

Fluid Identities and the Use of History: The Northern Lights Route and the Writings of Bengt Pohjanen

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The article highlights the impact of agency and context in analyses of the theme of identification in texts produced on the levels of aesthetics, ethnic mobilisation, region-building and the European project. The connection between cultural heritage and identity is discussed with examples which elucidate the role of literature in nation-building in the period of modernity and industrialisation. Texts by the Tornedalian author Bengt Pohjanen are foregrounded as part of the ethnic revival emerging in the nineteen-eighties. Swedish examples of the use of history are contrasted against the discourse of the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes which is part of a supranational project aiming at the construction of a European identity in the political project of preparing the ground for European citizenship. The conclusion presented is that it is not viable to produce a “European identity cultural package” which runs the risk of conflating differences related to aspects such as language, ethnicity, gender, worldview and religion. Identities are fluid, they exist on various levels and shift in response to changing contexts. Sometimes they develop in overlapping discourses. One way of dealing with this is to think of identification as a constant negotiation of symbolic and concrete borders.

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As a contribution to the project of Europeanization the Council of Europe launched the Cultural Routes program in 1987. The program aims at promoting “the European identity in its unity and diversity” by demonstrating how the cultural heritage of the European countries represents a shared cultural heritage (Resolution (98) 4 On the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe). The influential idea of “unity in diversity” has been used in various ways in contexts where the issue of a European identity has been on the agenda (Delanty and Rumford 2005: 57). Delanty and Rumford underline that in the context of the enlargement of the European union and because of the diversity of “languages, religions and societies, the recognition of diversity is an administrative necessity.”(ibid. p. 60). However it is no easy task to define the contents of the idea of unity in diversity. Delanty and Rumford call attention to the fact that the relation between the key words unity and diversity has shifted, from unity *and* diversity to unity *in* diversity (ibid. p. 57). The idea as such is appealing not least because it suggests the possibility to acknowledge diversity while at the same time achieving unity.

One important feature of diversity discussed by Delanty and Rumford is that it exists on various levels, for example a polynational level and on numerous national levels. Regional diversity exists within and across national cultures. Delanty and Rumford even suggest that there might be greater diversity within nations than across them (Delanty and Rumford 2005: 64). They describe the idea of unity in diversity as a myth which they see as potentially dangerous as it “denies the possibility of a European identity since this will always be in danger of undermining national diversity” (ibid. p. 65). They propose an alternative, namely to think beyond “the diversity myth”, for example by consciously and strategically acknowledging democratic and cosmopolitan values (ibid. p. 66). They quite rightly point out that the visions of a political elite advocating a supranational project does not necessarily coincide with discourses articulated by inhabitants in the European countries. According to them discourses connected with popular movements such as environmentalism, sustainability, anti-corruption, biotechnology, humanitarianism and anti-war are significant contexts for the articulation of European identity (ibid.). Nevertheless the European project is on the political agenda. One new cultural project within a political structure which has arisen as an answer to contemporary social transformations is the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes program.

Cultural Routes and Fluid Identities

The initial concept of the program, which is presented on the Council of Europe’s website, was to demonstrate “in a visible way, by means of a journey through space and time, how the heritage of the different countries in Europe represented a shared cultural heritage.” (Council of Europe Cultural Routes). The stated main aims are “to raise awareness of a European cultural identity and European citizenship, based on a set of shared values given tangible form by means of cultural routes retracing the history of the influences, exchanges and developments which have shaped European cultures”. The program explicitly aims at defining a common European space with shared values and a shared cultural heritage which may constitute a common ground for a European cultural identity and citizenship.

Considering the diversity of languages, religions, worldviews and traditions in contemporary Europe which exist not only between countries but also in countries where multiculturalism is acknowledged, a narrative of sameness would of course be problematic. It is stated in the Resolution (98) 4 on the Cultural Routes projects that in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development projects must “take account of local, regional, national and European identities” (Resolution (98) 4: 4). One possibility to solve the

seemingly paradoxical idea of “unity in diversity” is to foreground the existence of diversity in democratic (and perhaps cosmopolitan) spaces as a unifying value. If the project is to succeed there has to be some common values which a “European cultural identity” can be based upon. As Delanty and Rumford point out it would hardly be viable to codify European identity in “a cultural package” (Delanty and Rumford 2005: 68). A European identity is by necessity fluid, existing on various levels and shifting in response to various contexts.

In *Rethinking Europe. Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization* Delanty and Rumford analyse how Europe changes both as an imaginary and in concrete ways as a result of the enlargement (Delanty and Rumford 2005). They conclude that a “post-western Europe” is coming into being: “a Europe that is no longer based on a singular, western modernity, but multiple modernities” (ibid. p. 49). As a result Europe “is becoming more poly-centric, with more than one centre and also more than one historical origin”(ibid.). This implies that the Europeanization project is a “highly indeterminate process of social construction” as the enlargement as such “is about transformation”. The EU is changing and expanding “and as it does so it forces other parts of Europe to change.” (ibid.).

Indeterminate Processes on Various Levels

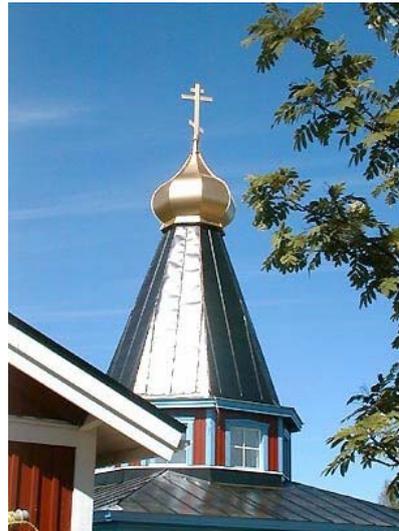
The Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes program contributes to shaping contemporary identification processes. As mentioned above these are dynamic, indeterminate and fluid. This is also the case with identification processes on national and regional levels which are affected by aspects such as ethnicity, language, religion, worldview, socio-economic status and gender. In this article a couple of examples will be examined which together might provide a composite narrative with multiple story-lines, agendas, implied authors and readers about the themes of identity, culture and history in present day Europe. The aim of this is to foreground the possibility of thinking about identity, culture and history as a constant negotiation of symbolic and concrete borders carried out in discourses on a political supranational level, on a national and regional level and on the levels of popular movements and the individual. The role of literary writing and art in Swedish nation-building will be commented upon as well as later critique of homogenizing nation-building from the perspective of ethnic and linguistic minority status. The latter will be elucidated with examples from the writings of the Tornedalian writer Bengt Pohjanen who is a vigorous contributor in the debate on the status of the historical ethnic and linguistic minority of the Meänkieli-speaking Tornedalians in Sweden. The Torne River Valley (Swedish “Tornedalen”) is a border area in northern Scandinavia. The Torne River divides the Tornedalians as it marks the border between Sweden and Finland. This has not always been the case. For centuries Finland was a part of Sweden. But Finland became a Russian Grand Duchy in 1809 and consequently the Tornedalians became citizens in different nation-states. The ethnic and linguistic minority Pohjanen belongs to was formerly called the Tornedalian Finns. According to the encyclopedia *Norrländsk Uppslagsbok* most people who belong to the minority use the term “tornedaling”, Tornedalian, today. It signifies a regional as well as a cultural identity. The denomination “Finn” is often understood as referring to nationality and thus it is awkward for denominating Tornedalians who are Swedish citizens (*Norrländsk uppslagsbok* vol 1: 249). However ethnic categorisation is no easy endeavour as there is a number of principles according to which the categorisation may be done (Elenius 2001). Sometimes “objective” criteria have been used and on other occasions the self-understanding of individuals have been decisive for deciding who is a Tornedalian.

If identities are understood as contextual this also means that they are multiple and dynamic. This implies that it is not possible to give an exact number with regard to the Tornedalian population in Sweden. There are no official statistics, but according to the Swedish standard encyclopedia *Nationalencyklopedin* there are roughly 25 000

“tornedalsfinnar” in Sweden (*Nationalencyklopedin* 2007). There is an interesting discrepancy between this figure and the one presented in a recent study by Lars Elenius who claims that today there are some 50 000 Tornedalians residing primarily in Haparanda, Övertorneå, Pajala and the municipalities of Kiruna and Gällivare (Elenius 2006: 16). The term “tornedalsfinnar” used in *Nationalencyklopedin* of course is somewhat dubious as it may be experienced as an act of attributing “non-Swedishness” to the Meänkieli-speaking minority in Sweden. In 2000 Sweden ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and The Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. As a result Yiddish, Romani Chib, Finnish, Sámi and Meänkieli (formerly called Tornedalian Finnish) were granted official status as minority languages in Sweden.

BENGT POHJANEN: selective cv

- author of fiction, poetry, opera librettos, co-author of two Meänkieli grammar books etc.
- former clergyman in the Church of Sweden
- wrote an academic thesis on the Finnish author Antti Hyry
- publisher
- minister of the Orthodox congregation at Överkalix
- promoter of Meänkieli culture



The Orthodox church at Överkalix.

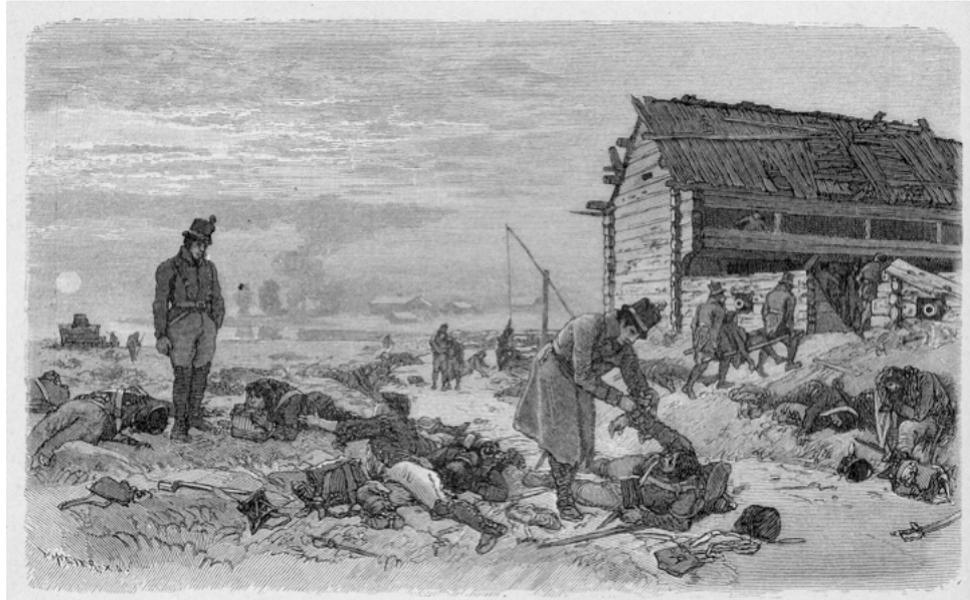
The role of historical subject matter and narrative for identification processes on the level of the European project will be discussed through an examination of one of the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes programs, the Northern Lights Route. This is not solely a political project aiming at the creation of a European identity. It is also a project aiming at wealth creation and the enhancement of economy, trade and tourism. This is underscored in the “Introductory note to the draft European Framework Convention on the integration of the cultural heritage into development”. In connection with this, branding of various regions has become part of the discourse of the Cultural Routes programs.

Contextualising Borders

Identification processes are closely connected to the construction of concrete and symbolic borders. After the peace treaty between Russia and Sweden in 1809 Sweden “lost” Finland. The Muonio River and the Torne River became the geographical markers of the new national border and the Tornedalian population was divided. The barrier function of the 1809 border is related to the territorial configuration of states and sovereign territories. Today a wider view on borders has been adopted in a number of academic disciplines. This new view has been influenced by globalization, the collapse of the Communist bloc, the advance of information technology, the European Union and post-modern thinking. “Border” may refer to the legal borderline between states but also to frontiers of political and cultural contestation.

War between
Sweden and
Russia 1808 –
1809.

Illustration
from the
Finnish
national poet
Johan Ludvig
Runeberg's
*Songs of
Ensign Stål*.



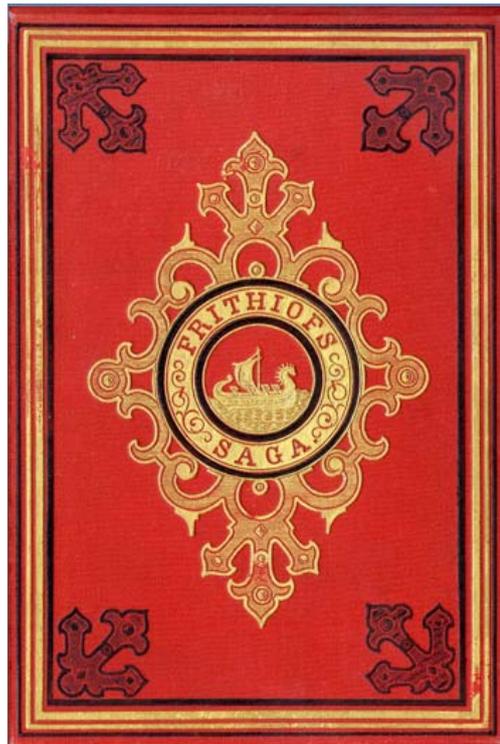
One way of analysing borders, barriers and boundaries is to examine representations of them as discourses. National, regional and European identities are politically, socially and culturally constructed in concrete historical settings under the impact of boundary-producing and border-crossing practices, manifest for example in the use of inclusionary and exclusionary language.

Identification Processes and the Use of History

In his well-known analysis of the processes which lead to the rise of nationalism and nation-states in Europe Benedict Anderson foregrounds the connection between the nation as an imagined community and ideas of a common history (Anderson 2006). This implies a constructivist view of history which enables us to analyse the discursive practices of historiography and narrativisation which create and negotiate meanings, norms and values. Nationalism emerged in connection with the modern nation-state and the development of industrial society (Delanty and Kumar 2006: 2). Delanty and Kumar describe nationalism in this context as “inextricably connected with statehood and with the centralizing and modernising tendency towards the homogenization of populations.” (ibid.).

In the realm of literary writing national characters acting in the historical drama of a constructed common past have been created. In Sweden Esaias Tegnér's *Frithiofs saga* (1825), *The Frithiof's Saga*, contributed the ingredient of romanticized viking mythology to ideas of a common past. In illustrations the hero Frithiof and his beloved Ingeborg are portrayed as racial exponents of the Nordic type. In a picture by Knut Ekwall the young couple is embedded in dramatic nature. They are sitting on the branch of a tree over an abyss with sharp rocks in the sea beneath. It is only Frithiof's firm grip around a branch which prevents them from falling. In this romantic image the young couple only have eyes for one another.

The illustration showing Frithiof and Ingeborg conveys an idea of what Swedes ideally should look like in the nineteenth century, and in doing so a symbolic boundary is activated separating the Nordic type from people with non-Nordic racial or ethnic markers. The image may seem innocent, but it can also be analysed as part of a racist discourse. In a study of orientalism in a Swedish context Christian Catomeris' explores a history of racism when discussing representations of immigrants from southern Europe and non-European countries



The cover of one edition of *The Frithiof's Saga*.

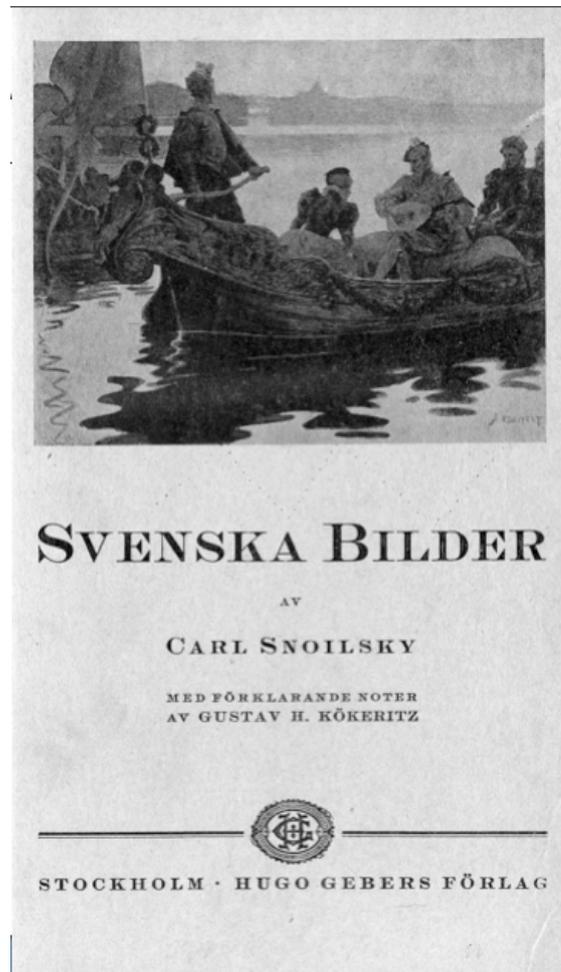
and people who belong to ethnic minorities (Catomeris 2005). He claims that racial stereotyping was frequent long before the time of increased immigration in the late twentieth century and that blond hair and blue eyes have functioned as markers of Swedish ethnicity in various discourses, for example in the popular children's books by Elsa Beskow (Catomeris 2005: 21). The picture representing Frithiof and Ingeborg is also interesting from a gender

Illustration by Knut Ekwall to song VII in *The Frithiof's Saga*. The Swedish text reads:

“Kom, älskade, och låt mig trycka
Dig till det hjerta, du är kär!
Min själs begär, min lefnads lycka,
Kom i min famn och hvila der!”



perspective as it conveys an image of gendered boundaries in romantic discourse, the young woman dressed in white seeming curiously deprived of empowerment enabling her to act independently in the dramatic nature, while the young man, although in a romantic situation, has not lost touch with the requirements of the material world around them.



Cover of a school edition of *Svenska bilder*.

Carl Snoilsky's collection of poems, *Images of Sweden*, *Svenska Bilder*, is another example of nineteenth century literature which was much read and admired. The title "Svenska Bilder" was used for the first time by Snoilsky in the collection *Nya dikter*, [New Poems], published in 1881. A selection of the poems was published in a school edition.

For decades Snoilsky's *Svenska bilder* was part of the curriculum of Swedish school-children. In one of the poems "I Ryssland" [In Russia], the warrior king Charles XII is portrayed as a righteous hero when invading Russia. The poem starts by presenting a scene with a hiding Russian peasant who is aiming at the Swedish king. Clearly the Russian represents the Other, a threat to the Swedes and the implied author and the implied reader are Swedes horrified at the audacity of the "evil" Russian peasant defending his country.

I Ryssland.

Den ryske bonden lämnat sin plog
Och lurar med hand på hane.
Ett skott ur löven i skymmande skog
Blir svenske kungens bane.

Sen soluppgången de dragit förbi,
De långa, mörka kanoner,
Med blanka kyrasser gult rytteri,
Till fots de blå bataljoner.

På blöta vägar vid hästars tramp
De tunga vagnarna rassla,
Där skramlar betsel, där klirrar pamp,
Och kvistar knäckas och prassla.

Vid eftertruppen, där faran är
Och bakhåll på snåren glänta,
Där följer Karl sin tågande här,
Där är han säkrast att vänta.

The beginning of the poem “I Ryssland”
[In Russia].

Contemporary Deconstruction and Renegotiation of Borders

During the nineteenth century Tegnér was considered the national poet of Sweden and count Snoilsky became widely known for his capacity to express what was seen by his contemporaries as the Swedish national spirit. Today their fame has faded. One reason is of course the change in aesthetic sensibility which has occurred. Another is the fact that the kind of symbolic border constructions which the texts partake in to a large extent have been challenged in the present situation when it is not possible to produce plausibility and consensus in the public debate over representations which valorise and romanticize questionable ideals in historical guise. With the pluralism of theoretical perspectives in the wake of poststructuralism and postmodernism the paradigm of “one nation, one people, one language and a homogeneous culture” has become dubious. Furthermore it has become obvious that demographics are changing due to migration. The EU and legislation protecting the languages of historical minorities have resulted in a process of reinterpretation of symbolic borders and redefinition of national culture.

The trauma of Swedish assimilation politics and experiences of identity loss are recurring themes in Tornedalian literature. In the poem “Jag är född utan språk” [I was born without language], Bengt Pohjanen expresses Tornedalian experiences of marginalization and identity loss due to linguistic minority status in a context where representatives of the majority culture in power exercise a politics of monoculturalism.

Pohjanen’s poem which has been printed in various publications can be found in the very beginning of a Meänkieli grammar book, *Meänkieli rätt och lätt*, by Bengt Pohjanen and Eeva Muli (Pohjanen and Muli 2005). The fact that this grammar book is used in Tornedalian schools in Sweden for teaching purposes today reflects the change in status for Meänkieli. The poem “I was born without language” provides a critical perspective on the history of linguistic and ethnic minorities in Sweden. It is obvious that the “I” of the poem voices experiences of exclusion, of not belonging in the modern Swedish welfare state, the people’s home, which does not welcome linguistic pluralism. Today the boundaries have changed as Meänkieli has become an official minority language.

Translation of Bengt Pohjanen's poem "Jag är född utan språk":

I was born without language
umbilical cord speechlessly bandaged
by a mute midwife

I grew up at the border
under the cross-fire from two languages
which have whipped my tongue
to dumbness

I was raised
with demands of clarity
language and nationality

I was whipped at school
into language, clarity
nationality
I was whipped to contempt
for that which was mine
the want of a language
and the border

I was built by exterior
violence
as well as interior constraint
on abbreviations
and misunderstandings

I was deprived of my identity card

(translation by Anne Heith)

In another poem by Bengt Pohjanen printed in the grammar book *Meänkielen kramatiiki* (Pohjanen and Kenttä 1996) Pohjanen connects the Tornedalians metonymically with colonised people: "Nyt aurinko nousee meile,/yli mailmaam neekereile" [Now the sun rises for us,/ over the negroes of the earth.]. In the multilingual poem entitled "Rättipää", which is Finnish slang meaning "fucking arabs", Pohjanen places the Tornedalians on an equal footing with oppressed arabs and black people thus implying that the Finnish-speaking people of the Torne River Valley have been subjected to a similar kind of colonisation as those peoples. There is no mistake about the critical and deconstructive stance towards the narrative about a democratic modern Swedish welfare state as the loss of language, culture and identity of an ethnic minority are highlighted. Analysed with perspectives from postcolonial theory the poem may be seen as an expression of "the subaltern speaking back".

The poem which was first published in 1987 reflects the ethnic revival of the nineteen-eighties. Pohjanen frequently questions the idea of a common Swedish history and a homogeneous culture when focussing on the role of characters and events shaping Meänmaa, a Meänkieli-name which literally means "our land". It refers to the area in the Torne River Valley where the historical ethnic and linguistic minority of the Tornedalian-Finnish population has its core area. To some extent Pohjanen's Meänmaa is a specific geographical area, but furthestmost Meänmaa is an imaginary construction expressing protest and alternatives to modernity and the Swedish "folkhem" which took shape after World War II. In an essay entitled "Sju flickor, sju pojkar" [Seven girls, seven boys] – the title alludes to the Finnish author Aleksis Kivi's *Seitsemän veljestä* [Seven Brothers] – Pohjanen briefly portrays seven women and seven men who have contributed to shaping Meänmaa and the identity of its people (Pohjanen 2006a). Pohjanen's use of history implies a deconstruction as well as a construction of symbolic borders which function as signifiers of cultural differences marking the border between "us and them". The contingency of identification has been

English translation of line 1–2 of the first stanza and of the second stanza:

“Now the sun rises for us,
Over the negroes of the earth.
/. . ./

Now our time has come,
to sing in the choir of minorities,
all over the world:
in London and in Pajala.”

The first part of “Rättipäät” printed in
Meänkielen kramatiiki.

12.16. Rättipäät

Nyt aurinko nousee meile,
yli mailman neekereile.
Rättipäät ja mutakuonot:
ei niil' ole ajat huonot.

Nyt oon tullu meän vuoro,
laulaa vähemistön kuoro,
kaikkialla mailmassa:
Lontonissa, Pajalassa.

Herraskansat, äitipuolet,
niilä vasta suuret huolet,
niilä vanhaa oon jo kieli,
meilä herräämässä mieli.

Net laulunsa oon laulanheet,
jo Dallaksensa elähneet.
Niil' ei ennää kelpaa mikhään,
sanova varsin: s'ole mithään!

underlined by Stuart Hall who describes the total merging of identification as a fantasy of incorporation which relies on a process of articulation operating across difference. This process entails “the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of ‘frontier-effects’. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process.” (Hall 1996: 3).

The themes of linguistic and ethnic minority status are central in Pohjanen’s use of history when exploring imagined communities and cultural identities. His writings can be described as a metonymic process in which the meanings attached to being a Tornedalian modify and develop. One northern, transnational, imagined community frequently referred to by Pohjanen is a prophetic belt stretching from Bodø in Norway to Narjan Mar in Russia (Pohjanen 2000a: 55). In his contemporary construction of a Meänkieli culture and history this belt functions as an alternative to the Swedish nation-state.

One important component of Pohjanen’s imaginary Torne River Valley is the contestation of the image of Russia as the strange and alien East, for example when describing his own Torne River Valley as a Russian landscape. This is done in the portrait of one of the seven women who have influenced Tornedalian identity constructions in “Sju flickor, sju pojkar” (Pohjanen 2006a: 217). In the section entitled “Flicka nr 5 – Hilja” [Girl nr 5 – Hilja] Pohjanen characterises the Tornedalian novelist Hilja Kallioniemi-Byström as “the Dostojevskij of Tornedalen” who depicts the Torne River Valley as a Russian landscape whose beauty is redeeming (2006b: 218). A major component of Pohjanen’s writings is the exploration of the theme of cultural heritage which has shaped the mentality and living-conditions of people in the Barents Euro-Arctic region.

On a political level the border area became increasingly strategically important after the loss of Finland in 1809 and the dissolution of the Union with Norway in 1905. There was a

shift in the image of Russia among the Swedish security elite based on the assumption that the Russians had expansionist intentions and that they aimed at securing an outlet to the Atlantic coast. There was also a growing self-esteem among Swedish decision-makers and an increased optimism regarding Sweden's prospects of surviving as an independent state in the age of imperialism (Åselius 1994).

Rewriting History

Pohjanen and Muli's *Meänkieli* grammar book from 2005 is published in Swedish. Previously, in 1996, another *Meänkieli* grammar book written by Bengt Pohjanen and Matti Kenttä was published in *Meänkieli*. In both books the authors transgress conventions of the grammar book genre. The books include poems and stories which provide critical perspectives on Swedish assimilation politics and modern Swedish society which are viewed from the perspective of the Other, or rather from a position where the pronoun "we" refers to an imagined community of the *Meänkieli*-speaking population of the Torne River Valley. The implied author as well the implied reader belong to the imagined community of Tornedalian speakers of *Meänkieli*. This implies the construction of a collective identity based on shared experiences deriving from a common historical and social setting, the Torne River Valley.

1.3.2.1. Sukulaiset

Contesting historiography by the construction of new histories:

The (re)construction of the history of *Meänkieli* in Kenttä and Pohjanen's *Meänkielen kramatiiki*: from despised stranger to member of a respectable family.



Illustration from *Meänkielen kramatiiki*.

The fictions of the grammar books do not only exemplify the Other speaking back. More importantly they partake in the contemporary formation of identity and culture. This process

also includes expressions of self-assertion. One example is the construction of the history of Meänkieli in Pohjanen and Kenttä's grammar book. In the family tree illustrating the kinship and development of the Fenno-Ugric languages, Meänkieli and Finnish are displayed as two equal languages branching from Old Finnish. This is clearly a rewriting of the history of Meänkieli which is not in accordance with linguistic scholarship. But contribution to linguistic scholarship is hardly the primary aim of Pohjanen and Kenttä's *Meänkielen kramatiiki*. Rather the language tree provides a negotiation of borders which create power relations and hierarchies between languages and language users. The word "meänkieli", which means "our language", only has a history of some decades. In the encyclopedia *Norrländsk uppslagsbok* the first appearance of the word in print is traced to a chronicle by Matti Kenttä published in the regional newspaper *Haparandabladet* in the early nineteen-eighties (*Norrländsk uppslagsbok* vol 3: 147). From the late nineteen-eighties and onwards it has been used to denominate the language spoken by the Finnish-speaking Tornedalians in Sweden. However it should be kept in mind that the status of Meänkieli is different in Finland compared to Sweden. In Finland Meänkieli has no official status as a language of its own. This illustrates the problem of categorisation. There are some thirty Fenno-Ugric languages, the number depends on whether the different varieties are regarded as dialects within one language or as separate languages (Collinder 1962).

The Northern Lights Route

The Northern Lights Route is one of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, though not one of the major ones which are enumerated on the Council's website. The choice of name for the route significantly refers to an electro-static phenomenon only visible in the North sky from the Northern Hemisphere. The Latin name for the phenomenon, *aurora borealis*, combines the name of the Roman goddess of the dawn, Aurora, and the Greek name for the north wind, Boreas. In a presentation of the Northern Lights Route on the website of the University Library of Tromsø the logo of Tromsø university is found next to the logo of the Barents Euro-Arctic region. With Naomi Klein's *No Logo* in mind the profusion of logos may seem somewhat comical. But as stated in one of the policy documents the Cultural Routes program has wealth creation as one of its aims. This is clearly not a discourse on the level of popular anti-consumerism movements but on a supranational political level which coincides with the level of regional politics aiming at regional development. The addressee in the text is a reader not familiar with this part of Europe, addressed by a narrator using the pronoun "we". "We" in this context most likely refers to an ideal imagined community of people living in the Barents Euro-Arctic region. In this demonstration of a "shared cultural heritage" based on "shared values" there is a clear distinction between "them" and "us". Obviously it is assumed that "they", the addressees in the text, are not familiar with the specific culture, history and life world of "us". Curiously enough the narrator in the text views the Barents Euro-Arctic Region with the eyes of a stranger when describing it as "this bordering area of sea and ice on the distant shores of northern Europe" (The Northern Lights Route). The defamiliarization is further strengthened by enumerations of the exotic qualities of the region: "The Northern Lights Route hopes to introduce its viewers to the fascinating and compelling qualities of the northern regions.", "We wish to show how daring journeys to the far corners of the ancient world once came to pass, and to offer you descriptions of life as it once was lived, and still is lived" (ibid.). It can be argued that the rhetoric of the presentation is more persuasive in promoting the tourist industry than in creating a sense of sharing values and a cultural heritage among Europeans. There is an erosion of internal borders inside the European Union today, but it is obvious that there are problems in creating plausible accounts of a shared identity and a shared past. On the other hand this is hardly possible due to the obvious differences and diversity that exist. The identities, values and

heritage that are evoked will necessarily be fluid, diverse and contextual if the heritage is not to be conflated into a common package – which as mentioned above would be impossible as a political project considering the apparent cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity that exists in Europe.

The Topos of the Marketplace

Taking the impact of consumption of both material products and immaterial ones like experiences in contemporary consumer society into consideration it is hardly surprising that there is a strong emphasis on the role of trade to connect people in the representation of the Northern Lights Route, and on wealth creation in the policy documents of the European Council. One of the titles of the menu on the introductory page of the Northern Lights Route is “Trade” and it provides a link to a presentation which is initiated by the sentence “Trade leads to contact between people.” This statement exemplifies rhetoric aiming at persuading the reader that trade and contact between people are in a metonymic relationship which implies that one merges with the other. In this kind of rhetoric the concept of the marketplace functions as a metaphor for peaceful, wealth creating co-operation. The persistence of this kind of peaceful co-operation is implied by the contacts of the past caused by trading, fishing and hunting and contemporary visions of the possibilities of tourism and experience industry. If the “brave” explorers of the past are to be succeeded by today’s tourists the representation has to rely on a rhetoric of persuasion which promises experiences out of the ordinary.

One important aim of the Cultural Routes program is to transcend politics and economics previously envisioned in national terms. But this is not enough. As implied in the Council of Europe’s policy documents there is a challenge in accounting for the diversity of cultural heritage in Europe, for example from the perspectives of ethnicity, linguistic pluralism and differences between rural and urban cultures.

Negotiating Borders and Identification Processes

Pohjanen is one of the individuals participating in the process of region-building and the formation of identity in the Barents Region. One of the publishing houses he has started is called the Barents Publisher and he plays an active role in the the Barents Literature Centre at Övertäljå in the Torne River Valley.

As Paasi and Neumann have pointed out regions emerge in processes of territorial, symbolic and institutional shaping (Paasi 1991; Neumann 1996). Maps provide visualizations of the borders of the region, natural phenomena like the aurora borealis may be promoted as symbols of the region, and institutions like the Barents Institute at Kirkenes, Norway, and the Barents Literature Centre mentioned above, play a role in constructing the Barents Region as an imagined community. Through his writings and social actions Pohjanen represents an agent belonging to the “interest group” of ethnic Meänkieli-speaking Tornedalians who wish to promote a culture, a language and an identity of their own. He is also an individual agent acting on the arena of the Barents Region. In both cases the idea of a monocultural, monolingual nation state as a desirable imagined community is challenged.

In a discussion of relevant theories for the analysis of cultural identity Stuart Hall underlines the use of history, language and culture in the formation of identities: “identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being” (Hall 1996). In this article some examples of the use of history, language and culture in aesthetic, educational and political discourses have been discussed. In all the examples the negotiation of borders, both symbolic and concrete ones, plays a major role in redefining the meanings of cultural identity.

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