in the 1980s in the *Meänkieli* speaking community in Northern Sweden by Bengt Pohjanen present lots of similarities. Of these, I will mention only those few that serve as a background for the topic of this study. At the basis of both ideologies stands the conviction that a place can form the human spirit and that the region where people speak the same language is a historical unit with its own culture, consciousness, and pride. Particularity is moulded by the intellectual interconnection among the ethnic groups speaking different languages; however, the adepts of these two ideologies emphasise the central role of the language and the minorities' mother tongue. Cults of the local values play a role as well in both cases.

However, there are also basic differences between Transylvanianism and the *Meänmaa*-concept, due to the dissimilarity of the two types of national identity: the Western European type, based on the concepts of country and citizenship, and the Eastern European type, based on the concepts of ethnic origin and culture. Due to this, the loyalty of Western and Eastern European ethnic and linguistic minorities to their own inner group and the majority language-speaking outer groups differ in many respects. (Veres 88) Their belonging to different groups is also constructed differently in many respects.

Two multilingual and multicultural regions are—in a larger sense—the objects of the present research: Northern Scandinavia and Transylvania. According to literature and culture researcher Anne Heith, Northern Scandinavia is a melting pot “where specific cultural legacies meet” (Heith 24). Transylvania, on the other hand, is an area where nations of different culture and language have been living together for centuries, and yet we cannot see it as a melting pot. Even though these cultures were in touch and had an impact upon one another, they have not mingled and developed hybrid (e.g. Paasi) forms to the same extent as the cultures in Northern Scandinavia.

The basic material of my present study consists of Transylvanian Hungarian and Northern Sweden *Meänkieli* text-bodies written in the respective minority languages. In case of the Transylvanian literature this was a very simple choice, as Transylvanian Hungarian literature is written in Hungarian, by definition. In case of *Meänkieli* things are not unequivocal, since most of the *Meänkieli* writers write in Swedish, the language of their majority. I have chosen for analysis one of Bengt Pohjanen's novels, which was also written in *Meänkieli*. Pohjanen consequently writes in his minority mother tongue as well, in this sense representing an exception in the Northern Scandinavian literary field.

This study attempts to answer the following research questions: 1. How is the belonging of the two main characters to a different language and ethnic group presented in the analysed Hungarian and *Meänkieli* novels? 2. How can the borders between “us” and “them” be constructed

2 The meaning of the word is ‘our land’ and it refers to the imagined community (Anderson 1983) which speaks *Meänkieli*.

through inclusion and exclusion and how can they be crossed at the individual level? I will thus concentrate on some aspects of the narratives of inclusion and exclusion, as represented in a Transylvanian Hungarian novel written by Károly Molter, entitled *Tibold Márton* and in a novel written in Meänkieli by Bengt Pohjanen, *Jopparikuninkhaan poika* (*The Smuggler King's Son*). My hypothesis is that I will find similarities in the way the representatives of the two minorities approach their situation, as well as in their relation to the minority they willingly belong to, even though they live far from each other.

## **Borders, Belonging and Imagined Communities**

One of the main operative terms I use in this study is *border*. I do not use this concept in its meaning related to a territory, but, in accordance with modern border studies (e.g. Johnson et al), in the sense of a site through which communication can be achieved among different groups of people (van Houtum 672). Border studies are today the study of human practices that constitute and represent differences in space. The main topic of today's border-research is constituted by the symbols, signs, identifications, representations, and narratives the borders are created with. If we accept that the borders are in fact the products of our own knowledge and interpretation, as such, they will serve us as lenses to help us imagine and understand the world. Borders should be interpreted as dynamic phenomena, social (and constructed) institutions, as well as symbols that are malleable and able to dynamically change. The borders between groups of people or between languages and cultures control the social sphere and we can consider their construction—in agreement with Helena Ruotsala—one of the ways to exercise power (Ruotsala 202). Thus, the border generally means the differences constructed in society and space between cultures; along with them, individual and group identities are formulated, and the narratives serving their differentiation are of very different kinds.

During the past decades, the concept of identity and the process of identification have been studied using diverse, parallel, and in some respects overlapping conceptualizations. I do not aim at presenting the theoretical frame of these conceptualizations; instead, I will use in this study the concept of *belonging* as an operative term. In their study, Tuuli Lähdesmäki and co-authors draw attention to the fact that the concept of belonging has emerged alongside and challenged the concept of identity. (Lähdesmäki) Studies concerning this concept have increased in number during the last two decades. Many scholars recommend that instead of concentrating on identity as a stable result of finite processes, identification should be considered as a never-ending process and it could be best conceptualised by using the term 'belonging' (Bauman; Hall; Scott; Woodward).

Belonging includes situational relationships with other people as well as social and cultural practices emerging from these relationships, which are basically political and include emotional and/or affective orientations (Lähdesmäki et al 242). Due to its flexible nature, belonging makes it possible to explore the shifting character of borders and the phenomenon of multiple identities. The concept of belonging emphasises the relational dimension of inclusion and exclusion. (Gerharz 553–554.) As such, the idea of belonging and being included also involves the possibility of being excluded. Belonging is generally regarded as something positive, and people try to achieve it for their own comfort. Belonging can be associated with the trope of home when defining belonging as “feeling at home” (Yuval-Davis 197). The idea of home refers to spaces of familiarity and emotional attachment, while non-belonging in an unfamiliar environment generates the feeling of insecurity. Both belonging and non-belonging are simultaneously embodied, affectively felt, socially constructed, and are influenced by diverse power relations.

Although in the contemporary world globalisation is emphasised, people’s identities are still deeply rooted in the local, the regional. However, the right to belong is often politicised in order to exclude others and thus the questions of belonging have practical and political implications. In the contemporary world, acts of inclusion and exclusion, identification, and struggles over identity have become ever more relevant.

Society, as an imagined community (Anderson), is made up of real individuals, which are organised into different groups. In this study, I deal with language and ethnic minority groups. Both smaller and bigger communities can be imaginary and can unite people even without expecting them to live in the vicinity of one another or to be personally acquainted with one another or to be in direct connection with one another. In order to be able to describe these groups, it is important to examine their relationships and their network system. It is worth examining the way they create relationships and networks of relationship, as well as those factors that stand at the basis of their solidarity. Both of the novels I am concentrating on in this study are especially suitable for such an examination.

In the following part of this study, I am going to present a short history of the two regions where the minorities in question live. After that, I will portray the work and literary role of the two authors whose novels I will later analyse.

## **A Short History of Transylvania**

Transylvania is situated in the South-eastern corner of the Carpathian Basin and is part of the territory of Romania. During the Middle Ages, it used to belong to the Kingdom of Hungary. After the Battle of Mohács in 1526 it became an independent Principality until 1690, when the Habsburgs gained possession of Transylvania through the Hungarian

Crown. Transylvania had a separate status within the Habsburg Empire until 1867. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Transylvania was formally re-annexed to Hungary, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After World War I, Transylvania was annexed to Romania in the Treaty of Trianon (4 June 1920). In 1940, Northern Transylvania was re-annexed by Hungary pursuant to the Second Vienna Award and remained part of Hungary until 1944, when the borders of 1920 were re-established. (Kocsis & Kocsis-Hodosi 101–125; Péntek & Benő 33–58.) The majority of Hungarians outside the present-day borders of Hungary live in Romania, mainly in Transylvania. The number of Hungarians in Transylvania was 1,227,623 according to the latest census in 2011 conducted by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania (Institutul național de statistică 2011). For centuries, Transylvania has had a complex ethno-linguistic, cultural, and religious structure, including Romanians (Romanian-speaking ethnic Romanians), Hungarians, Germans, Roma, Ukrainians, and Serbians amongst others.

### **A Short History of Meänmaa**

The geographic area called the Tornio Valley (Tornedalen in Swedish, Torniolaakso in Meänkieli) lies at the border between Finland and Sweden. It was once a culturally and linguistically unitary area until 1809, when the border between Russia and Sweden was drawn. The Treaty of Hamina (17 September 1809) ceded the territory inhabited by Finns, including almost all of the Tornio Valley, to Russia. After 1809, the Finnish-speaking people on the western side of the valley became a language minority in Sweden. As a result of the language assimilation policy launched in the 1880s, the language spoken by the Finnish population has become stigmatised and endangered. Most young people speak Swedish as their mother tongue. The Finnish dialect spoken on the Swedish side of the Tornio Valley, called Meänkieli, was acknowledged as a minority language in 2000. (Andersson and Kangassalo 99–108; Arola et al. 2–3.) The area where Meänkieli (earlier Finnish) is spoken has always been multilingual, Finnish, Swedish, and Sámi being spoken there. There are no official statistics in Sweden concerning the mother tongue of its citizens. The number of the Meänkieli population is estimated to be between 25 000 and 75 000 (Arola et al. 3; Sulkala 11; Winsa 254).

### **The Writers**

Károly Molter (1890–1981) was a Hungarian novelist, dramatist, literary critic, journalist and academic. He was born in the Vojvodina region, Serbia, as an ethnic German, but he adopted Hungarian as his

preferred language. He completed his studies in Hungary and earned a degree in Hungarian and German languages in 1912. Then he moved to Transylvania and settled down in Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely), where he was a teacher at the Reformed College between 1913 and 1945. He obtained his PhD degree at the Bolyai University in Cluj (Kolozsvár) and was a professor of German at the same university between 1945 and 1951. He took an active part in organising the Transylvanian Hungarian literary life after 1918. (RMIL 3, 627.) In 1937, he published one of his most successful works, the novel *Tibold Márton*, which presents a Swabian family in the process of adapting Hungarian culture. At the same time, the novel also captures minority dramas caused by social and identity discrimination in opposition to the civic consciousness of a character that fully experiences oppression and denationalisation. (Nastasă – Salat 236)

Molter's *Tibold Márton* was an important novel of the interwar period Transylvanian literature. Its popularity can be connected to the writer's talent with which he was able to make the reader deeply experience Tibold Márton's interesting way of life, on the one hand. On the other hand, it also presents the aspiration and endeavour of the ethnicities—who do not seem to be capable of living together without conflicts—for a peaceful life together, in the atmosphere of the 1930s fascism breaking forward. According to Éva Cs. Gyimesi, *Tibold Márton* is a typically Eastern European novel, as it bears a message that was already valid several decades before the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and has never lost its validity since. The novel stands for the moral and spiritual behaviour of those who are able to rise above dissensions and accept even the unfavourable consequences of a situation, if necessary. "However, *Tibold Márton* is much more than that. It is the expression of sensitivity manifesting as identity and otherness, national intolerance and tolerance. It is, in other words, the novel of Eastern Europe. Because there is no other region in Europe where the demand for respecting otherness is so great as here, where the ethnic and language differences begin not at the border, but practically at the neighbour's back garden, or table, or church." (Cs. Gyimesi 35) This statement is not only true for Eastern Europe but also, for instance, for the Tornio Valley in Northern Europe. The interdependence of people speaking different languages is an everyday reality in the lives of neighbours, which at the same time also has an impact upon the different generations within one family (the elderly family members still speak the minority language, while the younger ones don't use it anymore).

Bengt Pohjanen (born in 1944) is an all-round and prolific trilingual writer of the Tornio Valley in Northern Sweden and the most dedicated representative of Meänkieli literature. He writes novels, poems, essays, plays, feuilletons, texts for musicals and short stories in Swedish, Meänkieli and Finnish. Pohjanen's mother tongue is Meänkieli, and he has assumed an important role in the revitalisation of this endangered Finno-Ugric language and culture since the 1980's. At the beginning

of his career, he wrote in Swedish; then, at an international seminar in Stockholm, he realised that members of a language minority may often feel as if they were some kind of rare, strange beings, until they find out that there are quite a lot of people in a similar situation: writing in a majority language instead of their mother tongue (Pohjanen 2011a, 8).

Pohjanen is the author of the first novel ever written in Meänkieli (*Lyykeri*, 1985 – The Luger), as well as of the first play (*Kuutot*, 1987 – The Kuutot Family). His best-known work is *Jopparikuninkhaan poika* (2009)<sup>3</sup> (*The Smuggler King's Son*), the first volume of his autobiographical novel. The novel presents the everyday life of a family speaking a minority language, Meänkieli, settled into a piece of the North-Sweden after-war social history; the effects of the cold war upon the North-European people's way of thinking can also be easily traced. In general, Pohjanen's works prove that literature gives the individual an opportunity to partake in their own people's or ethnic group's culture and collective memory. One of Pohjanen's main aims is to present the relation of the Meänkieli culture to the majority (Swedish and Finnish) cultures. He masterfully presents the individual's experience in sharing the same fate of being different, as well as minority strategies in an exclusionary society. Pohjanen is also in search for an answer to the question who "the others" are and whether it would be possible to cross the border between "us" and „them”.

## Belonging through Inclusion and Exclusion

Human beings are always more than their historical constraints, and it is a matter of individual decision how they relate to different situations and how they construct the borders depending on to their experiences of inclusion and exclusion. I am going to prove with the example of the above-mentioned two novels how much self-consciousness depends on inner urge.

Both of the protagonists of the novels, Martin Tibold and Pänktti Pohjanen are multilingual *Bildungsroman* heroes. Martin is a Swabian<sup>4</sup> child, who was born into a Serbian-Hungarian environment in Bácska (Bačka)<sup>5</sup>. He first experiences the disadvantages of being different from the point of view of a German. The Serbian landlord does not like Martin's father, because he is a friend of Hungarians. When Martin, still as a child, wants to become a *huszár* (cavalryman), the landlord mocks him: "You gluttonous Swabian, you want to be Hungarian,

3 The novel was published first in Finnish (2006), then in Swedish (Pohjanen 2007). The Meänkieli version was translated into Hungarian (Pohjanen 2011b) and English (2014).

4 German-speaking population who lived in various countries of south-eastern Europe, especially in the Danube River Valley.

5 This region was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and is today a territory divided between Serbia and Hungary.

too? You'll get Great Serbia instead" (Molter 6). In this situation, the main character's wish to belong to a certain group appears clearly. And along with it, one also feels the rough mockery of this wish coming from a person who—out of political reasons—deeply despises the main character's ethnic group. At the end of the novel Tibold has to face his otherness from the point of view of a Hungarian. As a teacher of German language, he mentions to one of his Hungarian colleagues how useful it was to him to get the opportunity of learning in Jena, as this had given him an opportunity to experience the West. His colleague interprets this statement in a totally different way, and reacts ironically: "Come on now, little bro' Tibold, you are not going to Germanise here at our place" (Molter 121). In both situations, Tibold follows the way of "otherness" free of political motivations; the way of an intellectual open to others, met by the incomprehension of those who cannot step over the rigid barriers they built themselves.

Pänktti is the child of a Meänkieli family in Sweden. He experiences from his early childhood the fact that those whose mother tongue is not Swedish are discriminated by the Swedish-speaking majority. On his very first day at school, he has to learn that the name he had been called in the microworld of his family and native village is not accepted in the majority society. From that day on, he had to be called by the Swedish version of his name, Bengt. The unfamiliar environment fills him with fear and bitterness: "No wonder we feel that the Swedish look down their noses at us as if we were some hungry, orphan little squirrel scratching at some icy pine-cone. This fact poisons all my thoughts and fills me with dread. The Swedish-speaking Tornio Valley inhabitants have no idea about all this. Their identity is clear, they're Swedish-Swedish. They're born with this clear identity, an awareness which grows along with them. On the other hand, it's only planted into us and tears at us from the inside. Some become conceited; others are filled with anger against those who giggle behind us whenever we mispronounce a word." (Pohjanen 2014, 96.) The development of Pänktti's character throughout the novel spans from the intimidated child to the self-conscious adult. He wants to belong to both groups, and while cherishing his mother tongue, he is also conscious of the fact that he has to be able to fit into the majority language society.

Both characters live in a tolerant family environment. Martin learns Hungarian history from his grandfather, who fought during the 1848 Revolution of Independence in defence of Hungary, against the Austrians. "My ancestors have been living here for one and a half century. The idea of captivity is alien to them; they had fled here from economic revolutions and oppression. Now they are rich and arrogant. What could have made them hate Hungarians, who are poorer over here than they are? A few roistering lordlings, the officials, some hicks, or servile new-Hungarians do not count. These Swabians have given their blood for their new homeland. And I feel an exception even compared to them because I am one with the Hungarians." (Molter 26.)



Hatred against those fellow citizens who speak other languages is alien to Martin and generally to his own group.

Pänktti's family is very much alike. It is interesting that he learns while still a child that there are functional differences among languages, and the use of a certain language implies the construction of belonging or non-belonging. These border-constructions are ingeniously presented in the novel. He is taught not to lie in his own mother tongue, because for his community mother tongue is as sacred as God. Mandatory lies are therefore told in the majority language, as it is situated outside the sacred space. "All the necessary lies are told in Swedish, so they can't be that dangerous and can't count as sins either. God might not even understand Swedish. We only talk Swedish to the masters, and Finnish to the Lord, and probably only Lappish to the dogs." (Pohjanen 2014, 83.) According to this quotation, two closely related languages are of high priority in the life of the protagonist's community: Meänkieli and Finnish. Swedish is for them the language of political and social power and as such, it generates negative feelings, while the value of Sámi is the lowest in their society. However, in the context of the whole novel the attitude toward Swedish and Sámi is not unambiguously negative, which means that crossing the border of different languages is not impossible for the protagonist.

Tibold's conscious construction of self-identity does not go hand in hand with suppressing or despising those who belong to another language group. The following quotation expresses the way he firmly refuses the use of pejorative names for Romanians and Serbians, at the same time being aware of the fact that it is characteristic for every nation to use stereotypes towards other nations. " 'Romanian or Serbian? Better say *Oláh* or *Rác*<sup>6</sup>. That's how they say it over here, scornfully...' 'Well, those who say it. This narrow-mindedness is characteristic for every nation alike.' " (Molter 68) Neither does Pohjanen's hero and *alter ego*, Pänktti, despise those speaking the majority language, although he is bitter because they dispute his own (and his community's) right to choose where they want to belong. He expresses his feelings using the metaphor of two different worlds which can never meet each other: "Only those who are looking for words while being pushed into the background can understand what living without words means. Those whose first language is Swedish live on quite a different planet from us, the Meänkieli. They can't even perceive our things. The language we speak during the first three years of our life is our mother tongue. That's what language researchers and linguists say. Those with the Swedish mother tongue have a Swedish world; those who speak Meänkieli have a Meänkieli world. And these worlds can never meet each other." (Pohjanen 2014, 158) Another metaphor used in this quotation is "living without words". This is also the main metaphor of one of Pohjanen's poems, central to his whole work (entitled *Jag är född utan språk* – Born

6 Pejorative names for the given nations.

Tongueless). The poem is a manifestation of being excluded and deprived of identity in an exclusionary society. The lyrical ego, member of a language minority, is born “tongueless” because the only accepted language in the given cultural and social environment is Swedish.

One of the basic human rights is the right to belong and non-belong (right to otherness). It is Martin’s own choice to learn the Hungarian language and belong to the Hungarian minority which he appreciates a lot. In the following quotation, Martin answers the provocations by choosing basic human values: “ ‘Are you Martin or Márton?’ ‘Both. – It would be really difficult to choose.’ ‘After all, your mother was German, so you are German, too, by birth.’ ‘By no means. Just a human being. Who can become whatever he wants to. My mother did not talk me into becoming neither German nor Hungarian.’ ” (Molter 101) For him, multiple identity is only natural; thus, the components fit together peacefully in the spirit of humanity. For Martin it is without question that he wants to become Hungarian and, at the same time, he cherishes his mother tongue and would never deny it. “ ‘Are you losing your mother tongue here, in Kecskemét?’ ‘Me? By no means. Only rascals or ill-fated persons would do that. I read in German a lot. I am curious of a lot of things that can be read in this rich language. How beautiful German poems are and how much I love German poets!’ ‘Do you love them as much as you love Hungarian poets?’ ‘Exactly as much.’ ” (Molter 101) In this scene, he is also asked provocative questions and the answers he gives can only be understood by those who have a flexible attitude regarding multiple affiliation.

For Pänktti it is clear that he has to manage in Swedish, having no choice to do that in his own mother tongue. But identity means more to him, as well, than the sum of his social possibilities. He wants to prove—to himself, first of all, but also to his environment—that he is capable of self-realisation on the basis of his own choice, exactly the way Martin does. Learning to write in Swedish is a huge effort for him, but he knows that this is the price he has to pay for stepping out into the world of the majority. He manages to turn this obligation to his own advantage and he considers a success each step he takes towards achieving his goal. “And that’s what I always ask whenever, with Finnish persistence, I torture myself with Swedish words. Is that acceptable? It also gets engraved into my skin’s memory: »Am I acceptable?« Whenever Rosa nods, my already written words are asking for other letters, for straight lines and further Swedish words.” (Pohjanen 2014, 220) At the same time his mother tongue is the basis of his personality, which the grown-up narrator of Pohjanen’s novel expresses using a metaphor of high emotional value: “Your mother tongue is the fingerprint of your soul” (Pohjanen 2014, 31).

Neither Martin nor Pänktti identify themselves with a certain ethnicity in order to gain advantage; on the contrary, they assume even the biggest inconveniences to remain loyal to their decision. In both novels, one can detect what Cs. Gyimesi considers valid for minority ideologies: “The ethical components of minority ideology [...] are

specific in their functions: they sanction the situation, on the one hand, and dissolve the disharmony between situation and identity awareness, on the other. Minority life in itself is itemised as possibility of gaining values. The following things seem to generously moderate the feeling of being limited by minority situation: self-reliance euphemised into self-sufficiency, the possibility of moral value creation (resistance), the objective interdependence and reliance on the majority, as well as other nations with whom they live together rated as value.” (Cs. Gyimesi 42)

Minority life-form is simply a historical-social given, with no value in itself. On the other hand, as Cs. Gyimesi argues, minority status offers value-creating possibilities as well. It offers the ethnicities living together the possibility of coining a fruitful connection from a moral and cultural point of view. Bi- or multilingualism of those living in such a situation enriches the humanism of those who know one another’s cultural heritage and literature. (Cs. Gyimesi 29) However, an essential difference can be observed between Transylvanian Hungarians and the Meänkielis: self-reliance in the case of the former ethnic group strengthened the need for language and cultural independence, while in case of the latter one it led mainly to conformation and assimilation into the Swedish majority.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the texts in this study gives examples of the possibilities of communication between the different language and ethnic groups living in the same region. The heroes of the two novels are open towards otherness, and gladly approach people speaking other languages and are open to their culture. Still, the basic condition for them is to be treated as equals, and to have their own language and culture respected as well. This very condition, however, is not always fulfilled because of political reasons.

In the two novels, the main characters’ belonging to different language and ethnic groups is presented through the process of constructing and deconstructing borders. It becomes clear that one cannot take for granted that people belong to a certain group, neither that the borders between groups are impenetrable; in other words, belonging is a dynamic process depending on the situation. The protagonists of the novels, because of the political status of their mother tongue, basically live in two worlds speaking two different languages and continuously negotiate between them. Their commuting between the two worlds and their looking for a balance is a form of life. Literary researcher Anitta Viinikka-Kallinen stated about minority writers that presenting the connection between the two worlds is usually a lifelong challenge for them. (Viinikka-Kallinen 172–173) In Scandinavia, minority writers (and minority language speaking citizens in general) have to prove themselves in two directions. On the one hand, they make every effort to be believable and acceptable for the majority group, and, on the other hand, they have to prove to their own communities that they belong to them.

As we could see, the construction of borders between the different language and ethnic groups is realised through the process of inclusion and exclusion. The primary condition of crossing these borders is the ability to compromise and to be flexible: “People frequently crossing borders need to compromise. [...] They know, out of their own experience, that a rational cooperation between individuals and groups of different origin depends on the mutual concession of those politically in charge. Such an inter-ethnic agreement is never perfect, as it only comes into being and lasts if the protagonists keep decreasing in a balanced and indefatigable way their real or suspected demands.” (K. Lengyel 5) On a practical level, this process is often hindered because of political power relations, which build up a hierarchy of values alien to the basic needs of people to communicate and cooperate in everyday life. Anne Heith calls attention to the conflict between the functioning of the cultural and the political borders: “Permeable and symbolic cultural borders have often been in conflict with borders constructed by the state in order to define its territory and the content of national culture and identity” (Heith 25).

As the analysis of the text-bodies proves, cooperation between language and ethnic majorities and minorities can be problematic from many points of view. The shortcomings of efficient and open communication between the above-mentioned minorities and majorities are multiple, including the historical traumas they underwent as double-opposed counterparts, the difficulty of forgetting the experiences of the past and the lack of patience and tolerance in accepting the other’s right to be different. Conflicts are likely to appear where history is interpreted in one way by one group, but differently by the other. Two neighbouring nations or ethnic and language groups, coexisting on the same territory, might create parallel and rival narratives of belonging. However, as the example of the protagonists of the two novels prove, it is possible to construct a multiple belonging.

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