Johanna Laakso (Ed.). Ways of Being in the World: Studies on Minority Literatures . Central European Uralic Studies, volume 1. Praesens Verlag, Wien 2020, 196 p.

The anthology *Ways of Being in the World: Studies on Minority Literatures* edited by Johanna Laakso and published as the first volume of the new series "Central European Uralic Studies" at the University of Vienna is a compilation of guest lectures presented by scholars from Finnish, Hungarian, Swedish and Austrian universities at the Department of Finno-Ugric Studies in Vienna. Three of the seven chapters–not including Johanna Laakso's introduction–which explore specific literary phenomena, do not focus exclusively on minority *Uralic* literatures, but extend to minority literatures either in a Uralic environment (Swedish literature in Finland) or in the European *oikumene* in general (Romani literature). The topical complementarity and contrasting quality–Swedish literature in Finland and Finnish literature in Sweden, local minority literatures, and the second most significant pan-European minority literature–constitute a conceptual framework for reconsidering certain fundamental terms, as summarized in Laakso's introduction ("In place of an introduction: a linguist's reflections on the concept of 'minority literature'"). Laakso opens by remarking on the practical links between minorities, minority languages and literature in the context of revitalization, identity, language varieties and language standardization. She draws attention to the deeply embedded and unreflected discourse of the "reality" of national languages which, while efficient in terms of practical policy, proves scarcely tenable from a rigorous scientific perspective (these debates resemble such pseudoscientific inquiries as which language is "older", or similar views espousing a "mere dialectal character" of e.g. Slovak as opposed to Czech). In the following sections, terms such as nation, minority and ethnic group are classified using different conceptual systems/languages according to different criteria. Special attention is paid to the *legal* terms "tribal peoples" and "indigenous peoples" defined in the ILO Convention No. 169, Article 1, (a) (for tribal peoples), (b) (for indigenous peoples).[1] These definitions are undoubtedly vague. Indigenous peoples are defined as being aboriginal to the area they live, holding the position of a *de facto* minority, and "retaining some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions". Each of the three criteria is a *conditio sine qua non* for the status of an indigenous people. Perhaps it would be appropriate to specify what exactly these criteria denote or to propose additional criteria. However, any such specification or elaboration would have to be sufficiently justified. We cannot find any explicit reasons warranting Laakso's narrowed criteria for paragraph (b) regarding indigenous peoples: they must be "visibly different from the dominant ethnic group", or they must have "been subject to different administrative treatment based on their 'race' or 'tribe'" (both p. 19). Thus, according to Laakso's modified definition, no indigenous peoples could be recognized in Europe, perhaps with the exception of the Sami. After all, if we accept the criterion of "different administrative treatment", the Karelians, Udmurts etc. would still satisfy the criteria of indigenous peoples, cf. the tsar's plans to move the

[1] However, the relationship between paragraphs (a) and (b) is unclear. In paragraph (a), tribal peoples are mentioned, while in paragraph (b), indigenous peoples are perhaps implied, though not explicitly mentioned. The operative term between the two paragraphs is clearly a disjunction ('or') rather than a conjunction ('and, at the same time').

Udmurts and others to Siberia and elsewhere (in addition many were executed during Stalin's terror), the forced urbanization and depopulation of ethnic Karelian villages in the 1960s, Putin's recent obstacles regarding the teaching in/of minority languages in schools across the Russian Federation, and many others. The remaining criterion of visibility ("visibly different") is unclear, culturally determined and arbitrary, subjected to the judgment of measure (certain differences are clearly visible at the very least to the Russian authorities). The introduction concludes with an exploration of the concept of minority literatures as a mere umbrella term for "diversity of diversities" (p. 24).

The first two chapters–after the introduction–focus on the language minorities that emerged from the many-sided contact between the neighbouring countries of Sweden and Finland at different times. Kristina Malmio's contribution focuses on the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, while the article by Satu Gröndahl engages with the Finnish- and Meänkieli-speaking minorities in Sweden. Meänkieli is spoken in Tornedalen (Torne Valley) in northern Sweden; historically it evolved from northern Finnish dialects, but today it is recognized as a distinctive language. Finnish-speaking minorities can be found mostly in large agglomerations in the southern parts of Sweden. Due to geographic proximity, the Meänkieli and Finland-Swedish minorities have lived in the area for a very long time and thus have a different history and status compared to other language and ethnic minorities living in present-day Sweden and Finland (apart from the Sami people who are an indigenous ethnic group in the north). This is also partially the case for Finns in Sweden outside of Tornedalen, though their migration to Sweden was not very extensive until the second half of the 20th century.

In her article "Finland-Swedish minority literature: social, economic, cultural and literary aspects", Malmio presents various perspectives and discussions on Finland-Swedish literature and also delves into our understanding of minority literature as such (cfr. S. Gröndahl; S.-E. Klinkmann, B. Henriksson & A. Häger; O. Löytty; M. Nilsson; C. Zilliacus). Based on her analysis, Malmio emphasizes that the definition of Finland-Swedish minority literature is problematic. The concept of a minority language arises from its comparison to the majority–in this case, the Finnish-speaking population of Finland. However, the Swedish-speaking population and its literature represent a minority only in the area of present-day Finland. Not even the territory-based definition is completely unambiguous, as authors can move abroad and even start writing in a different language. Furthermore, the position of Finland-Swedish literature and its role in society changed throughout the 20th century. In the beginning, authors struggled to preserve the prestigious position that Finland-Swedish literature once held in Finland's history; however, their contemporary works reflect a more cosmopolitan perspective and exhibit more international motifs.

As Gröndahl puts forth in her article "Minority literature as an emancipatory force: The development of Tornedalian and Sweden-Finnish literature", the situation of the Sweden-Finnish and Tornedalian minorities is more complicated; they did not struggle to retain their status but rather vied to receive some form of official recognition. This was finally achieved in 2000 when both the Finnish and Meänkieli language were awarded the status of official minority languages in Sweden. The ethnic mobilization and literary production aimed at reviving minority languages started in the 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately, these revitalization tendencies were accompanied by the parallel processes of

assimilation. This might be a long-term consequence of the Swedification campaign that led to interdiction of using Finnish (or Meänkieli) in Swedish schools for a certain period at the beginning of the 20th century. Even though these restrictions are now a part of history, most speakers of Meänkieli have chosen to switch to Swedish to avoid more potential problems. This has significantly impeded the transmission of the language to younger generations. Today, the role and ambition of Sweden-Finnish and Tornedalian minority literatures is not only to support the language, but also to reinforce the position of the minority, making it more visible beyond the borders of Sweden. In addition to literatures, Gröndahl's article also mentions organizations and examples of state support designed to help language minorities.

Antje Wischmann's chapter "Re-Appropriation auf Augenhöhe? Inszenierte 'Minoritätssprache' am Beispiel von Romani" systematically and comprehensively covers the main themes that permeate debates on minority literatures, from ethnic and language essentialism to the pertinence of academic careers based solely on the "anthropological research" of an ethnic minority. These themes are confronted with the specific existence of the Romani and Romani literature, transcending the paradigms of national language/literature, canon, field and territory. The following chapter "Possible ways of discourse: Notes on the process of name-giving to Romani Studies" by Zoltán Beck might be considered a pendant to Wischmann's terminological considerations and reflections on particular programmatic narratives. Beck mentions the need for persistent methodological and ethical self-reflection in Romani Studies, which he demonstrates with a brief contextual analysis of basic and variously marked nomenclature. We may add that methodological and ethical self-reflection should be immanent to any field of intellectual struggle, though ethical considerations are naturally involved to a much greater extent in any discourse that concerns a minority.

The chapter "Literatur der ungarischen Migration in Österreich in den 2010er Jahren" by Károly Kókai starts with an exposition of the contemporary Hungarian migration in Austria by the continuing presence of Hungarians in Vienna, Burgenland and elsewhere. The legal status of minorities and migrant groups is also presented from a diachronic perspective, along with parallel examples from the transnational framing of contemporary approaches to literary historiography. The first example–*der Prager Kreis*–is in German Studies and perhaps in Austrian historiography as well one of the most well-known and explored phenomena also and primarily from a transnational point of view; however, what is still deserving of greater attention is the second example, i.e. literatures of the Uralic minorities of the Russian Federation, despite having received some academic consideration since the beginnings of Uralic Studies. Kókai's contribution lies primarily in his brief analyses of several texts by Austrian-Hungarian authors, mainly with respect to "border crossing", deterritorialization and the post-colonial theory of subalternity. Indeed, such an approach to texts of this provenance [(Central-)Eastern European] is not common, partially thanks to the friendly, open-minded and helpful societies found mainly in German-speaking countries within the European Union, where expatriate authors are not made to feel "abroad". This is perhaps why there are so few examples of works on the topic of migration written in German-speaking countries by authors of Hungarian, Czech etc. origin. On the other hand, the proliferation of this theme in the Nordic fiction of the last decades might be a mere trend or it could be ascribed to the popularity

of the new literary branch of "imagology" ("How are we perceived by others?") that has a counterpart in Central Europe in the "Polish school of reportage", which reflects on the stereotypes and "mentalities" of the Hungarians, Czechs and perhaps others too.

Tuulikki Kurki's chapter "Minority literature in the Russian borderlands: Finnish-language literature in Russian Karelia" contains a precise historical overview of the position of language–Finnish, Karelian, Russian–and politics in Soviet Karelia, as well as an analysis of the language, ethnic and national "borderland identity" in texts by Karelian writers Nikolai Jaakkola and Antti Timonen. Regarding any *sovietica* or texts produced in politically restricted regimes, we are relegated to a strictly "*als ob*" reading, at least in terms of a sociological approach. (Auto)censorship thus limits the potential of these authors, despite their intrinsic intention and courage, to engage in a full-scale dialogue which adequately reflects the social situation. However, Jaakkola and Timonen represent the less schematic writers, similar to the Soviet Estonian dramatist August Jakobson, compared to the fully schematic Hans Leberecht. As Kurki points out, Jaakkola and Timonen's texts "deviated […] from the established narratives of Soviet history and the idealized Soviet citizen" (p. 149). However, could the individual narrative rejection of the historical dynamic of Finnish-Karelian identity in the "bloodland" of Karelia not be somewhat marked, compared to the unequivocal rejection of Soviet(-Russian) identity? After all, an emphasis on borderlands and "bridges" has historically served diverse diplomatic intentions and cover-up strategies. Kurki's conclusions are nevertheless plausible and well-grounded both in the given methodology and textual material. It is only the last analysed text by contemporary Karelian author Arvi Perttu that would perhaps best serve as a corrective to the foregone *als ob,* but doesn't, as it deviates too much from the aforementioned conceptual framing of the borderland. Perttu addresses "individual, post-modern identities, rather than collective, ethnonational identities" (p. 156). The question that arises then is: Why juxtapose texts on a specific historical situation with a text on generic alienation in the contemporary world? Is there any place in today's world where one could not consider themselves as being in a borderland?

Karina Lukin's contribution "Soviet voices in Nenets literature" begins with an expression of her surprise at the negative self-images in Nenets early literature. By means of a narratological and contextual analysis of the voices–distinctive (diversity of Nenets voices) and contrastive (to Soviet voice(s))–in Nikolai Vilka's (Vylka's) novels from the 1930s, she convincingly shows the positive tone of Nenets voices resonating from beneath the framing of socialist realism and programmatic Soviet modernity; the voices bring forth the message: leave us alone. This conclusion is preceded by a concise explication of the specialized literature, archival sources and interpretation of texts and illustrations from the first Nenets primers. Thanks to Karina Lukin's *acribia*, everything holds together. *Finis coronat opus*.[2]

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