DISCURSIVE DWELLINGS:
TROPES OF BELONGING IN PANNONIAN FICTION

By

Petra Bakos

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate in Comparative Gender Studies

Supervisors:
Professor Jasmina Lukić
Professor Elissa Helms

Vienna, Austria

2023

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no material previously accepted for any other degree in any other institution. Nor does it contain material previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of a bibliographical reference.

Petra Bakos

January 2023

ABSTRACT

My research aimed at the exploration of the current state of Pannonian borderlands consciousness in order to understand the layers of emotions, ideas, perspectives, values and worldviews of those living in a 'corridor', a 'no man's land', on the 'losing side' of the frontier. As much as state borders by design are meant to represent obstacles, the borderlands are spaces where thinking in terms of multiple affiliations and multilateral possibilities comes naturally to many if not most. While the conceptualization of EU border regimes tends to remain entrapped in the colonial fiction of a militantly clear-cut inside and outside, engaging with borderlands consciousness allowed access to alternative perceptions of bordering processes. Furthermore, the uncompromising complexity that is part and parcel of borderlands consciousness posits challenges to ingrained binary-based conceptual differentiations concerning our bodies, our humanness, and our sense of belonging. In other words, the examination of the borderlands represents a timely contribution to a comprehensive and decolonial reconsideration of solidarity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

WORDS MATTER: CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Following newscasts and social media one gets the impression that borders are some kinds of physically fortified demarcation lines meant to mark the rim of the world as the target audiences know it. However, state borders are never laid on a sheer stretch of barren earth but are part of a complex arrangement of landscapes and cultures – namely, the borderlands.

Born and raised in the vicinity of the Hungarian-Yugoslavian, now Hungarian-Serbian state border, I was already as a child aware of some particularities of my locality. I grew up among people who had close relatives on 'both sides', people who regularly paid visits to dentists, doctors, mechanics or trades' partners on the 'other side,' people who went shopping 'just across', people who tended to their orchards 'over there' or placed their beehives 'here' in such a way that the insects could harvest meadows 'there.' Due to a bilateral governmental agreement Hungarian and Yugoslav citizens who lived within 50 kilometers of the state border could apply for a special permit, *kishatárforgalmi engedély* in Hungarian, *malogranični pasoš* in Serbo-Croatian, with which they could more often and more easily travel across. Furthermore, permit holders could spend longer periods of time on Hungarian or Yugoslav grounds as long as they remained within the 50 kilometers zone. Nominally, the bilateral agreement was meant to help maintain cultural, social, and family connections and non-commercial farming, but with this agreement the two states basically tacitly acknowledged that the lives of those living on the two sides of the border are intertwined by history and interrelated in the present both with each other and with the land they share.

The acknowledgement of the unity of land despite human efforts to cut it into pieces is foundational to this dissertation. By unity of land I mean that humans and non-humans living on either side of state borders walk the same soil, are parts of the same ecosystem, face the same weather conditions, and suffer from the effects of the same extractive economic system. People inhabit the same landscape attaching to it the same or similar meanings, share cultures, languages, often past experiences too, while in the present they come up against the life-structuring effects of state sanctioned administrative and ideological boundaries in a similar vein. Because of that, as much as state borders by design are meant to represent obstacles, the borderlands are spaces teeming with instances of connection and exchange, where thinking in terms of multiple affiliations and multilateral possibilities comes naturally to many if not most. As Gloria Anzaldúa put it, "the consciousness of the Borderlands", is continuously effected by "racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization." (2007, 99)

For this dissertation Anzaldúa's vision of the borderlands represents a foundational premise. If every attempt at defining and thus conceptually securing what a border is requires "the application of a simplifying force", as Étienne Balibar claims (2000, 77), one may say Anzaldúa rather chose the perils of 'unbelonging' than to surrender to these 'simplifying forces'. The first time I ever read her ethical, poetical and political manifesto, the *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987), I was left speechless for days. Nearly all of her reflections on her own experiences living in the Mexican–Texan borderlands deeply resonated with my experiences coming from what's today the Serbian– Hungarian borderlands. How could this be possible? According to Anzaldúa's explanation there is a particular lens that is chiseled by living as a "mongrel […] where two worlds grate against each other". (2007, 25) Yet, the similarity of our experiences despite cultural, geographic, linguistic, and other distances was not what struck me most. What I found profoundly inspiring was the creativity, clarity and courage with which she pushed back against all those 'simplifying forces' that wanted her to give up her complexity in

order to 'fit' in one of the ready-made identity categories of *either* of the hetero-patriarchal nation states that she happened to have ties to. Her work shows the immense strength needed for but also yielded by living *on* the border: by embracing the complex, often contradictory position of those not choosing 'sides'. As she so succinctly formulated, "[w]hat we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other" (2007, 41), in the face of which she claimed and repeatedly reclaimed her borderlands position both as a resource and as a requisite of resilience. The power of Anzaldúa's borderlands thought lays in her radical seizure with the conflict to which someone inhabiting multiple cultures, countries, genders, languages, races is exposed. Instead of assimilating into the hegemonic order, or taking a counter-stance that would reinforce the existing power-binaries, Anzaldúa's suggestion is to incorporate the interplay of differences into what she envisions as a new consciousness. Critically, the construction of this new consciousness is also inclusive of the physical realm. When declaring that the borderlands person/a, "*la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders" (2007, 100), and that "in our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures" (2007, 103), Anzaldúa is not talking about some symbolical 'flesh,' but the lively materiality of bloody tissues. Her new consciousness is therefore an awareness interlaced with alertness to the inextricably entwined, mutually constitutive emotional, material, social, and symbolic processes of the borderlands.

Inspired by Anzaldúa's work I decided to devote my dissertation to the exploration of the present state of East European borderlands consciousness. I also followed her lead in keeping my eyes open for the material effects of borderlands existence, including humans' connections with the non-human in its sentient and non-sentient embodiments. Lastly, as she constructed the new consciousness primarily by literary means, I focused my efforts on the consciousness-construction site of contemporary Eastern European literary creation.

More closely, the area that I sampled literary works from as well as the locus of my own situated and embodied point of departure is the southern rim of the Pannonian Plain, the southernmost edge of which is marked by the Sava and the Danube rivers. The Sava represents a natural boundary between the states of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, while the Danube between the east of Croatia and the northwest of Serbia, as well as between the east of Serbia and the southwest of Romania. Besides these one more state border stretches through the area, between Hungary and Serbia. Each of these territorial borders are also part of the borderline that most markedly divides the European continent at the present; that of EU and non-EU member states. According to Anzaldúa borderlands are in a "constant state of transition" (2007, 25), which is emphatically true for this segment of our planet. The southern rim of the Pannonian Plain has been a historical crossover land claimed by many but invested into by few. Its economic, military and political significance, usually determined at far away centers, has shifted over and over again radically with changing governmental and border regimes, such as, just during the past century, the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and most recently Hungary, Croatia, and Romania's joining of the EU. The economic and political reorganization that followed each change of state formations brought along swift societal transformations. For instance, in my native Vojvodina, a south Pannonian borderlands territory pocketed by the state borders of Croatia, Hungary, and Romania, during the 1980s aptness in cultural and linguistic code switching was a sign of resourcefulness, while from the 1990s on it progressively became suspicious excess. Currently those who do not fit seamlessly in – Croatian, Hungarian, or Serbian – state sanctioned identity categories and/or relate to multiple ones are quickly deemed unreliable if not dangerous, but for this to occur it is often enough if someone is unwilling to march under a particular national party banner. Therefore, when setting out to map the current state of Pannonian borderlands consciousness, I was curious in what forms such a culturally, ethnically, and historically amalgamate phenomenon can

be sustained under the ever-increasing political pressure towards homogenized, normative identity options.

Pannonian borderlands consciousness is a representative variety of East European borderlands consciousness, which is in some way present not only in the vicinity of state borders or the edges of geographic regions or linguistic areas, but ubiquitously all over East Europe. This is due to the historical fact that from the Baltics together with today's Poland through the Carpathian Basin to the Balkan Peninsula much of East Europe's area until recently belonged to shifting imperial peripheries, where empires grated against each other. Presently the south Pannonian rim, comprising hundreds of kilometers of EU borderlands, is among those places where the ambivalences and anomalies biting at the – literal – edges of the European project can be examined up close with the promises and failures, the hopes and fears surrounding it still in the making. Together with its counterparts, such as the borderlands of the Baltics and Russia, Poland with Belarus and Ukraine, or those of Romania with Moldova, the Pannonian rim and its inhabitants embody what Dace Dzenovska described as "in-between spaces – and people – … abandoned to their own devices" (2020, 22). Before the increased influx of refugees via what came to be known as the Balkan Route and later through the northern eastern borders of the EU these borderlands regions scarcely received any attention. Since 2015 the amount of media coverage – and research projects – on the Hungarian-Serbian, Bosnian-Croatian, and Belarus-Poland borders multiplied manifold, but in these the borderlands and their inhabitants usually serve as mere backdrops providing some local flavor to journalistic – or scholarly – investigations concentrated on the 'real deal', the refugees negotiating with brutal border regimes enforced from far away capitals. In other words, the East European borderlands have once again become inscribed into the European imaginary as

In this dissertation I bring these marginalized spaces center. I do so because I consider that, on the one hand, understanding the layers of emotions, ideas, perspectives, values and worldviews present in the borderlands could benefit those attempting to be of help in any of the ever-imminent crises unfolding on the EUs external barriers. On the other hand, while thinking about EU border regimes tends to remain entrapped in the colonial fiction of a militantly clear-cut inside and outside, engaging with borderlands consciousness allows access to a treasure trove of alternative perceptions of bordering processes. Lastly but just as importantly, the uncompromising complexity that is, as Anzaldúa showed, part and parcel of borderlands consciousness, posits challenges to ingrained binary-based conceptual differentiations concerning our bodies, our humanness, and our sense of belonging. In other words, the examination of the borderlands represents a timely contribution to a comprehensive, decolonial, and radically egalitarian reconsideration of solidarity.

The dissertation proposes an emergent methodology (Lykke 2022) that is a methodology that evolved in dialogue with the material. The exploration of Pannonian borderlands consciousness necessitated a grafting of Anzaldúa's borderlands poetic and Édouard Glissant's concept of opacity into minor literature as established by Deleuze and Guattari. The resulting prism then enabled the close reading of fictional and scientific texts on equal footing in the spirit of decolonial feminist scholarship.

Édouard Glissant considered that "[t]he novel unveils something veiled that never becomes purely unveiled but exposes itself in the very mechanism of unveiling." (2010: 164) In the case of Pannonian borderlands novels the uncertainty inherent in state borders and the layers of violence intrinsic to nation state propagated ethnonationalistic identities are the veiled element. Fiction can never thoroughly unveil it – in the sense that it cannot fully expose all the resultant suffering –, but its attempts at unveiling concentrate and direct attention towards it. Just as importantly, by doing so, according to

Glissant, fiction achieves "to revive the collective consciousness, to maintain it in a state of anguish and questioning" (ibid.).

Literature has the capacity to step off the beaten track and as Susan Squier put it, offer an "alternative to the expert discourse." As literary fiction is situated in a specific epistemological location "between knowledge and unawareness," it is capable of remaining open to such fields of exploration that other epistemological frameworks preclude (2004, 22). Literature can often get closer to and deeper into such shifting conceptual, emotional, and geopolitical grounds as those of the borderlands, than descriptive or analytical attempts. This takes a particular kind of literature, of course. Each of the novels discussed in this dissertation unfolds within those 50 kilometers of the state borderline that has been since the 1950s officially designated as border zone. This deep rootedness of the novel's worlds within the strict border zone was one of the selection criteria, the second being their involvement with the material effects of borderlands existence. This I considered to be a tough one, but I found that as a response to the perceived expendability of both humans and nonhumans in the region many borderlands novels place human's relationship to nonhuman others and/or the material environment center. Thirdly, as I wished to trace the current state of Pannonian borderlands consciousness, I mainly sought out on novels written after 2010, though in some cases, for the sake of contrast or background I also brought on board books written during the previous decade. Most importantly, from the onset I was looking for novels that not only take the borderlands as their topic but, evoking Anzaldúa, they poetically perform borderlands complexities and specificities. In my interpretation the kind of borderlands literature Anzaldúa proposed *with* her writing is a form of minor literature as envisioned by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who hold that the first main characteristic of minor literature is that its "language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (1986, 16), in other words it revolts against normative discourses. All novels selected for this dissertation, written in the Bosnian, Croatian,

Hungarian, or Serbian languages exhibit a dissident streak within the established national literary canon.[1] The second feature of minor literature that "everything in [it] is political" (1986, 17) is again ubiquitously true for each novel this dissertation engages in a dialogue with. As they step off of the beaten track of language organized around distinct binaries dropping askew glances on notions ingrained in the so called 'cultured' discourse from 'both' sides of the political palette, these novels become a provocation to the status quo thus utterly political. Experimentation, provocation and revolt are the prerequisites to fulfill their potential as "[…] literature that produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism; [with] the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility." (1986, 17)

Indeed, the south Pannonian rim is seeped in skepticism: because of the lasting economic difficulties and growing social disparities the long-standing external image of the region, that of the corridor, crossover land, passage more and more becomes the prism through which people living here perceive their locality, as a result of which, as the Bosnian cultural scholar Danijela Majstorović put it, "we all yearn for an elsewhere" (2020, 3). The books selected for my dissertation represent a form of minor literature also in the sense that they deconstruct the unidirectional dynamic of this ubiquitously perceived yearning. They keep a distance to western-conceived concepts of linear progress while actively destabilizing various nation state sanctioned orders of signifiers as well. Yet, they write without an illusion of exceptionality, knowing that 'East Europe' was put together from the flotsam and jetsam of the same cultural reference base as what is called Western Europe but has been historically positioned differently, placing local efforts and results on a slant slope. On this slant slope then these writers, instead of trying to climb 'upward' or scornfully start marching in an 'other' direction attempt

[1] Several of these novels were written by writers who write in the language of an ethnic minority, but that fact alone would not qualify their writing as minor literature.

to establish their home, writing "like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow. […] finding [their] own point of underdevelopment, [their] own *patois*, [their] own third world, [their] own desert" (Deleuze and Guattari, 18)[2], because, as one of the writers discussed later in detail, Orsolya Bencsik, argued: the minor writer's home is "the no man's land of language" (2022, 139). Therefore, borderlands writing is not a depiction of borderlands consciousness but itself in the making. For this writing, for these novels the dog's hole, the rat's burrow, the third world, the desert are not only evocative metaphors but part and parcel of the borderlands experience as construed in writing. The often overwhelming experience of living in a corridor, in a no man's land, on the losing side of the frontier, during the past decade swept 'elsewhere' the most apt, educated, skillful, and daring members of Pannonian communities resulting in a social desertification, the rapidness of which has only been paralleled by the desertification of the region itself partly as an effect of climate change, but mainly due to extractive agricultural and economic praxes.

Certainly, in-depth knowledge about the affective, historical, ideological, political, and/or societal context is not a prerequisite for understanding literature. Yet, since this dissertation is involved with an utterly politicized minor literature, knowing the grounds the reader can get a better sense of the stakes of digging or burrowing into them. Therefore, when approaching the selected works of borderlands fiction, I will attempt to be responsive both to the specificities of the narratives, and to the discursive realities they are embedded in. My method thus comprises of close reading of the selected novels together with transnational environmental, feminist, historical, literary and political scholarship, and bringing these fictional and scientific texts into a dialogue on equal footing in the spirit of decolonial feminist thought.

[2] In the English translation it was "his own point of underdevelopment, his own patois …" which I found exclusive and delimiting thus changed to the more inclusive and allowing pronoun of 'their'.

Another feature of my method emerged from the very material I work with. As these novels allow access to the folds of borderlands consciousness where curious alliances offer temporary solace, their close reading invited the frame of a radical relational epistemology, which takes connection as the smallest unit of analysis. Connection, in my understanding, may take a variety of forms; it may be amicable or antagonistic, productive or reductive, but it is always processual: there is a whirlpool-like character to it as it brings seemingly separate phenomena together then releases them on a slightly changed track. The textual borderlands matrix of the novels teems with instances of connection. Much of these are, from the perspective of Eurocentric/colonial, patriarchal/capitalist worldview quite unlikely exchanges that happen through the faultlines of age, class, gender, language, nationality, race, and species, established and sustained by political power. By exploring the possibilities of connection and even communion these novels are not only exposing the artificiality and toxicity of heavy set cultural and social boundaries but construe tropes of belonging. Yet, forming alliances have different stakes for different actors. Based on Anzaldúa's work as well as on feminist literary studies I aim to offer a differential and intersectional analysis of the difficulties involved in the process of developing and maintaining the capacities of caring and sharing in an environment where the one who has the gold makes the rules, and the disadvantaged often have no other choice but to risk probing the boundaries, literally: the weakest go to the (border) wall.

The three chapters of the dissertation are organized around three conventional boundary-setting areas where, as the novels witness, Pannonian borderlands consciousness is presently hardest at work: the border/lands of the state, the border/lands of writing, and the border/lands of community. Within each chapter I establish a dialogue with debates and trajectories from relevant fields of research, while by cross-referencing the chapters I aim to show how all these borderlands are interrelated and mutually constitutive. As I will shift from one thematic cluster to another through the chapters, different sides of

the selected novels will come into focus, with a sensitivity to their features of borderlands minor literature acting as a common ground. Not all novels will be dealt with in all chapters, as not all novels bear the same weight in propounding the argument about borderlands consciousness harboring the potential for alternative senses of belonging and connection. The books that best represent the kinds of contemporary borderlands minor literature this dissertation centers on, are, in the order of publication: *Élhetek az arcodon* by Katalin Ladik (Can I live on your face?, 2007); *Makovo zrno* by Neven Ušumović (Poppyseed, 2009); Slobodan Tišma's *Bernardijeva soba* (Bernardi's room, 2011); Bekim Sejranović's *Tvoj sin Huckleberry Finn* (Your son, Huckleberry Finn, 2015); *A dögeltakarító* by Zoltán Danyi (The Carcass remover, 2015); *Szeméremékszerek I: A két steril pohár by* Ottó Tolnai (Intimate Jewelry I: The two sterile cups, 2018); and Sándor Jászberényi's short novel *A varjúkirály* from his volume of the same title (The crow king, 2020). Besides these I will also repeatedly revisit Erzsébet Juhász's posthumus novel *Határregény* (Bordernovel, 2001), a book unshakably entrenched in a center-periphery hierarchy that offers a sensitive account of middle class intellectual melancholy on the perceived edges of Europe. Melinda Nadj Abonji's *Der Tauben fliegen auf* (Fly away, pigeon, 2010) will represent another reference point as a novel about a Vojvodina gastarbaiter (German for 'guest worker') family's negotiation of belonging in Switzerland.

As I was mainly interested in investigating the affective, creative, conceptual, and sensual resources needed for and mobilized by choosing complexity, throughout the dissertation my goal was to tie together rather than separate (disciplines, fields of research), to include rather than exclude (concepts, epistemologies), and to repeatedly adjust my lens to seeing complexity and even contradiction without reduction. In doing so, I devised borderlands consciousness also as the metaphor of my epistemological position. To quote Madina Tlostanova, the Pannonian borderlands in this dissertation represent a "locality as not merely a geo-historical location of the knowing subject, but also

the epistemological correlation with the sensing body" (2010, 6). The way I understand the world therefore the way I read and write are rooted in my particularly classed, gendered, ethnicized, raced borderlands experience, and this experience, as Anzaldúa so aptly formulates it on the first page of *La Frontera*, is rife with the "emotional residues of an unnatural boundary" (2007, 3). Therefore, trying to act as a detached analyst would be a hypocritical if not impossible agenda, instead I will keep reflecting on my relative positionality all throughout the following pages, because as Donna Haraway put it, the surest way to a rigorous account of the world is exactly an 'objectivity' which is rooted in the particularities of embodiment and location (1988).

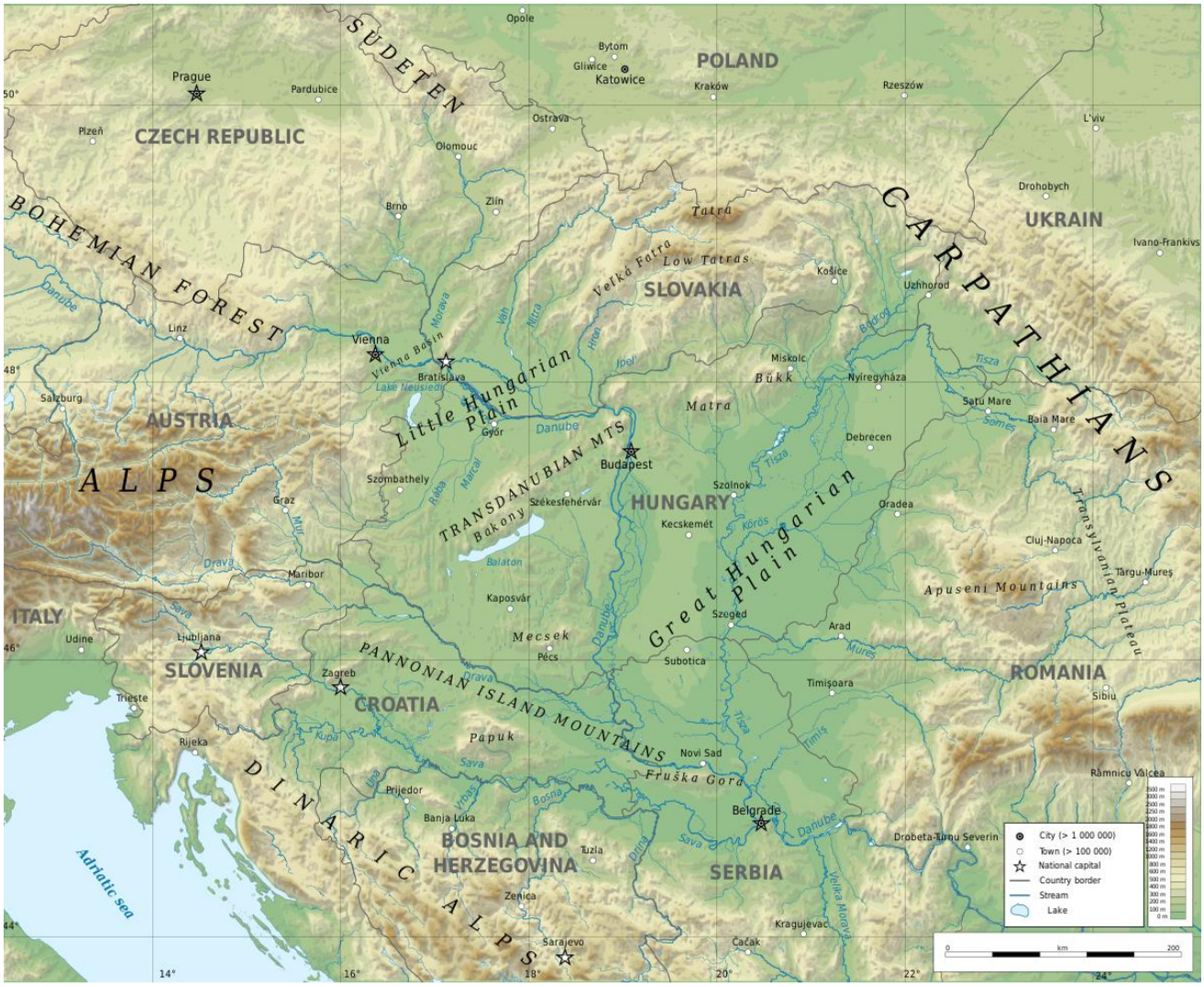

TABLE 1: PHYSICAL MAP OF THE PANNONIAN BASIN

WHEREABOUTS: HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The antique Roman province of Pannonia, comprised of the western side of the Pannonian Basin between the Alps and the Danube and in some historical periods its southern fringe, extended eastwards beyond the Danube, encompassing the present day territory of Bácska / Bačka.

During the medieval ages the Pannonian Basin belonged to the area enveloping the Roman Empire's *limes* between the Roman church's Europa Occidens and the Orthodox sphere, but what was first the boundary of church lands, soon became a marker of civilizational differences. In the Enlightenment discourses the whole East European region appears as an intermediary between what was conceived as Asia and 'Europe proper,' in other words between 'barbaric' and 'civilized' lands (see Wolff 1994). On the often black and white screen of metageography the region has ever since been a grey area characterized by an unstable difference towards both east and west and more recently also towards north and south, a fuzzy cultural, and geopolitical entity "without precise physical or political boundaries." (Janos 2000, 4). From the 16th century on, the area was either under Habsburg or Ottoman rule, but again it belonged to the shifting imperial peripheries, where the two empires grated against each other (Rustow 1997, 187). This, together with the frequent changes of imperial boundaries and the divide and conquer attitude displayed by the Habsburg court, with which they undermined the possibility of cooperation among ethnically defined groups, prepared the post-imperial instability of the region (Wank 1997, 104).

The Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian Empires were the only contiguous territorial empires in Europe, or in other words the only empires without overseas colonies. By the 19th century this situation led to the accumulation of a relative economic disadvantage compared to Britain or France, who used it as the basis for construing a disproportionately large moral advantage for themselves. Renewing the old-time binaries of east / west as barbaric / civilized they posited the Habsburg, but especially the

Ottoman and the Russian courts as secondary, from which time on their population was marked by 'imperial difference': an epistemic difference founded on a racial classification of the planet's population (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006). During the 19th century these 'secondary' empires, grouped also as 'the pre-modern empires' (Bucur 2022, 10), increasingly displayed symptoms of an inferiority complex towards the truly 'modern,' that is colonial, empires like Britain and France. This was especially true for the Habsburg and the Ottoman courts, because their territorial integrity more and more depended on the goodwill of the 'west.'

Importantly, in this respect Austria-Hungary was treated differently than the Ottoman Sultanate. Before its 'sudden' collapse, the Habsburg Empire was sheltered by the international system in order to avoid a power vacuum in its place, which could have lead to a continental war. At the same time the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity was less respected, because there was a silent agreement that "it was not appropriate for Muslim rulers to govern Christian subjects." (Wank 1997, 112). Christian rulers, on the other hand, were deemed suitable to govern Muslim subjects: with the tacit support of western empires in 1878 Austria-Hungary occupied the Ottoman territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the occupation was favored neither by German nor by Hungarian political elites because with it Slavic speakers suddenly gained considerably more weight within the imperium, yet "both halves of the Empire made efforts to have the new acquisitions allocated to their complex of territories. No agreement could be reached, and as a result, the annexed provinces remained the state no-man's-land" (Rauchensteiner 2014, 21). This state of affairs lasted for two decades, after which Hungary officially annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the occupation and all throughout Hungarian administrative control Bosnia and Herzegovina was treated as a colony by the Hungarian crown, as Hungarians, historically subordinated within the Habsburg Monarchy, were hard at work placing themselves among European colonial powers (Varga 2022, 31).

From the beginning of the 20th century the political balance of the Balkans increasingly occupied the center of European courts' attention. According to Mannfried Rauchensteiner's state of the art centennial monograph on the First World War, "[s]ince the question of whether there would be war or peace so evidently appeared to hang on developments in the Balkans, any event or change in the status quo that occurred on the Balkan Peninsula was a trigger for alarm bells in the state chancelleries." (2014, 22) The premonitions were correct: as is well known, the event that triggered the First World War (1914– 1918) indeed took place in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The post-First World War peace treaties redrew the political map of the region. The losing supranational states such as the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Sultanate were rendered into small and mid-size nation-states. From 1920 the southern part of the Pannonian Basin was shared among three freshly established countries, the Kingdom of Hungary (1920–1946), under the reign of Regent Miklós Horthy; the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918–1943) that is from 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; and the Kingdom of Romania (1881–1947). The state borderline between present-day Croatia and Hungary, and between Hungary and Serbia precisely overlap with the borders established by the Trianon Treaty in 1920.

The fresh Eastern European nation states "were granted neither freedom from external pressures nor adequate time" (Wank 1997, 114-115) to develop firmer economies, lessen social asymmetries, and reconcile ethnic tensions, thus they remained in the throes of inner instabilities and outer hegemonic interests. Because of the new state borders some culturally defined groups of people became 'state people' while others 'national minorities'. As Roginer pointed out, "the majority nations considered

the borders stable and everlasting, while the minorities considered it transitory, a temporary necessity"[3] (2019, 12). The Entente Powers' aim was to establish a buffer region, the independent states of which could together resist a potential Soviet or German expansion. To secure these states' inner stability each of them had to sign a Minority Treaty, either as part of the peace treaties or as prerequisite of their ascension into the League of Nations (Eiler 2022, 172). With that an international minority rights protection system was put in place under the supervision of the League of Nations. This system is considered as the forerunner of the human rights framework established after the Second World War under the auspices of the United Nations. At the same time the fact that the minority rights discourse was developed in relation to East Central Europe contributed to the solidification of West Europe's paternalistic approach to Eastern Europe as a region of "national states with minority problems" (Dzenovska 2017, 300). This perception was aided by the fact that Northern and Western European states were not obliged to sign the Minority Treaties, therefore problems national minorities faced on West European territories could remain concealed for a while longer (Eiler 2022, 172).

The Second World War began on September 1, 1939 with Germany's invasion of Poland, yet it was only from 1941 that it took on a global scale with Germany's attack on the Soviet Union and the Japanese attacks against American and British territories (Fóris 2022, 216). The same year Hungary as an ally of Nazi Germany attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The south Pannonian region was again divided up among various state formations: Bácska / Bačka and Baranya / Baranja were annexed by the Hungarian Kingdom; Szlavónia / Slavonija and Szerémség / Srem became part of the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska), a puppet state of Germany and Italy; while Bánát / Banat

[3] "Mindeközben viszont a határokat a többségi nemzetek állandónak és örökérvényűnek, a kisebbségek pedig ideiglenesnek és csupán átmeneti kényszerhelyzetnek tekintették." (Roginer 2019, 12)

was under the indirect administrative control of the German Reich (Roginer 2019, 14). After the defeat of the Axis Powers the pre-1941 state borders were reinstated.

Following the Second World War most of East Europe fell under the direct or indirect rule of the Soviet Union, with what came to be known as the Iron Curtain securing a physical and ideological barrier between 'east' and 'west'. The intra-European boundary embodied by the Iron Curtain from 1946 was not so much defined by internal European relations, rather by global hegemonic interests: it was "a geopolitical consequence of a conflict of ideologies" (Welch 2004, 81). From 1948 the Iron Curtain also divided Hungary and Yugoslavia, which as a founding member of the Non-aligned Movement remained the only socialist country on the European continent that maintained distance with both 'blocs'.

The end of the Cold War was marked by 1989, when the East European autocratic regimes established during the first part of the 20th century commenced their transformation into democracies. By this time the Soviet Union gradually lost its former hegemonic status and was incapable of preventing political reforms in its satellite countries like Hungary (Csizmadia 2022, 398). From the 1990s on, Eastern Europe, still a distinct category in the Eurocentric imaginary, was envisioned as a 'transitional zone' between 'east' and 'west,' while the European Union was being constructed as a qualitatively superior paradigm, with which the East European countries should catch up via 'integration' and/or 'civilizational' processes (Judt 2011, Melegh 2006). Thus, the meta-geographical concept of 'west' remained conflated with the meta-historical concept of modernity, therefore "the non-West can enter the modern world only to the extent that it emulates the norms established in Europe and northern North America" (Lewis and Wigen 1997, 7). Tellingly, within the region the change of regime was often narrated as a "collective coming-of-age" (Nadkari 2010, 199); or as East Europe's slow 'catching up' with its European family of nations after a long and troublesome digression. Until

the early 2000s, the ultimate goal of 'catching up' was embodied in the accession to European Union membership (Laczó 2022, 442). The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, that is the Visegrád Group, together with Slovenia became EU members in 2004, while Croatia joined in 2013. From 2007 the Visegrád Four also joined the Schengen Area, while Croatia became part of it starting January 1, 2023. Yet, although most East European countries had become members of the EU by 2013, the discursive field, which is structured by the debates about their Europeanness, is still alive and well. In fact, as I will detail it later, the corrosion of democracy in the region, most notably in Hungary and Poland, as well as some East European countries' response to the 2015 influx of Syrian refugees refueled old-time stereotypes about the 'east'.

Unfortunately not all East European countries' transformation was peaceful. Between 1991 and 1998 the state of Yugoslavia disintegrated through bloody wars that were the most heavily fought on the territories of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbian President Slobodan Milošević's warmongering chauvinist regime was put under international economic sanctions, which hit Serbia's population hard yet did not decrease the war effort. The Dayton Agreement in 1995 ended the Bosnian war, but by 1998 another military conflict started in Kosovo. As a response, in 1999 the NATO intervened with air strikes on Serbian territories.

Finally, the Milošević regime was overthrown by Serbian people's power on October 5, 2000, yet Serbia and Montenegro's hope for political stability dwindled again with the assassination of democratically elected Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003. The federal state dissolved in 2006 when Montenegro declared independence, and although Kosovo also declared independence in 2008, this decision is still disputed by Serbia. Instead of reconciliation and deep-running societal reforms, Serbia's politics since the 2000s has been characterized by an "opportunistic pacification of the past, or a strategy of ensuring continuity with nationalism" (Dimitrijević 2003, 8 in Losoncz 2022, 126).

This is best exemplified by how from the late 2000s Serbia's former radical right has appropriated the EU integrationist position.

In his thoroughly researched, short-monograph sized study on the two neighbor states' 21st century political trajectory, Márk Losoncz illustrates that the rise of Hungarian and Serbian authoritarian regimes, though originally built on different if not opposing political platforms, eventually established a parallel pattern. One of the most obvious similarities is that "both Fidesz and the SNS insisted on creating a political vibe that diverged from that of the 2000s, and they both combined the promise of establishing law and order with socially sensitive political messaging" (Losoncz 2022, 152). Yet, while Hungary boosts a self-described Christian-conservative, and increasingly right-wing populist internal politics and regularly takes dissident views about EU matters, Serbian governance "confounds easy distinctions between right and left, east European Euro-skepticism, and tolerance" (Greenberg and Spasić 2017, 316).

Another parallel between the two countries is the way their ruling parties – PM Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in Hungary and PM Aleksandar Vučić's SNS in Serbia – have permeated and appropriated the media. In Hungary "the party colonization of the media" (Bajomi-Lázár 2013) commenced soon after the 2010 Fidesz-KDNP parliamentary victory. By the coalition's third parliamentary term, print media together with public radio stations had been brought almost entirely under governmental control. Furthermore, "print and broadcast outlets increasingly came to spread the same far-right conspiracies also propagated through omnipresent billboard campaigns" (Kallius – Adriaans 2022, 680). Besides a handful of Internet based platforms presently the bastions of politically independent, well-researched, critical content in the Hungarian language domain are based in Slovakia (the public broadcast of the bilingual Pátria Rádió / Rádio Patria), and in Transylvania (the public broadcast of Marosvásárhelyi Rádió / Radio Târgu Mureș).

The media landscape in Serbia is similarly bleak. According to a 2018 study conducted by Media Associations, Serbian public broadcasters' news are "dramatically dominated by the executive authorities"; or as Losoncz summed up: Serbian public media is "openly one-sided and full of fake news, and journalists working for other [that is government independent] media outlets are often humiliated or threatened" (2022, 133).

PM Orbán's Fidesz started off as a liberal democratic party, while PM Vučić's SNS has direct continuities with Milošević's politics, yet they arrived at a very similar political platform. This platform can be best described as populism in so far as populism "pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous 'others' who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice" (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008, 3 in Pető 2021, 314).

Despite the fact that Serbia is home to more than twenty ethnic and religious minorities, and a high number of irreligious citizens, current governmental discourse forefronts a unified and homogeneous Serbian identity of Orthodox faith. Similarly, although Hungary is historically home to East Europe's largest Jewish community, in 2011 the Fidesz-KDNP coalition framed the country in the new Fundamental Law of Hungary (the former Constitution) as a Christian state. As Serbia in not an EU member, the government's political rhetoric is careful to remain within the confines of liberal norms, thus populist fear-mongering presently is restricted to depicting the collective self as deprived victims. Hungarian governmental discourses, on the other hand, are fully invested in enemy creation. Since 2010, Orbán's government has pitted the Hungarian population against the Roma (Than 2020), the homeless, LGBTQ+ people, and most recently against refugees or with the term deployed in Hungarian media: migrants.

During the summer and fall of 2015, over a million mainly Syrian and Afghan refugees passed through the so-called Balkan Corridor running from Turkey via Greece, Bulgaria / Macedonia, and Serbia. The northern section of the corridor had been established a year prior, when large numbers of refugees from Kosovo stepped onto Hungarian territory through its Schengen borderline with Serbia. Passing through the Hungarian border was not much of a challenge then, especially given that people from the borderlands quickly discovered the moneymaking possibility represented by human trafficking (Sik 2022, 487).

In the summer of 2015, Serbian PM Vučić drew a comparison between "the experience of refugees fleeing war-torn countries to those of refugees during the wars of Yugoslav Succession" (Greenberg and Spasić 2017, 315). His approach set the tone for a tempered official discourse that to this day has recoiled from displaying outright xenophobic attitudes. This is partly due to Serbia's EU membership ascension hopes, and partly to the fact that Serbia being a precarious economy never represented a final destination for refugees and immigrants.

Hungary's politics has remained notorious for its harsh rhetoric and policies towards asylum seekers. In 2016 more than 60% of Hungarian citizens across age groups held negative convictions about immigrants (Juhász et al. 2017). According to Ivan Krastev, East European "hostility towards refugees … has its roots in history, demography, and the twists of post-communist transition, while at the same time representing a central European version of popular revolt against globalization." (2017, 293). Though these might be contributive factors, Krastev failed to include in his analysis the role of governmental manipulation. As part of their campaign to alienate Hungarians from asylum seekers, in 2015 PM Orbán's government charged the word 'migrant' (migráns) with a new connotation and started to use it exclusively for people of Middle Eastern origin. While 'migrant' beforehand was used interchangeably with 'menekült' that is refugee, due to this government intervention the word

increasingly began to suggest voluntary transition. This usage swiftly became part of mainstream colloquial expressions and with it the picture of the 'migrant' who arrives to Hungary to 'take away' the livelihood of Hungarian citizens, an image made ubiquitously present by a government-funded billboards and pro-governmental media.

The way Hungarian, but also Bulgarian, Czech and Polish immigration policy and the related public discourse has increasingly displayed openly xenophobic and racist attitudes against asylum seekers, re-ignited the age-old stereotypes about East Europeans as not-fully or not-yet European (Dzenovska 2017, 297, also Krastev 2017). However, the past decade's political shift in East European countries are not isolated occurrence, rather as Andrea Pető emphasized, part of a global phenomenon:

> The global transfer of illiberal ideas and practices have led to deep societal, political, and economic polarization [...] And depending on the national context, has eliminated the checks and balances of the legal system [...] curtailed press and academic freedom [...], captured the state by interest groups while ruthlessly exploiting the labour force, and banned gendered perspectives in academia, policy, and beyond. Still, these ideas are winning more and more popular support. (Pető 2021, 313)

As a result of the above, migration from East Europe to West Europe has grown severalfold since the 2000s. The youth of Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, and other countries of the region increasingly identify a better future with other places, places far beyond the state borders of their homelands.

* * *

This brief overview of the historical past and current politics of the region was meant to indicate how deeply borders affect contemporary realities of border regions and the states they delineate. The next section will be devoted to introductions into the novels this dissertation engages with.

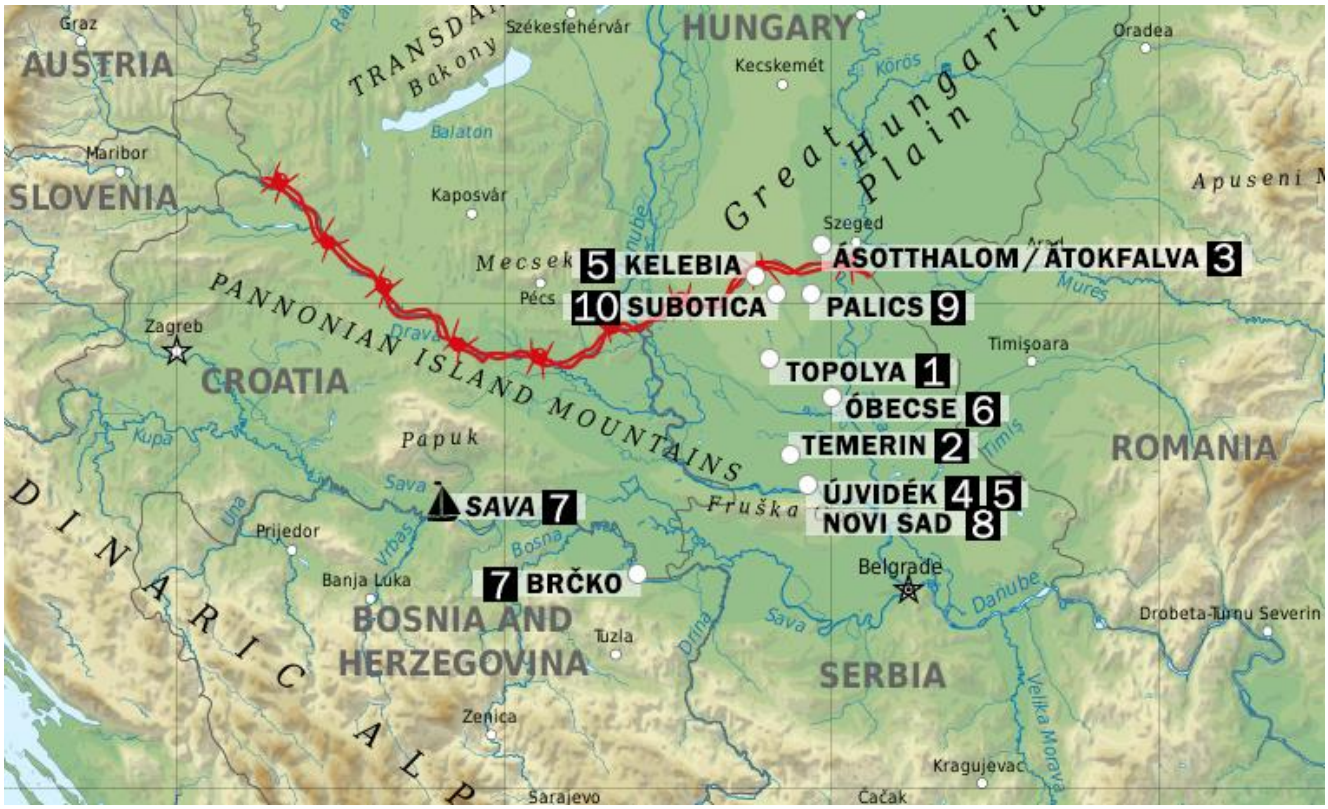

TABLE 2: THE NOVELS' LOCATIONS

1. Bencsik Orsolya: *Több élet* [Extra life]
2. Danyi Zoltán: *A dögeltakarító* [The Carcass Remover]
3. Jászberényi Sándor: *A varjúkirály.* [The Crow King.]
4. Juhász Erzsébet: *Határregény* [Border Novel]
5. Ladik Katalin: *Élhetek az arcodon?* [Can I live on your face?]
6. Nadj Abonji, Melinda: *Tauben fliegen auf* [Fly Away, Pigeon]
7. Sejranović, Bekim: *Tvoj sin, Huckleberry Finn*. [Your son, Huckleberry Finn]
8. Tišma, Slobodan: *Bernardijeva soba.* [Bernardi's room]
9. Tolnai Ottó: *Szeméremékszerek I: A két steril pohár.* [Intimate Jewels. The two sterile cups]
10. Ušumović, Neven: *Makovo zrno* [Poppy Seed]

THE BOOKS

1. Bencsik Orsolya: *Több élet* [Extra life] 2016

Orsolya Bencsik's (Topolya / Bačka Topola, 1985) *Több élet*, that is *Extra life*, is a melancholy, feminist mockery of the family novel and Bildungsroman genres focusing on a Vojvodina Hungarian girl leaving her family to study 'on the other side,' that is in Szeged, Hungary. Though the novel's timeframe is uncertain, it can be established that the main protagonist's move takes place after Montenegro's secession from the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (1992 – 2006), and that the earliest event recalled through family history is that of 1944, when the Red Army entered the territory. Within the narrator's own lifeline the novel's happenings take place during her first year abroad, inclusive of her attempts to establish herself in her new environment, her first illness away from the hearth, her simple yet for a while yielding money making schemes, and her largely unsuccessful experiments with a set of men. Yet, the discussion of her 'adult' life in Szeged is in most part a façade for her internal digging into her relationship to her three generational family as well as to various family members individually. Via the narrator's ruminations about her beloved ones' life events, choices and values, the reader gets to know an Eastern European middle class family as it is sliding into poverty during the Balkan wars and the consecutive sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro. As their yearning for a decent life is increasingly overshadowed by the more immediate concerns caused by their struggle for livelihood, the family members shift towards various forms of monomania. These manias then become the markers not only of particular personas but also of a particular era in a particular geographical, cultural and political setting. While reading about the often desperate thriftiness with which these people overcome hardship, the reader can never be sure whether the storyteller is pulling her leg or her wry tone is meant to conceal deep pain.

There is no chronology to the novel's happenings either. The text is organized associatively, with Bencsik's signatory postmodern playful irony, inspired among others by the oeuvre of Péter Esterházy and Dubravka Ugrešić, deeply saturating it. Already the title, *Több élet*, allows for several interpretations therefore several translations. *Több* meaning 'more', and *élet* meaning 'life', the title can be understood as 'more lives' in the sense of 'multiple lives', and this interpretation is supported by the fact that the novel devotes equal space to the life events of the focalizer narrator and her sister, mother, father, grandfather, and grandmother. 'More lives', on the other hand, can signal that the protagonists of the book had lived not one, but several lives. The grandfather for instance was a citizen of five state formations: the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929-1944), the Hungarian Kingdom (1941-1944), Yugoslavia (1945-1992), the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (1992-2006), and Serbia, all without ever leaving his hometown, Topolya. Also, the main protagonist talks about her life in Szeged and her life at home in Vojvodina as two different, yet converging lifelines, which points toward a third possible interpretation of 'more lives'. According to a fourth interpretation, 'more life' can refer to the many lives teeming in one body, as in the novel's world the body, especially bodily habits related to feeding, grooming, and spawning gain special importance. But, besides 'more lives', the title can be also interpreted as 'more life', that is a larger extent of life, a richer, greater, protean experience of human existence. By translating *Több élet* as *Extra life* I attempted to catch all these dimensions, that of multiplicity and of superfluousness too. The ironic aspects of the novel are further emphasized by the game of words placed into the novel's subtitle – *kis va(j)dmagyar* –. 'Kis' means 'small', while 'vajdmagyar' is an endemic term for Vojvodina Hungarians (*vajd*asági, that is Vojvodinian + *magyar*, that is Hungarian), almost exclusively used by the local intelligentsia. 'Vadmagyar' in literary translation means 'wild Hungarian'; yet, the term 'vadmagyar' is a derogatory term used for Hungarian people with a radically chauvinistic worldview. The insertion of the *j* therefore creates a seesaw effect

within the subtitle: depending on the interpretation the meaning can tilt towards ‘small pro-Hungarian’ or towards ‘small Vojvodina Hungarian’, the common denominator being the marker of littleness.

These two paratextual instances, that is the title and the subtitle well exemplify the playful yet very thoughtful superimpositions that Bencsik’s textual world abounds with. At the same time, exactly this richness, this layered texture, this matrioshka doll-like structure of her prose makes it difficult to summarize her narratives. Alfonz Fekete succinctly described the world of *Extra life*:

> The tension engendered by a constant search for novel excitements; the incessant struggle for getting to the better, brighter, happier side of life; the various stages of grief building layer upon layer onto each other; and the joys of everyday life that may appear at the most unexpected places are imbued with fictional power here. (Fekete 2016)

2. Danyi Zoltán: *A dögeltakarító* [The Carcass Remover] 2015

The unnamed protagonist of *A dögeltakarító* that is *The Carcass Remover* is a "so called Vojvodina Hungarian" man, a veteran of the Balkan wars, who participated in the "cleansing", that is the pillaging and destruction of Slavonian villages. In the aftermath of the war he is desperately trying to find his place under the sun – for a while he is daydreaming about escaping to America, for a while he smuggles gasoline from Hungary to Serbia, for a while he is hired by a Serbian nouveau rich to make a mosaic image on the wall of his war-money built villa in Split, Croatia, and possibly for the longest while he works with a team cleansing Vojvodinian roads of animal carcasses – hence the novel's title. Instead of a chronological order the narration is organized by the pain driven associations of a deeply traumatized mind; therefore it is challenging to determine the precise order and actual duration of events.

The sense of being lost that the reader experiences because of suspended time-coordinates and a flaky timeline is a prerequisite for the comprehension of the novel's stakes. Through the story of a war veteran's desperate attempts to flee from his past the book shows that there is but one way out of the past, and that leads right through its very heart. On the level of the story, *The Carcass Remover* is about the struggle to face the deep running mental and visceral traces that war leaves in people indelibly. In Tamás Tokai's interpretation *The Carcass Remover* reveals, that

> The rational and detailed analysis of the so called facts of the past cannot necessarily lead to the comprehension of a tragedy, because the focus on details itself is an alienating gesture, a way to put the past into the closet of history. We should rather accept the very vivid presence of past, and confront the absurdities of post-war present in our everydays. (Tokai 2015)

And that cannot be done without a particular relationship to language. Accordingly, on the level of narration this book is itself a struggle to find the language, which can convey the past's indelible

traces into the present and thus confront the present steadfastly. The main protagonist's incessant soliloquy is saturated by so much anger, anguish and pain that at moments it threatens with explosion, or more precisely with implosion, with an unavoidable, unresolvable inward collapse. Yet his yearning for clarity that propels him through such torturous self-analysis keeps him going and going till he pushes through to the other side where he can finally accept his past as part of what he is or rather what he has become because of it.

Unlike many trauma-centered novels that are focused on naming and revealing, Danyi's book rather concentrates on bringing home and making feel what it is like to live trauma tormented as well as the torment of overcoming it. Doing so, *The Carcass Remover*'s two most powerful mediums of transmission are rhythm and silence. Danyi's numbered sentences meander through several pages, yet their heightened rhythmical structure keeps the reader glued to the page, similarly to when we listen to someone who is about to tell something very important, potentially life changing. On the other hand, this prose carefully discloses how even the most self-revealing forms of talking can act as covers for the ultimate evil, because "[t]he carcass remover cannot name the greatest horror of all. Srebrenica is not once named in the novel, but every allusion and hint points towards that horrid black hole." (Mikola 2015)

The Carcass Remover was the only Hungarian book analyzed in Project Cassandra, a research project run by the University of Tübingen, Germany, asking what literature may reveal about future military conflicts. Based on nine variables the researchers designed a "risk score system" for the books, and the higher a book scored the more 'dangerous' it was deemed, i.e. the more it could contribute to the starting or escalation of future conflicts. *The Carcass Remover* scored a meager 12, "because it reflected on the Yugoslav wars without using black-and-white depictions of heroes or villains" (Oltermann 2021). Yet, the uncompromising quality of this prose with which it relates to the events of

the Balkan wars had also negatively influenced the trajectory of the book's reception. Although Marko Čudić prepared an excellent translation of the book into Serbian, he could not find a publisher because the manuscript was deemed "anti-Serbian".[4] As I heard through the translators' grape wine, it is for a similar reason that its publication in Croatian was halted too, except there it was considered "anti-Croatian". Luckily, despite the critical attitude of the novel towards the role of "Europe" in the Balkan wars and in particular in Bosnia, in 2018 Suhrkamp Verlag published its German edition, *Der Kadaverräumer,* in Terezia Mora's translation, to great critical acclaim.

[4] Selected chapters were published under the title *Strvoder* on https://www.xxzmagazin.com/autor/2150

3. Jászberényi Sándor *A varjúkirály.* [The Crow King] 2020

Sándor Jászberényi's (Sopron, 1980) oeuvre gained a unique placement within contemporary Hungarian literary scene. By profession a journalist focusing on West Asia and political Islam, merited for pioneering Hungarian gonzo journalism, Jászberényi has been involved with various literary journals since the early 2000s. Yet, for the wider audiences his name primarily evoked his daring interviews and reports from conflict zones. This changed abruptly in 2013 upon the highly successful publication of his first collection of short stories, *Az ördög egy fekete kutya és más történetek* (The devil is a black dog and other stories), soon published in English as *The Devil is a Black Dog: Stories from the Middle East and Beyond* (2015). Soon he published another critically acclaimed short story collection, *A lélek legszebb éjszakája – Történet álmatlanságról és őrületről* (The most beautiful night of the soul – A story about insomnia and madness, 2016), in its English version *The Most Beautiful Night of the Soul: More Stories from the Middle East and Beyond* (2018), with which he won the most prestigious state-independent Hungarian literary award, the Libri Prize.

These two volumes, both built on his experiences as a war journalist, established Jászberényi as Hungarian literature's Hemingwayesque macho writer with "testosterone-fuelled bare-knuckle action" stories (Fischer 2015). The quoted Guardian-review goes as far as to claim: "in the context of Hungarian literature, Jászberényi is a dangerous heretic, a cosh-wielding ruffian." It is true that upfront menliness, exhibited in an incessant search for individual, often life threatening challenges, an aspiration towards a classic ideal of honor, a know-how with weapons, and a huge capacity for drinks and drugs has no other representatives in the contemporary Hungarian high literary canon. Yet, Jászberényi's persona is not without forerunners. From the late 19th century till the Second World War there has been several authors, most notably Endre Ady, who, just like Jászberényi, were politically

progressive both in their journalistic and literary works yet stood up for a conservative, stately masculinity.

Jászberényi's protagonists also aspire to some kind of idealized manhood, though under the pressure of circumstances and/or in lack of inner resources they often end up with less than mediocre results. This close-capture attention on how expectations towards masculine performance shape one's choices and values established Jászberényi as an accute literary analyst of manhood already in his first two prose volumes. In his third volume, *A varjúkirály // Nyugati történetek*, that is *The Crow King // Western Stories* published in 2020 Jászberényi turns his keen attention mainly towards Hungarian realities. The volume contains fourteen short stories, most of which have the same focalizing main protagonist. One story focuses on his birth, while several others focus on his consecutive re-enterings into manhood from various angles, thus the initiation into manhood in this book appears as a never fully accomplishable task. The text that I engage with in this dissertation is the volume's closing piece, *The Crow King*, a standalone, more than hundred pages long novella.

The Crow King, just like the volume's other stories, is an exploration of masculinity as it intersects with social class and race. The Hungarian Roma Csabi and the Hungarian White Csontos, the two main protagonists have just been released from a state orphanage with little money and hardly any life perspectives. They return to their homesteads in the vicinity of the dead-end settlement Átokháza near the Serbian border. Átokháza means 'the cursed house/home', but it also evokes T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922), as in Hungarian its title's known as *Átokföldje* that is 'the cursed land'. Having no kind of capital, the lads have no choice but to return to their respective family properties, two long abandoned, moldy, weed-grown standalone adobe houses on the rim of no man's land. Their youthful energy and yearning for a life with prospect drives them to a group of far-right leaning man, The Brotherhood. The Brotherhood organizes an informal border patrol team with the

aim to stop refugees from entering Hungary through the strip of forest encompassing the green border between Hungary and Serbia. As fresh initiates of The Brotherhood, Csabi and Csontos participate in these raids against refugees and enjoy spending the money snatched away from them. Yet, the increasing violence of The Brotherhood's doings gradually starts to grow on them, especially on Csabi. After a night in the forest that ends in the humiliation and slaughter of several refugees he commits suicide. After finding his friend's corpse Csontos is stricken with guilt and grief. As he sits paralyzed in his house a police van pulls up the muddy driveway. Csontos, seeing an act of higher justice in this occurrence, enters the van in peace with his fate. To his surprise, all The Bortherhood members are inside the van. And to his even greater surprise, they are not taken to the court, but to the Town Hall, where they are all given Orders of Merit for their service for the homeland.

As this necessarily simplified storyline of *The Crow King* conveys, Sándor Jászberényi is ever ready to touch the neuralgic spots of Hungarian society.

4. Juhász Erzsébet: *Határregény* [Border Novel] 2001

Erzsébet Juhász (Topolya / Bačka Topola, 1947 – Novi Sad 1998) was a writer of great erudition and a literary comparatist of deep insight. Her research interest, primarily in the literature of the late Habsburg Monarchy, and, relatedly, Yugoslav literatures with a focus on Vojvodina Hungarian literature, were palpably present especially in her later years' prose works. Although, as her book reviews from the 1990s show, she was an avid reader of postmodern Hungarian and post-Yugoslav prose marked by textual experiments, she aimed to establish a poetics that nurtures the remains of large epic forms, such as the intergenerational family novel. Since *Border Novel* was compiled from a set of individually published novellas of the tragically deceased author, therefore the larger structural features of the book represent the vision of the editors, Kornélia Faragó and Éva Toldi. The same is true for the title, which was also chosen by the volume's editors. Yet, the textual refinement of the prose unquestionably shows Erzsébet Juhász's craft(wo)manship.

The opening text of the book, *Egy villamos végállomást jelző csengetése*, that is *A tram's bell marking the end station* introduces the fondest memory of Angeline Nenadovits / Nenádovics / Nenadović, a nonagenarian inhabitant of Neusatz / Újvidék / Novi Sad.[5] The memory is that of a golden early autumn day spent riding the tram upon her arrival in the city in 1910. While Angeline remembers that autumn day of her youth, the time of the narration (late 1980s) and the time of the story (the Golden era of the Habsburg Monarchy right before the First World War) organically connect, establishing the whole volume's temporal boundaries. At the same time this maneuver reveals the text's Möbius strip-like structure, through which events that are very distant in calendar terms can still resonate together.

[5] Ноби Сад / Novi Sad

The geographic perimeters of the novel's narrative are best summarized by the following quote: "…the little boy was drawn by some unknown, enormous force, perhaps the same force that drew his ancestors through several lifetimes from Graz to Subotica, from Szeged to the Isonzo Valley, from Târgu Mureș to Bratislava, from Novi Sad to Oradea back and forth, back and forth." (2001, 98) Following Angeline's last days of Angeline Nenadovits / Nenádovics / Nenadović, along her wanderings in time, the novel takes its readers to a journey among the layers of Angelina's and her family's individual and collective memories. As her monographist, Orsolya Bencsik pointed out, in Erzsébet Juhász's prose the "mapping [of personal and family histories] always entails a forced yet powerful border-drawing that points towards a sense of lack, a yearning" (Bencsik 2022, 116). This "sense of lack, yearning" can be identified with the 'force' that 'drew' the little boy and his ancestors. This force is indeed vividly present in all family members' lives, either in the form of life long, yet by the rule unrequited passions, or in some form of a quest for a more complete human existence often embodied in the potential return of a long lost friend or brother.

I will again reference Bencsik's excellent monography on Erzsébet Juhász, according to whom the *Border Novel* depicts

> [...] the bloody, tormenting wars and historical events that tear families and nations apart, and the following crises of national and personal identities, but besides these – and despite geopolitical boundaries – it also recounts conjoined human fates and common traumas that may act like glue. (2022, 107)

Although through the 1980s and 1990s Erzsébet Juhász maintained a quiet yet steadily influential presence in the (Vojvodina) Hungarian cultural circles both as an author and a literary scholar, after her untimely death her oeuvre started to slowly sink into oblivion. The main reason of this was, in my view, that the discourse about the traumas of the 1990s increasingly overshadowed all other discourses

about past traumas, such the those of two World Wars, which Juhász in her oeuvre was focused on. Orsolya Bencsik's monography convincingly showed how Juhász's – and her generations' – efforts to establish a meaningful relation to even the most hurtful events of the past can act as examples for our generations' attempts to come to terms with what we carry.

5. Ladik Katalin: *Élhetek az arcodon?* [Can I live on your face?] 2007

Katalin Ladik's (Újvidék / Novi Sad, 1942) book is an experimental autobiographic novel quilting together various literary genres and visual representational forms. The main narrative is composed on three female voices, that is three first person narrators, all of whom are called Katalin Ladik, yet they are separate persons. They are the Woman Editor (in the original Hungarian *Szerkesztőnő* is an unused though grammatically correct female version of 'szerkesztő' that is editor), the Woman Glazier (the same logic as before: *Üvegezőnő* is the female, unused though correct form of 'üvegező' that is glass-cutter or glazier), and the Woman Artist (*Művésznő* – an existing and widely used word for female artists). The sense of madeupness and the ensuing sense of alienation engendered by 'Woman Editor' and 'Woman Glazier' apellations influences the reader's perception of the 'Woman Artist' denominator too, revealing the artificiality and superfluousness at the heart of this expression. Such is Katalin Ladik's feminism: she claims her space by revealing the suffocating pretension inherent in patriarchal constructs.

The Woman Glazier is a citizen of Novi Sad (Yugoslavia first then the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro), the Woman Editor lives in Budapest (Hungarian People's Republic first then Hungary from 1989), and the Woman Artist is almost always on the go among three localities: Novi Sad, Budapest, and the island of Hvar (Yugoslavia first then the independent Croatia). The three narrators' monologues critically reflect on the shifting of borders, loyalities, and state ideologies as

well as on the ensuing societal changes.

Learning that they are namesakes, the three Womans seek out each other then start to enter into each others' (textual) worlds through letters, postcards, telegrams and phonecalls. This main thread of the novel acts as a host for various textual insertions: diary entries, textual and visual poetry by Katalin Ladik and others, artistic and personal postcards and letters received by the extra-textual Katalin Ladik, lists of books to read, and even some official documents. Besides these, the narrative is also enriched by visual implants, primarily photographs taken of Katalin Ladik's performances.

Katalin Ladik was among the recipients of the 2016 Yoko Ono Prize, which renewed interest in her work both in her home countries and internationally. The Serbian translation of her autobiographic novel was published in 2021 under the title *Mogu li da živim na tvom licu: romaneskna životna priča*.

6. Melinda Nadj Abonji: *Tauben fliegen auf* [Fly Away, Pigeon] 2010

Ildi Kocsis, the narrator of *Tauben fliegen auf*, Melinda Nadj Abonji's (Óbecse / Bečej, 1968) autobiographical fiction, is a 1,5 generation Yugoslavian immigrant of ethnic Hungarian origin. Ildi's parents, after more than a decade spent in a German speaking Swiss village working hard in menial jobs, by 1990 finally gathered enough financial capital and, just as importantly, gained enough social credibility to rent and run a frequented local breakfast and lunch cafe. This bistro, the Mondial, just as its name suggests[6], becomes the world for the Kocsis family as well as it models their entire world: in the front of the house, among the jovial Swiss customers they continue struggling for their social standing, while back in the kitchen, between family members and among their Yugoslavian refugee

[6] Mondial = 'of or involving the whole world'

employees the tensions of the Balkan wars are palpably present. While the main storyline takes place in the 1990s, there are significant sections devoted to the 1980s. On the one hand, through the main protagonist's recollections we can get to know this gastarbeiter family's first difficult years in Switzerland, which nominally ended with their reception of Swiss citizenship. Even more importantly, through the narrator's evocative reminiscence we may engage with the idyllic Vojvodina landscape and community of her childhood, with her grandmother's, Mamika's house and garden at center.

While the novel follows no chronological order, it has a very particular structure: there are fourteen chapters altogether, the first, the third, the fifth etc. are on Vojvodina, while the second, the fourth, the sixth etc. are on Switzerland, the life terrains thus evolve parallelly. Though, as signaled, the novel follow's no chronological order, still, as the first chapter focuses on Vojvodina and the early years of the novel's narrator, Ildi Kocsis, and the last on Switzerland and Ildi's moving out of the family home, there is a clear cut trajectory drawn from the small child to a grown woman's stepping into formal adulthood. This trajectory could be also read as the pre-war, peaceful, abundant rural joviality of Vojvodina representing the beginnings and the noise-filled, run down, cheap urban surrounding of a Swiss city as the landing where from a new, grown up life takes off. However, the first chapter, although it takes place in the Vojvodina, begins with the Kocsis family's arrival for a summer vacation – therefore the beginning of the novel is not the beginning of their story, their story is already on its way. Similarly, the last chapter of the novel, though it is placed in an unnamed Swiss town, ends with Ildi and her sister's All Saints Day visit to the local cemetery, to place flowers and golden autumn leaves on a common grave site in remembrance of their beloved grandmother, Mamika. As the beginning of the novel connects to Switzerland, and the ending of the novel connects back to Vojvodina, Nadj Abonji disrupts the conventional trajectory of immigrant novels, that of arrival – struggle – reconciliation – integration, and with that the East to West teleological progress narrative as

well.

Although Ildi is marred by her experiences of Swiss xenophobia, yet she is capable of reconstructing herself by integrating her Vojvodinian and Swiss values into a meaningful, sustainable worldview (Bakos 2016: 72). Though this is a personal struggle, her story is not exceptional. Beáta Thomka, discussing Nadj Abonji's novel in the context of language switching transnational authors, concludes that "for protagonists and autobiographical narrators with double loyalties the parents' financially driven unconditional compliance and loyalty to the host environment is not acceptable." (2018: 155-156). That is, *Fly Away, Pigeon* represents an example of critically reflexive second generation immigrant literature.

In 2010 Melinda Nadj Abonji's novel won the Deutscher Buchpreis (the German Book Prize). Since then it was translated into English by Lewis Tess in 2014. During the close reading of the novel I mainly relied on the 2012 Hungarian edition titled *Galambok röppennek föl*, translated by Éva Blaschtik. The Serbian translation, the work of Dragoslav Dedović was published under the title *Golubije srce* also in 2012.

7. Bekim Sejranović: *Tvoj sin, Huckleberry Finn*. [Your son, Huckleberry Finn] 2015

In his last book Bekim Sejranović (Brčko, 1972 – Banja Luka, 2020) offers a vivid and evocative account about river life. *Your son, Huckleberry* is an autobiographic picaresque adventure novel centering on a sometimes likeable, sometimes pitiable, sometimes downright contemptable anti-hero who lives on a boat floating along between the Croatian and Bosnian banks. At the same time, it is also an anti-Bildungsroman, as its main protagonist refuses the responsibilities conventionally associated with adulthood while he dives deep into all the pleasures that only an adult can have access to. Besides the first person narrator, identified as Bekim Sejranović, and the river, identified as the Sava, there is a third main character to the novel: drugs.

According to Vanja Kulaš with this book Sejranović pioneered two genres in the post-Yugoslav region: the river memoir and the genre of addiction fiction (Kulaš 2016). On a further layer the novel is also about love: romantic love in the form of an intense yet failed love affair, but also filial love, as in the time of the narration the main protagonist shares his boat with his terminally ill father. The thread connecting these layers, or rather the substance that seeps through not only the narrative layers and themes and motives but basically each word of *Huckleberry* is the main protagonist's yearning for pure, unreserved, endless bliss. As Sejranović put it in an interview, he wanted nothing more from life than to float along on his boat and to read, because "traveling is reading and reading is traveling" (Vukadinović 2021).

The father, only ever mentioned as Matori, which in loose translation means 'my old man', arrives from Australia to Brčko, Bosnia to see his son once more before his death. The two of them with the help of a friend, Crnac, a river smuggler, refurbish an old boat. This boat, the Savska Buba (i.e. the Sava Bug named after the narrator's Volkswagen), will become the venue of the novel's present time storyline. However, one morning, after months of relatively joyful coexistence on the boat Matori

fails to return from late night fishing. His son, afraid that something terrible happened to the elder man, starts to re-visit various spots on the river hoping to find his father and fearing of what he might find. To sooth the edge of his anguish he keeps on taking various "cocktails" as he endearingly names his drug concoctions. During this search for Matori, under the combined effect of narcotic and hallucinogen substances he recounts key events of his life. Prompted by his memories he delves deep into analyzing his relationship to women and to his father, to his homeland, and also to Norway, his place of exile during the Balkan wars. Much of these analyses can be read as witty and often provocative mini essays touching on Balkan history, Scandinavian xenophobia, life abroad in exile, life in one's home country in exile, diverse masculinities, addiction, depression, and, importantly: writing.

8. Slobodan Tišma: *Bernardijeva soba*. [Bernardi's room] 2012

In 2012 Sloboda Tišma's (Stara Pazova 1946) *Bernardijeva soba* that is *Bernardi's room* was the recipient of the most prestigious Serbian literary prize, the NIN Award for the Best Novel of the Year. Beforehand the poet, novelist, rock musician, and band lead Tišma, despite his prolific literary output, was mainly known in underground circles and on the cultural fringes. The importance of the event that such an idiosyncratic representative of Yugoslav urban cultural anti-mainstream was awarded the NIN-prize cannot be overstated. As Tijana Matijević put it: "a truly significant moment of this awarding is the 'admittance' of the work and the author occupying the cultural margins into the cultural centre, for this gesture in fact mainstreamed some of the essential aspects of the post-Yugoslav literature." (2021, 190)

Bernardijeva soba consists of a loose string of meditative monologues by the main protagonist and narrator of the novel, Pišta. As Pišta is rather reluctant to be placed into categories of age, gender, ethnicity, very few things can be known with certainty about them; yet, through these monologues we get intimate with their interior landscapes. These landscapes, as the novel's subtitle, *Za glas (contratenor) i orkestar* that is *For voice (counter tenor) and orchestra* projects, are musically organized. According to Maja Solar:

> A novel that is a cantata can be only talked about the way we talk about music – on the level of impressions. This work is a mélange of prose and poesy, of narrative and reflection, music and images, alchemic joining of events, thoughts, color and shapes, furniture, rooms, cities and the ocean. The narration is not linear but discontinuous, musical, repetitive, dialectical. (2012, 125-126)

Indeed, Pišta's soliloquys lack any linear trajectory; they are rather connected by recurring themes, i.e. *leitmotifs*. The most important of these are a once magnificent, limited edition Mercedes coupe, now a wreck left in a parking lot; the furniture of the late Yugoslav Croat architect and designer Bernardo Bernardi – hence the title of the novel; Pišta's troubles with societal expectations, yearning for motherly care, and love for classical music. As the narrator mingles acute observations with banal comments,

> [t]he text introduces a masterful game: it incorporates elements of everyday life yet it does so mockingly. The result is a set of comic situations which will amuse the reader, but never to the point of a belly laughter – what the reader can allow is at most a cynic smirk, knowing that the narrator also makes fun of them, the readers, while they are reading all this. (Gvozdenović 2015)

Apart from its ending, when Pišta finally visits his estranged mother in a hippy commune in Southern Serbia, the whole novel takes place in Đurvidek, Vojvodina. Đurvidek, just like *Urvidek*, Tišma's 2005 book title, is clearly identifiable as Tišma's home town Novi Sad that is Újvidék. Újvidék in Hungarian

means ‘new land / province’, while ‘urvidek’ can be translated as ‘lord’s land / province’, that is a subjugated territory. In *Bernardi’s room* the fictional toponym Đurvidek forwards this idea. Tišma, a fluent speaker of Hungarian placed the word ‘gyúr’ that is ‘kneading’ into his home town’s name, i.e. Đurvidek marks a kneadable, that is a malleable, compliant land / province. From a different angle though Đurvidek may hint at Novi Sad’s newly elected patron saint, Sveti Georgije that is Saint George. If it is the name Georgije, in its more common form Đura, that Tišma incorporated into the town’s name, than his choice points at the once secular urban cultural center Novi Sad’s increasing clericalization and right-wing political radicalization. In the afterword to the book’s Hungarian edition Beáta Thomka provided yet another alternative interpretation to these fictional toponimies. According to her:

> The conjoint Serbian and Hungarian elements in the name of the narrator Pišta Petrović, the use of Đurvidek and elsewhere Urvidek toponimies instead of Novi Sad, are metaphors for the city’s disappeared era that sunk in time to the depths of geological layers. These are not spatial metaphors, but the traces of ended times, eras, life periods. (2017, 136-137)

In either case by fictionalizing Novi Sad’s name Tišma creates a distance between the actual settlement and its counterpart in his novel. This distance then provides the space necessary to evoke a sense of inhabitability that the real, bricks and stones Novi Sad is not capable to offer anymore.

9. Tolnai Ottó: *Szeméremékszerek I: A két steril pohár*. [Intimate Jewels. The two sterile cups] 2018

Szeméremékszerek I: A két steril pohár, that is *Intimate jewels I: The two sterile cups*, from now on *Intimate jewels*, is the first volume of a series of novels by Ottó Tolnai (Magyarkanizsa / Kanjiža, 1940), a living classic of Hungarian literature. Tolnai throughout his literary career spanning more than six decades has gathered all accolades and prizes the Hungarian literary sphere can offer. He has been a ground-breaking poet, prose writer, fine arts critic, essayist and literary journal editor, whose immense effect on contemporary Hungarian culture is perhaps best expressed by the fact that during the past ten years five different conferences and workshops, and a full edited volume of essays was devoted to his work. Yet, despite all praises and the incessant interest of literary scholars Tolnai remained an outsider to the Hungarian literary establishment. This is partly due to the fact that unlike many, so called 'over the border'[7] Hungarian poets and writers Tolnai did not move to Hungary but remained a citizen of his native Vojvodina. On the other hand, Tolnai has been already from the early 1960s oriented just as much towards Yugoslav literature and its multi-centered network of writers and translators as much towards Budapest. Lastly, the third and perhaps most pertinent reason why Tolnai's not part of Hungarian mainstream is that Tolnai's idiosyncratic poetic world deeply rooted in his borderlands experiences simply cannot be fit into any of the Hungarian mainstream's well-manicured categories.

The question of (un)belonging posited as a question aiming at the (im)possibility of finding the 'center' is recurring motive of Tolnai's works. This is immediately apparent in *The two sterile cups*, as one of the book's chosen mottos is by Maurice Blanchot:

If it is true that there is (in the Chinese language) a written character that means both 'man' and

[7] 'Over the border Hungarian', in the original 'határon túli magyar' is the mainstream Hungarian term for ethnic Hungarians who are citizens of a country neighboring Hungary.

> ‘two’, it is easy to recognize in man he who is always himself and the other, the happy duality of dialogue and the possibility of communication. (1992, 39)

Accordingly, the novel consists of a set of internal or internalized dialogues with various authorial personas. Yet, as Beáta Thomka acutely remarks in relation to the Blanchot-motto, the novel’s narrator is not dual but multiple, “deeply engaged in conversation the narrator surrounds himself with a plethora of imaginary doubles” (2019, 109). The way the orchestra of narrator-personas accompanies the focalizer storyteller Oliver T’s solo journey evokes the relationship of the choir and the hero in Greek tragedies. Yet, his journey is rather trivial: he starts out from his home in Palics[8] to the nearby pharmacy, where he purchases two sterile cups necessary for his upcoming urethra examination. On his way home he takes a detour and wanders into the sandy plain of the border zone, where he gets arrested by the Serbia border patrol, then interrogated by the joint forces of Serbian and Hungarian border services. As he avoids giving straightforward answers, he gets sent to the Szabadka[9] municipal prison, where from he is transferred straightjacketed into the local mental asylum. All throughout the happenings he keeps on confabulating indifferent whether he has an audience or not, not the least because he always has his ‘choir’ as his company. Lastly he gets released, which he understands even less than the reasons behind his arrestment, and walks home.

This main narrative thread, as István Ladányi pointed out, is in effect the story of Ulysses, who left his wife behind to tend to some urgent business, then started home but faced all kinds of obstacles on the way (2019, 45). However, in the book this simple and ancient storyline is not exactly in plain sight, because the novel’s texture is quilted together from narrative scraps and tatters connecting into

[8] Serbian Палић / Hungarian Palics / Croatian Palić, a small town located in Serbia, 18 km south from the Serbian–Hungarian border. All throughout the dissertation I will use place names as they are used in the analyzed novel.
[9] Суботица in Serbian, Szabadka in Hungarian, Subotica in Croatian. A town in North Vojvodina, 10 kilometers south from the Serbian-Hungarian state border. Significant administrative, cultural and educational center.

an abundant associative network bridging cultural eras and spheres. Therefore, Tolnai's Ulysses is just as much a traveler of time as of space.

Since 2018 Tolnai published two further volumes of the *Intimate jewels* saga: *Az úr pantallója* / The lord's pantaloons 2021; and *A fröccsöntés kora* / The era of injection molding 2022. When I asked him last how long the series of novels will be, his answer was: as long as possible.

10. Ušumović, Neven: *Makovo zrno* [Poppy Seed] 2009

Neven Ušumović (1972) was born in Zagreb, presently lives and works in Koper and Umag, yet he has strong ties to Vojvodina and in particular Subotica, as he lived there from his early childhood till he left to study in the Croatian capital. His connection to the Pannonian borderlands is most expressively present in his 2009 collection of short stories, *Makovo zrno* that is *Poppy Seed*.

As I read the volume long before I started my research, perhaps I would have failed to remember Ušumović's strong embeddedness in Pannonia had it not been for a freshly published Hungarian edition of his work. In this 2021 volume the translator, István Ladányi picked all Ušumović's Pannonian texts from his various short story collections and put together a great starter-kit selection for a Hungarian readership. Ladányi prepared an exquisite translation of the texts, but just as importantly, organized the texts in the Hungarian edition in such a way that the stories taken from the two volumes richly re-contextualize each other. So much so, that as Attila Sirbik's remarked in the book's afterword, the Hungarian edition reads as a short novel (2021, 159). For that reason in my close reading of Ušumović's work I will just as much rely on the Hungarian edition as much on the Croatian ones.

"I woke up with the clear intention to leave Subotica for good."[10] This quote, taken from the opening story of *Poppy Seed*, well represents the direction of the whole volume. Its dominant theme is, as Strahimir Primorac duly noted, "departure, the leaving of Subotica during the war, when Milošević's warmongering nationalistic politics got a strong grip on the city's multiethnic community" (Primorac 2009). Right away the first story's main protagonist / narrator concludes: "The next day or the day after all of us who had the means packed their suitcases together with the Japanese and left this country for larger and noisier cities." (2009, 9)[11] In Ušumović's world this leaving does not have a positive ring to it, rather it is the acknowledgement of defeat. Another story of departure as defeat is *Otac i sin* that is *Father and son* centering on a Bunjevac lad who readily denounces his Croatian ties just to get in the favor of a Serbian police officer, yet, at the end he ends up only with some money and a warning to "get out of Serbia" within 24 hours. In a similar vein *Vereš* is about a Vojvodina Croat called Vereš, who, just like "every Serbian citizen who had a bit of horse sense" (2009, 46)[12], crossed the Hungarian border illegally when the war broke out and tried to scrape by in Budapest ever since. All these stories are about the members of "the lost Yugoslavian generation" (Sirbik 2021, 159), that is the generation that was hit by the war and its effects in the so called best years of their life, that is exactly when they were stepping into adulthood. Ušumović himself, born in 1972, belongs to this generation.

Yet as his short story, *29. Novembar* shows, Ušumović's empathy extends beyond his generations' horizon of experiences. The named narrative takes place in 1949 when Eszter, an old Jewish woman and last survivor of her family of once wealthy factory owners is asked by new communist authorities to renounce her right to the family inheritance. As soon as she signes the

[10] "Probudio sam se s jasnom namjerom da zauvijek odem iz Subotice." (Ušumović 2009, 7)
[11] "Svi koji smo mogli, zajedno s Japancima, sutra-prekosutra spakirali smo kofere i otišli u neke veće i bučnije gradove izvan zemlje." (Ušumović 2009, 9)
[12] "kao i svaki 'građanin Srbije' koji je imao nešto u glavi!" (Ušumović 2009, 46)

necessary documents, the frail old woman is exiled from the country of brotherhood and unity. Thus, forced departures from Subotica are not the exclusive experience of one particular generation, they have historic precedents.

Ušumović's deep insight into regional and in particular Pannonian past is the most apparent reading his novella titled *Bačka riža* that is *Bačka [or in Hungarian Bácska] Rice* originally published in *Birds of Paradise*. As unusual as this text is in Ušumović's oeuvre as many typical features of his prose come together in it. The use of soft drugs is ubiquitously present in Ušumović's short stories and together with that various experiences caused by altered senses of reality, but the delirious vision of *Bačka Rice* enters another plain. The soft use of time is also characteristic of Ušumović's texts, i.e. the protagonists inner sense of time is more often detached from calendar time then not, yet in *Bačka Rice* this also gets a new twist. The story's characters are from the late 19th century, still, the story cannot be placed in time, as its unclear whether its protagonists woke up to a lunatically altered reality after several hours or several decades of sleep or death. Ušumović carefully provides the spatial coordinates in all of his short stories, but never so precisely as in *Bačka Rice*, based on which one could draw a detailed hydrographic map of West Bačka. It is most probably for these listed reasons that his Hungarian translator, István Ladányi, chose this text to open the Hungarian edition of Ušumović's short stories.

PROLOGUE TO CHAPTER 2

…sometimes it takes hours. There's no point in looking at your phone, the Hungarian signal is long lost, and the Serbian is not yet strong enough. We need to wait while they comb the train for alcohol and cigarettes. Of course there are smugglers. Remember the old ladies from the station? The little one with the marcelled hair and the other in hand made sweater? They are both smugglers that's what they are. One bottle in the lady purse and the rest dispatched among benevolent passengers. That's what they all do. I too often take one of their bottles because by the rule everyone can take one, one bottle of alcohol and a carton of cigarettes per person, that much is allowed. Sure, I return it as soon as we start northbound from the border. Sometimes they dish out candies in return. Oh these two are certainly not the only ones. They flock together. They are so old they can travel for free on the Hungarian side, and that section from the border to Subotica is really not a big deal, not even for a Hungarian pensioner. Then at the Subotica station a taxi awaits them and off they go to the Flea Market. Usually there are four of them, all prettied up, fresh from the hairdresser's, nails, shoes, purses, scarfs all harmonized. And they are always so cheerful, they greet the custom's officers with huge smiles, call them by their name, ask about their health, their children, the traffic on the border, whether the uniform is too warm in the summer, is it warm enough in the winter, they ask how their Serbian lessons go, and each time, but really every time I ever saw them on this train they asked how the system is doing, does the system have a good day, is the system on, how long will it take, Matyikám, does the system favor you today? It took me years to fathom that the system is Frontex. These old ladies are in close terms with Frontex.

* * *

…since there is no direct train from Belgrade to Budapest, that is since the new Silk Road is in the making, one has to get off of the Serbian train in Kelebia, the Hungarian one that is, because there is also a village called Kelebia on the Serbian side, and walk over to a Hungarian train. And since it's been so, the Hungarian border police stopped checking our documents on the train, as they did since time immemorial. Instead, they are

stationed on the platform between the Hungarian and the Serbian trains, as if the border had somehow spilled out towards the north, onto that platform, in between these trains.

…then we were herded off of the train. The concrete was black with muck and the strip of sky visible from the canyon of train trunks was as grey as the border guards' uniforms. The system did not favor them that day. A young guard was stationed in the train's door with one foot inside and one on the platform to keep us out. He punched his handheld scanner over and over again with his right index finger, and after about every three punches he held it up high. Drew it back annoyed, wiped the screen off with the sleeve of his jacket, then went on punching. It must be so embarrassing, said someone behind me. To struggle with stupid technology in front of dozens of waiting passengers soaking in the prickly autumn rain. The Hungarian State Railway's dutiful conductors urged us off the train and into the drizzle although there was at least half an hour more left before the train was to return to the capital. Still, not one of us complained. The closeness of the border heightened the paralyzing effect of uniforms. Fifty of us stood quietly in the intensifying rainfall, and watched the nervous rookie, because only a rookie can have such a stage fright. He still sees faces when looking at us, bodies like his in the rain and feelings in the eyes, but soon enough he'll break in and faces will become identifiers stamped on plastic, the gathering of human bodies a crowd, and each glance directed at him a potential provocation.

… once I stared at the sunflower husk covered concrete of this eight steps wide stretch between the tracks wondering where the borderline may be, but to no avail. What I knew for sure is that the Hungarian train is still Hungary, and the Serbian train is already Serbia. As usual, on the platform there were several uniformed people, old and young, women and men. As I looked at them the thought came to me that perhaps their scattered line is the border. So before getting off the train I carefully examined and memorized their positions. Then I tried to not move along with the crowd toward the other train instead I progressed with very measured and deliberate steps. I wanted to know from what point on do they have the right to bark at me and ask for my documents in a tone that suggests that I have committed something. I wanted to know where do I cease to be a model citizen and become a trespasser. In other words I wanted to know where the border was. But no matter how I scrutinized

the geometry of their bodies in space, how carefully I scanned their features for a signal. Alas, I didn't manage to sense the line. The space between the trains remained inscrutable, a no man's land, a piece of concrete and a stretch of sky, that's all I could see, a stretch of sky with a lonesome puff of a cloud. I hung my weary eyes on that cloud while I made my last steps toward the Serbian train, held on to it while the Hungarian border guard checked my passport halfway in, and it was the last thing I saw before the train's doors closed behind me. As soon as I secured a south-facing seat I shoved my face to the windowpane and looked high up, but nothing was there.

Some things are only visible from the no man's land.

CHAPTER 2: THE BORDER/LAND/S OF THE STATE

When setting out to map the current state of Pannonian borderlands consciousness, I was particularly curious in what forms such a culturally and historically amalgamate phenomenon can be sustained under the ever-increasing political pressure towards nation-state sanctioned, homogenized, normative identity options in the region. For that it seemed essential to examine the various meanings nation state borders acquire in borderlands narratives. State borders are among the most powerful symbolic assets of populist governments aiming to conjure a sense of ethnicized, gendered, and raced 'us' as opposed to 'them' residing, or worse, arriving from beyond those very borders.

As it is widely discussed in anthropological literature, the state border, constructed as a symbolically charged interface between contiguous social systems, is associated with doubt and danger (Douglas 1966, Seremetakis 1996, Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, Green 2018). Since 2015 the racially infused political fantasy about an unambiguously dividable inside and outside, 'us' and 'them' is increasingly present in regional political discourses, amplified by government controlled and/or pro-governmental media outlets. The regional social media arena has also been suffused with a xenophobic and racist language, in the spreading of which people participate from the heartlands and the borderlands alike. Following threads under news media posts about immigrants one almost daily comes across dwellers of various Bosnian, Croatian, Hungarian, and Serbian border towns and villages sharing 'insider' knowledge about the 'destruction' caused by immigrants. Although these narratives are mainly based on hearsay, the fear they arise from and the fear they engender are ever so real, and represent a tangible political capital.

Besides the smugness and spite sputtering from these threads what nauseated me was the brevity of our remembrance. Apparently, in the matter of merely two decades the people of Bosnia, Croatia,

Serbia forgot what war was like, what it felt to have dimensions of our humanness erased and be taken only for what our name or religion stood for. Though I am also aware that these hateful voices do not necessarily represent the majority of our societies, I worry that our government-backed memory failure will soon reach epidemic proportions. As the Hungarian writer Péter Esterházy put it:

> [T]he greatest temptation that power represents is that of memory loss. One forgets what one was like without power. Then it only takes a step from here to forget all those who are not in power. When in power, one should ceaselessly fight for one's memory.[13]

By seeping through the narrative layers of emotional, material, and symbolic imprints that major – and sometimes seemingly minor – historic shifts left in people and land alike the Pannonian borderlands novels this dissertation engages with all contribute to this fight. Consequently, in their world rarely do state borders make their appearance as abstract notions; they rather emerge as places or their specters heavily charged with stories from the past and emotions of the present.

As Sarah Green pointed out, in a 1985 study on mapping practices Alfred Gell presented the idea that the position of locations could be described in indexical and non-indexical ways. A non-indexical statement about location may be true or false independent of the speaker's position in space, while an indexical statement's rightfulness is dependent upon the speaker's location (Green 2012, 585). A non-indexical description of location is, for instance, that the Croatian-Hungarian border stretches north of Zagreb. That the Hungarian-Serbian border is to the north – which happens to be true presently as I am sitting by my desk in Vojvodina, but would not be necessarily true under other circumstances – is an indexical description. Building on Gell's notions Green considers that the building of border walls and fences is a way of "emphasizing the nonindexicality of the border as a line" (2012, 586), while in

[13] "Azt hiszem, a hatalom legnagyobb kísértése az emlékezetvesztés, az, hogy az ember már nem emlékszik, milyen is volt ő maga hatalom nélkül. Innen csak egy lépés, hogy ne emlékezzék azokra, akik nincsenek hatalomban. Az embernek a hatalomban folyvást ezért kell harcolnia, az emlékezetéért." (Esterházy Péter: Ember a hatalomban – részlet)

relation to borders as indexical places she claims:

> [W]hen borders are imagined as an indexical place, borders may not mark or "do" anything, for they are not necessarily imagined or experienced as an entity that marks, but as simply a place, within which, somewhere, different entities overlap. In those cases, the source of the distinctions that borders mark (the differences that make a difference) are not condensed into an abstract line at the edge of a place, but are located elsewhere.

The first subchapter, *Edges*, will focus on how the non-indexical notion of borders as "abstract line[s] at the edge of a place" as well as their various material enhancements are constructed in borderlands novels. The textual instances dealing with state borders as materialized cartographic artifacts are close read in dialogue with scholarship on state borders. The second subchapter, *Specters*, will focus on the ghosts of long gone or never existed borders as they linger on in the way Pannonian borderlands people negotiate their sense of belonging and solidarity. While engaging with both non-indexical and indexical aspects of state borders, the chapter as a whole proposes that bodies, feelings, thoughts, and memories are, as Sarah Green put it, the "elsewhere", where the "source of distinction that borders mark" is located.

EDGES

The boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences,
but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially.
(Georg Simmel, 1903)[14]

In Orsolya Bencsik's 2016 *Több élet*, that is *Extra life*, the grandfather, as part of his attempts to retrospectively organize his life, takes to re-drawing borderlines on old maps: "The country on the reverse cover of these rokovniks is still great Yugoslavia: grandpa took a red marker and circumscribed Serbia, of course without Kosovo and Montenegro."[15] The word 'rokovnik' marks a planner that is a notebook for recording appointments, tasks and errands. It is in Serbo-Croatian in the Hungarian original too, as the use of planners, as a modernist civilizational achievement, got to be known in the Vojvodina Hungarian community during the Yugoslavian era, so its name, together with other lexemes of socialist modernist state organization, became embedded into the regional Hungarian colloquial in its Slavic form. As is well known, planners expire within the year, yet in the economic scarcity of 1990s and 2000s Serbia, old planners from the 1980s became valuable objects reusable as notebooks. However, in the time of the narrative not only was the calendar section obsolete in these rokovniks, but the state maps too, which is why the grandfather decided to re-draw them. That he is actually re-drawing these maps "without Kosovo and Montenegro" signals that the event takes place after 2008, when Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia, while Montenegro had become independent two years prior, in 2006. As Serbia has not acknowledged Kosovo's independence to this day, the grandfather's border-drawing action is a clear act of dissent against the official politics of the

[14] Quoted in Schimanski, Johan. 2017. "Reading from the Border."
[15] All translations from the novels are mine. "Ezeknek a rokovnikoknak a belső borítóján az ország még a nagy Jugoszlávia, a tata piros filccel rajzolta körbe Szerbiát, persze Kosovo és Crna Gora nélkül." (99)

Serbian state that he is a citizen of. Dissent is an attempt at re-drawing borders, so the grandfather's doings are a *mise en abyme,* an action-structure folding into itself and recreating itself.

Similarly, whoever seeks to define 'what' border 'is' ends up with/in a *mise en abyme*, since defining something is itself an act of marking out a border. Therefore, borders appear as wholly non-definable because, as Jacques Derrida shows in *The Parergon* (1979), they act as frames, and bordering/framing is a contingent activity always yet to be completed, as the inside and the outside are never seamlessly separated. The grandfather too comes back to his project over and over again and "with his red marker he circumscribes the remainders of that once glorious and great country with renewed strength."[1] What urges him to do so is his deep-seated, anxiety driven need to organize the world around himself, and borders, with all their intrinsic instability and contingency, are an integral part of what Lewis and Wigen termed metageography, or "the set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world" (1997, ix). Nation-state borderlines emerged from the 19th century onwards simultaneously with the representation of space as state territoriality (Diener and Hagen 2010; Green 2012). Since space was, at least in the European context, conventionally associated with stasis, this helped to place nation state-hood on the ontological plane of timelessness, which in turn backed the forceful global imposition of some local European spatial configurations. The feminist geographer Doreen Massey (1994) began to ponder the possibility of space as flow, later the work of indigenous feminists, such as Mishuana Goeman (2009) and Lisa K. Hall (2009) revealed that the universally posited bounded and static conceptualization of space is in fact principally a European phenomenon. For certain indigenous communities' metageography space / place is dynamic, and as such it can be flexibly rearticulated, or as Manisha Desai put it, "not bound by geopolitics but rather defined by stories as continuous." (2021, 160) In Bencsik's *Extra life*, as well as in most other Pannonian borderlands novels, space is continually re-constructed through overlapping stories as a

palimpsest the author of which was careful not to ever completely erase the previous layers of writing. This is very much apparent from the way various historical configurations of space linger simultaneously in the narrators' flows of consciousness, as the following subchapter, *Specters,* will show.

The palimpsest-like construction of space in Pannonian borderlands novels evokes Peter Zajac's view of East Central European literature's perception of cartographic space that is "not fixed, does not have constant coordinates, but it is characterized by mobile, vibrating, pulsating movements and the possibilities for changing" (Zajac 2003, 98 in Dánél 2021, 6). It is exactly the experience of ever shifting borders that acts as the driving force behind the grandfather's repeated attempts to fix, at least on paper, the boundaries of the geopolitical space he inhabits. As the novel makes it apparent, his gesture is driven by a yearning for control over space, the way his obsession to put together the ultimate selection of pictures of his past lovers is driven by a yearning for control over time. Through these yearnings the grandfather's figure becomes an allegory of colonizing white European masculinity aiming to catalogue the whole world. As Gearóid Ó Tuathail noted, European colonial/modern geopolitical imaginary's epistemological perspective most resembled that of a "singular eye removed from the rest of the body" surveying the global stage (in Vaughan-Williams, 2012, 42). This is the perspective of the 'zero point' where the observer *him*self cannot be observed (Alaimo 2009; Grosfoguel 2008). Historically, this perspective grounded the illusion that the knowledge produced in the colonial centers is ubiquitous and ahistorical, and the borders drawn therein were posited as inescapable abstract universals and, simultaneously, as bounding material realities. As the re-ordering of space was of foremost importance for those in power (Batori 2018, 6), the borders drawn and maps created in the hegemonic centers were far more invested in 'encoding' the world rather than 'decoding' it (Pickles 2000, 52). Maps therefore belong among those "cultural techniques of ruling spaces", which

helped to project and then forcefully impose a specific geographical and social experience on the entire global scene (Siegert 2011, 169). This is what Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova describe as the "coloniality of knowledge," that is the propagation of the local arrangements of western colonial powers globally (2006, 218).

In Ottó Tolnai's 2018 *Szeméremékszerek I: A két steril pohár*, that is *Intimate jewels I: The two sterile cups*, the main narrator, the old Olivér T. remembers how diligently he used to work on putting his hometown, Palics[16] on the map, because Palics "(is not marked on any of the French maps, so he cannot show it to his [French] friends, who started to whisper behind his back that he had wandered off the map)"[17]. In Tolnai's extensive oeuvre wandering plays a central role, so much so that concerning his work and especially the *Intimate jewelry* novel series, literary critics established the term "wandering epistemology" (Ladányi 2019; Radics 2022). Tolnai's wandering epistemology entails a readiness to get lost in the world in order to find the world as it is, that is a way of throwing off the shackles of preconceived ideas to remain open to learning. Consequently, in *Intimate jewels*' very self-reflexive prose 'wandering off the map' has no negative connotations; yet, Olivér T., aware that 'his French friends' see the world through a different prism, ironically asserts that in order to exist for them he has to put his town, Palics, on their maps.

'French friends' here embody the colonial gaze and system of values, to which only those things exist which were mapped that is legitimized by colonial power. Therefore, although *The two sterile cups'* wandering epistemology is about decoding the world, for the sake of his foreign friends Olivér T. invested into encoding it, i.e. attempted to put Palics on the map. As we find out, for a long while he

[16] Serbian Палић / Hungarian Palics / Croatian Palić, a small town located in Serbia, 18 km south from the Serbian–Hungarian border. The geographical names I will use as they are in the novels.

[17] "(ami különben egyik francia térképen sem szerepel, nem tudja megmutatni barátainak, akik immár azt mondogatják a háta mögött, hogy lement a térképről) (Tolnai 49)

tirelessly gathered local architectural, cultural, sports etc. achievements to advance Palics on the civilizational ladder high enough so it could be merited a place among European towns. The heightened awareness Olivér T. displays of the civilizational difference encoded into maps is ubiquitously present in many other Pannonian borderlands novels as well. In *Extra life*, for instance, the young female narrator after a failed date with a Hungarian guy concludes:

> There are people like him, born forty kilometers from the Serbian border, but never once step over it, nevertheless they would of course gladly travel to West Europe, had they have the means.[18]

Underneath the bitterness of this sentence there is a deep-seated, though melancholy irony: the fact that this young man's choices are so obviously affected by cultural stereotypes turns him into a stereotypical representative of a particular system of values. Bekim Sejranović's wayfarer riverboat man narrator choses different means to ridicule, therefore at least symbolically overcome the civilizational marker encoded in the EU borderline:

> By the law one could get as close as five meters to the [Croatian] banks, but could not by any means step on the sacred ground of the European Union. Of course we often did so, Crnac for business purposes and I out of sheer spite.[19]

As Nishitani Osamu argued, colonial modernity transformed the spatial difference that maps, and in particular state borders represented into temporal difference, thus positing itself as new and progressive, and simultaneously marking those from the 'other side' of borders or frontiers as lagging behind or downright reactionary (2006, 262). With that, colonial modernity introduced an epistemic difference founded on the racial classification of the planet's population. Within Europe, this was

[18] "Vannak ilyen emberek, negyven kilométerre születnek a szerb határtól, és harmincéves korukig nem lépik át, de Nyugat-Európába bezzeg utaznának, ha lenne rá pénzük." (Bencsik 2015, 51)

[19] "Mogao si, po zakonu, brodicom prići do pet metara udaljenosti od obale, ali ni slučajno spustiti svoju nogu na sveto tlo Europske Unije. Naravno, radili smo to, i Crnac i ja, on zbog posla, ja iz inata." (Sejranović 2020, 52)

further accentuated by the "imperial difference," the classificatory measure meant to separate the populations of European and the "subaltern empires," such as the Ottoman and Russian (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, 206), but also Austria-Hungary as the only European empire without overseas colonies. This hierarchy of values was ubiquitously accepted by imperial centers on both sides of the presumed civilizational divide, leading to a rush by "subaltern empires" to prove their Europeanness.

Since 1989, East European countries underwent a rapid cultural, economic, and political transformation, but the region still represents a distinct category in the Eurocentric imaginary. East Europe in many ways remained West Europe's other (Gott and Herzog 2014; Koobak and Marling 2014; Kulawik 2020), that is an underrepresented semi-periphery associated with backwardness. The lasting mark of "imperial difference", or as Maria Mälksoo put it, the East European populations' perceived "liminal Europeanness" as opposed to West European, or 'core' European identities (2010, 56), explains both the urgency with which East European nations have been working on proving their western-ness, as well as the roots of self-orientalizing tendencies apparent there (Kovačević 2008; Zarycki 2014). In the long run this same dynamic also significantly contributed to the eventual general disenchantment with the European project in countries such as Hungary or Serbia, while the upsurge of illiberal democracies refueled old stereotypes about the region.

The awareness of East Europe's and in particular the Balkan's lower placement on the civilizational ladder is emphatically present in Pannonian borderlands novels. It is sometimes construed as a debilitating fact of a protagonist's existence (Jászberényi), sometimes as a deeply held though never examined conviction of the narrator (Danyi), sometimes as the direct topic of the autobiographical narrator's ponderings (Sejranović), while Bencsik handles localized ethno-racial stereotypes with her trademark melancholy irony: "The Albanians were kind and helpful, although

everyone knows that they are nothing like that."[20] Ottó Tolnai's book offers another, more radical take on the theme: there the Balkans appear as a territory that downright resists mapping. While leafing through Vol. III of the *Tolnai Világlexikona,* that is the *World Lexicon of Tolnai,* the main narrator of the novel, Olivér T. notices a hiatus:

> [I]n Volume III there is no map of the Balkans, because as its [19]13 introduction put it, those grounds were still in motion, that map was still alive, so maybe in the next volume, said the introduction, they would supplement it, if another volume would be published at all. It never happened, it still hasn't been published, and we can almost certainly assert that it will never be… Strangely, those grounds are still in motion, that map is still alive...[21]

The *World Lexicon of Tolnai,* published between 1912-1919, was meant to become the representative encyclopedia of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, or as its subtitle holds, *The book of universal knowledge and erudition*. The encyclopedia authors' words therefore stand for what was perceived as common or at least commonly acceptable knowledge about the Balkans in 1913, just a year before the outbreak of World War I. The wording of the introduction, "that map is still alive," shows how the colonial gaze sees the ruled territories as maps and nothing but maps, though wild, unruly, uncivilized, with one word: Balkan maps. By this time Bosnia and Herzegovina was indeed treated as a colony by the Hungarian crown, and Hungarians, historically subordinated within the Habsburg Monarchy, were hard at work placing themselves among European colonial powers (Varga 2022). From the point of view of Tolnai's wandering epistemology of course the fact that those "grounds are still moving" is not perceived as a problem, rather as an advantage, as an opportunity to eschew categorization.

[20] "Az albánok kedvesek voltak, segítőkészek, noha mindenki tudja róluk, hogy nem ilyenek." (Bencsik 2015, 87)

[21] "a 3. B.-Betegápolás köteteben még nem közöltek Balkán-térképet,'13-ban még nem, ugyanis, mint az előszóban megjegyezték, még mindig mozog az a talaj, még mindig él az a térkép, talán majd a következő tomusban, tették hozz., ha egyáltalán lett, létezik következő tomus. Nem létezett, még mindig nem készült el, majdnem biztosan állíthatjuk, sosem is fog elkészülni… Különös, az a talaj még ma is mozog, az a térkép még ma is él…" (Tolnai 2018, 163)

Throughout modernity the dynamism of geopolitical and social power relations was omitted from the conceptualizations of borders, in order to keep up a "semblance of stability and immutability" necessary for the maintaining of the colonial/modern geopolitical status quo (Vaughan-Williams, 2012, 132). Despite their frequently detrimental material and social consequences there has been a vast amount of effort invested into maintaining and strengthening these boundaries, as well as into sustaining and potentially enhancing the activity they perform. Yet, during the past half century the in essence fragile, but powerfully backed normative idea of a fixed and continuous border at the geographical edge of the state has been challenged from multiple angles. Changes in the means of communication shifted the significance of the port of entry; and the transitional zones created within the territorial confines of states where migrant populations negotiate their right to entry/exit changed the meaning of territoriality. Still, although contemporary state borders may be becoming more open to the flow of goods, investment, or information via the Internet and other channels, at the same time they are actively differentiating between individuals in terms of gender, race and/or social class (Balibar 2002; Diener and Hagen 2010; Mezzadra and Nielsen 2013; Rosello and Wolfe 2017).

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, in the examined Pannonian borderlands novels I found very few examples of borders narrated as abstract, cartographic lines. Seldom as these are, as common is the appearance of the materiality of borders in the form of checkpoints, guards, fences that are "emphasizing the nonindexicality of the border as a line" (Green 2012, 586). In fact these supposed state-edges play central roles in these novels, compared to which the national centers of Belgrade, Budapest, Sarajevo and Zagreb are distant peripheries representing arcane expectations. A conversation between the two main protagonists, Csabi and Csontos in Sándor Jászberényi's 2020 short novel, *A varjúkirály*, that is *The Crow King*, displays the interferences that happen when messages from the center are translated into the lived everydays of the borderlands:

'We will protect the borders of Hungary.' – said the Prime Minister, but Csabi switched to a music station playing American evergreens. […]

'We protect the borders of Hungary.' – he said.

'Aha.' – answered Csontos, and sat down opposite to him.

'We are Hungary?'

'Yes. We are, Csabi.'

'Then we are protecting ourselves?'

'Sure.' – said Csontos.[22]

Based on the events of the narrative, *The Crow King* unfolds sometimes between the fall of 2014 and early spring of 2015. From 2014 an increasing number of people, primarily from Afghanistan, Kosovo and Syria, crossed the southern borders of Hungary asking for refugee status (Sik 2022, 468), to which the Hungarian government responded with the building of its infamous border barrier, a four-meter high razor wire fence.[23] *The Crow King* takes place when, as the above excerpt shows, the Hungarian government had already begun its campaign against refugees, but the building of the fence has not yet begun. In an unnamed settlement of the Great Hungarian Plain, just a few kilometers north of the Hungarian-Serbian border, a group of far-right leaning men create an informal border patrol group, the 'Brotherhood.' Two close friends, the Hungarian Roma Csabi and the Hungarian white Csontos, both recently released from the state orphanage system with no income, no education, and no perspectives,

[22] „Megvédjük Magyarország határait" – mondta a miniszterelnök, de Csabi áttekerte egy zenei adóra, melyen örökzöld amerikai slágerek mentek. …
„Mi védjük meg Magyarország határait" – mondta.
„Aha" – mondta Csontos, és leült vele szemben.
„Mi vagyunk Magyarország?"
„Igen. Mi vagyunk, Csabi."
„Akkor magunkat védjük meg?"
„Ja" – mondta Csontos."
(Jászberényi 2020, 418)

[23] Government resolution 1401/2015 (VI.17) 'on certain measures necessitated by the exceptional immigration pressure.' *Official Journal (Magyar Közlöny)*, No *83*. http://www.kozlonyok.hu/nkonline/MKPDF/hiteles/mk15083.pdf

are recruited into the group. Csabi's introduction as a new recruit raises considerable tensions, as the following exchange between a core Brotherhood member, Laci, and their leader, Brother Ákos, shows:

> 'How could a Gipsy help us protect the motherland from the aliens?'[asks Laci]
>
> 'He's a Hungarian Gipsy.'[says Csontos, to which the leader responds by saying]
>
> […] 'The outside threat first. If he's a Hungarian Gipsy, then he's a Hungarian Gipsy.'
>
> 'And not a filthy Arab.'— adds Laci in a more placated tone.[24]

The conversation's dynamics well exemplifies the fractal nature of conceptual borders: they allow for a continuous creation of successive subdivisions. Case in point: the core member Laci is against having a racial 'other,' a 'Gipsy' among the ranks of the Brotherhood, but the group's leader, Brother Ákos quickly reconciles him by pointing out that on the civilizational ladder a "Hungarian Gipsy" is superior to a "filthy Arab." At the same time by emphasizing "the outside threat first" the leader acknowledges that he is well aware of the problem, 'the threat' that Hungarian Roma people supposedly represent. His words can even be read as a provisional guarantee that later that 'inside threat' would be also taken care of. This dimension of the leader's utterances is, however, entirely lost on Csabi, who is simply delighted that he was finally not excluded from a group of white men and, by proxy, from the larger community that he so yearns to belong to: the Hungarian nation. On the way home from this first meeting he gleefully shares with Csontos: "You know, I was never called Hungarian before."[25] And he never will be. Except for Csontos, who addresses him as Csabi, everyone calls him 'Cigány,' that is Gipsy all throughout the narrative. Yet, as long as he performs his duty in the border zone, he receives

[24] „Hogyan védhetnénk meg a hazát az idegenektől egy cigánnyal?"
„Magyar cigány." […]
„A külső fenyegetés előbb. Ha magyar cigány, akkor magyar cigány."
„Hát nem is koszos arab" "– mondta engedékenyebb hangon Laci." (382 – 383)

[25] "Tudod, még sosem neveztek magyarnak." (Jászberényi 240)

all the benefits of Brotherhood members, that is, he too gets a hefty share from the goods snatched from refugees: "Csabi was bothered by the sight of women and children stripped naked, but he didn't object because he didn't receive less than the others."[26]

Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* reconceived the limits of sovereign power "not as fixed territorial borders located at the outer edge of the state but rather infused through bodies and diffused throughout everyday life" (1998, 9), and thus shifted the focus from a geopolitical to a biopolitical horizon. Within this horizon the meeting of bodies and borders produces both bodies *and* borders: instead of "timeless territorial artefacts," borders get "(re)inscribed through mobile bodies" which can be triaged, classified, and then handled either as trustworthy citizens or bare life (Vaughan-Williams, 2012, esp. 134). In *The Crow King* each day after nightfall the Brotherhood enters the forest that stretches through the state border of Hungary and Serbia from the Hungarian side, and from there they chase refugees back to the Serbian side. Clearly, the northern edge of the forest is in Hungary while its southern edge is in Serbia, yet within the forest there is no marked borderline. The Brotherhood's goal is to provide voluntary physical enhancement to the non-indexical line of the state border, but by necessarily failing to identify an absolute line they bring the border's non-indexicality into question. "Stop, that's not our homeland any more!"[27] shouts Brother Ákos to withdraw his men from entering deeper into Serbian territory. Nevertheless, the fact that the border is inscrutable does not mean that it is ineffective, rather, as Vaughn-Williams put it, it gets "(re)inscribed through mobile bodies," in other words the border *appears* to be always exactly where members of the Brotherhood attack people trying to cross. Therefore the enhancement that the Brotherhood attempts to offer to the non-indexicality of border as an abstract line actually emphasizes the indexicality of the border: it is not an abstraction but

[26] "Csabit zavarta a pucérra vetkőztetett nők és gyerekek látványa, de nem szólt, mert nem kapott kevesebb pénzt, mint a többiek." (Jászberényi 267-268)
[27] "Álljatok le, az már nem a mi hazánk!" (Jászberényi 258)

a place within which brutal violence occurs against those who are perceived to represent a difference. The bodies of Brotherhood members scattered in the woods are therefore the "elsewhere" where according to Green "the differences that make a difference" are located (2012, 587). In this forest the meeting of bodies and borders indeed produces both bodies *and* borders.

Even along the same state border section such encounters can turn out very differently depending on one's citizenship, gender, race and/or social class. In Ottó Tolnai's novel the old Oliver T. following his heart's desire for wandering more or less aimlessly, unwittingly enters the border zone north of Palics:

> All at once I was there, standing in the deep sand of the border zone, handcuffed. Somehow humiliated. True, not for the first time. I could get used to it by now. In every regime, or rather during these regimes more or less insignificant changes I was routinely humiliated there. On the border.[28]

As we later find out, this time Oliver T. got arrested because he was seen waving in the direction of a 'migrant.'[29] According to the border patrol's interpretation with this movement he directed the 'migrant' towards the most accessible illegal border crossing point, consequently he is accused of participation in human trafficking (149-150). True to his wandering self, Oliver T. does not provide direct answers to the questions of the Hungarian and Serbian border patrols' joint forces; rather in his effort to give as true responses as possible he ends up endlessly meandering among layers, details, and nuances of stories. "Szétbeszéltem", that is "I talked it into shreds" says Oliver T. several times about

[28] "Egyik pillanatról a másikra ott álltam a határsáv mély homokjában megbilincselve. Valamiféleképpen megszégyenítve. Igaz, nem először. Akár már meg is szokhattam volna. Hiszen minden rezsimben, e rezsimek ilyen-olyan, kisebb-nagyobb irányváltásai alkalmával megszégyenítettek volt ott. A határon." (118)

[29] In 2015 the Hungarian government introduced the word 'migrant' (migráns) for Middle Eastern asylum seekers arriving to the country. While the previously used word 'menekült' that is 'refugee' connotes a person seeking safety, 'migrant' suggests voluntary transition from one country to another. Via pro-governmental media the term swiftly became part of mainstream colloquial and with it the picture of the 'migrant' who arrives to Hungary to 'take away' the livelihood of Hungarian citizens.

his, as he calls it, ‘method’ of gliding from topic to topic within his multidimensional matrix of references. Of course due to the application of this ‘method’ he becomes even more suspicious to the border guards. After several days of repeatedly failing interrogations he is transported into the nearby prison, from where he is again quickly transferred to a mental asylum – partly because he waved at the wrong person, but also because he refused to speak the bureaucratic idiom.

Although most of the characters of the novels discussed in this dissertation live outside the walls of Fortress Europe, almost all of them possess one or more EU or EU-entry allowing travel document, therefore, in principal, their mobility is unhindered. What’s hindered is their stability, rather. Most borderlands people have mixed sociocultural heritages, which often makes them targets of interrogation about their affiliation, belonging, loyalty and ‘real’ place under the sun. Inhabitants of the borderlands are often marginalized by mainstream discourses, and therefore for them “no existing discourse is satisfactory because each necessitates the repression of different aspects of the self” (Torres, 1998, 279). As a result, many borderlands people harbor the desire for an idiom that offers a measure of freedom from encountering forces that make them identify, that is limit, themselves. Ottó Tolnai's *The two sterile cups* can be read as a masterful exercise in constructing, and just as importantly, sustaining such an idiom. As I will analyze in Chapter 2, throughout the novel various narrators’ point of views and manners of speech weave into each other alike the improvisative solos of a jazz orchestra. Here I would like to focus on Oliver T.'s idiom, or as he calls it, his ‘method’. As the elderly men’s speech meanders among his own reference points, unhindered though not unaffected by the presence of authorities, it is “like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow”, as Deleuze and Guattari put it (18). Deleuze and Guattari considered these actions the minor writer's way of “finding his own *patois*” (ibid.). From another perspective, with Édouard Glissant's term Oliver T exercised his “right for opacity” (1997, 189), that is he refused being visible on the authority’s terms.

Based on Deleuze and Guattari's notions as well as inspired by Glissant's thought for this phenomenon of borderlands literature I propose the concept *discursive dwelling*. It is similar to what Deleuze and Guattari calls *patois* that is a non-standard form of speech or jargon, in the sense that it is constructed by linguistic means and that in its meaning making practices it deviates from the normative code. Yet, *patois* has a hybridized yet pre-set vocabulary either.

With that it evokes Glissant, who conceived of opacity as "a notion of intercultural and inter-subjective relationality that depends […] on incomprehension" (Allar 2015, 44). Discursive dwelling is the rambling flux of signifiers in search for comprehension that is, necessarily, always incomplete. As a dwelling, it is the place where speech may keep curiosity, empathy, and a sense of singularity open, alive and in motion, which is crucial especially when one is offered a limited form of presence by those vested with power.

In Tolnai's novel those vested with power to classify people also differentiate among them based on their modes of self-representation. They are separating normative forms from deviant ones, such as the one exhibited by Oliver T., who consequently gets treated as a secondary citizen with limited agency. However, from another point of view, a point of view supported by Oliver T.'s retrospective interpretation of the events, by remaining true to his idiom, that is by talking about everything *he* considered relevant instead of simply answering questions, Oliver T. exercised a measure of control over the conversation's content as well as its temporal framing. By "talking shreds" he managed to avoid the ready-made identity categories that the bureaucratic idiom attempted to enforce upon him. By remaining within his discursive dwelling Oliver T. retained a measure of agency.

As we find out later in doing so Oliver T.'s exemplar is no one else but the great Hungarian composer Béla Bartók (1881–1945). The following scene takes place at the US immigration offices in

New York Harbor on October 30, 1940 when Bartók, like every immigrant, was required to do his paperwork:

> [Bartók] Apathetically filled out the questionnaire. Year and place of birth? Ethnicity? Height? Weight? He responded to each question with painstaking precision. […] Then at the question about the color of his eyes he seemingly stopped short. In the next moment he tilted with his trademark deliberation … [and] under 'eye color' Béla Bartók […] wrote *blue*.[30]

What immediately catches one's attention on pictures of Bartók are his charcoal eyes. This is why Oliver T. attributes utmost importance to his claiming that his eyes were 'blue':

> In my humble opinion this is nothing else but a serious, revolutionary, anarchist gesture. I don't know of any greater, or more revolutionary, or more deeply anarchic gesture in Hungarian culture.[31]

There are clear parallels between Oliver T.'s discursive dwelling and Bartók's gesture. Firstly, their situatedness: both come into being through communication with power. Then, both refuse to enter the classificatory idiom of power by not surrendering to its reductive forces. Yet, while Bartók's gesture creates a slippage between his persona as represented in official documents and himself through a single 'tilt' (Tolnai's choice of word here evokes the tilting of a piano key), Oliver T. is opting for a particular form of 'speaking truth to power'. He eschews the distortive boundary setting attempts of the classificatory idiom by withdrawing into the borderlands of improvisation, and instead of providing pre-formatted answers he disappears in his discursive dwelling.

In Bekim Sejranović's 2015 *Moj sin, Huckleberry Finn*, that is *My son, Huckleberry Finn* we can also witness an encounter between the narrator and border authorities. The novel's sometimes

[30] "Egykedvűen töltögette a rubrikák kérdéseire adott válaszokat. Születési éve, helye? Nemzetisége? Magassága? Súlya? Aprólékos pontossággal felelt minden kérdésre. ... Majd amikor a szeme színe kérdéshez ért, megtorpanni látszott. Aztán egy csak rá jellemző elszántságú mozdulattal billentett … A szeme színe rubrikába ugyanis Bartók Béla azt írta, hogy: *kék*." (Tolnai 2018, 286-287, emphasis in the original)

[31] „Szerény véleményem szerint ez nem értelmezhető másképpen, mint komoly, lázadó, anarchikus gesztus. Kevés nagyobb, lázadóbb, anarchikusabb gesztusról tudok a magyar szellemi életben." (Tolnai 2018, 286)

likeable, sometimes pitiable, sometimes downright contemptable anti-hero lives on a boat on the Sava river floating along between the Croatian and Bosnian banks. This boat is the sole venue of the novel's present-time events, therefore *Huckleberry* is uniquely placed among the examined borderlands novels as the only one that fully enfolds in the very borderzone. Furthermore, the boat is in constant motion throughout the narrative, because of which this novel offers an example of wayfaring as the refuge of those who cannot reconcile their borderlands selves with the straightjacket identity categories offered by nation states. The below excerpt well exemplifies the state authorities' reaction to a life lived outside the box:

> I lived on the boat without fishing or smuggling. It wasn't rare that the police and the river border patrol from one of those newly composed states stopped me, combed my boat, and often verbally abused me. They could not figure what I was doing there.
> – You are weird, really weird... – which sounded as if the members of Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian border police were somehow justifying themselves. [...] What are you doing here? Why are you not working? [...] Where are you from, where do you live, what do you do for a living?
> Whoever asks me these questions should not hope for an answer. From me will only get a pitying glance.[32]

The protagonist refuses to answer the police's questions, yet engages in a dialogue with them on his own terms, starting to tell them makeshift stories, raising a smokescreen, in other words, he constructs a temporary discursive dwelling within which he may remain opaque.

As these instances show, staying within one's own idiom may engender a measure of freedom. However, even under similar circumstances freedom comes at a different price for different people. While Oliver T. ends up locked up in the county prison, the riverman is free to go, because "… for the

[32] "Plovio sam a nisam ni pecao ni švercao. Policija, odnosno riječne patrole svih novonastalih država nerijetko bi me zaustavljale, pretresale brodicu, često i verbalno zlostavljale. Nije im bilo jasno što ja tu radim. – Čudan si nam, čudan... – kao da su se opravdavali djelatnici bosanske, hrvatske ili srpske pogranične policije. … Šta radiš ovde? Zašto ne ideš raditi, zarađivati? – a zatim pitanja poput: – Odakle si, gdje živiš, čime se baviš? Onaj koji mi postavi ova pitanja neka se ne nada odgovoru. Od mene će dobiti samo sažaljiv pogled." (Sejranović 2020, 46)

hundredth of times I was saved by my Norwegian passport, without that I would have been expulsed like Crnac. He cannot even enter his house any more. That's why he lives on a raft."[33] Although he is from a nearby Bosnian town on the banks of the Sava, because of his Norwegian citizenship local Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian police forces can scrutinize him only to a point. When borders get "(re)inscribed through mobile bodies" (Vaughan-Williams, 2012, 134) his Norwegian passport exempts him – as long as he carries it on him. Once heavily under the influence of drugs he failed to present his documents to the Serbian police and ended up incarcerated and treated as bare life (Agamben), until he managed to prove his citizenship.

As it is also apparent from Neven Ušumović's short story, *Gyár* (2009), citizenship can have enormous weight in the border zone. Tolnai's Oliver T. was captured and interrogated through a joint venture of Hungarian and Serbian border patrols, as in the narrative time of the *Intimate jewels* Hungarian and Serbian border guards are each other's allies against those trying to enter Fortress Europe. Only twenty years earlier and just twenty kilometers to the west along the same state border the situation was entirely different. In Ušumović's *Gyár* a group of ethnic Bunjevac, Croatian and Hungarian youth from Subotica[34] decide to walk through the forest – the very same stretch of forest that serves as the main scene of events in *The Crow King* – to Hungary, partly to acquire some goods, but mainly for the sake of the thrill. Just like the members of the Brotherhood in Jászberényi's text, these youth either have no idea when and where they crossed the 'actual' border within the forest until they are ambushed by Hungarian border patrol.

> [The Hungarian border guards] drove them for a long time in the forest before they arrived at a clearing.

[33] "...po tko zna koji put me spasila činjenica da imam norvešku putovnicu inače bi dobio izgon, kao i Crnac. Taj više ne može legalno ući ni u vlastitu kuću. Zato i živi na splavu." (Sejranović 2020, 52)

[34] Суботица in Serbian, Szabadka in Hungarian, Subotica in Croatian. A town in North Vojvodina, 10 kilometers south from the Serbian-Hungarian state border. Significant administrative, cultural and educational center.

> […] There, at one place, under the high, endlessly stretched-out sky as the sole witness of the events, they entered into a ditch, and from there into a labyrinth of underground premises. They were stripped naked on one corridor among many, then separated into rooms. […] It felt like as if her whole life had passed before they were handed over to the Serbian border police. So far she never talked anyone about it.[35]

This passage allows for bringing together several already raised threads of thought. The inscrutability of the nonindexical border that is the border as a line without physical enhancements is once again apparent. The border guards as materializations of the border as a binding force, i.e. that the meeting of bodies and borders produces both the bodies and the borders gains further emphasis. Being stripped naked as a matter of course, without interrogation or investigation, evokes Agamben's formulation: these youth were treated as bare life, not people, until they were handed over to the Serbian border police, when they once again became potential citizens. There is a twist here though. The narrative takes place in the late nineties, when the Serbian police was in the service of Slobodan Milošević's regime. At the time ethnic minority youth in the Vojvodina did not perceive Serbian police as those to whom they can turn for protection, quite the opposite. Yet, the border zone dictates a different code of conduit, as there, as the above example from Sejranović's *Huckleberr*y showed, citizenship provisionally overwrites ethnic and other differences.

The youth all throughout Ušumović's story remains silent. Although there are Hungarian speakers among them who could communicate with Hungarian border patrol, yet "[t]he two lads acted as if they spoke no Hungarian, while the Hungarian [border guards] were swearing at them in Serbian"[36]. It seems that because of their age and corresponding lack of experience with authorities they considered that

[35] "Vozili su ih dugo kroz šumu dok nisu izbili na jednu pustaru. [...] Na jednom mjestu, naočigled golemog neba koje ih je jedino okruživalo poput beskonačno razvučene kupole, ušli su u rov i dalje u labirint podrumskih prostorija. U jednom hodniku skinuli su ih do gola i onda rasporedili po sobama [...] Činilo joj se da je cijeli život bila dolje dok je nisu, samu, predali srpskoj graničnoj policiji. Nikome dosada nije rekla ni riječi o tome." (Ušumović 2009: 34)

[36] "Mladići su glumili da ne znaju ni riječi mađarskog, Mađari su ih obasipali srpskim psovkama." (Ušumović 2009: 34)

their silence may somehow protect them. Their case shows that the benefits of remaining opaque are not available for those who are inexperienced, frightened, or deprived of speech like the 'migrants' suffering the violence of the Brotherhood in *The Crow King*.

In Ušumović's text there is no word either about how the youth prove their citizenship eventually, as they certainly did not have any identification documents on them. A story from Katalin Ladik's 2007 *Élhetek az arcodon?* that is, *Can I live on your face?* once more underlines the powerful role age, citizenship, ethnicity, gender, race and other identity markers may play in the border zone. At the beginning of the story the Woman Artist ('a Művésznő' in Hungarian) falls off of a night train somewhere in the south of the Great Hungarian Plain. After finding a bike she starts pedalling towards the Hungarian – Yugoslavian border, but eventually she collapses exhaustedly on the roadside:

> – I wanna go home! […] A pair of eyes flickers from the left. I stand up and stare in that direction; hopefully it's not a wolf. It could easily be a hound, since we are close to the Yugoslavian border. […] The two eyes slowly turn into two reflectors. […] A truck halts in front of us.
>
> […] I grab the driver's jacket: Could you take me across the border? After a moment of hesitation he speaks out in a language that sounds Middle Eastern and says something like: – Climb in!
>
> […] The truck halts in front of a bright sign:
>
> ÚTLEVÉLVIZSGÁLAT – PASOŠKA KONTROLA – PASSPORT CONTROL
>
> – You quickly returned from Hungary – says the uniformed officer. His right side moustache dances csárdás, the lift side kolo. Ashamed, I start sobbing.
>
> – I lost my passport.
>
> The csárdás stops mid-air, the kolo goes on. Brief silence.
>
> – You are lucky that I recognized you – he says in a contemplative tone. – I will try to solve this.
>
> After twenty minutes the moustache returns.

– Here is a certificate that you can cross with. But next time take better care of your passport, drugarice![37]

At the end of the quoted passage *drugarice*, that is 'comrade' in the female vocative form is in Serbo-Croatian in the Hungarian text too. In part it signals that the exchange with the boarder guard happened in Serbo-Croatian, the largest official language of the Yugoslavian state, it also signals that the exchange happened in the bureaucratic idiom of the socialist state which considered each citizen a comrade, but the use of the word as part of a warning can be read as a reminder of one's duties as a model socialist citizen too. *Drugarice*, therefore, acts as a spatial marker signaling that this is the Yugoslavian border checkpoint (how she managed to get through the Hungarian one remains undisclosed); a temporal marker signaling that the story within the book is from the socialist times; as well as a marker of modality. At the same time, similarly to the word *rokovnik* in Bencsik's prose, on the one hand it signals borderlands' linguistic hybridity, and on the other hand it is part of the "commuting grammar" of multilingual authors (Thomka 2018, 146). So this *drugarice* placed within a Hungarian text acts like the initially jovial border guards' moustache, the right side of which dances Hungarian folk dance (csárdás) while the left a traditional Balkan dance (kolo), i.e. it is actively engaged with two cultures at the same time. The notable moustache otherwise has a very precise

[37] – Haza akarok menni! … Bal felől két macskaszem hunyorog. Felállok, bámulok felé; tán csak nem egy farkasé, de az is lehet, hogy vadászkutyáé, hiszen közel vagyunk a jugoszláv határhoz. ... A két szem fokozatosan két reflektorfénnyé változik. ... Egy teherautó fékez le előttünk. ... ...megragadom a bőrzakóst: Átvinne-e a határon? Egy pillanatra meg torpan, majd a Közel-Kelet valamelyik nyelvén ilyasmit mond: -- Másszatok fel! ... A teherautó lefékez egy kivilágított felirat előtt: ÚTLEVÉLVIZSGÁLAT – PASOŠKA KONTROLA.
– Gyorsan visszajött Magyarországról – vigyorog rám az egyenruhás tiszt. Bajusza jobb fele csárdást, bal fele kólót táncol. Elpityeredek.
– Elveszítettem az útlevelemet – vallom be szégyenkezve.
A csárdás erre megáll a levegőben, a kóló még járja. Rövid csend.
– Szerencséjére felismertem magát – mondja töprengve. – Majd megpróbálom elintézni valahogy.
Húsz perc múlva titokzatosan bebilleg a bajusz.
– Itt ez a bizonylat, ezzel átmehet. De máskor jobban vigyázzon a passzusára, drugarice! (Ladik 2007, 62 – 63)

geographic placement: when arriving to the Yugoslavian, now Serbian border from the north, that is from Hungary, the border guards' booths are from the left, that is facing west, therefore a hypothetical guard's hypothetical right moustache would point to the north, that is towards Hungary, and the left towards south, that is towards Vojvodina/Serbia/Yugoslavia. The attention to such nitpicky details is characteristic of Ladik's prose: she regularly includes hard-boiled facts into her experimental, sometimes downright surrealistic imagery. This is how she creates her discursive dwelling: her readers can never be sure where autobiography ends and total phantasmagory begins, as through very thoughtfully administered authorial interventions she let's her prose linger in the borderlands of fact and fiction.

I would also like to draw attention to the fact that a person speaking "a language that sounds Middle Eastern" attempting to cross the border is constructed as an entirely regular phenomenon in Ladik's novel. During the 1980s economic relations between East European socialist states and Middle Eastern countries were flourishing, thus a Middle Eastern truck driver crossing the Hungarian – Yugoslavian border was an ordinary matter signaling business as usual. Thirty years on the sound of Middle Eastern languages at the same borderline raises nothing but suspicion, if not violence.

Lastly, the non-indexical mark of the border sign merits some attention. In the Woman Artist's narrative at the country's entrance a bright, multilingual sign welcomes the weary traveler. Potentially on the very same border crossing thirty years later the narrator of Zoltán Danyi's 2015 *A dögeltakarító*, that is *The Carcass Remover*, comes across a different sight:

> beyond the border station's dilapidated building there was nothing but a huge rusty sign with the country's name crossed over on it as to signal that this is the end, this was Serbia[38]

[38] "így érkeztünk meg a határállomás lepukkant épületéhez, amelyen túl már csak egy rozsdafoltos, hatalmas tábla állt, rajta az országunk áthúzott nevével, mintha csak azt jelezte volna, hogy itt a vége, ez volt itt Szerbia" (Danyi 2015: 81)

As Danyi's narrator, an embittered ethnic Hungarian veteran of the Yugoslav wars reads the sign through his hard-shell anger against everything that is Serbia or Serbian reveals that the efforts directed towards the solidification of an absolute state border may in fact contribute to marking the border's, and through that, the nation state's temporality and fragility. As if echoing this, in a later passage *The Carcass Remover*'s signature bitter irony bites even harder at the edges of the nation state:

> things fall apart just like that, they turn into dust, and everything wears itself out, because that is the law of things, under which only Serbia is an exception, because 'Serbia is eternal', says the Serbian minister of internal affairs in the TV[39]

The accentuation of the assumedly 'eternal' quality of the nation state project is meant to ridicule, therefore to symbolically overcome the strangling realities these pathos-coated formulae conceal and construct. Sejranović used the same rhetoric device when writing about the "sacred ground of the European Union"[40]. Irony in its various forms, as also exemplified by Bencsik's work, is a common tool of Pannonian borderlands literature. Another common instrument is the construction of, as I termed it, discursive dwelling, that is an idiom unyielding to the epistemic violence of normative categorization yet open to dialogue. These we arrived to while surveying the way borderlands literature deals with the administrative notion of state borders. The following section will focus on how borderlands consciousness engages with their time and remembrance.

[39] "a dolgok maguktól hullanak darabokra, maguktól porladnak el, és saját magát koptatja el lassan minden, mert ez a törvény, amely alól egyedül Szerbia kivétel, mert „Szerbia örök", mondja a szerb belügyminiszter a tévében" (Danyi 2015, 146)

[40] "na sveto tlo Europske Unije" (Sejranović 2020, 52)

SPECTERS

Presence is active through materiality and memory, even if it is speaking of absence.

(Owain Jones 2015, 4)

The thus far analyzed instances from Pannonian borderlands novels were mainly about state borders that are active in the times of the narratives. However, these are not the only borders affecting borderlands consciousness. The southern edge of the Pannonian Plain was among those European territories that had played the role of the buffer zone between various empires struggling for continental hegemony. Its economic, military and political significance, always determined at far away centers, has shifted over and over again radically with changing governmental and border regimes, such as, just during the past century, the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and most recently Hungary, Croatia, and Romania's joining of the European Union. Past border regimes, especially long-standing ones, like that of the Habsburg Empire or Yugoslavia, left an indelible mark in borderlands' peoples' consciousness. The presence of these today absent borders I approach drawing on Béatrice von Hirschhausen's understanding of "phantom borders", that is "political borders that once were, are no more, but – nevertheless – somehow still are" (Zajc, 2019: 298). Von Hirschhausen and her team of researchers primarily apply this concept to borders that were removed, such as the one formerly separating the East and West Germany (1949-1990), but they also extend it to borders that remained in place but became part of the boundaries of transformed geopolitical configurations, such as the borders of Yugoslavia (1945-1992). Furthering the applicability of the notion I also consider as 'phantom borders' those state borders that neither vanished nor became part of new state formations yet acquired novel significance due to changes in geopolitical circumstances.

Borders that once were

No clear-cut nation state demarcation line, like that of the former East and West Germany, was removed in the broader Pannonian territory, yet in Pannonian borderlands novels 'phantom borders' appear in a variety of forms. Several state borders cutting through the territory underwent historical transformations, and as a result current borders, i.e. state demarcation lines that exist in the timeframe of the examined narratives can act spectrally. The haunting presence of past borders within present borders is tangible in this already quoted excerpt from *The two sterile cups*:

> In every regime, during these regimes more or less significant changes of course I was humiliated there. On the border. Especially, when I was banished from Hungary for two years, and after two years I wanted to cross the border but apparently I still couldn't […] and I was arrogantly deported.[41]

For Tolnai's elderly narrator, Oliver T. the border of Serbia and Hungary is rife with memories and emotional imprints from the time when, in a very different geopolitical constellation, it was the border between Yugoslavia and Hungary. Despite the fact that the state formations altered on both side of the state border, Oliver T. perceives his detainment by the Serbian border patrol on the same continuum with his past humiliation by officers of the former Hungarian People's Republic (1949-1989). His layered experience evokes Gaston Bachelard's famous observation from his *The Poetics of Space*: "In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time." (1994, 8). And space with historical and/or personal time compressed in it becomes a place. According to Anzaldúa borderlands are "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (1987, 25). These emotional residues are often caused by historical time being pressed against personal time, pushing the latter off-kilter. Lasting anger or grief felt over the change of state formations is an example of that.

[41] "Hiszen minden rezsimben, e rezsimek ilyen-olyan, kisebb-nagyobb irányváltásai alkalmával megszégyenítettek volt ott. A határon. Különösen, amikor két évre kitiltottak Magyarországról, s két év után menni akartam, de minden jel szerint még mindig nem mehettem, mert az adminisztráció nem tette volt egyértelművé a dolgot, és engem valami számomra furcsa arroganciával mindig visszatoloncoltak." (Tolnai 2018, 118)

Yet, there is also a quiet and melancholy solace in the fact that these borders are ephemeral too:

> these borders are constantly pushed back and forth, yet they never disappear, Europe cannot exist without borders, and even if sometimes they 'immaterialize', soon enough they are all redrawn, realigned, refortified, the way tidewaves draw folds, creases, lines in the sand of the seashore, then wash them away, then redraw them somewhere near.[42]

Danyi's observations on bordering as an action similar to that of the work of tide-waves has a notable parallel in border literature. Sarah Green suggested that one way to think about the transitions of borders is to perceive them as "tidemarks, [that is] traces of movement, which can be repetitive or suddenly change, may generate long-term effects or disappear the next day, but nevertheless continue to mark, or make, a difference that makes a difference" (quoted from Green 2012, 585, but also Green 2018). The ephemeral quality of state borders and state formations is a critical experience of many generations of Pannonian borderlands dwellers. This is why in *Extra life* the narrator simply stops naming her country of origin; instead she designates it as "the country circumscribed with red in my grandfather's old rokovnik"[43].

Several of the analyzed novels ponder the phenomenon that there are borders presently where there did not use to be any. These are those instances when, in my interpretation, the anguish felt over lost possibilities kicks in and makes itself felt on emotional, cognitive, as well as on visceral levels. This pain often gets expressed through loyalty to the past through the refusal to acknowledge current state formations. A fitting example of this is Sejranović's narrator mentioning "the river border patrol from one of those newly composed states"[44], or when we learn that Danyi's narrator "remembered the

[42] "ezeket a határokat ide-oda tologatják, épp csak megszüntetni nem tudják őket, Európa képtelen meglenni határok nélkül, és ha átmenetileg olykor „légiesítik" is őket, hamarosan újra megrajzolják, újra meghúzzák, újra megerősítik mindet, mint ahogy a tenger hullámai rajzolnak redőket, bordákat, vonalakat a parti homokra, majd elmossák, és kicsivel arrébb megint megrajzolják őket" (Danyi 2015, 186)

[43] "Apám a tata régi rokovnikjában piros filccel körberajzolt országban, a számítógép előtt ülve számolta, hány lájkot kapnak." (Bencsik 2015, 102)

[44] "riječne patrole svih novonastalih država" (Sejranović 2020, 46)

Yugoslav flag forever, but he had a hard time differentiating these national flags"[45].

The anguish felt over the loss of moving and thinking within and beyond much larger and much more open Yugoslavian borders, as opposed to the confines of the "newly composed [nation] states" saturates the novels of Danyi, Ladik, Sejranović, Tišma and Tolnai as well, though with distinct accents. As Owen Jones holds, "(l)andscapes are always made up of losses, absences and presences – but differently so for different people, and in changing constellations of asymmetrical tension" (2015, 11). In the case of the named authors the differences are primarily generational: Katalin Ladik, Slobodan Tišma and Ottó Tolnai, born in the 1940s were all accomplished artists by the time Yugoslavia fell apart, while Zoltán Danyi and Bekim Sejranović, born in the 1970s were just coming of age. The Yugoslav cultural repository matter of factly belongs to Ladik's, Tišma's and Tolnai's vernacular, while Danyi and Sejranović, though also freight with it, are aware of its gradual obsoletion too.

The authors' differing ethnic background is another reason why their approach to the lost Yugoslav space diverge. Despite the loss suffered, Sejranović and Tišma can still use the Yugoslav idiom as a sign of good faith when connecting with people from Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro or Serbia, countries that, though administratively separate, remained in many ways intrinsically interrelated. For Danyi, Ladik, and Tolnai, as for other members of the Vojvodina Hungarian community, the falling apart of Yugoslavia also entailed the falling apart of a country where at least nominally all nations and nationalities were equal. 'Nationality' may signify national character or a group of people with a particular national character, while specifically in Yugoslavia the term was used for every ethnic group that did not make up the majority in either of the country's six federal republics. In 1990s Serbia the

[45] "a jugoszláv zászlót megjegyezte örökre, ezeket a nemzeti zászlókat viszont nehezen tudja megkülönböztetni egymástól" (Danyi 2015, 90)

notion of 'nationality' was rapidly switched for 'minority', a concept much more delilimiting in its connotations. Additionally, also from the 1990s as a response to the pan-Serbian politics of Slobodan Milošević, the political leaders of the Vojvodina Hungarian community were increasingly looking for allies in the political scene of Hungary. This initial search for bilateral connections during the past thirty years, and especially since the 2010 right wing turn of Hungarian governance, led to a unidirectional positionality for the community and its leaders alike. Presently Sarajevo or Zagreb are basically non-existent on the Vojvodina Hungarian cultural horizon and even Belgrade only has administrative importance. Therefore, for Danyi, Ladik, and Tolnai thinking in terms of a greater Yugoslav space, i.e. the maintenance of the Yugoslav idiom also entails a refusal of the Hungarian ethno-nationalist ghettoization of the Vojvodina Hungarian community.

* * *

The following subchapter will hone in on a further specimen of 'phantom borders' in Pannonian borderlands novels, that is the presence of borders that never existed. The case in point is the boundary constructed around the perceived civilizational differences of the Balkans and the northern section of East Central Europe, within this dichotomy usually marked as Central Europe.

Borders that never were

The fact that some states, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia are not (yet) members of the European Union in the discussed Pannonian borderlands novels often evokes the longstanding north-south binary that supposedly cuts through local societies along the imagined line where (Central) Europe meets the Balkans, with the former placed higher on the civilizational ladder. As discussed in the *Introduction*, this hierarchy is the residue of the 19th century state of affairs, when in the

civilizational rivalry of empires with no overseas colonies the Habsburg/Western Christian lands were in a more favorable political position than the Ottoman/Eastern Christian-Muslim territories. Ever since the Balkans lingers in western imagery as the never finished product of attempted westernization, a half-developed, semi-oriental and semi-civilized region that permanently has to shed "the last residue of imperial [i.e. Ottoman] legacy" (Todorova, 1997, 13).

The assumed necessity to differentiate between the Balkans and (Central) Europe haunts the protagonists of most Pannonian borderlands novels, so much so that it can be taken as a defining feature of Pannonian borderlands consciousness. The texts of course engage with this question in a variety of ways. The most unambiguous approach is that of Erzsébet Juhász (1947-1998), a writer of great erudition, a literary comparatist of deep insight. As her monographist, Orsolya Bencsik pointed out, in Erzsébet Juhász's prose the "mapping [of personal and family histories] always entails a forced yet powerful border-drawing that points towards a sense of lack, a yearning"[46] (2022, 116) for what is perceived as the lost Golden Age, that is the times of the Habsburg Monarchy. Especially in her pieces written during the Yugoslavian wars Juhász attempted to clear-cut separate her ivory tower built of high (Central) European culture from what she perceived as lowly, filthy, violent, that is the Balkans. Her posthumus novel, *Határregény* that is *Bordernovel* (2001) follows the last days of Angeline Nenadovits / Nenádovics / Nenadović, a nonagenarian inhabitant of Neusatz / Újvidék / Novi Sad, who "[f]rom the 1980s exclusively lived in the years before the First World War"[47]. Through the events, venues and people that Angeline choses to remember or deliberately forgets the reader gets a vivid impression of how the system of values traceable in the (Central) Europe – Balkans dichotomy

[46] „ez a feltérképezés mindig egy kényszerített, erős határmegrajzolást jelent, és egy hiánytapasztalat, sóvárgás felé mutat" (Bencsik 2022, 16)

[47] "A nyolcvanas években azonban Angeline már mindenestül áttette létezésének színhelyét a század világháborút megelőző éveire." (Juhász 2001, 7)

organized one's whole sense of self. Just like Angeline, Juhász herself never questioned the cultural superiority of (Central) Europe over the Balkans, nor the civilizational boundary separating the two.

However, Erzsébet Juhász is a standalone example. In Danyi's *The Carcass Remover* the Serbs as representatives of the Balkans 'mentality' first appear as the despicable 'other' responsible for the terrible fate of the narrator's homeland, Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the novel this 'other' is distant and contemptible, yet the narrator through an incessant, self-vivisecting internal monologue comes to the realization that everyone, but absolutely everyone has the potential for good and for evil. From there he eventually arrives to the reconciliatory recognition that the Serbs are absolutely necessary not only for his self-understanding, but for his sense of self:

> ...for him all other Hungarian towns were somehow always distant and alien, in Szentendre though he experienced just the opposite, he was at home from the first moment, so it very much seems that the Serbs are and will be forever a part of what he, quite uncertainly though, yet still calls a sense of comfort[48]

Other Pannonian borderlands novels also uproot and deconstruct the (Central) Europe vs Balkans binary, but with different tools. In Melinda Nadj Abonji's 2010 *Tauben fliegen auf,* that is *Fly away, pigeon*, the narrator's first generation Swiss immigrant, originally Vojvodina Hungarian family lastingly carries the mark of potentially inappropriate otherness in the eyes of their café's predominantly local, small town Swiss customers. The dichotomies of Europe vs. the Balkans, civilization vs. wilderness, culture vs. nature, are seemingly endlessly circulating in the discursive space of the café's micro-universe while for the Kocsis their whiteness "functions as capital that the post-socialist subject can claim, trade, and negotiate in the racial capitalist marketplace of the European

[48] "az igazság az, hogy neki az összes többi magyarországi város valahogy mindig is távoli volt és idegenszerű, Szentendrén viszont, éppen ellenkezőleg, az első pillanattól fogva otthon érezte magát, éppen ezért nagyon úgy tűnik, hogy akárhogy is vannak a dolgok, neki a szerbek feltehetően már örökre hozzátartoznak ahhoz, amit eléggé bizonytalanul ugyan, de az otthonosság érzésének kell neveznie" (Danyi 2015, 181)

Union" (Tudor and Rexhepi 2021, 196). The clarification of whether the Kocsis belong with the Balkans or they are 'proper' Europeans becomes increasingly urgent from 1992, as more and more Bosnian war refugees arrive to Switzerland. The regular customers of the Kocsis family's joint more and more often refer to people from the Balkans as 'animals' or 'hyenas'; derogatory remarks such as "the *homo balcanicus* is incapable of enlightenment"[49] are also frequently made; while the general sentiment of the locals concerning asylum seekers is summed up by the comments like "the Balkan will not stop in our doorway"[50].

Some customer's try to dissolve their fears by clinging to the fact that the Kocsis family is Hungarian by ethnicity, as if the borders of 'the Balkans' wouldn't be geographical but rather ethnical. For others' it is the fact that they are "Papierswiss", i.e. that the family has Swiss citizenship that differentiates them from the 'newcomers,' the freshly arriving refugees, indicating that in their interpretation 'Europe' and 'the Balkans' are an administrative categories. There are customers who emphasize that the Kocsis sisters have learned the local customs and speak the regional dialect; therefore they regard cultural assimilation as the proof of their leaving 'the Balkans,' while for some the fact that they are capable of assimilation proves that they have never been *homo balcanicus* to begin with. The largest group, though, is comprised of those café customers who use productivity as the litmus test of the Kocsis family's belonging: they perform well as business owners and employees, therefore they are worthy of Swiss citizenship, and clearly different than the rest of 'the Balkans' folks. Although, at least according Ildi Kocsis, the novel's narrator, the family *is* from 'the Balkans' (she thinks: "somehow we are [from the Balkans]"), the café's customers apparently actively negotiate that. Recognizing the Kocsis family as people from the Balkans would rupture their image of the *homo*

[49] Nadj Abonji 2014, 210. Emphasis in the original.
[50] Nadj Abonji 2014, 210.

balcanicus – and shatter the authenticity of their European persona which they have so conveniently built up in relation to that.

> You must be aware our waitress comes from the Hungarian region of the Balkans … the Vojvodina, south of Hungary, that's what it's called, that region, an autonomous province until recently, wasn't it? … Your mother tongue is Hungarian, then, not Serbo-Croatian … yes, I confirmed. So you are not from Balkans at all, then? Not really, I answered, but still somehow we are, I thought. Mr. Berger suddenly wrinkled his brow, lectured his wife Annelis, you see, I told you, people from the Balkans have a different shape to the backs of their heads.[51]

During the European Enlightenment the "need for a classification project", as Anne Fausto-Sterling puts it (1995, 40), engendered an increasing variety of methods for the clarification of the borderline between 'European' and 'other.' By the 19th century the examination and comparison of the brain structure – the cranial and facial characteristics – became one of the most popular branches of taxonomical efforts (ibid). As the above quotation from *Fly away, pigeon* showcases, the scientific terminology ("shape to the back of the head") has trickled down into the vocabulary of the educated European middle classes, while exercising the classificatory gaze on 'others' served to clarify the boundaries of the body-at-home. There are also textual instances in the novel, which, using the same methodology, openly aim at racial classification, such as when an equally jovial customer tells Ildi "(you almost have an African nose, said someone once, your nose would fit an African face)"[52].

As these examples from Nadj Abonji's novel show, the borders of Europe and the Balkans are not only unsettled, but even the criteria based on which they should be drawn are unclear. I venture that this is because those borders are nonexistent, they never were existent, only take effect through the hiatus that they are supposed to fill. Sarah Green draws a parallel between the working of borders and the working of trace as Jacques Derrida conceptualized it: "The trace is always contingent – it never

[51] Nadj Abonji 2014, 160–161
[52] Nadj Abonji 2014, 209

hides an ultimate, timeless, reality; what it signifies is always dependent upon the here and now." (Green 2018, 78) Similarly, borders are not fixed entities, what they signify heavily depends on circumstances. I would take this parallel further by claiming that the border of (Central) Europe and the Balkans functions like Derrida's *arche* trace, in the case of which "the origin did not even disappear, [as] it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin." (Derrida, 1997, 61) The perceived difference between Europe and the Balkans is retrospectively projected onto a quasi-historic organization of space, but by its establishment in space, no matter how illusionary, the boundary takes up a sense of historical necessity. When Sejranović's riverman says, "[the Sava river] again became the border between two worlds"[53] he channels this stereotypes-backed and therefore seemingly clear-cut image about regional spatial and civilizational arrangements.

Yet, to imagine the borders of empires based on our present day knowledge of state demarcation lines is a historical travesty. In the age of the empires most maps were approximations (see Wolff 1994), and the borders without security and surveillance systems were rather porous. Along the Habsburg – Ottoman border throughout the centuries the fairly common conflicts engendered "a peculiar form of frontier society where loyalties were unpredictable and border crossing a way of life" (Rieber 2004, 182). This gets reflected in Sejranović's novel too:

> […] the Schwaben [were] making one [fort] on one side, then the Turks making another one the other side, and vice versa.
> But even those 'Schwaben' and those 'Turks' were mostly our people, Serbians, Bosnians, Croatians, Pannonians, Slavic peasants and landless paupers whom misery taught nothing but to fight, steal, burn, and

[53] "to je ponovo bila granica između dva svijeta" (Sejranović 2020, 52)

> pillage. […] At least for two centuries they battled with Turkish vessels the crew of which, again, consisted, at least partially, of our Slavs that converted to Islam.[54]

In the above quote 'our people' entails borderlands people who under various banners, speaking various languages, following various cultural and religious traditions were over and over again divided but also united by ever shifting borders. At the end of the previous section I concluded that exactly this ephemeral quality of state borders and state formations is a critical experience of many generations of Pannonian borderlands dwellers. The experiences of Tolnai's narrator and Neven Ušumović's characters as well as of the asylum seekers in Jászberényi's *The Crow King* brought forward another essential feature of these borders: their violence. The following excerpt from Danyi's *The Carcass Remover* puts the experiences of ephemerality and violence onto a historical continuum, which together seem to suggest that in the Pannonian borderlands very few things are as certain as the ever occuring possibility of violence:

> [T]he Serbs and the Croats, while they screwed each other, fucked up his life too, although actually he had very little to do with it, only that he, due to a trick of fate, was born Yugoslav, or rather so called 'Yugoslav Hungarian', which he had not much to do with again, because that happened due to an earlier war […] so this is more complicated than to be resolved by who is on whose side […] the answer should go back, way back, to the first world war, or even further, to the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, or perhaps even further, to the Turkish or Tatar occupation, because it seems here one can not make a single step without running up against the fucked up past, although everyone had shot everyone else into the Danube and everyone had screwed everyone else's mother multiple times.[55]

[54] "A i te „Švabe" i ti „Turci", većinom sve naši ljudi, Srbi, Bošnjaci, Hrvati, Posavci, slavenski kmetovi i bezemljaška sirotinja koju je nevolja naučila ništa drugo do ratovati, pljačkati, paliti i otimati. Pa zatim surovi pohodi vlaških nomada, turske paravojske zvane martolozi iza kojih ni kokoš više zakokodakala. ... Bar dva stoljeća tukli su se s turskim lađama čije su posade također bar dijelom bile sastavljene od našeg slavenskog življa što je prešlo na islam." (Sejranović 2020, 95-96)

[55] "a szerbek és a horvátok, miközben egymást gyakták, egyúttal az ő életét is alaposan elkúrták, noha tulajdonképpen nem sok köze volt az egészhez, legfeljebb csak annyi, hogy a sors különös játéka folytán jugoszlávnak született, jobban mondva úgynevezett „jugoszláviai magyarnak", amihez viszont megint csak nem sok köze volt, mivel ez meg egy másik, egy korábbi háború következtében alakulhatott így, éppen ezért válaszolta Dalinak azt, hogy ez az egész mégiscsak bonyolultabb annál, semmint hogy el lehetne intézni annyival, hogy ki kinek az oldalán áll, de ha már erről van szó, tette hozzá, akkor viszont messzebbről, jóval messzebbről kellene kezdeni az egészet, az első világháborúnál, vagy még

The above quote is the unnamed narrator's response to the question "on whose side are you actually"[56] posited by Dali, an ethnic Serbian man from Knin, that is the Croatian region the ethnic Serbian population of which in most part keenly supported Milošević's bloody fight for 'Greater Serbia'. The contextual translation of the question would be therefore "are you with the Croats or with the Serbs" asked by an ethnic minority Serb from Croatia from an ethnic minority Hungarian from Serbia. The unnamed narrator's response, that this question cannot be tackled "without running up against the fucked up past" that is without considering the role of historically shifting borders and the all-permeating nature of violence, reveal that he sees the citizen's choices as very limited, often downright predetermined by state borders and the allegiances they prescribe. Case in point, although the war was framed as an issue of the Serbian nation, he as an ethnic Hungarian was also drafted into the army. Yet another segment of this internal monologue reflects on the fact that citizenship is but one aspect of the story:

> they experienced the war very differently the two of them, because while he was taken to the battlefield to risk his life for the Great Serbian Truth, Dali was screwing bar singers and drove around in newer and newer cars in Novi Sad, in cars that were by the way confiscated by his troop or some other similar troop at the 'liberated [Slavonian] territories'[57]

On the one hand this section puts forward the importance of social position and / or wealth under wartime circumstances; but just as importantly it differentiates the two men's approach to the issue of war based on their experiential background: one is a war veteran while the other never experienced

messzebb, az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchiánál, vagy esetleg még annál is messzebb, a török vagy a tatár megszállásnál, mert úgy látszik, hogy az ember egy kurva lépést se tehet itt anélkül, hogy bele ne botlana az elcseszett múltba, habár mindenki belelőtt már mindenkit a Dunába, és mindenki többször is megkúrta mindenki anyját" (Danyi 2022, 114-115)

[56] "kinek az oldalán áll ő tulajdonképpen" (Danyi 2022, 113)

[57] "a háborút szintén nagyon különbözően élték meg ők ketten, mert amíg őt a frontra vitték, hogy az életét tegye kockára a nagy szerb igazságért, addig Dali az esztrád énekesnőket kúrogatta, és újabbnál újabb kocsikkal furikázott Újvidéken, mellesleg éppen azokkal a kocsikkal, amelyeket az ő egysége, vagy más hasonló alakulatok zsákmányoltak az úgynevezett „felszabadított területekről" (Danyi 2015, 115)

warfare. The fact that Dali, a wealthy ethnic Serbian who never experienced warfare, posited such a belligerent question, as "on whose side are you actually", is a powerful emotional trigger for the unnamed narrator. What he revolts against is "the application of a simplifying force" (Balibar 2000, 77) by which Dali's question reduced the complexities of history and the intersectional matrix of individual experiences onto a matter of 'choice'. Sensing his tension Dali abruptly proposes to visit the harbor and get some 'whores', i.e. the raft created by what he perceives as 'ethnic' differences he wants to bridge through the common denominator of gender.

His suggestion shows that Dali obviously did not understand the consequences of the narrator's response. Yet, the fact that he allowed himself to ramble in front of someone who in many ways represents 'the other side' that is the side of warmongers; furthermore is presently his employer (at the moment of their conversation he works as an interior designer in Dali's Dalmatian coastline villa), represents a turning point. Through his speech act he finally starts to reconnect with "the fucked up past that he wanted to get rid of"[58] as the beginning of his reconciliation with his wartime traumas shattered self.

* * *

Since nation state borders play a constitutive role in the structuring of borderlands consciousness, Chapter Two was devoted to the examination of the various meaning(s) state borders acquire in Pannonian borderlands narratives. I was aware that no text could offer an ultimate definition of what borders signify for borderlands consciousness, yet I assumed that the chosen novels would attempt to bring forward some kind of idiosyncratic 'truth' about borders and bordering processes. However, through their close reading I found that these novels are not aiming at disclosing some thus far

[58] "ez az elcseszett múlt volt az, amitől szabadulni próbált" (Danyi 2015: 117)

uncharted or long forgotten knowledge about borders, instead their focus is on the workings of the meaning making mechanism inherent to borders. Thus, reading Pannonian borderlands novels one does not get any reassuring explanation of what borders are, rather an often perplexing and almost always thought provoking cascade of insights into what borders do. Besides depicting the often blood-tainted effects of state borders, these novels bring forward an essential feature of borders: that they are not primarily meant to separate but to introduce a distinction based on which separation becomes not only possible but justified. Since this distinction entails a power structure, the meaning making mechanism inherent to bordering classifies the two 'sides' into hierarchically ordered categories. Therefore, though borders may be ephemeral, as in the south Pannonian region they rather are, the distinction introduced by bordering leaves lasting marks in the affected population and their cultures, languages, political and institutional structures. Furthermore, as the examples in Chapter 2 demonstrated, while bordering is a contingent phenomenon, the categorization central to it each time follows the same logic. It is the unforeseeable nature of borders that makes it impossible to thoroughly unveil the violence inherent to them, and it is the very foreseeable nature of the categorization central to bordering that makes it possible to disrupt or eschew it, even if only temporarily, like Oliver T. did by remaining in his discursive dwelling.

The ephemeral quality of state borders and state formations is a critical experience of many generations of Pannonian borderlands inhabitants, and the novels bring forth those emotional, material, and symbolic imprints that major – and sometimes seemingly minor – shifts of borders left in people. Within these narratives human bodies, feelings, thoughts, and memories are, as Sarah Green put it, the "elsewhere", where the "source of distinction that borders mark" is located (2012, 587). The following chapters hone in on this "elsewhere" as they examine another conceptually distinguished border, that of human.

CHAPTER 3: THE BORDER/LAND/S OF WRITING

The idea of Yugoslavian national collectivity was built on the concept of *Staatsnation*, where the delimitations of national collectivity and the citizens of a state overlap. According to this concept only the citizens of the state could be referred to as members of the national community, and all citizens of the state are equal members of the national collectivity irrespective of their ethnic or other affiliations (Yuval-Davis 1998, 27). Due to this inclusive concept of national collectivity from the 1960s until the 1990s ethnic Hungarians (and also ethnic Romanians, Slovaks etc.) predominantly referred to themselves as Yugoslav Hungarians (Romanians, Slovaks etc.) or even as Yugoslavs (Roginer 2019, 138). However, starting from the 1980s the newly emerging chauvinistic Serbian political and intellectual leadership increasingly defined Serbian national collectivity as a mixture of *Kulturnation* and *Volksnation*, that is a collectivity based on shared culture and biological relations (Yuval-Davis 1998, 30). This approach eventually became hegemonic in Serbian politics and played a foundational role in the justification of Serbian military violence in former Yugoslav territories. By 2010 the conceptual mixture of *Kulturnation* and *Volksnation* became a widespread ideological pattern in Eastern Europe, so much so that Ivan Krastev argued that the preference for *Kulturnation / Volksnation* together with a readiness to accept government promoted identity constructs is historically predetermined in the region:

> While the European Union is founded on the French notion of the nation (where belonging is defined as loyalty to the institutions of the Republic) and the German notion of the state (powerful Länder and a relatively weak federal center), central European states were built on the reverse: they combine a French admiration for the centralized and all-powerful state with the idea that citizenship means common descent and shared culture, as held by the Germans (Krastev 2017, 294).

Though it may be disputed whether this necessarily leads to an exclusionary conceptualization of national collectivity, in the case of Serbia and since the 2010 victory of the Fidesz-KDNP government in Hungary it definitely did. Understandably, in this political constellation most ethnic Hungarians from Vojvodina opted to adapt the right-wing ethno-nationalistic identity constructions propagated by the Hungarian government (Losoncz, A. 2016, 86). Already during the succession of Yugoslavia Hungary represented a safe haven for many ethnic Hungarian youth fleeing from the army draft as well as families leaving because of economic hardship. By the end of the war and Serbia's return to relative political stability Hungary and in particular Budapest became the most significant cultural and political reference point for most Vojvodina Hungarians (Bakos 2016, 10-11; Losoncz, A. 2016, 86). Since Fidesz "united the nation" by granting Hungarian citizenship for members of the Hungarian diaspora in 2010, the popularity of Fidesz skyrocketed among diaspora Hungarian communities including Vojvodina.

During the past few years the trans-border unity of the Hungarian nation was further emphasized. Representatives of the Hungarian government regularly perform symbolic yet powerful trespasses of state borders for instance with the public display of the image of 'Greater Hungary' (Molnár 2020). Another such symbolic trespass of state borders concerns the border between Hungary and Serbia. Instead of the official name of Vojvodina or Vajdaság in Hungarian the government more and more often uses the term "Délvidék". The historical political term "Délvidék" that is "southern land" or "southern territory" during the Medieval Ages referred to the southern region of the Kingdom of Hungary, that is present day Međmurje and Prekmurje (Slovenia), Slavonija and Baranja (Croatia), Bačka and Srem (Serbia), and Banat (divided between Hungary, Romania and Serbia). The long obsolete term since the 1990s went through a historical revival though with a modified meaning. Hungarian far-right irredentist groups started to use it as a replacement for the historically and

politically accurate term Vajdaság that is Vojvodina; then from far-right vocabulary it gradually entered mainstream Hungarian colloquial where presently the two expressions are used interchangeably. Since 2010 the Fidesz-KDNP right-wing populist government gave further weight to the term "Délvidék" by regularly referring to the Hungarian community in Vojvodina as "délvidéki magyarok" that is "southern Hungarians".

Despite these symbolic border trespasses intergovernmental relations between Belgrade and Budapest are "the best in recent history", at least according to Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić.[59] This is partly due to the close financial ties of the two governments, the most spectacular element of which is the building of the Belgrade – Budapest fast train line (Curic and Kálmán 2021). The Serbian government also wholeheartedly welcomed the Hungarian government's economic aid program nominally aimed at supporting ethnic Hungarian entrepreneurs to be able to remain and prosper in their historical homeland. In reality this program was meant to increase the Vojvodina Hungarian community's willingness to vote for Fidesz, while most of the money went to entrepreneurs who maintain close ties with both Fidesz and SNS (Gyurkovics 2022).

As I already discussed in the Introduction's contextual section, by the second half of the 2010s the Hungarian and the Serbian government arrived to a very similar political and ideological platform. This platform can be best described as populism in so far as populism "pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous 'others' who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice" (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008, 3 in Pető 2021, 314). Consequently, the right-wing ethno-nationalistic identity constructions propagated by these two governments are also of the same mold in so far as they both forefront a unified and homogeneous White Christian Hungarian / Serbian identity.

[59] See for instance https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/192829/relations-of-serbia-hungary-the-best-in-recent-history.php

Besides nationalist, traditionalist, and xenophobic attitudes this identity construct has one more ubiquitous constitutive element: patriarchal ideology (Félix 2015, 67, Hughson 2020: 72). Analyzing Serbian masculinity of the 1990s Marina Blagojević (Hughson) established that nationalistic state propaganda argued for "(a) the necessity of Serbian 'protection,' since Serbs were 'threatened,' and (b) Serbian 'difference,' in the sense of its superiority over 'Others' [while] Serbianhood was constructed as Manhood, and vice versa" (Blagojević 2006 quoted in Hughson 2020, 73). The same logic still applies for contemporary Serbian hegemonic masculinity together with its Hungarian counterpart, but as the studies in *Gender as a symbolic glue*, a seminal volume on European conservative parties connections with anti-gender mobilization show, the phenomenon is not unique to the region (see Kováts and Põim 2015).

The purpose of this introduction was to outline the political and ideological climate affecting south Pannonian borderlands people. As all novels discussed in this dissertation are connected to Serbia (Vojvodina) and because with the exception of Bekim Sejranović's novel all novels maintain ties to Hungary, I focused on these two countries. Since both governments more and more vehemently promote their respective ethno-nationalist identity constructions there is lesser and lesser space for more inclusive and / or diversified and / or heterogeneous options, because for the parochial nationalist mindset "[c]omplexity is always a crisis of safety" (Konstantinović 2021, 31). The state-sanctioned hegemony of homogenous identity constructs represents an especially pressing problem in the borderlands as most borderlands people have mixed sociocultural heritages. Not only that they are marginalized by mainstream discourses, but with the close to complete governmental colonization of the media and civil spheres there are hardly any venues left where dissident voices could be heard. As party politics entirely permeated the entrepreneurial and public sectors, those who do not collaborate can easily become outsiders with precarious existences.

The question is how can one maintain a borderlands consciousness between the two jaws of a vise? Through the close reading of south Pannonian borderlands novels this chapter will show some literary examples for that.

To be certain, borderlands consciousness is not fixedly present in these novels; therefore it cannot be mined for like some precious ore, yet it can be accessed through the close examination of its actions. As discussed in Chapter 2, many borderlands people harbor the desire for an idiom that offers a measure of freedom from encountering forces that make them identify, that is limit, themselves. In this chapter I will discuss the literary tools with which south Pannonian borderlands novels construct their dissident idiom. In doing so, I will focus on the way they relate to the genre of autobiography.

I chose to focus on this genre because in its traditional forms autobiography offered a coherent developmental narrative of an autonomously conceived human self. Furthermore, by positing the distinctive features of self-governing, white, middle-class, cis-heterosexual male as the apex of human values, autobiography in its conventional form participated in the construction of the so-called universal human as well as in the silencing of other experiences and representations of human condition. In other words, autobiography played a constitutive role in the formation and international distribution of homogenous identity constructs that ethno-nationalist governments revive.

Therefore the first section of the chapter, *Probing the genre* will briefly summarize the main features of conventional autobiography. Next, it will discuss those seminal feminist interventions into the genre, which opened up the horizon of autobiographic writing and together with that introduced novel ways of thinking about identity construction. Though much of these works are from the late 20th century, they still represent a valid toolkit in a fight against oppressive identity politics. In fact, what prompted my turn to them is that the tools contemporary Pannonian novels use to counter the current

upsurge of homogenous and exclusionary identity constructs in the region show many continuities with the feminist toolkit of the 1990s.

In the following two sections I will discuss the way Pannonian borderlands novels' narration constructs those *nooks* and *crannies* where from attempts at disrupting the rule of state-sanctioned straight jacket identities could potentially spring up. Thus, the second section of the chapter, *Nooks* will be therefore devoted to select Pannonian borderlands novels that can also be read as experimental and / or fictional autobiographies, notably Orsolya Bencsik's *Extra life*, Katalin Ladik's *Can I live on your face?*, and Ottó Tolnai's *The two sterile cups.* This section will examine what these Pannonian borderlands autobiographical writings propose in contrast to the stable, unified, and bounded identity construction advocated by conventional autobiography.

Building on the insights of *Nooks*, the third section, *Crannies* enriches the discussion by involving further texts to explore the ways first person narrators are constructed in borderlands novels. With the exception of Sándor Jászberényi's *The Crow King*, all Pannonian borderlands novels this dissertation engages with are narrated in the first person(s), and even Jászberényi's short novel has such a strong focalizing figure that much of the features conventionally associated with first person narration are applicable to his story. *Crannies* posits the question what does first person narration enable for Pannonian borderlands authors, why do they opt for it across genders and generations.

PROBING THE GENRE

Already our ancestors' could only express themselves in arts, we had no other way to talk about ourselves than by way of recoiling into the text.

(Erzsébet Juhász 1984)[60]

Human as an analytical category, as it was developed during the European Enlightenment, has determined ever since the Eurocentric conception of political and human rights, as well as Eurocentric approaches to the non-human world. The borders of 'human' were for the past centuries envisioned as clear-cut boundaries seamlessly separating what does not or rather should not belong together. This vision was foundational to the way the human body was imagined (as a container or a vessel, see Scheibinger 1993); the way the human self was imagined (as an autonomous unit, see Evans 1999, Anderson, L. 2006); and the way human communities were imagined (as homogenous entities, see Anderson, B. 1983). The perceived borders of 'human' were then foundational to every other form of bordering; among others, as shown in Chapter 2, the distinction between those considered full-fledged humans and the not /yet/ or sub- humans is inherent to and reinstated by state borders including those of the European Union. 'Human', though, has never managed to become a stable category, rather those who stepped up as humans attempted to secure its boundaries through reiterated exclusionary gestures. The notion of the self-governing human was rooted in western man's arrogant fantasy of being independent from and superior to others, and separate from everything other than his consciousness, including the materiality of his own body. As this fantasy was central to white men's self-image, since the European Enlightenment there has been enormous conceptual and material effort invested in the continuous re-affirmation of 'human' borders both in theoretical and in practice. The fact that the act

[60] „[M]ár eleink megszólalása is csak művészi lehetett, vallanunk magunkról sohasem adatott meg másként, mint behátrálva a műbe" (Erzsébet Juhász: *Műkedvelők*; quoted in Bencsik 2022, 98)

of bordering never ceased, that the borders of 'human' were never drawn once and for all signals the unavoidable contingency and incompleteness of the endeavor.

The Cartesian fantasy of humans, understood as white, wealthy, able bodied, cis-heterosexual men living individual lives detached from other human and non-human beings had a formatting effect on past centuries' autobiographical writings too. The inherence of particular exclusionary practices in western autobiographical writing has been extensively discussed in Mary Evans's biography of autobiography, *Missing Persons: The impossibility of auto/biography*. Evans regarded the development of self-consciousness and the negotiation of the boundaries of public/private as the most characteristic features of 19th and 20th century western autobiography writing (1999, 12). Through these features the fantasy about 'progress' and 'order' were maintained (1999, 75-76), as well as "…the fantasy that individuals live lives which are separate both from general patterns in any culture and from other human beings" (1999, 128). According to Evans, the fact that the analysis of relationships between the self and others was deliberately left out from 19th and 20th century western autobiographical writing acted as fuel for "the culture's desire for managed difference" and helped "to turn our backs on the shared circumstances of social life" (1999, 143). Consequently she arrives at the conclusion that if autobiography is capable of existing only through such maneuvers which deny influences which have shaped the autobiographical subject, then what these practices of exclusion disclose is the impossibility of writing the self in its 'totality', or, in other words, the impossibility of auto-bio-graphy as one-self-writing (1999, 178).

By this conclusion Evans certainly does meant not herald the end of autobiography as a genre, what she points out is that at a closer look the bounded, complete, stable subjectivity of conventional autobiographies appears as untenable. In other words, the emperor wears no clothes. Conventional autobiography like the identity construction propagated by classist, racist, and / or sexist political

ideologies attempts to hide the non-existence of ultimate borders between communities, cultures, genders, and humans by reenactments of the distinction that these borders, had they existed, were supposed to maintain.

Second-wave feminists during the 1960s and 1970s dismantled autobiography as a bulwark of patriarchal ideology, and the genre quickly became "a privileged space for women to discover new forms of subjectivity" (Anderson, L. 2006, 119). From the 1980s on Black, intersectional and postcolonial feminist interventions into the theory of the genre further widened its horizon of possibilities. The following few examples were selected not as representatives of a particular school or strand of thought but because the ideological and political context within which these proposals were articulated resembles the current context of Pannonian borderlands literature, and / or because these proposals offer a prism through which the dissident streak of borderlands autobiographic production can be fruitfully read.

Mae Gwendolyn Henderson emphasized the interlocutory or dialogical character of women's autobiographical writings, thus challenging conventional autobiography's purported focus on one single individual. Focusing on Black women's texts, Henderson claimed that the interlocutory character of Black women's writings is "a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self" (1998, 344), drawing on the notion of dialogism introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin:

> [A]t any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions […] These 'languages' of heteroglossia intersect each other … forming new socially typifying 'languages' [which then] may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically … in the consciousness of real people – first and foremost in the creative consciousness of people who write novels. (Bakhtin 1981, 291-292).

According to Henderson Black woman writers' autobiographical texts are spaces of heteroglossia because they consist of dialogues with the external discourses of racism and sexism, but also with the internalized distortions caused by racism and sexism. Significantly, her chosen conceptual frame for exploring these dialogues is Hans Georg Gadamer's dialectical model of conversation, which, unlike Bakhtin's model that conceives verbal interactions as contestations, assumes that a conversation aims at the creation of a sense of community and consensus (Henderson 1998, 345-346).

Henderson's apprehensions about Black women's autobiographies are also applicable to borderlands literary works. As I will discuss later, it is among the distinguishing features of the works of Bencsik, Danyi, Ladik, Nadj Abonji, Sejranović, Tišma, and Tolnai that their novel's rhetorical construction of the narrator and / or protagonist readily though not painlessly embraces the 'other' within it. In other words instead of rejecting those externally constructed features, which in the semiotic field of the majority culture(s) act like markers of their difference, they engage in productive dialogues with them.

Drawing on autobiographical writings of Afro-American and Francophone woman writers Francoise Lionnet forefronts that these narratives are quests for a different past, one that could be excavated from under the patriarchal and racial inscriptions, while these very inscriptions are also present in their writings in the form of internalized negative stereotypes (1998, 330). Further she claims that these autobiographical writings engender multifold discursive textures within which the denotative and connotative layers contradict and subvert each other (1998, 331).

The significance of this approach in present time Pannonian borderlands discursive field can be best disclosed by way of remembering how the ethno-nationalist ideology approaches the past:

> The past is not something that isn't the present, a kind of pre-present, or non-present. The past is leastwise the anticipation of the present, but much more so its affirmation. A provincial looks for the satisfaction of

> his need everywhere, in his neighborhood as well as in time; he wants the past as his confirmation, and therefore wants it not. (Konstantinović 2021, 29)

As the works of Losoncz (2022) and Pető (2017) showed it holds true for both Hungarian and Serbian governmental discourses that they, with the words of Konstantinović, 'want the past as their confirmation', i.e. they have a rather selective approach to the past. This is emphatically true for Vučić's government's approach to the wars of the 1990s, and for the Orbán government's approach to Hungary's participation in the Second World War. Bencsik, Danyi, Nadj Abonji, Tolnai and Ušumović to some extent all engage in a quest for a different past, and often they do so by creating, as Lionnet claimed, text's within which the denotative and connotative layers contradict and subvert each other. The following passage from *The Carcass Remover* that I already quoted in Chapter 2, well illustrates this dynamics:

> things fall apart just like that, they turn into dust, and everything wears itself out, because that is the law of things, under which only Serbia is an exception, because 'Serbia is eternal', says the Serbian minister of internal affairs in the TV[61]

'Serbia is eternal', in its full form 'Serbia is eternal as long as her children are loyal to her'[62], is a slogan that dates back to the First World War, recycled in the 1990s by radical right-wing warmonger politicians to entice the fighting spirit of Serbian men. Then, during the past decade followers of Vučić recycled it again without much reflection on its previous use. In Danyi's text the accentuation of the assumedly 'eternal' quality of the nation state project within the context of the protagonist's ponderings about the finitude of all things extant exposes the inherent violence of the slogan.

[61] "a dolgok maguktól hullanak darabokra, maguktól porladnak el, és saját magát koptatja el lassan minden, mert ez a törvény, amely alól egyedül Szerbia kivétel, mert „Szerbia örök", mondja a szerb belügyminiszter a tévében" (Danyi 2015, 146)

[62] In the Serbian original: Србија је вечна док су јој деца верна. / Srbija je večna dok su joj deca verna.

Autobiography can be also approached through the prism offered by Ellen Rooney, who argued for an understanding of representation "as *productive* of differences rather than as *reflecting* predetermined differences", and posited literature as an "active force" capable of constructing a subjectivity as well as dismantling it (2006, 89). From this angle autobiography appears as a historically specific construct, which is accomplished through discursive practices that tie subjectivity, memory and narration together. Consequently autobiographical accounts can be approached as sites of memory where through the narration of one's past various self-constructions are negotiated. Thus, autobiography writing does not reflect an a priori stable self, rather the repetitions of signification, that is writing constructs it, or as Kim L. Worthington put it, "[r]emembrance and self-reflection are narrative acts in which we create, rather than simply retrieve, our personal pasts and hence our conceptions of who we are" (1996, 16). Even if the narrator of an autobiography straightforwardly tells the reader about their body and bodily functions, these are the features of a discursively construed self, the coherence of which is created, sustained, and potentially destroyed by poetic means. As I will discuss, the narrators of Bencsik, Juhász, Ladik, Sejranović, and Tolnai all display an awareness of the fact that they are participating in the construction of a discursively construed self.

* * *

As Evans sarcastically yet accurately formulated, conventional autobiographic writing is trapped in the "prison created by the need for the coherent self" (1999: 24). What do borderlands writers do with(in) this prison? The following two sections will attempt to respond.

NOOKS

To avoid potential generic confusions I would like to emphasize that none of the literary works selected for this dissertation are autobiographies proper, they all belong to the genre of autobiographic fiction. Autobiographic fiction has a more allowing framework than autobiography does, yet they have many shared characteristics.[63]

As Elizabeth Grosz pointed out, "the sexuality and corporeality of the [writing] subject leave their traces or marks on the texts produced" (1995, 21). The authorial presence in autobiographic writings, that is autobiographies and autobiographic novels alike, may be retraceable in the form of such 'footprints' in the texture of the fictional world which can be pursued going 'backwards', following the biographical traces of the author, and 'forwards', looking into the produced discursive persona's dimensions. For that reason, according to Grosz, the footprints of the author could act as 'hinges' where the author and the text are sliding onto each other or away from each other (ibid.).

Orsolya Bencsik's *Extra life*, Katalin Ladik's *Can I live on your face?*, Melinda Nadj Abonji's *Fly away, pigeon*, Bekim Sejranović's *My son, Huckleberry*, and Ottó Tolnai's *The two sterile cups* are all rich in 'footprints' left in the text, that is verifiable biographical facts of their authors. Without attempting to offer an exhaustive list, here is but a few: in *Extra life* the family home is in Topolya [see Table 2], where Orsolya Bencsik was born and raised. The narrator's mother is a high school literature teacher, just like Bencsik's mother. Bencsik's first collection of prose, *Akció van!* (2012) is mentioned as the book of the narrator, who, as we find out, is called Bencsik, and receives the same literary scholarship that Orsolya Bencsik received while writing this novel. In Katalin Ladik's book there are three Katalin Ladiks and each of them possesses some documents, among them personal and official

[63] For a possible distinction between autobiography 'proper' and autobiographic fiction see Lejeune 1989.

letters, bills, contracts etc. addressed for or undersigned by Katalin Ladik. All of them readily share these within their segments, i.e. the text abounds in visual proofs that each of these Katalin Ladiks are indeed the Katalin Ladik whose biographical data are printed on the volume's inner cover. The name of the first person narrator of *My son, Huckleberry* remains undisclosed, yet all of his biographical data are identical with that of Bekim Sejranović, the author. Furthermore, the longest episodic insert of the novel is about the narrator's adventure with a Japanese and a Norwegian guy aboard the Savska Buba. In this narrative insert the three men take the boat down the Sava and the Danube to the Black Sea in an attempt to make a river-movie about the voyage. Although they never reach the Black Sea, they record a documentary about the segment of the river route they covered. This documentary is actually available online with Bekim Sejranović being the captain of the boat.[64] Melinda Nadj Abonji grew up in Switzerland in an immigrant Vojvodina Hungarian family that run a café, furthermore *Fly away, pigeon*'s Ildi Kocsis has the same birthplace and family structure as the author. The house from where Oliver T., the first person narrator of *The two sterile cups* starts off at the beginning of the novel is the author's Palics home, Oliver T.'s wife has the same name, Jutka, as Tolnai's wife, and last but not least Oliver T. even has the same initials as the author, Ottó Tolnai.

The inherent subversive potentialities of autobiographic fiction as a genre were revealed by feminist literary studies. Discussing female autobiographies Carolyn Heilbrun pointed out that despite the generic conventions of autobiography until the 1960s even women of high social standing did not discuss their lives as exemplary, rather as "exceptions chosen by destiny or chance" (1995, 20). Yet, during that same era many women opted to disguise and displace their personal battles and successes by embedding them into some other form, such as fiction. Thus, by creating a 'fictional self' the woman

[64] The documentary *From Tokyo to the Morava river / Od Tokija do Morave* is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PynZBejEbE. Last accessed on 23/01/2023.

writer "avoids the controlling form of the conventional autobiography" (Evans 2000, 76). Furthermore, as autobiographic fiction allows for more freedom within the narrative, it enables the inclusion of topics that conventional autobiography precluded. Moreover, autobiographic fiction may also incorporate reflections on events, which have affected the narrator as a member of a community as well as on her position within a community, her relationships with others, as well as with herself and her past.

Although these analyses focus on the way women deployed the generic particularities of autobiographic fiction, the toolkit they engage with holds the same potential for borderlands writers too. By fictionalizing their selves borderlands writers may discuss politically risky or tabooized topics, the way Ottó Tolnai did by tackling the everyday occurrence of violence in the border zone; or the way Katalin Ladik did by revealing the significance of appropriate cultural and gender codes in dealing with authorities. Within autobiographic fiction borderlands writers can also counter the delimiting and distortive effects of homogenously conceived identity constructions by creating more allowing, flexible, and nuanced options.

At the beginning of Tolnai's *The two sterile cups* the story starts out seemingly straightforwardly, with a first person narrator recounting his departure from home to take care of a chore, i.e. to buy to sterile cups for his forthcoming urethra examination. After several dozens of pages all at once it turns out that this first person narrator is actually speaking to someone, that he has been speaking to someone all this time, that he has been in a conversation with someone, and this person has his own say in the story – adds to it, comments on it, asks questions, challenges the narrator's statements or reminds him of some undisclosed or forgotten detail, as interlocutors usually do. Eventually the first person narrator who spoke about departing from home, and whom we learn to identify as Oliver T., goes on with his story, but several dozens of pages further along another interlocutor appears with his set of comments, questions, and requests for clarification. Hundred pages or so into the novel as newer

and newer (but from Tolnai's earlier works quite familiar) conversational partners appear the reader comes to an understanding that this is not a conversation with a couple or at most several participants but a gathering. The apropos of the gathering remains undisclosed but its aim increasingly seems to be to support Oliver T. in telling his adventures. Yet, as much as the attention of the interlocutors propels the story forward, their very presence urges Oliver T. to engage with more and more details and to more and more often go down memory lane. Furthermore, not only does he clarify, chisel, detail, reconsider and revise his story in the light of his conversational partners' interjections while they are present; but he also does so while he is talking to the border patrol, the prison guards, the guards at the psychiatric ward. In other words, Oliver T. added things, included elements, enriched layers of the narrative as if his interlocutors were present *at all times*.

In large part *The two sterile cups* consists of Oliver T.'s recounting of how he tried to "talk himself together" in front of various authority figures, in other words much of the story is an unmarked quotation of an earlier speech of his, a speech that was created when

> [t]he great flaneur of modernism, the one who walks around aimlessly, just for the sake of it, [is met by] modernism's two large supra-human invention, the police forces and psychiatry, which immediately attempt to "normalize" him and fit him within their frameworks (Ladányi 2019, 47)[65].

As stated, while being held by the border patrol, and later in the municipal prison and the psychiatric ward, Oliver T. in his incessant speech regularly evokes his regular conversational partners, who seem to be present for him at all times together with their sometimes witty, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes challenging, and once in a while supportive remarks and other interjections. They are present, at least for Oliver T., while the speech takes place – at the border, in the prison, on the ward – and they are also

[65] „A modernizmus kószálóját, a haszontalanul, értelmetlenül sétálót, csatangolót, bámészkodót a modernizmus két nagy, az emberek fölött uralkodó találmánya: a rendfenntartás és a pszichiátria próbálja 'normálissá' formálni és elhelyezni a maga keretei között." (Ladányi 2019, 47)

present, perhaps again only for Oliver T, but not necessarily, when the whole speech is re-told as part of the story about his arrest. As Oliver T. tries to meet their real or assumed expectations in both dimensions of his speech, his story becomes ever more complex, meandering, extensive and profuse, and from an in effect very localizable story (everything takes place within 15 kilometers of the starting point, Oliver T.'s house) the speech bursts out and sweeps through small townships on the Adriatic coastline, Zagreb and Belgrade, Budapest, Berlin, Paris, Niagara Falls, and in relation to these various encounters and other events connected to diverse people and times.

As it is apparent, in Tolnai's *The two sterile cups* the poetic construct of the narrative identity is absolutely not in the service of keeping up the coherence, directionality, and autonomy of a self, i.e. the three main components of conventional autobiographic accounts and of narrowly conceived identity constructions. Just the opposite, the speech of Oliver T. often runs on so many threads at once that it becomes convoluted and the reader – especially those uninitiated into Tolnai's world – feels utterly lost (sometimes the initiated ones too, but they have come to enjoy it). Even the narrator himself feels lost at times:

> I sat there exhausted, paralyzed, absolutely empty. In some moments as if I had a clear view of myself. True, the then there was always a moment when I could not differentiate any more between a figure or hero of my texts and myself.[66]

By turning the narration into such an echo chamber of various voices, Tolnai's prose evokes Henderson's notion about autobiography as a space of heteroglossia, that is the incessant dialogue of a multitude of voices within the self. This is the most apparent when faced with authorities "deeply engaged in conversation the narrator surrounds himself with a plethora of imaginary doubles" [67]

[66] "Ott ültem kimerülten, lebénulva, abszolút kiürülve. Egy-egy pillanatra akárha rálátásom lett volna magamra. Igaz, akkor mindig volt egy pillanat, amikor nem tudtam különbséget tenni a szövegek-szövegeléseim, meséim egy-egy jellegzetes figurája, hőse és magam között." (Tolnai 2018: 172)

[67] "A társalgásba mélyedő mesélő alakmások siserehadát képzeli maga köré." (Thomka 2019: 109)

(Thomka 2019, 109). The presence of these 'imaginary doubles' enables him to stay within his idiom instead of entering the bureaucratic idiom proposed by the authorities. In other words these 'others', that is his interlocutors are key to his maintenance of his discursive dwelling, his temporary nook of freedom. At the same time the way he "talked himself into threads" in front of authorities is an allegory of the whole book's narration, thus the whole book represents a discursive dwelling.

It has been established that Tolnai's narrators always only seemingly attempt to self-identify and / or self-define, but "their facial features […] never are clearly recognizable" (Virág 2010, 58). The narrator's quasi revealing gestures can be seen as a form of "face-covering, mask-like self-identification" (2022, 165); but also interpreted as attempts at the construction of a private mythology, a "Tolnai-portrait exhibit" (Novák 2018, 45). Although I consider all these as valid readings, there is a thus far neglected aspect of Tolnai's approach to the autobiographic narrator's construction. The scene in *The two sterile cups* when Oliver T. recounts a visit to a hand made stamp shop during his trip to Japan holds a possible key to it.

> [Upon entering the store] [m]y eyes were caught by one of the smallest, most simple, most insignificant stamps that had but a tiny flower ideogram on it. This is the one, I said. […] To my surprise my translator contested my choice, which is the most unusual from a Japanese man in his position. […] Finally I asked him, why is he so much against me buying it? He said because this sign, which is most probably used during inventories, says:
>
> TO BE SUPPLEMENTED
>
> But this is exactly, said I, what I was looking for, I want to put this stamp onto things that the audience, the reader should indeed supplement, I shall place it on my texts…[68]

[68] "Nekem azonnal megakadt a szemem az egyik legkisebb, legegyszerűbb, legjelentéktelenebb, valóban csak egy kis virágideogramot mutató pecséten. Mondtam, ez az. […] Meglepetésemre a fordítóm ellenkezni kezdett, ami szinte

In my interpretation this scene reveals Tolnai's deep conviction that the work of construction in literature, including the construction of the self is never done and cannot be done without others.

The first person narrator of Orsolya Bencsik's *Extra life* is constructed as a single voice, yet this single voice keeps several interconnected narrative layers in motion. It is unclear where her story begins – with the meeting of the grandparents, the progenitors, the founding elders of her three generational family unit; or was their story something that the parents held dear and recounted to their daughters, or is it that the narrator, who is one of the daughters, retrospectively analyses the grandparents' and her parents' marriages in order to learn about the workings of heterosexual relationships? Or, and this seems the most probable, what the first person narrator analyses are the stories heard from her parents, some of which they also heard from their parents. As a book reviewer aptly remarked, "the narrator is jumping here and there in time and space looking for her place […] and tells stories on the fly about everyone she bumps into, yet her family remains her starting point." (Fekete 2016) Indeed, family stories represent the book's as well as the narrator's foundation. She attempts to create her own world apart from her family in her Szeged-based solitude only to find that everything that she finds meaningful there actually borrows their meaning through some associative or commemorative channels from the family household. The gendered dimensions of this struggle I will analyze in detail in Chapter 4, here I will remain focused on structural features of the text.

The reader can so easily get lost among the overlapping folds of stories about the narrator and her family members that I would compare the reading of *Extra life* to that of looking at strangers'

elképzelhetetlen egy japán embernél. [...] Végül megkérdeztem, magyarázza meg nekem, miért nem akarja, hogy megvegyem? Azt mondta, azért, mert azt írja rajta, ugyanis több mint valószínű, leltár alkalmával használják, hogy:
KI KELL PÓTOLNI
De hát én, mondtam, pontosan ezt kerestem, én olyan dolgokat akarok lepecsételni vele, amelyeket tényleg ki kell pótolnia a nézőnek, az olvasónak, mert szövegeimre is ráütögettem, ki kell pótolniuk valamiféleképpen…" (Tolnai 2018, 195)

family album. While at first the faces on the photographs are perplexingly alien, certain figures become recognizable after a while. Later we may also discern the nature of relations among particular characters, and if we devote ample time to the album eventually our imagination will start filling in the hiatuses and construct narrative threads. By this parallel I mean to suggest that *Extra life*, like Tolnai's novel, presupposes the readers' active participation in the meaning making process.

Bencsik's narrative unhinges the generic expectations towards the narrative direction typical of conventional autobiography as well as the coming of age novel, that is a narrative that depicts the self as gradually progressing towards greater autonomy, more agency, and higher consciousness levels by means of overcoming obstacles. The narrator, instead of increasing her independence as measured by societal standards, eventually returns to the family homestead and devotes herself to a practice enjoyed by her family: yielding piglets. The family's intimate connection to these animals conventionally associated with filth I will also analyze in the following chapter.

Katalin Ladik's *Can I live on your face?* is a *de facto* photo album merged into an experimental autobiographic novel that quilts together various literary genres and visual representational forms. The main narrative is composed on three female voices, that is three first person narrators, all of whom are called Katalin Ladik, yet they are separate persons. The photographic implants have a particular importance in the novel's autobiographic structure. These photographs and photo collages, mostly made during the late 1960s, the '70s and '80s, as Éva Hózsa put it, are once more "actualized" by their juxtaposition with present time autobiographic reflections. Furthermore, Hózsa claims that by inserting old photos of herself into her autobiography Ladik performs a radical act: she elevates her self out of the images made of herself (2007, 26-27). The importance of this gesture in Ladik's oeuvre cannot be overstated. As she explained in an interview, the nude photographs taken unwarrantedly during her poetic performances and then circulated without context and permission "stigmatized me as the 'naked

poetess', and as such I have no real place in Hungarian literature." (Bakos 2019) Therefore, by implanting these notorious images into the body of her reflexive and edgy autobiographical experiment she re-incorporated these externalized versions of herself via creative means.

For Ladik, like for the Afro-American and Francophone woman writers Francoise Lionnet analyzed, autobiography is a quest for a different past, one that could be excavated from under patriarchal stereotypes and traumas, but also for a different present, one that is free from negative stereotypes. Since there are three narrators in the novel, neither of them can be fully identified with the author, yet in their heated exchanges and debates there are a plethora of critical reflections on the violence of borders, straight jacket gender and national identities, and state ideologies.

Ottó Tolnai's *The two sterile cups*, Orsolya Bencsik's *Extra life*, Katalin Ladik's *Can I live on your face?* are autobiographical texts that very consciously utilize the possibilities opened up by the framework of fiction. They disrupt a base notion about conventional autobiographic narration, which is that always the same singular 'I' says 'I'. In Bencsik's novel it is basically impossible to keep apart the first person narrator's voice as it so seemlessly fits into the family choir; in Ladik's book the many Katalin Ladiks pass back and forth the baton of first person narratorial position; in Tolnai's novel there are a multitude of first person narrators who tirelessly enter each others' monologues. At the sam time these novels so emphatically promote their autobiographic elements as if they were tempting their reader to identify the first person narrator's voice with that of the author; then forcefully blow up any such attempt by pushing their fictional features forward. They give with one hand and take away with the other, and while doing so they destabilize the commonsensical idea that someone's biographic data are identical with their selves. Introducing the disruptive element of creativity into the identification process, the self-constructions in these texts stepped out of the "prison created by the need for the coherent self" (Evans 1999, 24).

CRANNIES

The question of how Pannonian borderlands consciousness that incorporates, as Chapter 2 showed, a multitude of historical experiences, perspectives, cultural and linguistic codes could be represented by a single point of view may come naturally here. First person narration is a mode of storytelling within which the narrator appears as an 'I' who remembers and / or reflects upon events that they witnessed or participated in. Conventional first person narration conjures the illusion that the narration is continuous, coherent, unbroken and related to one single point of view represented by one identity at all times, in other words that always the same 'I' says 'I'. While the first person narration of Ottó Tolnai's *The two sterile cups*, Orsolya Bencsik's *Extra life*, Katalin Ladik's *Can I live on your face?* directly or indirectly involved further voices thus opening up the possibility of integrating further points of view, most other Pannonian borderlands novels do not operate with such an obvious display of extra narrators. In Erzsébet Juhász's *Border Novel*, Bekim Sejranović's *My son, Huckleberry*, or Zoltán Danyi's *The Carcass Remover* first person narration is indeed maintained by one single voice.

Yet, what seems like an undivided single voice may also be a composite of perspectives. This comment deserves clarification. Dividing narrator and narration in the case of a first person narrative might sound counter-intuitive, however, as it has been established in classical narratology, the narrator's voice and the narrated first person singular persona are not necessarily identical (Margolin 2014). For instance Bekim Sejranović's *My son, Huckleberry* is a lengthy monologue by a severe drug addict on a boat searching for his potentially dead father while taking innumerable varieties and combinations of drugs in the meantime. From the narration we learn in detail how he prepares his drug cocktails, in what ways he consumes them, how they take effect, and what happens next. Yet, even

though the whole monologue is in present tense, clearly there is a time gap between the doings of the man on the boat and the narration of the events, because, simply, someone under the effect of so many drugs could not possibly tell a story with such coherence. In other words, in this novel there are at least two perspectives present: that of the point of view character, who experiences things, and the narrator. Although while reading one often intuitively identifies these two, the text's compositional elements and the time-lag introduced by writing serve as constant reminders that the river dweller's persona is a construction engendered through narration.

My other example is Erzsébet Juhász's *Border Novel*. The opening text of the book, *Egy villamos végállomást jelző csengetése*, that is *A tram's bell marking the end station* is about the fondest memory of Angeline Nenadovits / Nenádovics / Nenadović. This special memory is of a golden early autumn day spent riding the tram upon Angeline's arrival in the city in 1910. While the nonagenarian Angeline remembers that day of her youth, the time of the narration, in the late 1980s, and the time of the story, the gilded era of the Habsburg Monarchy right before the First World War, organically connect. Within the book this story also acts as a "hosting narrative" (Faragó 2001, 96), because Angeline's remembering enables the introduction of various figures, love interests and family members, and through them the whole web of relationships among people and localities that the novel will later swirl around. This text therefore is positioned similarly to that of the *enumeratio* in classic epic poems, in the sense that it catalogues events and localities and introduces genealogies necessary for further reading.

The dominant perspective is of course Angeline's; it is through her inner murmuring that the reader gets to know a segment of her universe. Yet, Angeline's stream of consciousness is but one thread of the text. It is due to an omniscient narrator that the reader may access Angeline's memories, a narrator that apart from providing access to Angeline's thoughts also comments on them,

contextualizes them, and supplements them. The written words of the narration represent another thread of the text. A further thread is comprised of the blanks and indeterminacies left in the narration, intentionally or not, for the reader to resolve them. For instance, the three family names, Nenadovits / Nenádovics / Nenadović, listed basically each time after Angeline's given name represent such an indeterminacy. It is nowhere explained in the text that the old lady is mentioned under three different yet similar names because she lived under several consecutive state formations[69], and each state formation adopted her name into their nomenclature with slight changes. For a reader who has appropriate knowledge to contextualize the three names and decipher the historical message therein this list provides the possibility of a deeper, more layered reading experience. At the same time a reader who lacks the needed cultural resources might find this unusual narratorial choice curious or downright annoying, in either way they would most probably not be able to overlook it. Juhász's listing of Angeline's various name-formations is reminiscent of the way Gloria Anzaldúa left Chicana, Mezo-American native and Spanish colonial words in the text of *Borderlands* / *La Frontera* and refused to provide their translation within the book. In doing so her aim was to remind her White American readers that the world is not universally and transparently coded for their immediate consumption (Keating 2005, 12). At the same time, the repetitions of the three names in the text may also serve as narrative equivalent of *Stolpersteine*[70], that is stumbling blocks that make the initiated reader remember, and the unitiated wonder. Lastly, the three names of Angeline that in effect entailed three official identities may be a key to Juhász's coeval Katalin Ladik's choice to disperse herself into three identity variations in her autobiography.

[69] The Habsburg Monarchy, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, the Kingdom of Hungary, SFR Yugoslavia.
[70] The public memorial project Stolpersteine (lit. stumbling blocks) was initiated by German artist Günter Demnig. Stolpersteine are brass plaques placed in the pavement in front of the last known address of Jewish, Roma, Sinti and other Holocaust victims. See more at: https://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/home/ Last accessed on 19/01/2023.

Zoltán Danyi's *The Carcass Remover* also has but one single narrator, an embittered war veteran who keeps on rambling about his aborted plans and other ailments. While in Tolnai's *The two sterile cups* Oliver T. time to time has a group of listeners, who are active contributors to the process of storytelling, listeners have an entirely different position in Danyi's novel. The reader learns whatever happened to the nameless guy identifiable as the carcass remover (a job invented by the author) through his ceaseless monologues, the addressee of which is sometimes a hospital nurse who had already left the room, a homeless person sleeping on the street, or a tea mug. The common feature of these 'listeners' is that none of them listens. These 'listeners' are but functions of the carcass remover's speech trying to conceal from his deeply tortured self the fact that he is in effect talking to himself. This interpretation is supported by the powerful shifts in the narration, which are unrelated to the 'listeners'. As a reviewer put it:

> Because of the changing of various narrative techniques the reader gets the impression that the speaker / narrator is not identical with oneself. Throughout the reading of the novel the vexing Becketian question, who is the one who says 'I' in this text is echoing in the reader. (Mikola 2015)

This interpretation considers that though the narration is of a single voice, within it there are such changes of perspective that it is uncertain whether always the same 'I' says 'I'. In my reading on the other hand the question "who is the one who says 'I'" emerges only in so far as one approaches the text expecting a unified, immutable, stable 'I', the 'I' of conventional autobiographies. Danyi on the other hand attempted to capture the workings of a deeply war-traumatized mind, a mind that has been, as the saying goes, to hell and back. The unnamed protagonist as a member of Serbian paramilitary groups in Slavonia participated in the ethnic cleansing of the territory. He participated in horrid crimes, such as the gang rape of a Croatian woman in an isolated country house. The things that he did and the things that he witnessed charred him so thoroughly that he can find continuity neither with the person who he

was before the war, nor with the person he is expected to be in so called peace. Since his self is shattered the narration is shattered, i.e. this book not only talks about the war but showcases the traumatizing effects of the war and in doing so holds a mirror to post-war Serbian society that attempts to sweep under the rug the bloody violence of the 1990s.

In Bekim Sejranović's *My son, Huckleberry* the first person narrator's construction of self takes yet another form. *Huckleberry,* just like *Extra life*, could be read as an anti-coming of age story, as its narrator refuses to reconcile with society's normative expectations. He is a forty-something white man born and raised in Bosnia, educated in Croatia, who left behind maritime studies without a degree, was married at least twice, has at least two children though not necessarily with women he was married to, does not support his children in any way, in fact he hardly communicates with them, neither with his mother against whom he holds some kind of a grudge. He left Yugoslavia when the war broke out, went to Norway, devoted himself to writing, learned Norwegian, translated Norwegian literature into Bosnian, and held courses on Yugoslav literatures at the University of Oslo. He is a Norwegian citizen, but only spends time there when its absolutely necessary, otherwise he lives on a boat on the Sava river, supports himself from his Norwegian earnings, and besides taking the boat here and there, almost exclusively aimlessly, his days are filled out with two things: writing and drugs.

The purpose of this lengthy summary of Sejranović's first person narrator's life was to show that this narrative identity would be hard to consider a conventional autobiographic self, marked by coherence, directionality, and autonomy. His coherence is seriously compromised by the heavy doses of drug "cocktails" that he takes. Under their effect it is often unclear whether things really happen to him, he actively hallucinates, remembers some past events, or some kind of a mixture of these. And even when things indeed happen to him, it is uncertain whether his perception of the events is accurate or off in some measure. When it comes to directionality, it seems that this person wishes to be like the river that

flows through landscapes and times without ever stopping or turning back, and his problem is that he is but a river boat man who from time to time must step both metaphorically and in reality on firm ground.

Although his conflict ridden, yet devoted relationship with his father is of great import to him, and although he is still not over his latest passionate but ill-fated love affair, neither of these, in his life possibly closest connections affect his life choices. Therefore, he could easily be seen as a stereotypical white man with the stereotypical autonomous character, i.e. a kind of anti-hero who is not moral in his choices; yet has his own ethics that he adheres to. In this regard *Huckleberry* could be seen as a text that sustains a particularly gendered, raced, and classed ideal of a human being. However, there are two non-human actors of *Huckleberry* that, if extracted from the narrative or from the process of narration its whole structure would implode: drugs and the river. As already signaled, the first person narrator is a drug addict and his choices and actions are basically without exception influenced by various hallucinogen and narcotic substances. Thus, his self is constructed as an intra-action of drugs and thoughts, where it is impossible to tell whether particular thought patterns have induced the need for drugs or drugs have induced certain thought processes that then lead to the taking of more drugs. Just as crucially, this protagonist is in an intra-active relationship with the Sava as well. The main connecting tissue between him and his father is the river, and as his last love affair also started on the boat, evolved on the boat, and ended after a boat trip, it could be said that he was never alone with his beloved one. The river is a constitutive part of his relationships.

Intra-action, Karen Barad's neologism marks a process through which material and semiotic actors come into existence *via* acting together (in contrast: in 'inter-action' distinct pre-existent entities affect each other). Intra-action is based on Barad's onto-epistemology, which contests the dichotomy of nature/culture and reality/discourse by acknowledging the inseparability of matter and discursive

conceptualizations, where "matter is a dynamic expression/articulation of the world in its intra-active becoming" (2007, 392). Inspired by Barad, feminist posthumanist critique of the Cartesian subject made a radical move towards an interpretation of human and nonhuman relations as intra-active processes. This is what, among others, Donna Haraway argues for in her seminal *When Species Meet*, claiming that subjectivities should be conceived in "co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist relating, and the relating is never done once and for all" (2008, 300). And although Stacy Alaimo notes that intra-action is almost inconceivable as a process as it is so challenging to think outside the box of well-defined entities, she concludes: "things, as such, do not precede their intra-actions" (2010, 21).

To come back at the end of the chapter to its beginnings, that is Pannonian borderlands novels' relationship vis-à-vis conventional autobiographies, I wish to point out that because of its prominent featuring of the river in the construction of the self, Sejranović's novel could be considered an autotopography. Autotopography is not a subgenre of autobiography, rather a development that sprung up from a paradigm shift in autobiography studies at the end of the 20th century when "[t]he focus on relational identity, on the way writers *use* other people to understand and explain themselves, has shown how the genre of autobiography can lessen its preoccupation with the self and move metaphorically toward the web of life" (Allister 2001, 20). In autotopography "place and landscape are always centered on the person(al) and articulated differently in each case in a series of connections through remembered/forgotten place-times" (Jones 2015, 4).

* * *

The strength of borderlands consciousness lays in a radical seizure with that conflict between identities to which someone inhabiting multiple affiliations – cultures, countries, genders, languages – is exposed. Contrary to expectation, these borderlands writers refuse to accept the readily available and

exclusive identity positions promoted by the nation state; instead they construe narrative subjectivities that capable of incorporating the interplay of differences. Most of the analyzed novels perceive the human self as a process of dialogic intra-action, which never offers the interpretative retreat of a seemingly coherent and fixed self. As we saw, in Ottó Tolnai's *The two sterile cups*, Orsolya Bencsik's *Extra life*, Katalin Ladik's *Can I live on your face?* the self is constructed as a polyphonic dialogue of a plethora of human voices. Others novels, such as Erzsébet Juhász's *Bordernovel*, Zoltán Danyi's *The Carcass Remover* or Bekim Sejranović's *My son Huckleberry*, though construed around a single narrator's voice, the resultant discursive subjectivity is never posited as universally human: it has age, gender, ethnicity, race and political stance, moreover dis/abilities, biases and limitations.

Writing about the borderlands Gloria Anzaldúa observed, "*la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders" (1987, 100). The following chapter discusses those borders that one may carry within often with lasting impact on one's mental and physical health, i.e. the body as an archive of borders. It also discusses textual instances, which suggest that the hyper-awareness of border-marked existences may eventually lead to a sense of dissolved borders of the self, which, in turn, may bring along a greater sense of companionship with others, including non-human sentient forms of existence. When the presence of the non-human anchors human consciousness, so prone to being trapped in past and future, in the present, the borders of human consciousness temporarily show their permeable and porous nature.

PROLOGUE TO CHAPTER 4

Minutes after taking a seat I knew I wasn't chosing carefully enough. Right in front of me there was a late teen couple with loud headphones and even louder chewing gums. Time to time they elbowed into each other, listen to this, the girl shoved aside the guys long blond locks and placed her own earpiece to his lobe, what d' ya think. In the meanwhile we reached Kelebia on the Hungarian side. Here we are, snapped the girl gleefully with her gum, and I started to become hopeful that they might get off here with their doodles-covered army backpacks and scrap leather waist bands and tattoos and the bitten skin around their nails, but mainly with their popping and snapping and champing, the rhythm of which changed with each new song in their ears. Instead of getting off as we arrived to Kelebia the girl got into a nostalgic spiel about the border crossings of her childhood, when they came over to the Hungarian side every other week, and she was ever so happy about it because she knew that here she would get a cheese candy, something she couldn't get at home. The guy mumbled something in response, but through the train's murmur I could only hear the girl's higher pitch, no, not because of the war, there was no war yet then, simply there was no such thing in Yugo, the cheese candy was non-existent there, unknown, get it? but then there was the war too and my cousins' family made the right choice when they came over here as soon as the shitshow began, my parents could move us too, but no, no, they only finally decided themselves during the bombings, but even then they kept on coming and going, coming and going, back and forth, I told ya already ... but now you'll see it with your own eyes, you'll see the land of cigarette butts and plastic bags and stray dogs, of course everyone leaves from there, what recycling, com'on, waves the girl, at best they set all that waste on fire... I was fuming in myself. You don't have to come here, I thought. You could stay in Hungary, listen to your annoying music as loud as you wish and eat as many cheese candies as you can handle. You really don't have to come here and talk crap. Then the border police came and checked our documents. After further half

an hour of inexplicable standstill the train started to slowly move along. The trees stood barren beyond the border fence, the forest was a beaten grey and brown after the snow. And truly, trash, trash everywhere, heaps of it by the traintracks. Smashed up bathroom interiors, cement bags filled with broken cables and fiber glass, and all kinds of household waste neatly bagged and disposed on the stretch of earth between the traintracks and the dirt road and on the other side between the tracks and the forest and deep into the forest, spreading among the trees like blisters. It felt like everything was seeped in filth, the whole landscape, the tracks, the train, the seats, the passangers, the clothes. And then I heard the loud snap of a bubble gum, then a sigh. And I'm not sure because the train was rolling, and her music was playing, and she anyways barely opened her mouth when speaking but I think that girl said something like oh how gorgeous. Oh how gorgeous. I always like coming home.

CHAPTER 4: THE BORDER/LAND/S OF COMMUNITY

As this dissertation aims at exploring borderlands consciousness through literary works, Chapter 3 was devoted to examining what borderlands texts' generic and narrative features reveal about borderlands consciousness. What I found is that borderlands novels disrupt the generic conventions of traditional autobiography writing by relinquishing the power of boundary setting that is central to conventional forms of autobiography. Furthermore, by introducing various narrative angles into first person narration borderlands novels deconstruct the concept of a homogenously conceived narrative 'I'. Doing so, these texts propose a flexible and porous conceptualization of the human self, one that is in a continuous dialogue with others, inclusive of its own present and past variants.

I hold that this dialogic conceptualization of the human 'self' in borderlands novels is borderlands consciousness at work, or in other words its par excellence actualization. I also hold that the experiences about the temporariness and potential violence of state borders and bordering practices in general, as discussed in Chapter 2, are foundational to that borderlands consciousness which actualizes in dialogic selves. Gloria Anzaldúa considered that borderlands are "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (2007, 25); I consider this an evocative and precise description of borderlands consciousness itself as well.

As said, Pannonian borderlands novels propose a flexible and porous conceptualization of human 'self' that is in a continuous dialogue with others. This chapter aims to investigate how the relationships with others, at all, how 'others' are constructed in these literary works. I approach this subject through asking the following question: whom do borderlands novels extend their community onto?

The English word *community* comes from the Latin *communitas*, which is a derivative of *communis* meaning "common, public, shared by all or many." *Communis* includes the Latin prefix *com-* meaning 'with, together' and the word *munis* from *munus* "service performed, duty, work."[71] Therefore in this chapter when asking whom borderlands texts extend their community onto, what I examine is who and what belongs to that togetherness that services are performed for. By which I am also asking, who are Pannonian borderlands novels compassionate with? The word compassion literally means "suffering with another," combining *com-* that is 'with, together' and *pati* 'to suffer'[72], therefore the question can be reformulated as: whose suffering do they share, whose suffering do they care for? Clearly, those whose suffering leaves one untouched one will not perform services for thus will not be incorporated into the togetherness of community.

With one last etymologic add-on I would like to reflect on the verb 'incorporate' often used, as above, together with community. 'Incorporate' comes from late Latin *incorporare* 'unite into one body, embody, include,' putting *in-* 'into, in, on, upon' and *corpus* that is 'body' together. From the early 15th century on it also started to signify the union of persons forming an artificial person (such as a guild). This is how the expression is generally used today, i.e. someone's incorporation into a community means that they become a part of a unified artificial personhood (such as a corporation or a nation). The prevalence of the abstracted usage came to overshadow the word's original meaning, which is to bring various substances together, like plants absorbing light or mammals digesting food.[73] Yet, the incorporation of someone into a community still has a strong material aspect, because even if a community is envisioned as an abstract artificial person, much of the communal practices are material.

[71] Sources: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Community#cite_note-1 and https://www.etymonline.com/word/municipality#etymonline_v_31398 Last accessed 12/12/2022.
[72] Source: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=compassion. Last accessed 12/12/2022.
[73] Source: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=incorporate. Last accessed 12/12/2022.

For that reason the investigation of whom do borderlands texts extend their community onto I will examine through what represents the banished, the expelled, the taboo, and the unremembered for most human communities, that is waste. By waste I mean everything that is treated as waste including humans.

The deeply gendered, raced and classed Cartesian detachment of the human agentic self from inactively conceived matter is still present as a quiescent certitude in most contemporary approaches to our material environment. Since in this model 'nature' is posited as either dispensable, or as a mere resource for human consumption, this world-view has been instrumental to the justification of the heedless exploitation of natural resources – and also to the production of unprecedented amount of waste. Just as importantly, in this worldview a lower ontological status was issued to those groups of people who were assumed to have a closer proximity to 'nature' either because they were seen as more susceptible to be influenced by the body, such as children, women, the elderly, sexually and/or gender non-conform persons, the uneducated, the infirm and the disabled, people living with mental illness, and convicts; or because their communities abided by different cultural and/or religious codes (Huggan and Tiffin 2010; Plumwood 2001). The level of their integration into the community of humans, i.e. those for whom services are performed for, could vary from inclusion with caveats (women, children) to forthright exclusion. The treatment of excluded people, that is 'non-people' follows the logic of the treatment of hazardous waste: societies want them isolated or annihilated. Such was the case with the Roma, the Jews, people living with mental illness and disabled people during the Holocaust, or with *trans and non-binary people in many present-day societies. The conceptual workings of these violent boundary-setting praxes I will examine in the first subchapter based on works by Mary Douglas, Radomir Konstantinović, Julia Kristeva and Sarah Ahmed. What I would like to emphasize here is that a common feature of these exclusionary praxes through different historic and social contexts of the

modern era is that most human beings status as humans always remains contested. According to the core argument of Mary Douglas's seminal work, *Purity and danger* (1966), this management of the human corpus is foundational to keeping up the power status quo within human communities. As it has been repeatedly pointed out, the management of the human corpus is also foundational for the upkeep of our era's global capitalist, colonial, patriarchal hegemony (see Agamben 1998; Balibar 2000; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006).

The Pannonian borderlands region represents borderlands in regards to the application of these exclusionary praxes too. From one angle, as already discussed in Chapter 1, people living here have a dubious placement on the Eurocentric civilizational ladder. Depending on context and circumstances as well as their individual background and assets they may or may not qualify as full-fledged Europeans. From another angle, the communities of South Pannonia also operate exclusionary praxes against those perceived as 'others'. The conceptual background of these praxes comprises of white European superiority complex suffused with hard-boiled bigotry, a mixture that the Yugoslav philosopher Radomir Konstantinović described as parochial attitude. Recently this attitude is in full force against people marked as 'migrants', that is refugees and potential immigrants arriving from Eastern Asia and Africa in order to pass through towards more prosperous regions of Europe.

I chose waste as the central metaphor of my inquiry because through examining who/what is considered waste it is possible to explore how community boundary setting is performed by and / or against Pannonian people. On the other hand, waste itself has been central to western conceptualizations about East Europe and its population. As Zsuzsa Gille noted, "[i]n the great majority of representations, state socialism's wastefulness is not only confirmed but, implicitly or explicitly, it is also contrasted with the cleanliness, efficiency, and thriftiness of Western capitalism" (2007, 3).

Placing the concept of waste center allows for the parallel handling of two issues: the conceptual boundaries of waste and its material effects, and the materiality of waste and its conceptual effects.

In handling borderlands people and their material surrounding on one plain I am again inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa, who declared that "*la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders" (2007, 100) thus spoke to the material effects of race and gender, to the illnesses brought on the Chicana/o community by the miseries of subaltern life "south of the border, called North America's rubbish dump by Chicanos." (2007, 33) Committed to including materiality in theory, Anzaldúa avoided the ontological separation of lively and dead matter, acknowledging the activity of matter – "growth, death, decay, birth … a constant changing of forms" (2007, 113).

As already noted, the first section, *Waste* will survey the conceptual and visceral workings of the boundary-setting praxes surrounding 'waste' also framed as 'dirt' (Douglas) or 'abject' (Kristeva) to set the grounds for further analysis. The second section, *Rock bottom* will explore who and what is considered as waste in Pannonian borderlands novels and with what effects. The title of the section has twofold connections with its contents: the narrators upon being treated as 'others' need to deal with what Sarah Ahmed calls the 'de-forming effects' of this experience first, and only after hitting the rock bottom of anguish and despair they come to experience its 're-forming effect', if at all (Ahmed 2000). Secondly, the hitting of rock bottom in several of the novels gets connected with a place that represents the 'bottom' either in spatial or in metaphoric terms, such as the clay pit for brick making, the carcass pit, the grave hole, the dumpster, or the toilet.

WASTE

If you have eaten soup from a plate, you say that the empty plate is dirty, although nothing else soils it but the last drops of the soup that you had just finished eating.
Manure is filth if placed in the middle of the room,
but it is nourishing power on the wheat field.
The same goes for everything seen as pure or dirty:
nothing is good or bad in itself, just by its placement.

(Sándor Weöres, 1945)[74]

The definition of waste in contemporary waste studies, as exemplified by the state of the art 2022 *The Routledge Handbook of Waste Studies* is primarily built on British anthropologist Mary Douglas's conceptualization as 'matter out of place'. Douglas's 1966 book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* is a classic of anthropologic literature from the era when the discipline still aimed at making universal claims about human condition. Although this aspect of her approach is dated, as demonstrated by its pertinence in the emerging field of waste studies, Douglas's account about how taboo topics are treated in various cultures still holds relevance.

Yet, as waste scholar Max Liboiron points out, when waste studies relies on Douglas's definition of waste as 'matter out of place' the definition gets appropriated with two notable alterations. Firstly, the quote that Douglas made famous (and that she herself attributed to Lord Chesterfield) was the following: "Dirt is matter out of place." (1966, 36) Secondly, as Liboiron emphasizes, in Douglas's view waste is not matter out of place, "rubbish is not dangerous … since it clearly belongs in a defined place" (Douglas 1966, 160, quoted in Liboiron 2022, 31).

[74] Quotation from Sándor Weöres's Tao-influenced 1945 poetic philosophical treatise *A teljesség felé* [Towards the Absolute]. It appears as an unmarked quotation in Orsolya Bencsik's *Extra life* on page 57.

Indeed, Douglas's argument is not about the spatial organization of dirt, rubbish or waste, her interest is power: how power is gained, maintained, and preserved against threats. What Douglas fails to reflect on is that the 'place' where 'rubbish belongs' is also defined by power. In her book like in many contemporary mainstream discourses it gets swept under the rug that people are not equal actors in the shaping of their environments, and are not equally impacted by its deleterious changes either. As ecofeminists (environmentalist feminists) have long warned, women and the global poor are disproportionately affected by environmental pollution (most notably Mies and Shiva 1993), in other words: the destruction of the environment is yet another way of "enclosing the global commons" (Harvey 2003, 147). In addition, there seems to be a strong negative correlation between living in an environmentally hazardous locality and having a voice in mainstream environmental discourses, which regularly gloss over social and economical disparities (Alaimo 2009; Filčak 2012). Therefore, although Douglas did not recognize the connection between waste management and power, following Douglas's set of power related arguments when thinking about waste is very fitting, as the access to clean and healthy environment is increasingly becoming the central power issue of our century.

According to Douglas dirt / waste and power have a very straightforward relationship: "Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting appropriate elements" (1966, 36). It is central to the workings of the system that the rejected elements shall be either ignored or annihilated in order to reduce the possibility of ambiguity. Power to be maintained demands absolute purity, and "[p]urity is the enemy of change, or ambiguity and compromise" (1966, 200), because these would eventually chip away at the edges of its realm.

Yugoslavian philosopher Radomir Konstantinović (1928–2011) arrived to very similar notions in his 1969 *Filosofija palanke* that is *The Philosophy of Parochialism*. Konstantinović's views about

the main tenets of parochial or provincial mindset (the English translation uses these two concepts interchangeably) bear such strong resemblance to Mary Douglas's views that I started to wonder if Konstantinović's book was perhaps written under the influence of the British anthropologist's work. I came upon no mention of impact in the scholarly articles discussing Konstantinović's oeuvre, and I could not find out either whether he could read English, which was the only language in which Douglas's work was available at the time. Therefore, it is just as likely that Konstantinović read *Purity and Danger* as it is likely that theirs is a case of simultaneous invention well known in science. What's for sure is that Konstantinović, relying on a very similar conceptual apparatus as Douglas, offered a relentlessly precise account of the hard-boiled bigotry inherent to a mentality he termed parochial or provincial, the core tenet of which is: "[t]hey are impure, the provincial is pure" (2021, 29). The 'they' of this credo can be anyone from inside or outside the community who in the community's judgment does not adhere to the community's ethos.

Importantly Konstantinović, himself a borderlands person – born in a Vojvodina Serbian family in Subotica – moved beyond the analysis of social boundary setting that Douglas focused on and showed that the most obdurate boundaries are within, in the hearts and minds. With that he brought to light that the set of exclusionary praxes that he associated with parochialism are not tied to geographic location or settlement structure, this hostile attitude towards 'them' can turn up anywhere, anytime. The question remains, what prompts this dynamics, what makes it flare up in some situations but not in others? Sarah Ahmed in *Embodying Strangers* (2000) offered an in depth exploration of this conundrum.

Inspired by, among others, Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva, and taking a famous passage from Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984) as her point of departure[75], Ahmed focused on the visceral effects of encounters with those whom a particular subject considers sub- or non-standard humans, or in the colloquial: others. In Ahmed's interpretation, the 'body-at-home' (the person who holds the normative subject position of human) perceives the 'body out of place' (the stranger, the racial other, the person not conforming with gender norms, the homeless, the immigrant) as a "strange bod[y that] threaten to traverse the border that establishes the 'clean body' of the privileged subject" (2000, 93), prompting the 'body-at-home' to enact a constant state of alertness and vigilance.

Relying on Julia Kristeva's work on the *abject*, Ahmed comes to read the stranger's body as the crisis of abjection, because "they pass between inside and outside" (2000, 93), thus the body-at-home cannot ever be entirely safe. Abjection is a mixture of contempt, fear and disgust that appears in that phase of the self's development when the distinction of 'I' and 'not-I' is palpable and insecure. When the insecurely bounded 'I' feels contempt towards an element of the external world, this necessarily entails a measure of self-contempt too. This way abjection prepares the ground for the setting of the self's boundaries as well as for the definition of what is 'not-I', including everything that the 'I' would like to expel from oneself (Kristeva 1982, 169). The not fully integrated self can produce forceful abjection symptoms which may be followed by attempts to powerfully, even violently re-set its boundaries. This is what happens when a body-at-home considers a body out of place – therefore any body that they experience as different and therefore threatening – as having a lower, even animal-like ontological status and they treat them as such, or when they mark them as biological or moral sources of contamination and treat them accordingly. By marking the other's body as body out of place

[75] In this passage Lorde recounts how she as a child learned to recognize her own strange-ness through reading the bodily reactions of an adult white woman who found the closeness of Lorde, a black child, physically unbearable.

the body-at-home attempts to secure its boundaries in a wish to achieve an ideally closed state and retain the illusion that their self as well as everything they can symbolically identify with is pure. This is what Konstantinović alluded to by claiming that in its self-perception

> …the spirit of the province, … is one of ideally pure innocence. Whenever it speaks inside us, thrown into the world, it speaks with a painful longing for purity. In the crisis of our world, of our own selves, return to the province equals a return to the lost purity. (2021, 30)

As Konstantinović keeps on emphasizing that parochialism is not an inherent quality of a person or a group of people but an attitude that may present itself in particular situations, Ahmed also makes it clear that by body-at-home she marks every person who assumes the position of the normative human when encountering someone whom they consider 'out of place'. Therefore neither the body-at-home nor the body out of place are fixed positions, they are dependent on the power dynamics of the encounter. In other words no westerner and / or white and /or middle class and / or male person counts automatically as a body-at-home, only those who step up as the trustees of the normative position of human in an exclusionary or discriminative manner towards others. Therefore, a person can assume the position of the body-at-home randomly or customarily, but the same person could end up in the position of the body out of place too. The opposite holds as well: someone who's by the rule handled as a body out of place may step up as a body-at-home. For instance in *Fly away, pigeon* the Kocsis family as first generation immigrants in Switzerland experience on a daily basis that they are perceived as bodies out of place, yet they step up as bodies-at-home when in the job advert for a new server to their family owned café they describe the ideal candidate as "preferably Swiss" (Nadj Abonji 2014, 79).

The boundary drawing praxes described by Mary Douglas, the idealization of purity analysed by Konstantinović, and what Sarah Ahmed interprets as the impetus to assume the position of the body-at-home have the same drive: an anxiety ridden yearning for establishing the difference that nature did

not provide readily, the distinction that would keep apart superior from inferior, human from non-human, spirit from matter. This yearning for "[p]urity might rely on categorization and sorting (of genders, of trash) as a tactic, but its goal is maintaining power." (Liboiron 2022, 34)

The following two sections will approach Pannonnian borderlands novels through the prism of Ahmed's, Douglas's and Konstantinović's notions to reveal how community boundaries are constructed in these literary works. This entails the exploration of who steps up as a body-at-home against whom in what context, but more importantly the examination of what happens to those who were treated as bodies out of place, that is human waste. Ahmed claims that the encounter between the body-at-home and the body out of place can have a de-forming but potentially also a re-forming effect on the stranger-subjectivity, who thus acquires the toolkit to identify oneself as a body out of place (2000, 85-86). Pannonian borderlands novels offer ample examples of the deformations caused by being treated as a body out of place, but in several of them we may witness the re-formative effect of these experiences as well. When exploring whom Pannonian borderlands novels extend their community onto my focus will be on these re-formed subjectivities. I will offer a close reading of how their literally painful awareness of the violence of boundaries set in the name of some ideal of purity propels them to disrupt these boundaries and the dichotomies inherent.

Community entails the circle of those who are worthy of services, but by being part of a community one is also entitled to compassion. In my working definition waste is what no one has compassion for. Whether human or non-human, waste is the ultimate reject. As I will show, Pannonian borderlands novels prompt a reconsideration of what is considered waste or what waste signifies. In these texts the extension of compassion and therefore community onto humans and non-humans that are otherwise excluded and treated as waste is a recurring phenomenon.

DISPOSABLE LIFES

Everything is a human being.
(Alice Walker, 1983)

> …we, the children, press our cheeks to the car's left window, it's surprisingly cool, and we look, incredulous, at people who live in a mound of refuse – nothing's changed, my father says – we look at shacks made of corrugated sheet-metal and rubber, and scruffy children playing amid broken-down cars and household waste as if it were completely common. […] and I record these faces caked with soot, the piercing gazes, the rags, the tatters, the light shaking over the trash heaps, I extend my gaze as if I should understand all this, these images, these people who have no mattresses even, not to mention beds, so perhaps at night they bury themselves into the earth, the deep dark plain … oh these poor children, says my mom, just like when we watch TV, only instead of changing channels we roll on…[76]

The above quote is taken from *Fly away, pigeon*'s opening chapter, "The Summer of Tito". The depiction is eerily reminiscent of the opening image of Zsuzsa Gille's 2007 monograph on post-socialist East European waste management:

> …a gray still life composed of shoddy goods; people wearing poor, idiosyncratic clothes surrounded by houses that looked like they could fall apart any time; piled-up garbage and filth…

This image, as Gille explains, was a recurring illustration in 1990s Western media reporting about what was termed East European 'ecocide'. Images like this were also used to justify why West European and North American mainstream discourse emphatically constructed the difference between communism and capitalism around their respective neglect or care for the environment (Gille 2007, 1-2). As a result, the harmonization of environmental policies has been one of the many 'uphill' stepping-stones on the slippery slope of East European states' European Union 'ascension'. Yet, in reality

[76] Nadj Abonji 2014, 2

capitalist and state communist framings of nature were close to identical. Both were grounded in an anthropocentric ontology which posited human as separate from and superior to 'nature' (Gille 2007; Filčak 2012; Gille 2016). In addition, the deleterious images of East European 'ecocide,' which prevailed in the West European and North American media in the 1980s and 1990s, were mainly based on sensationalist reports about the excessive environmental degradation that happened in the zones of 'hot spots', that is around heavy industrial polluters (Pavlínek and Pickles 2005).

Research repeatedly underlines that it would be a mistake to narrate the current state of environmental affairs in Eastern Europe as an after effect of state socialist politics alone (Tamás 2002; Harper 2006; Gille 2016). Eastern Europe is embedded in a global grid of inequalities within which poorer countries are more likely to become hosts of toxic industrial processes and waste. During the 1990s under the guise of economic development 'westernization' also entailed the taking advantage of the opening of new markets for promoting environmentally dubious technologies, and various environmentally detrimental practices: the transnational traffic in toxic byproducts, the proliferation of plastic packaging, the growing of nuclear power markets and the introduction of GMOs (Harper 2006; Gille 2007 and 2016). Although nominally the EU favored preventative approaches to waste management such as reduction and recycling, it provided no financial support for the prevention of waste accumulation, instead it supported the candidate states with "millions of Euros to establish an extensive network of dumps and incinerators, all of which are to be built by Western European capital and technology" (Gille 2007, 5). At the same time the process of EU integration unquestionably introduced novel environmental criteria to East European candidate states' policymaking, which in many areas enhanced environmental protection in the region. Croatia and Hungary as EU member states that adhere to EU environmental standards fare much lower on every pollution measurement chart then Bosnia and Herzegovina or Serbia. With corrupt local economic and political elites readily

serving the interests of global capital both countries ended up among the most polluted ones in international comparison. In Serbia, where the majority of the situations from the novels analyzed below unfolds a staggering 80% of municipal waste, 2.4 million tons out of 2.9 million per year, is disposed in improperly sanitized or illegal landfills that are not equipped to prevent the spread of toxic gasses and liquids.[77]

No wonder then that waste is an everyday site in Pannonian borderlands novels. As the van of the carcass removers crosses a bridge "the Danube murkily churns below them, on its banks disemboweled refrigerators and washing machines halfway sunk into the mud"[78]. Wherever Bekim Sejranović's river dweller ties up his boat he finds rubbish littered shores, and the currents of the Sava take "all the trash and debris and the black plastic bags with the innards of slaughtered animals or with human corpses always […] on the Bosnian side"[79]. What is common in these instances is that the narrator moves along and the rubbish remains. The opening scene of Melinda Nadj Abonji's novel, quoted at the beginning of the chapter, has the same dynamics: the Kocsis family on their way home from Switzerland passes a settlement in the vicinity of their destination, the parents' hometown. The 8 years old Ildi notes how her father fumes with anger at the sight of such poverty while her mother shakes off the feelings caused by the site: "oh these poor children, says my mom, just like when we watch TV, only instead of changing channels we roll on…"[80]. Seeing the soot-caked faces and disheveled clothing of the children playing among the rubbish heaps Ildi tries to imagine what it could be like to live among such conditions. As opposed to her parents who put up their traditionally gendered

[77] https://balkangreenenergynews.com/garbage-dumps-in-serbia-are-quietly-poisoning-its-citizens/ Last accessed 12/12/2022.
[78] "a Duna zavarosan kavarog a mélyben, a partján kibelezett hűtőszekrények és mosógépek süllyednek félig az iszapba" (Danyi 2015: 70)
[79] "sve smeće i granje i crne vreće sa životinjskim iznutricama poslije klanja, pa i ljudski leševi uvijek nekako završe na bosanskoj strani" (Sejranović 2020, 52)
[80] Nadj Abonji 2014: 8

emotional armor (the man reacts with rage, the woman with pity), the little girl uses her imagination to reach beyond her horizon of experiences and probe theirs, to feel what they feel.

Several years later as a young adult Ildi visits a cousin who has run away from home and moved in with her boyfriend in a similar settlement. Yet now that she does have a chance to get a sense of what it is like to live under such conditions her response is entirely different:

> I don't want to look around, I don't want to see too much, I'd like to turn my head away, perhaps towards the sky, to not see the half naked, dirty kids, whom otherwise I only see from afar […] it is the same here as on that dumpster where the Gypsies live, outside the town, and because I already know a few scraps of English, the word *slum* comes to mind and the film our history teacher showed us before summer vacation about the outskirts of Sào Paolo, but this is not Sào Paolo, this is my cousin Csilla[81]

While the little Ildi was curious about the children she saw through the car's window, the grown Ildi wants to not see what she sees. The 8 years old wanted to get closer, the adolescent wants to turn away. Little Ildi sees children just like herself, she perceives those kids as members of the same community that she belongs to, and extends her feeling of curiosity, the precondition of compassion, onto them. The grown Ildi sees the children as different from herself and this recognition fills her with shame. To fend off the uncomfortable feeling she attempts to cognitively control the situation by labeling the site as 'slum'. Yet, the next moment the artificial distance that she tried to create by labeling implodes, because the person in front of her is her cousin, her family, someone whose personhood she cannot deny.

Besides familial relations what could have also prompted this turn in Ildi's perception was the very presence and returned gaze of her cousin, Csilla. Since John Berger's seminal works on the male gaze and later the human gaze (*Ways of seeing* 1972; *Why Look at Animals?* 1977) it is widely known

[81] Nadj Abonji 2014: 81

that gaze entails a power-relation with the gazer at the top of hierarchy. One-way gaze has been historically a tool of objectification, a tool that established and maintained the space for producing differences between subject and object, man and woman, human and non-human. However, before Berger's study of the unidirectional gaze Michel Foucault in his 1966 *The Order of Things* already delved into the reciprocity of gazes as part of his scrutiny of *Las Meninas*. Here Foucault, at odds with his later analysis of power, arrived to a conclusion that in the reciprocated gaze "subject and object, the spectator and the model, reverse their roles to infinity" (1974, 4-5). The reciprocated or as she calls it returned gaze is also important for Donna Haraway. In her *When Species Meet* she claims that the returned gaze has an unbalancing effect as it removes the gazer from the top of the hierarchy. At the same time the returned gaze may hold "a possible invitation, a possible introduction", which, if reciprocated, may induce a sense of companionship (2008, 20-21). Csilla's returned gaze re-introduces her as Ildi's cousin, re-places her in the network of familiar relations, and consequently shakes off the conceptual armor Ildi had attempted to protect herself with from the sight of misery.

The 8 years old Ildi was not equipped with such conceptual armor yet. This difference between the child and the adolescent is also apparent in the way they grasp the settlement the family passes by: the child sees 'people' and 'kids' living among for her beforehand unimaginable circumstances while the grown Ildi describes it as "the dumpster where the Gypsies live". What the child perceives as a complicated set of "old tires and corrugated iron sheets, car wrecks and discarded house appliances" the adolescent labels 'dumpster', and the people the child curiously observes with the desire of understanding the adolescent dismissively marks as 'Gypsies'. The adolescent therefore Ildi exercises "the application of a simplifying force" that Étienne Balibar pinpointed as central to border drawing (2000, 77). Indeed, with that half sentence the grown Ildi re-draws and reinforces two borders all at once: one between ordered and disorderly spaces (town versus dumpster) and the racial divide between

Whites and Gypsies. In effect both borders, the spatial and the racial are meant to mark the same: the perimeters of 'our' community, the 'pure', i.e. uncontaminated, organized, cultured space that Douglas and Konstantinović described, where uncontaminated, organized, cultured people can feel safe and protected from those stigmatized as 'others'.

By coming to the settlement and standing in front of her cousin Ildi took the ontological risk of recognizing herself in the Other's eyes (Haraway 2008, 20). This experience brought home the fact that despite the differences in their circumstances they belong to the same micro-community that is the family, which eventually made it possible for her to listen to Csilla with compassion. Csilla's father Tibi on the other hand refuses to visit his runaway daughter moreover he bans her from the family home or as he calls it "my house" (108). As he never risks recognizing himself in his 'othered' daughter's eyes, he feels that he lost his daughter to a world that he wholeheartedly rejects. The divide that he perceives between his world and 'theirs' is apparent form the way he describes the man for whom his daughter left his household:

> …this one has no job, brings home no bacon, has no house, has nothing but his cock, but that's certainly larger than a mole's! … but it won't take long and these dogheads[82] will disappear, everyone says that the war is coming, and these will be the first to be drafted into the Yugoslav army, they will wholeheartedly welcome these half Gypsies, let them fight, let them die for the Serbs![83]

Tibi first denies the 'other' man's manhood as in his parochial system of values manhood is equated with productivity; then by attributing animalistic qualities to him he denies his humanness as well, lastly his slur of racist and sexist commonplaces funnels into a politically heated bloodthirsty curse. The analyzed situation takes place around '88-89 when the pan-Serbian movement was already in

[82] Doghead, in Hungarian 'kutyafejű' is a racist term ingrained in Hungarian colloquial and used to mark people of Asian descent, primarily men.
[83] Nadj Abonji 2014, 84

motion and Slobodan Milošević had already risen to power with his chauvinist program of 'Greater Serbia'. War was indeed in sight. In this context Tibi's curse has double meaning: on the one hand he supports the drafting of 'half-Gypsies' like his daughter's boyfriend as that would permanently resolve the problem of 'matter out of place' they represent; on the other hand he would rather have 'half-Gypsies', i.e. the racial others taken to the Yugoslav National Army to fight for 'Greater Serbia' than his fellow ethnic Hungarians. Therefore, his discursive boundary-setting attempt is twofold as it is protective of his family and of his wider community as well while he marks both the Roma and the Serbs as 'others'. Yet, the Roma are clearly placed much lower in his imaginary hierarchy than the Serbs. While he attributes agency to the Serbs as warmongers the Roma in his view are mere "canon fodder" (84) that is material to be wasted in the war effort.

In Chapter 2 I have already analyzed a situation in which a Roma person was involved in violent activities organized by members of the majority community. In Jászberényi's *The Crow King* the novel's Roma protagonist, Csabi joins the ranks of The Brotherhood, an extreme right wing paramilitary group comprised of Hungarian white men who swear to "protect the motherland" from the threat represented by immigrants. Not all members of the Brotherhood welcome Csabi though; some are outright against having a 'Gipsy' among them, but the group's leader quickly reconciles these tensions by pointing out that on the civilizational ladder a 'Hungarian Gipsy' is superior to a 'filthy Arab'.

The two situations are different yet there is a significant parallel streak. In Jászberényi's novel the Roma person's capability and willingness to perform certain tasks for the time being overwrites what his ethnicity otherwise represents in the majority's eyes. In Nadj Abonji's novel Roma people are considered to have a life less valuable than Whites, thus they are described as a perfect fit for the army's purposes. The parallel is that in both novels it is situations of extreme danger in which the majority

society temporarily suspends some otherwise carefully protected community boundaries in order to use the racial other for their purposes.

In *Fly Away, Pigeon* Tibi's callous slur about the 'half-Gypsies' used as 'cannon fodder' is powerfully countered by his wife's riposte calling him out for wishing the death of his daughter's lover. Icu goes even further though and recalls that he was

> …also designated to be cannon fodder in the previous war as a Hungarian among the partisans, when they didn't give you weapons in your Petőfi Brigade[84], only that you […] have long forgotten it, but I haven't.[85]

Since Icu remembers the suffering endured because they as Hungarians were in a different historical context considered potentially dangerous others, she has compassion for the situation of their daughter's Roma boyfriend. With Sarah Ahmed's terminology, because of her remembrance of being designated as a body out of place in the past she does not assume the position of the body-at-home against the racialized other in the present. Nadj Abonji's novel thus models two tools with which the body-at-home's position can be unbalanced and/or their boundary drawing attempts disrupted: the reciprocated gaze and remembrance. The followings will show how the conventionally dehumanizing trope of animal as / and a creature controlled by their bodily functions gets deconstructed in Pannonian borderlands novels.

* * *

Although in *When Species Meet* Donna Haraway focused on the returned gaze of the animal her analysis is valid for any situation when a human gazes in an objectifying manner on another sentient being, whether human or non-human, or with Ahmed's terms, when a human takes the position of the body-

[84] XV. Vajdasági Petőfi Sándor Rohambrigád / XV Vojvođanska Udarna Brigada Šandor Petefi.
[85] Nadj Abonji 2014, 118

at-home and looks at another human or non-human as a 'body out of place'. As Paula Amad points out in her study on the returned gaze in cinema, one of the first registered instances of the willfully and powerfully reciprocated gaze in the postcolonial context was when in 1965 the noted African filmmaker Ousmane Sembène accused a French ethnographic movie director with the following words: "Tu nous regardes comme des insectes." that is "You look at us as though we were insects." (Amad 2013, 49). Sembène's riposte shows his deep awareness of the dehumanizing effect of the unidirectional gaze as well as the ontological degradation inherent in being seen as an animal.

Being seen as an animal is a recurring trope in Pannonian borderlands novels as well. I have already quoted Tibi's contemptuous statement about his daughter's 'dogheaded' boyfriend. In the same novel but at a different venue people like Tibi, that is Hungarians from Vojvodina, moreover his family members are measured to animals. The affluent local customers of the Kocsis family café in Switzerland consider it an utmost necessity to decide whether the Kocsis belong to the "angry mob of hyenas" from the Balkans, especially since the Kocsis have access to their sustenance. As showed in Chapter 2, some Swiss villagers deploy conceptual tools to distinguish the Kocsis from the "homo balcanicus untouched by enlightenment"[86], while others simply refrain from visiting the café. The Kocsis parents do everything in their might to defer to their costumers' xenophobic expectations: first they forbid the café's Bosnian cook and Croatian waitress to speak their vernacular in front of the customers, then they gradually drop traditional Hungarian dishes from the menu. The latter instance, as Brangwen Stone in her analysis of food's and the kitchen's centrality to this family narrative showed, equaled the final relinquishing of their pre-immigration identities (see Stone 2018). Through their food

[86] Nadj Abonji 2014, 61

choices the Kocsis parents thus attempted to signal the village community that they are now one of them, that they, as Rózsa Kocsis, the mother put it, also deserve "human status"[87].

The Kocsis family's humannes was questioned basically from their very arrival to Switzerland, but the clarification of their 'status' became ever more urgent for their Swiss customers when the war on Yugoslav territories flared up. In Zoltán Danyi's novel these same years are also narrated through animal-related terms, but from the point of view of someone who remained within the confines of embargo-stricken Serbia:

> …during the wars Yugoslavia became ever more little, ever more tight, ever more cage-like […] and if he only thought of Vienna or Berlin he started to feel dizzy like someone living in a basement or in a hole in the ground who gets crushed by the very thought of light[88]

This experience had a deeply formatting effect on Danyi's nameless protagonist's self-perception as well as on the way he relates to animals. As a carcass remover – a job invented by Danyi – together with a crew of men he is responsible for the removal of roadkill from Vojvodinian motorways. While performing this job he is careful to save deadly hurt animals from extended suffering (21-22), and even takes home a stray dog found on the roadside in the hope of healing him (25-26).

Oliver T, the main narrator of Ottó Tolnai's *The Two Sterile Cups*, a person who, as shown in Chapter 2, have endured much trouble because of borders, has an even more radically compassionate approach. His all-encompassing vision is most apparent when in conversation with the pharmacy owner Oliver T recounts a memorable scene:

> Once I walked that way and saw them. The Pakistanis. It was an incredible sight. What, asked the

[87] Nadj Abonji 2014, 56

[88] "Szerbia ugyanis, vagy ahogy akkoriban nevezték, Kis-Jugoszlávia a háborúk alatt tényleg egyre kisebbé, egyre szűkebbé, egyre ketrecszerűbbé vált elég volt Bécsre vagy Berlinre gondolnia, máris elkezdett szédülni, mint aki egy pincében él, vagy egy földbe vájt gödörben, és a fénynek már a puszta gondolata is letaglózza" (Danyi 2015, 17)

> pharmacist. The way they were sitting in the rose arbors in the freezing cold and deep snow. In the rose arbors, asked the pharmacist. [They found shelter] in the metal remainders of the rose arbors, which had some bench-like structures inside. So the courtyard looked like a new zoo, like a newly added section of the Palics ZOO, but here it was not animals sitting sadly around in large iron cages, but people, fine, supple, dark skinned people who hunkered and yelled, because […] in the middle [of the courtyard] a hockey game was on, they all took turns playing hockey, this was their only way to avoid freezing.[89]

While he also draws a parallel between immigrants and animals, by fine-tuning the context he makes the reader feel uncomfortable for passively participating in the torture of zoo animals as well as in the dehumanization and torture of immigrants. Tolnai thus not only extends compassion onto those from whom it is in the Pannonian mainstream discourses entirely withdrawn presently, that is immigrants, but deconstructs the trope of the animal as a less-than-human creature. Here the animal emerges as a dignified recipient of suffering caused by 'model citizens', while the likened immigrants emerge as beings with superior capacities of survival.

Talking about the animal's position in parochial thinking Konstantinović argues that for this mindset:

> [t]he animal does not evolve with the man as something that is inalienably contained in his human-ness. It is rejected, repressed into the past. The history of man is the history of his emancipation from animality. If, in the attempt to go back to the body, he tries to go back to the animal, it is because animality is somewhere behind him, rather than where he is. (2021, 129)

Tolnai's narrator besides shaking off the modern colonial approach to animals that places them *below* human, he also breaks out from the confines of parochial thinking that puts animals *behind* human, in so far as he perceives animals and the immigrant people as contemporaneous in suffering. Doing so he applies the same principle that is the main tenet of Kelly Oliver's *Animal Lessons*: "human suffering

[89] "Egyszer arrafele sétáltam, és láttam őket. A pakisztániakat. Hihetetlen látvány volt. Mi, kérdi a gyógyszerész. Az, ahogyan a nagy hidegben és hóban üldögéltek a rózsalugasokban. Rózsalugasokban, kérdi a gyógyszerész. A rózsalugasok fémvázmaradványaiban, mert csak ott, azokban voltak valami padféleségek, pontosan úgy nézett ki az udvar, mint egy új állatkert, akárha a palicsi ZOO részlege, csakhogy ott nem állatok gubbasztottak a nagy vasketrecekben, hanem emberek, finom, hajlékony, sötét bőrű emberkék üldögéltek, kiabáltak, […] és középen hokiztak, felváltva mindenki hokizott, csak így tudták elérni, hogy hiányos öltözékükben ne fagyjanak meg" (Tolnai 2018, 24-25)

and animal suffering are inseparable" (2009, 45). In this seminal book on animal pedagogy, or as its subtitle holds, on *how they teach us to be human* Oliver claims that throughout history "animals [were] called as witnesses to man's superiority … they teach man how to be human: man is human by virtue of animal pedagogy" (2009, 11). Tolnai's novel also proposes a kind of animal pedagogy but with radical alterations. Oliver's vision is embedded in the Western notion about human as the head and crown of creation who deploys animals as a measuring rod of his humanness: the more different he is from animals, the more superior he is. In Tolnai's work, on the other hand, as in other Pannonian borderlands novels, the animal serves as an exemplar for or as a reminder of virtues that humans nominally hold central yet in praxis they exercise only with members of their strictly bounded communities.

I would also like to draw attention on how Tolnai's narrator, Oliver T relates to the people in the rose arbor. He describes their position, their bodies, and their actions in detail, and by way of careful discernment he concludes why they sit in the arbors and what drives them to play hockey. Therefore, he is not a detached observer by any means, rather someone who wants to understand, and, as we later find out, potentially partake in their communal games. His wide-eyed and open-minded approach to his surrounding is reminiscent of the little Ildi's way of seeing the kids at the settlement: without labeling, without judgment, without the "the application of a simplifying force", as Balibar put it. Even though Oliver T mentions the people in the rose arbor as 'Pakistanis', this is only to identify them for the purposes of the conversation with the pharmacist. All throughout the novel immigrants are interchangeably mentioned as Bangladeshi, Eritreans, Pakistani, Syrians etc. by which the narration emphasizes that it does not matter where these people come from, what matters is their current situation.

* * *

Orsolya Bencsik's *Extra life* also offers an idiosyncratic approach to waste. In relation to the Kocsis family's experiences in *Fly Away, Pigeon* we have already mentioned cooking and / or eating particular dishes as a cornerstone of self-identification. Self-identification through food stuff is also evidently present in Orsolya Bencsik's *Extra life*. However, while the Kocsis use food for identification with their adapted country, Bencsik's narrator deploys it as a way of disidentification from her new surrounding:

> Since I moved away from home I start the day […] collecting discarded potato peels and rotten food. The swill, that's what it's called, and they named me the swill person, although in reality I'm a pig. When I get home I munch all day huffing like a machine.[90] I have money for regular food but I enjoy eating other's filth. My father warned me, never forget, whatever you put in yourself, is yours forever, no one can take it away from you. […] My body is a spacious, stinky pigsty.[91]

There are plenty of occasions in *Extra life* when food items are being mentioned, but in almost each of these cases food appears as an exchange item used for the acquisition of something else. For instance the main protagonist, the unnamed young woman receives freshly caught fish from one of her neighbors in the tenement building. She gladly accepts the present but soon she notices that the neighbor, a retired man more and more often touches her arms, then waist, as if with the fish he had bought the right to lay his hands over her (12). Soon after she is the one who takes a pumpkin for a male friend in Szabadka who, as she put it, "screwed me mighty well in return" (14). As we learn, already the narrator's great grandmother baked cakes and cooked stuffed cabbages to her future great grandfather to seduce him

[90] This sentence is an unmarked quotation from György Petri's 1974 poem *A sertés énekei,* that is *The songs of the swine*. György Petri (1943 – 2000) was a Hungarian poet. Because of his active participation in the Hungarian illegal opposition during the state communist regime, his works were banned as politically unacceptable.

[91] "Mióta elköltöztem otthonról, és Szegeden élek, azzal kezdem a napot, hogy bemegyek a hátsó udvarba, előszedem a talicskámat, és elindulok körbe a házakhoz meg a szállodákhoz összeszedni a kidobott krumplihéjat meg a romlott ételeket. A moslékot, így mondják, engem pedig moslékembernek hívnak, pedig valójában disznó vagyok. Ha hazaérek, egész álló nap dohogva, mint a gép, zabálok. Persze volna pénzem rendes ételre is, de nekem élvezetet jelent, ha mások mocskát ehetem. Apám arra figyelmeztet, *soha ne feledd, amit magadba töltesz, azt senki nem veheti el tőled*, én pedig ehhez tartom magam. A testem tágas, bűzös ól." (Bencsik 2015, 54-55)

(25). So potentially this young woman's devouring of kitchen waste is her attempt to step out of the circulation of food for sex by consuming something that no one considers to have an exchange value, rather, people are glad that she helps them get rid of it.

From another point of view, as she feels quite lonesome and isolated in Hungary and continuously homesick for her hometown in Vojvodina her eating habits may be a way of differentiating herself from her surrounding in Szeged, as "we habitually define ourselves in relation to what is other, and this is nowhere (more) evident than in questions of food" (Sceats 162, quoted in Stone 2018, 184). More specifically, the eating of swill can be a way of remaining connected to her family abroad. The Bencsik family of the book is quite particular as most, if not all, family members have the capacity to time to time transform into or to live parallel lives as swine. This capacity is handled as a matter of fact among the family members but whether the outside world is privy to it remains unknown. Humans' turning into pigs is a literary trope with long tradition. The best-known 20th century example is George Orwell's 1945 satirical allegory, the *Animal Farm*, in which after a successful revolution and freedom fight of farm animals pigs eventually take over the leading of the farm, start walking on two legs and reinstate all the old rules the revolution was against at the first place. Yet, in Bencsik's novel the familial pigs are not at all human-like. The Bencsik-pigs rather evoke Homer's *Ulysses*, where during a feast the sorceress Circe transformed Odysseus's companions into swine. The parallels are fairly obvious: both in the epic poem and in Bencsik's novel eating is the way into pighood; the transformation process is reversible; and the humans-turned-pigs drop all their human-like features, except that they are still loyal to their herd, the company of sailors in *Ulysses* and the family in *Extra life*. By gobbling swill and self-identifying as a pig the narrator re-inscribes herself into her family from afar.

This way in *Extra life* kitchen waste becomes a pledge of freedom, and the pigsty becomes the marker of belonging. Yet, Bencsik's postmodern topsy-turvy of the conventional grid of values does not stop there. Soon enough we learn that the family of happily grunting pigs is

> … rotten, wicked, and they are against everyone. Grandpa as long as he was strong enough killed pigs without any further ado, grandma, as long as she was strong enough, joyfully cut the throat of hens. My mother dutifully uproots every weed in the garden […] My father is the happiest when he mixes plaster in milk and liquidates mice and rats, my sister when she kills flies.[92]

Thus the fact that they themselves are at least in part or occasionally animals does not hinder them in slaughtering or consuming other animals. In this regard they are indeed reminiscent of Orwell's swine, and *Extra life* seems to be proposing the same moral to the story as *Animal Farm*: no creature is good or bad in essence, their ethic is always contingent upon their handling of power.

* * *

While the little Ildi in *Fly Away, Pigeon* and the elder Oliver T in *The Two Sterile Cups* turn open heartedly towards people who are treated as waste, the narrator of Bencsik's *Extra life* treats herself to waste as a way of carving her own space out in a society within which she feels alienated and / or (sexually) objectified. In each of these novels as well as in Danyi's *The Carcass Remover* the trope of the animal plays a central role in deconstructing the meanings associated with disposable lives that is lives that may be or should be wasted. Within post-enlightenment Western system of values inclusive of the parochial mindset as analyzed by Konstantinović the animal was always below or behind human, thus marking someone with animal characteristics corresponds to placing them below or behind those

[92] "…a családom összes tagja romlott, kiállhatatlan, és mindenki ellen dolgozik. A tata, amíg bírta, szemrebbenés nélkül ölte le a disznókat, a mama, amíg bírta, élvezettel vágta el a tyúkok nyakát. Anyám a kertjében gondosan kicsupálja a paréjt, a gazt szemetesvödörbe rakja, hogy az a gyökerével többé soha ne tudjon a földben megtapadni. Apám akkor a legboldogabb, ha gipszet keverhet a tejbe, ha egereket, patkányokat gyilkolhat, a nővérem meg akkor, ha legyeket." (Bencsik 2015, 54)

who count as human. Sarah Ahmed, inspired by Mary Douglas's formulation "[d]irt is matter out of place" holds that people marked as less or not-yet human represent bodies out of place for those who consider themselves bodies-at-home, that is humans with full rights. The discussed novels dismantle the animal(istic) equals less-than-human equals disposable logic by showing that the position of the body-at-home is contingent (*Fly Away, Pigeon*), that humans may learn from animals (*The Two Sterile Cups*), that the disposable may be an asset (*Extra life*), and that the animal may be a source of empowerment, as exemplified by each of the analyzed novels (inclusive of *Fly Away, Pigeon* as I will show in the next section).

ROCK BOTTOM

In this section I wish to move even closer to the effects of being treated as a body out of place that is an 'other'. Ahmed claims that through the "strange encounters", that is instances of being identified as a body out of place, "bodies are both deformed and reformed; they take form through and against other bodily forms" (2000a, 86). Yet, in Pannonian borderlands novels the deforming and reforming effect is rarely narrated in relation solely to bodies, rather as an all-round experience of the subject. These novels suggest that after hitting the rock bottom of anguish and despair caused by the deforming effect of othering the subject may come to experience a reforming effect through the strength gained from recognizing that the place one was relegated to in society is independent of one's individual characteristics. In turn this recognition may act as a remedy for the shame and sense of guilt that being labeled as 'other' engendered in the subject, while being relieved from these paralyzing feelings may contribute to a sense of agency.

Yet, first one has to hit rock bottom, and the way leading there as well as the very experience of the crush landing in some Pannonian borderlands novels gets narrated in relation to the getting rid of waste i.e. its expulsion, in others through the (re)claiming of waste that is its re-embracing by redrawing or suspending the boundaries that separate it from the realm deemed as safe.

The main protagonist and narrator of Slobodan Tišma's novel, *Bernardi's room*, Pišta Petrović is a person who does not fit into any of the ready-made identity categories of the nation state project. He has a Serbian family name and a Hungarian given name but keeps equal distance to all ethnic identities. He is a heterosexual male yet with an undeveloped penis that he would rather get rid of. He has neither profession nor education; he does not belong to any club, gang, or group. Although he does have an apartment he does not claim property rights over it, rather leaves it behind and moves into a dismantled car's bodywork long abandoned in a parking lot.

As exemplified by his statement "[b]ecause of known reasons I was exempted from army service"[93] Pišta is well aware that he does not fit in the nation state's patriarchal order. Moreover, measuring himself against the strict system of modernist values that sees a man's worth in their potential for production and reproduction, he comes to the conclusion that he is "a discard on the trash heap of humanity"[94]. Yet, as he explains, he had his own embodied form of riposte from an early age: as a teenager he had stopped bathing entirely because "it is better to have a feeble body that stenches than [to have] a feeble, that is good for nothing body perfumed. […] This was my response to the punishment, the accident of nature."[95]

[93] "Oslobođen sam vojske iz već poznatih razloga, ona stvar među mojim nogama nije im ulivala poverenje" (Tišma 2012, 71)

[94] "Uvek sam bio sklon razmišljanju, ali nisam voleo da učim. Drugim rečima, bio sam primerak škarta, ljudskog otpada." (Tišma 2012, 22)

[95] "bolje je i slabašno telo u smradu nego slabašno, takorekuć nikakvo, a naparfimisano. Čak, slabašno telo prepušteno prljavštini je ipak nešto posebno. To je bio odgovor na kaznu, na udes same prirode. Ako sam se rodio nikakav, ni lep, ni

Pišta's 'response' evokes the maneuvers of Bencsik's unnamed female narrator. Bencsik's narrator started consuming kitchen waste and turned her body into a "stinky pigsty", while Pišta was stinking because he avoided washing up. The figure of the animal also shows up in Pišta's self-identification: "I walked the streets and barked, talked to myself, turned into an animal."[96] On the surface the common denominators are their indulgence filth and the resulting stench; on a deeper layer what also connects them is their discontent with their respective placement in the hierarchy of human bodies: one is a woman and the other an 'accident of nature'. In turn, both of them decidedly opt out of the late capitalist competition for having acceptable bodies. Moreover, both of them stress that it was their conscious effort to make their bodies less desirable: "I have money for regular food but I enjoy eating other's filth."[97], while Tišma's narrator calls his choice a 'response' (in Serbian 'odgovor'), i.e. something that was the result of deliberation, unlike a reaction. To sum it up, both of them attempt to step out from the repressive hierarchy of normative bodies within which they had very limited agency in an attempt to exercise a greater deal of agency through their own bodily choices and by embracing something that normative society discards.

As signaled, Pišta gradually leFT behind the Novi Sad apartment that he inherited from his parents and moves into a car wreck in a nearby parking lot. For a while he is encompassed by the sensory realm of the once upon a time luxury car's remainders, the leather seats, the morsels of Dutch pipe tobacco in the glove box entice his imagination. Yet, his increasing desperation and loneliness pushes him into a regressive mental state where he starts yearning for his long seen mother. And as a

pametan, ja sam ipak znao odgovor. … Ipak, što sam bivao stariji, počeo sam malo više da vodim računa o higijeni. Ali bio sam sve siromašniji. Jer, u krajnjoj liniji, treba se odreći svega, pa i prljavštine. Urednost je neka vrsta siromaštva, i fizičkog i mentalnog." (Tišma 2012, 20)

[96] "…ja sam znao da sam lud, otvoreno sam to govorio svima. U početku mi niko nije verovao … ali malo-pomalo ljudi su počeli da me gledaju sumnjičavo, a neki i da me obilaze u širokom luku. U stvari, ludilo je bila moja poslednja ideja. Išao sam ulicom i lajao, razgovarao sam sam sa sobom, pretvarao sam se u životinju." (Tišma 2012, 25)

[97] "Persze volna pénzem rendes ételre is, de nekem élvezetet jelent, ha mások mocskát ehetem." (Bencsik 2015, 55)

miracle, exactly when he scarcely holds his head above the water, his mother shows up, straightens out everything and takes Pišta with her to the mountain hippy farm in Southern Serbia where she has been living since she had abandoned her family.

This last segment of the novel, that is from Pišta's mother's arrival is conceived in a different modality than the rest of the book. While throughout the narrative Pišta represents someone who is ready to disrupt the power hierarchy innate to dichotomies of man / woman, human / animal, useful / useless, safe / unsafe; the novel's closure is organized along a very conventional set of values: the long awaited safe haven, that is the dwelling of the Mother is in the wilderness set among pristine mountains, and it is inhabited by benevolent, dutiful and diligent people who respect and protect traditional ways of life.

In the middle of the night en route to the farm Pišta is subject to a powerful experience:

> I doubled over in the dark as if I was leaning out a window or a doorframe. […] I started to empty myself, I emptied myself endlessly. […] Waste has left me and it left me definitively. But I also emptied down there too, I mean I pooped and peed myself. The stench was unbearable.[98]

When done, he cleanses himself in a nearby creek then submerges in the water evoking images of baptism. The Christian allusion is fortified by his evaluation of the experience: "[w]hen I finally left the water I felt like a brand new, a different being". His mother's response: "[n]ow I can take you into the house"[99], suggests that Pišta in order to be allowed within the community of farm dwellers had to undergo a purification process first. The expulsion of 'waste' here is the prerequisite for stepping over

[98] "Nagnuo sam se u mraku, kao da sam se promolio kroz nekakav prozor ili nekakav ram. … Počeo sam da povraćam. Povratio sam samu utrobu ... Smeće me je napuštalo, i to definitivno. Ali takođe sam se praznio i nadole, mislim, kakao sam i piškio sam. Užasno je smrdelo."(Tišma 2012, 106)

[99] "Kada sam se najzad digao iz vode, bio sam kao nov, drugo biće. … Mama je rekla: Sada mogu da te uvedem u kuću." (Tišma 2012, 107)

of a border, which is textually indicated by the 'window' and the 'frame', both markers of the boundary between inside and outside. In other words Pišta had to 'definitively' get rid of everything that he carried from his previous life before stepping into the new one. As signaled, this clear-cut boundary marking is in contrast with the rest of the book. The reason why I devoted time to this episode is that this near-death experience was Pišta's hitting of rock bottom, after which he embarks on a new and hopefully less cumbersome journey.

In Melinda Nadj Abonji's *Fly Away, Pigeon* the main protagonist and narrator Ildi's hitting of rock bottom is also marked with feces but it is narrated in much more everyday terms. While her recognition of the deforming effect that being treated as a body out of place has on her own subjectivity is already tackled by an instance of "animal pedagogy" (Oliver 2009), it is a bathroom 'incident' that makes her finally confront the deep running and lasting deformations her beloved parents suffered, and make her realize what destiny she wants to avoid.

The prequel, that is Ildi's moment of "animal pedagogy" happens when a café customer announces that her shoe is gone. Ildi in her super feminine and almost painfully uncomfortable waitress regalia gets on her knees and climbs under the tables, underneath which she encounters another costumer's dog. A third customer, Herr Pfister in the meanwhile "heartily laughs" at Ildi's performance to which she thinks, "if the dog won't then I will bite Herr Pfister's ankle"[100]. To overcome this fit of rage she starts to observe the café from the dogs' angle, and her first emotional response is an urge to save dogs from Western civilization. A moment later she experiences a strange desire, a desire to stay down there with the dog, to lay down and stop putting on the act of the seamless server, the well-assimilated foreigner, the docile female body entrapped in the tight waitress attire (98). After taking a

[100] Nadj Abonji 2014, 93

long moment to reflect on this perspective, she finally stands up and returns among the customers, with an action that's bitter irony is not lost on her: her re-entering the circle of 'humans' is the retrieving of an object: the lost shoe – a conventional dog-activity. However, under the effect of this event Ildi starts to realize that she does not want to be the docile underdog any more.

Yet, the strength necessary for breaking out she gains from another, in fact particularly nasty experience at the café, when it is her task to clean up the toilet after a customer's 'accident'. Upon entering the bathroom Ildi quickly realizes that there was no accident, rather the feces smeared all over was probably a 'proper' Swiss customer's message to the Kocsis family. From her train of thoughts we can also discern the meaning of the 'message': "*Schissuslander!* that is shitty foreigners! is the most common verbal attack"[101]. In her state of shock Ildi resorts to a radical step: starts to clear up the filth with bare hands. Since it is "clear as a day that someone smeared the wall intentionally, then I don't want any plastic between myself and the shit"[102], she thinks. Her further ponderings offer a precise analysis of the social embeddedness of the situation:

> …it wasn't some crazy, abnormal, unpredictable freak who picked up his own shit and smeared it on our wall but a cultivated person (as I write the word 'shit', I can't imagine that word passing the lips of any local citizens, but maybe it does, maybe they whisper 'shit' to themselves, Yugo and shit go together, the citizens who, in their cultivated lives urinate and have bowel movements, the fact that shit is stuck on the wall proves that we, they, are dirty)…[103]

After this incident Ildi wants to turn to the police, but because of her parents's objections she ends up not to. The Kocsis parents see the only way of social integration in remaining imperceptible, or as her mother says, "[t]he only way to move forward with work is to play deaf or dumb"[104]. Her parents's

[101] Nadj Abonji 2014, 249
[102] Nadj Abonji 2014, 248-249
[103] Nadj Abonji 2014, 207
[104] Nadj Abonji 2014, 261

objections Ildi interprets as the sign of their deformation after having been treated as bodies out of place for decades, and the bathroom incident and the recognition that her parents would be ready to even "assimilate to shit" propels her to "disappear from this community, […] to stop fading into the wallpaper, […] to leave behind this divided life"[105].

* * *

Ildi Kocsis experienced her life as 'divided' because she felt that she cannot fully belong to either of the communities that she has strong ties to: she was too Yugo Hungarian for Switzerland but by this time too Swiss to return to Vojvodina. What she suffered from, what most protagonists of the analyzed novels suffer from is that "absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other", as Anzaldúa put it (2007, 41).

After the bathroom-incident Ildi left her position at the family café, then, to make the cut even more final, she moved away to another town. At first glance these gestures seem to be her response to the conundrum of double unbelonging: by way of moving elsewhere, especially to a more urban-cosmopolitan setting she may become her own person on her own right. This interpretation suggests that she after all gave in to that "absolute despote duality" and chose to be Swiss – and not the 'other'.

However, there are hints in the text, which put forward the possibility of another interpretation. During the last scenes of the book, while moving into her new apartment and getting to know her new neighborhood Ildi mentions several time that she began or she wishes to begin writing. Textual traces also suggest that it is her family's story that she wants to put into writing. Placing these mosaic pieces together one arrives at the conclusion that *Fly Away, Pigeon* is the book that Ildi is about to write. If so, then instead of giving in to that "absolute despote duality" Ildi lastly engendered and entered the

[105] Nadj Abonji 2014, 266

space where she can be all of the aspects of her borderlands self: her own discursive dwelling, the space of writing.

CONCLUSION

To undertake this land – this land beyond the strongholds –
to undertake it like the greatest challenge, a hazardous journey,
but to move around in the world, to be at home in the world
without any provincial inferiority complex.
(Ottó Tolnai 1995)[106]

The above quote is just as important as its dating and context. In 1995 there has been war for years on the former Yugoslav territories, and Serbia was under international economic embargo. Yet, several students of the Institute for Slavistics at the University of Szeged decided that they would risk coming to Vojvodina to make interviews with ethnic Hungarian writers. These students were ethnic Hungarians from all over Hungary, who considered that their embeddedness in Hungarian culture and, through their studies, into Slavic literatures provides an epistemic mélange appropriate to engage in dialogue with Vojvodina Hungarian writers. The result of this endeavor is the volume titled *A rózsaszín flastrom* that is "The Pink Plaster", a standalone collection of in-debth conversations on literature in the backcountry of war.

The book itself and the project behind it well illustrate the workings of borderlands consciousness: people from differring backgrounds lead by the conviction that they have something in common take on administrative obstacles and the physical discomfort of traveling into a country with faltering infrastructure to connect, engage, and learn. On the other hand, the fact that these conversations were made during the war gives further weight to Tolnai's measured choice of words about the land – the borderlands.

[106] Interview with Ottó Tolnai in *A rózsaszín flastrom* edited by Mihály Szajbély. Szeged: JATE.

Living in the borderlands in many cases entails a hightened awareness of multiple belongings, of cultural and linguistic hybrydity, of being the bearers of several, sometimes conflictuous historical heritages, and what comes with these – a sense of not fitting in, of being an outsider. There is a measure of difficulty and even risk involved in togetherness, caring and sharing, especially so in an ideological environment that nurtures fears and rewards acts of strict boundary setting. By exploring the possibilities of connection and even communion the Pannonian borderlands novels discussed in this dissertation are not only exposing the artificiality and toxicity of heavy set cultural and social boundaries but construe tropes of belonging.

REFERENCE LIST

Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ahmed, Sara. 2000. "Embodying Strangers." In *Body Matters*, edited by Horner, Avril and Angela Keanem 85-97. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Alaimo, Stacy. 2009. "Insurgent Vulnerability and the Carbon Footprint of Gender." In *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*, 3. https://doi.org/10.7146/kkf.v0i3-4.27969. Last accessed 22/12/2022.

Alaimo, Stacy. 2010. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Allar, Neal. 2015. "The Case for Incomprehension: Édouard Glissant's Poetics of Relation and the Right to Opacity." *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*. Vol. XXIII, No. 1: 42-58.

Allister, Mark. 2001. *Refiguring the Map of Sorrow: Nature Writing and Autobiography.* Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia.

Amad, Paula. 2013. "Visual Riposte: Looking Back at the Return of the Gaze as Postcolonial Theory's Gift to Film Studies." *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 52. No. 3 (Spring): 49-74.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities.* London: Verso.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. 2007. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Armstrong, Nancy. 2006." What Feminism Did to Novel Studies." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, edited by Ellen Rooney, 99–118. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bachelard, Gaston. [1958] 2014. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas. New York: Penguin.

Bajomi-Lázár, Péter. 2013. "The Party Colonisation of the Media. The Case of Hungary." in *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* Volume 27 Number pp. 69-89.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. “Discourse in the Novel.” In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, edited by Michael Holquist, 259-422. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakos, Petra. 2016. “Kik vagymuk?” in *Ki vagy te, vajdasági magyar?* edited by Márk Losoncz, 9-18. Novi Sad: Forum.

Bakos, Petra. 2016. “Testet öltött határok. Kati Hiekkapelto és Melinda Nadj Abonji bevándorlóregényeiről.” [Embodied borders. On Kati Hiekkapelto’s and Melinda Nadj Abonji’s immigrant fiction] in *Létünk*, XLVI/4 pp. 57-73.

Bakos, Petra. 2019. “They expect us to be pretty but I dare to be ugly – and interview with Katalin Ladik” in *Punkt*, https://punkt.hu/en/2019/10/25/they-expect-us-to-be-pretty/ Last accessed 11/8/2022

Bakos, Petra. 2019. “Sárszöveg.” In *Laboratorija Tolnai Laboratórium*, edited by Danyi Zoltán, 127-143. Szeged: Porta Novum.

Balibar, Étienne. 2000. “What is a Border?” and “The Borders of Europe.” In *Politics and the Other Scene*. London – New York: Verso.

Barad, Karen. 2003. “Posthumanist Performativity. Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 28, 3: 801-831. Chicago: The University of Chicago.

Barcz, Anna. 2021. *Environmental Cultures in Soviet East Europe. Literature, History and Memory*. London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Batori, Anna. 2018. *Space in Romanian and Hungarian Cinema*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bencsik, Orsolya. 2016. *Több élet – kis va(j)dmagyar – [Extra life]* Budapest: Magvető Kiadó and Novi Sad: Forum Könyvkiadó.

Bencsik, Orsolya. 2022. *Énekes Krisztina rongyikái. Otthonkeresés Juhász Erzsébet, Végel László és Tolnai Ottó írásművészetében.* [Scraps and tatters. Home-seeking in the literary art of Erzsébet Juhász, László Végel és Ottó Tolnai]. Novi Sad: Forum.

Berényi, Emőke and Herédi Károly (eds.). 2022. *Vajdasági ládafia.* Novi Sad: Forum.

Blagojević, Marina. 2006. “Serbianhood as manhood: Politics of gender and ethnic identity in Serbia.” In *Frauen und Frauenorganisationen im Widerstand in Kroatien, Bosnien und Serbien,* edited by Marijana Gršak, Ulrike Reimann, and Kathrin Franke. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Edition AV.

Blanchot, Maurice. ([1973]; 1992). *The Step not Beyond.* Original title: Le pas au-delà. Translated and with an introduction by Lycette Nelson. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Bucur, Maria. 2022. “Between Regional and Transnational Contexts” in Katalin Fábián, Janet Elise Johnson and Mara Lazda (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 9 –18.

Csizmadia, Ervin. 2022. “A szovjet rendszer bukása és a demokratikus átmenet.” In *Magyarország globális története 1869-2022* edited by Laczó, Ferenc and Varga Bálint, 397-401. Budapest: Corvina.

Ćirić, Saša. 2009. “KRITIKA 21: Neven Ušumović.” In *Booksa.hr* https://booksa.hr/kritike/kritika-21-neven-usumovic . Last accessed 18/11/2022.

Ćurić, Ana and Kálmán, Attila. 2021. “From Budapest to Belgrade: a railway line increases Chinese influence in the Balkans”. *Investigate Europe,* December 28, 2021. https://www.investigate-europe.eu/en/2021/from-budapest-to-belgrade-a-railway-line-increases-chinese-influence-in-the-balkans/?fbclid=IwAR0X5phfoU9Z9R88T4NUs9q7P_Gcg54Iy4b--XItlxYxzglFZ1yYD00GSEU

Dánél, Mónika. 2021. “Accents and Locality: Hungarian Literature as a Medium of Multilingual Cultural Memory.” In *SFU – Studi Finno-Ugrici*, n.s. 1. pp. 1-38.

Danyi, Zoltán. 2015. *A dögeltakarító.* Budapest: Magvető.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1986. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature.* Translated by Dana Polan. London-Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1979. “The Parergon” in *October*, Vol. 9 (Summer), pp. 3-41.

Derrida, Jacques. 1997. *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Desai, Manisha. 2021. “Reflections on Cross-Border Solidarities and Transnational Feminist Analytics.” In *Cross-Border Solidarities in Twenty-First Century Contexts: Feminist Perspectives and*

Activist Practices, edited by Conway, Janet M., Pascale Dufour, and Dominique Masson, 159-167. Lanham – Boulder – New York – London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Diener, Alexander C. and Joshua Hagen. 2010. *Borderlines and Borderlands: Political Oddities at the Edge of the Nation-State. Plymouth,* UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Donnan, Hastings and Thomas M. Wilson. 2012. *Borderlands: Ethnographic Approaches to Security, Power, and Identity*. Lanham: University Press of America.

Doreen Massey. 1994. *Space, Place, and Gender.* Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Douglas, Mary. 1966. Purity and Danger: *An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo.* London and New York: Routledge.

Dzenovska, Dace. 2017. "Coherent Selves, Viable States: Eastern Europe and the 'Migration/Refugee Crisis.'" in *Slavic Review* 76, no. 2: 297–306.

Dzenovska, Dace. 2020. "Emptiness: Capitalism without people in the Latvian countryside" in *American Ethnologist.* Vol. 47, No. 1, 10-26.

Egry, Gábor. 2022. "A nemzeti önrendelkezés eszménye és a Magyar Királyság szétesése." In *Magyarország globális története 1869-2022* edited by Laczó, Ferenc and Varga Bálint*,* 130-134. Budapest: Corvina.

Eiler, Ferenc. 2022. "A bánsági telepesek panaszt nyújtanak be a Népszövetségnél" In *Magyarország globális története 1869-2022* edited by Laczó, Ferenc and Varga Bálint*,* 172-175. Budapest: Corvina.

Evans, Mary. 1999. *Missing Persons. The impossibility of auto/biography.* London and New York: Routledge.

Evans, Mary. 2000. "Extending Autobiography: A discussion of Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar." In *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods,* edited by Coslett, Tess, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield, 76-88. London and New York: Routledge.

Faragó, Kornélia. 2001. "Közép-európai határjáték" afterword to Erzsébet Juhász's *Határregény*, 95-101. Novi Sad: Forum.

Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 1995. "Gender, Race, and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of 'Hottentot ' Women in Europe, 1815-1817." In *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and*

Popular Culture, edited by Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, 19-48. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Fekete, I. Alfonz. 2016. "A rongyikadisznó színjátéka. Bencsik Orsolya: Több élet." in *Revizor* https://revizoronline.com/hu/cikk/6197/bencsik-orsolya-tobb-elet Last accessed 11/8/2022

Félix, Anikó. 2015. "Hungary." In *Gender as a Symbolic Glue* edited by Eszter Kovács and Maari Põim. Budapest: FEPS, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Filčák, Richard. 2012. *Living Beyond the Pale: Environmental Justice and the Roma Minority*. Budapest – New York: CEU Press.

Fischer, Tibor. 2015. "The Devil is a Black Dog: Stories from the Middle East and beyond by Sándor Jászberényi – explosive and dark" in *The Guardian*. Last accessed 11/8/2022 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/12/the-devil-is-a-black-dog-by-sandor-jaszberenyi

Foucault, Michel. [1966]; 1974. *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.

Fóris, Ákos. 2022. "Magyarország megtámadja a Szovjetúniót." In *Magyarország globális története 1869-2022* edited by Laczó, Ferenc and Varga Bálint, 216-221. Budapest: Corvina.

Gille, Zsuzsa. 2007. *From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History: The Politics of Waste in Socialist and Postsocialist Hungary*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Gille, Zsuzsa. 2016. *Paprika, Foie Gras and Red Mud: The politics of materiality in the European Union.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Gille, Zsuzsa and Josh Lepawsky. 2022. "Introduction: waste studies as a field." In *The Routledge Handbook of Waste Studies*, edited by Gille, Zsuzsa and Josh Lepawsky, 3-19. London and New York: Routledge.

Glissant, Édouard. 1997. "For Opacity." In *Poetics of Relation*, 189–194. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Glissant, Édouard. [1969]; 2010. *Poetic Intention.* Translated by Nathalie Stephens with Anna Malena. Callicoon, New York: Nightboat Books.

Goeman, Mishuana. 2009. "Notes Toward a Native Feminism's Spatial Practice." *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2: 169–87.

Gott, Michael and Todd Herzog. 2014. *East, West and Centre. Reframing post-1989 European cinema.* Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press.

Green, Sarah. 2012. "A Sense of Border." In *A Companion to Border Studies*, edited by Wilson, Thomas M. and Donnan Hastings, 573-592. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Green, Sarah Francesca. 2018. "Lines, traces, and tidemarks: further reflections on forms of border." In *The political materialities of borders: new theoretical directions*, edited by Demetriou, O. and Rosita Dimova, 67-83. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.

Greenberg, Jessica and Ivana Spasić. 2017. "Beyond East and West." in *Slavic Review* Vol. 76. No. 2. SUMMER, 315-326.

Grosz, Elizabeth. 1995." Sexual Signatures: Feminism after the Death of the Author." In *Space, Time and Perversion*, 9-24. New York and London: Routledge.

Gvozdenović, Nataša. 2015. "Slobodan Tišma: Čar vatre" in *Strane* [originally published in Nova misao], https://strane.ba/slobodan-tisma-car-vatre/ Last accessed 11/8/2022

Gyurkovics, Virág. 2022. "Tizenkét vajmagyar nábob". *Autonómia*, March 29, 2022.

https://hu.autonomija.info/tizenket-vajmagyar-nabob/?fbclid=IwAR0BOTELU8E8w-nICWEtOrO767-51ToPK5oPHxtcrrW2-OkK8V9Z5MUPmek

Hall, Lisa K. 2009. "Navigating Our Own 'Sea of Islands': Remapping a Theoretical Space for Hawaiian Women and Indigenous Feminism." *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2: 15–38

Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, No. 3: 575-599.

Haraway, Donna. 2008. *When Species Meet.* Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press.

Harper, Krista. 2006. Wild Capitalism: Environmental Activists and Post-Socialist Political Ecology in Hungary. *East European Monographs* No. DCXCIV. Boulder, Colorado -New York.

Harvey, David. 2003. *The New Imperialism*. London – New York: Oxford University Press.

Heilbrun, Carolyn G. 1999." Woman's Autobiographical Writings: New Forms." In *Women and Autobiography*, edited by Martin Watson Brownley and Allison B. Kimmich, 15-32. Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books.

Henderson, Mae Gwendolyn ([1989]; 1998).“ Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition.” In *Women, autobiography, theory: a reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 343-351. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Hózsa, Éva. 2007. “Önéletrajziság és függönyhatárok (A közvetítés „Ladik Katalin”-látványai)” in *Önmegalkotás és rálátás. Kód – irodalom – kultúra – régió* II., 17-34 Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet.

Huggan, Graham and Helen, Tiffin. 2010. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment.* London and New York: Routledge.

Hughson, Marina. 2019. “Not just another country case. Engaging with the semiperipheral perspective in the deconstruction of Serbian masculinity.” In *Borderlands of European Gender Studies*, edited by Teresa Kulawik, Zhanna Kravchenko. London: Routledge.

Janos, Andrew C. 2000. *East-Central Europe in the Modern World: The Politics of the Borderlands from Pre- to Postcommunism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Jászberényi, Sándor. 2020. “A varjúkirály.” In *A varjúkirály.* Kisregény. // Nyugati történetek. Tizennégy novella, 211 – 320. Budapest: Kalligram.

Jones, Owain. 2007. “An Ecology of Emotion, Memory, Self, and Landscape.” In *Emotional Geographies*, edited by Davidson, Joyce, Liz Bondi and Mick Smith, 205-218. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Jones, Owain. 2015. “’Not promising a Landfall…’ An Autotopographical Account of Loss of Place, Memory and Landscape.” In *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6: 1-27.

Judt, Tony. 2011. *A Grand Illusion?: An essay on Europe.* New York: NYU Press.

Juhász, Attila, Molnár, Csaba, and Zgut, Edit. 2017. *Refugees, Asylum and Migration Issues in Hungary.* Prague / Budapest: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung / Political Capital. Last accessed 22/12/2022. www.boell.de/sites/default/files/refugees_asylum_migration_issues_in_hungary.pdf

Juhász, Erzsébet. 2001. *Határregény*. Edited by Kornélia Faragó and Éva Toldi. Novi Sad: Forum.

Kallius, Annastiina, and Rik Adriaans. 2022. “The meme radar: locating liberalism in illiberal Hungary.” in *Cultural Anhtropology.* Vol. 37. Issue 4. pp. 679-706.

Koobak, Redi, and Raili Marling. 2014. “The Decolonial Challenge: Framing Post-socialist Central

and Eastern Europe within transnational feminist studies." in *European Journal of Women's Studies*. Vol. 21 (4) pp. 330-343.

Konstantinović, Radomir. [1969]; 2021. *The Philosophy of Parochialism*. Translation by Ljiljana Nikolić and Branislav Jakovljević. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Kovačević, Nataša. 2008. *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe's Borderline Civilization*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Krastev, Ivan. 2017. "The Refugee Crisis and the Return of the East-West Divide in Europe." in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 76, No. 2, pp. 291-296.

Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Translated by Leon S. Raudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kulaš, Vanja. 2016. "Bekim Sejranović: Tvoj sin, Huckleberry Finn." in *Moderna vremena*. https://mvinfo.hr/clanak/bekim-sejranovic-tvoj-sin-huckleberry-finn Last accessed on 11/8/2022

Kulawik, Teresa. 2020. "Introduction: European Borderlands and Topographies of transnational feminism." In *Borderlands in European Gender Studies: Beyond the East-West Frontier*, edited by Kulawik, Teresa and Zhanna Kravchenko, 1-39. London and New York: Routledge.

Laczó, Ferenc. 2022. "Magyarország csatlakozik az Európai Unióhoz" In *Magyarország globális története 1869-2022* edited by Laczó, Ferenc and Varga Bálint, 441-444. Budapest: Corvina.

Ladányi, István. 2010. "Između. Neven Ušumović: Makovo zrno." In *Kritična masa*. Last accessed 18/11/2022. https://www.kriticnamasa.com/item.php?id=190

Ladányi, István. 2019. "Küldetés, kószálás, bejárás. A Szeméremékszerek körül." In *Laboratorija Tolnai Laboratórium* edited by Danyi Zoltán, 43-50. Szeged: Porta Novum.

Ladik, Katalin. 2007. *Élhetek az arcodon? Regényes élettörténet*. Budapest: Nyitott Könyvműhely.

Lejeune, Philippe. 1989. *On Autobiography.* Edited and with a foreword by John Paul Eakin; translated by Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Lewis, Martin W. and Karen E. Wigen. 1997. *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*. Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press.

Liboiron, Max. 2022. “Matter our of place.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Waste Studies,* edited by Gille, Zsuzsa and Josh Lepawsky, 31-40. London and New York: Routledge.

Lionnet, Francoise. 1998. “The Politics and Aesthetics of Métissage.” In *Women, autobiography, theory:* a reader, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 325-336. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Losoncz, Alpár. 2016. “Az autonómia / heteronómia horizontja.” In *Ki vagy te, vajdasági magyar?* edited by Márk Losoncz, 85-123. Novi Sad: Forum.

Losoncz, Márk. 2022. “Authoritarian Regimes in Hungary and Serbia: A Comparative Approach.” In *The Crisis and Future of Democracy* edited by Ada-Charlotte Regelman, 108–181. Brussels: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.

Lykke, Nina. 2021. *Vibrant Death. A posthuman phenomenology of mourning.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Majstorović, Danijela. 2020. “Love as practice of solidarity: On Peripheral Bodies, Embodied Justice, and Associated Labor.” In *On Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 9 (2020). http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2020/15440/

Mälksoo, Maria. 2010. *The politics of becoming European: A study of Polish and Baltic post-Cold War security imaginaries.* London: Routledge.

Margolin, Uri. 2014. ”Narrator.” *The Living Handbook of Narratology.* University of Hamburg. https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/44.html Last accessed on 12/6/2022

Matijević, Tijana. 2021. “What to Do With the Past? Feminist Literary Historiographies II: Slobodan Tišma's Bernardijeva soba.” In *From Post-Yugoslavia to Female Continent: Feminist Reading of Post-Yugoslav Literature*, 189-249. Bielefeld: transcript.

Media Associations. 2018. *Media freedom in Serbia today.* Available at: https://pescanik.net/media-freedom-in-serbia-today. Last accessed 23/12/2022.

Melegh, Attila. 2006. *On the East-West slope: Globalization, nationalism, racism, and discourses on Central and Eastern Europe.* Budapest and New York: Central Europen University Press.

Mezzandra, Sandro and Brett Neilson. 2013. *Border as Method, or, The Multiplication of Labor*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva (eds.) 1993. *Ecofeminism*. London – New Jersey: Zed Books.

Mignolo, Walter D. 2000. *Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mignolo, Walter D. and Madina V. Tlostanova. 2006. "Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-politics of Knowledge" in *European Journal of Social Theory*. 9.2, pp. 205-221.

Mikola, Gyöngyi. 2015. "Elmondani a magyaroknak. Danyi Zoltán: A dögeltakarító" in *Kalligram* http://www.kalligramoz.eu/Kalligram/Archivum/2015/XXIV.-evf.-2015.-oktober/Elmondani-a-magyaroknak-Danyi-Zoltan-A-doegeltakarito Last accessed 11/8/2022

Molnár, Virág. 2021. "The Toolkit of Nationalist Populism in Contemporary Hungary: Symbols, Objects, and Modalities of Circulation." In *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures.* Vol: 35. No. 4. pp: 948-974. New York: The New School for Social Research.

Nadj Abonji, Melinda. 2010. *Tauben fliegen auf.* Salzburg und Wien: Jung und Jung.

Nadj Abonji, Melinda. 2014. *Fly Away, Pigeon.* Translated by Tess Lewis. London: Seagull Books.

Nadkari, Maya. 2010. ""But it's ours": Nostalgia and the Politics of Authenticity in Post-Socialist Hungary" In Todorova, Maria and Zsuzsa Gille (eds.): *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 190-214.

Novák, Anikó. 2018. *A kollekció poétikája. Gyűjtés és muzealizálás Tolnai Ottó művészetében.* Novi Sad / Újvidék: Bölcsészettudományi Kar és Vajdasági Magyar Felsőoktatási Kollégium.

O'Hare, Patrick. 2022. "Landfill life and the many lives of landfills." In *The Routledge Handbook of Waste Studies*, edited by Gille, Zsuzsa and Josh Lepawsky, 55-67. London and New York: Routledge.

Oliver, Kelly. 2009. *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to be Human*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Oltermann, Philip. 2021. "'At first I thought, this is crazy': the real-life plan to use novel to predict the next war" in *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/jun/26/project-cassandra-plan-to-use-novels-to-predict-next-war Last accessed on 11/8/2022

Pavlínek, Petr and John Pickles. 2000. *Environmental Transitions: Transformation and Ecological Defence in Central and Eastern Europe.* London and New York: Routledge.

Pavlínek, Petr and John Pickles. 2005. “Environmental Pasts/Environmental Futures in Post-Socialist Europe.” In *EU Enlargement and the Environment: Institutional Change and Environmental Policy in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by JoAnn Carmin and Stacy D. VanDeveer, 237-265. London and New York: Routledge.

Pető, Andrea. 2017. “Revisionist Histories, ‘Future Memories:’ Far- Right Memorialization Practices in Hungary.” in *European Politics and Society* 18 (1): 41–51 .

Pető, Andrea. 2021. “Gender and Illiberalism.” In *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism,* edited by Sajó, András, Steven Holmes, Renate Uitz. London and New York: Routledge.

Plumwood, Val. 2001. *“Introduction” in Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason.”* London: Routledge.

Pogačnik, Jagna. 2012. “Priče i junaci obilježeni granicama u svijetu iracionalnih događaja” in *Jutarnji list.* https://www.jutarnji.hr/kultura/knjizevnost/price-i-junaci-obiljezeni-granicama-u-svijetu-iracionalnih-dogadaja-1517661 Last accessed 18/11/2022.

Primorac, Strahimir. 2009. “Pripovijetke o odlascima bez povratka – Neven Ušumović: Makovo zrno” in *Vijenac Matice Hrvatske*. No. 397. Last accessed on 11/8/2022. https://www.matica.hr/vijenac/397/Pripovijetke%20o%20odlascima%20bez%20povratka/

Radics, Viktória. 2022. “A végtelenített mű. Tolnai Ottó: A fröccsöntés kora. Szeméremékszerek 3.” In *Élet és irodalom*, LXVI. 32. pp. 21.

Rauchensteiner, Manfried. 2014. *The First World War and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy.* Translated from the German by Alex J. Kay and Anna Güttel-Bellert. Wien – Köln – Weimar: Böhlau Verlag.

Rieber, Alfred J. 2004. “The Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers.” In *Imperial Rule,* edited by Miller, Aleksey I., Alfred J. Rieber, 177-208. Budapest: CEU Press.

Roginer, Oszkár. 2019. *A jugoszláviai magyar irodalom terei (1945–2010).* Zenta: VMMI.

Rooney, Ellen. 2006.“ The Literary Politics of Feminist Theory.” In *Feminist Literary Theory,* edited by Ellen Rooney, 73-95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rosello, Mireille and Stephen T. Wolfe. 2017. “Introduction.” In *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, edited by Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe. New York: Berghahn Books.

Rustow, Dankwart A. 1997. “The Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires and Their Aftermaths.” in Dawisha, Karen and Bruce Parrott (eds.) *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective.* Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe. pp. 186-198.

Scheibinger, Londa. 1993. *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Schimanski, Johan and Stephen F. Wolfe. 2017. “Intersections: A Conclusion in the Form of a Glossary.” In *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, edited by Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe, 147 – 170. New York: Berghahn Books.

Sejranović, Bekim. 2020. *Tvoj sin, Huckleberry Finn.* Beograd: Booka.

Seremetakis, C. Nadia. 1996. “In Search of the Barbarians: Borders in Pain” in *American Anthropologist* Vol. 98. No. 3.

Siegert, Bernhard. 2011. “The Map is the Territory.” in *Radical Philosophy* n. 169 (Sept/Oct 2011). pp. 13-16. https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/the-map-is-the-territory

Sik, Endre. 2022. “Átvándorlás Magyarországon.” In *Magyarország globális története 1869-2022*, edited by Laczó, Ferenc and Varga Bálint, 466-469. Budapest: Corvina.

Simmel, Georg. 1997 [originally 1903] “The Sociology of Space.” In *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, edited by Frisby, David and Mike Featherstone, 137-170. London: Sage.

Sirbik, Attila. 2021. “Egy elfelejtett generáció” afterword to Neven Ušumović's *A csalogány nyelve*. Translated by István Ladányi. Novi Sad: Forum.

Solar, Maja. 2012. “Soba na dnu okeana” afterword to Slobodan Tišma's *Bernardijeva soba*, 125-131. Novi Sad: Kulturni Centar Novog Sada.

Squier, Susan Merril. 2004. *Liminal Lives: Imagining the Human at the Frontiers of Biomedicine.* New York: Duke University Press.

Stone, Brangwen. 2018. “Food and the Foreign Home in Melinda Nadj Abonji’s Tauben fliegen auf.” In *The World Within: self-perception and images of the Other in German literatures and culture*, edited by Andrea Bandhauer, Tristan Lay, Peter Morgan, and Yixu Lü, 169-183. North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.

Tamás, Pál. 2002. *A magyar környezeti jövőkép koncepcionális elemei: Nemzetközi minták, függőségek, keretek*. Budapest: The National Ecological Council and the HAS Sociology Department. https://adoc.pub/tamas-pal-a-magyar-krnyezeti-jvokep-koncepcionalis-elemei-a-.html Last accessed 12/12/2022.

Than, K. 2020. "Hungarians march to protest PM Orban's anti-Roma campaign." in *Reuters*, 23 February. Available at: www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-romaidUSKCN20H0GB Last accessed: 22/12/2022.

Thomka, Beáta. 2017. "A hűlt helyek regénye." afterword to Slobodan Tišma's *Bernardi szobája*. 131-137. Budapest: Jelenkor Kiadó.

Thomka, Beáta. 2018. "Gastarbeiterstory. On Melinda Nadj Abonji's Tauben fliegen auf." In *Regénytapasztalat. Korélmény, hovatartozás, nyelvváltás*, 154-157. Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó.

Thomka, Beáta. 2018. "Új nyelvi otthonok a fikcióban." In *Regénytapasztalat: Korélmény, hovatartozás, nyelvváltás*, 127-178. Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó.

Thomka, Beáta. 2019. "A meseszövő Tolnai." In *Laboratorija Tolnai Laboratórium*, edited by Danyi Zoltán, 107-114. Szeged: Porta Novum.

Tišma, Slobodan. 2012. *Bernardijeva soba.* Novi Sad: Kulturni Centar Novog Sada.

Tlostanova, Madina. 2010. *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tlostanova, Madina. 2015. "Can the Post-Soviet Think? On Coloniality of Knowledge, External Imperial and Double Colonial Difference." In *Intersections* 1(2): 38-58.

Todorova, Maria Nikolaeva. 1997. *Imagining the Balkans.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tokai, Tamás. 2015. "Az angyalokról szól? Danyi Zoltán: A dögeltakarító" in *Új Forrás* 2015/9 http://ujforras.hu/az-angyalokrol-szol-danyi-zoltan-a-dogeltakarito/ Last accessed 11/8/2022

Tolnai, Ottó. 2018. *Szeméremékszerek. A két steril pohár*. Budapest: Jelenkor Kiadó.

Torres, Lourdes. 1998. "The Construction of the Self in U.S. Latina Autobiographies." In *Women, autobiography, theory: a reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith – Julia Watson, 276-287. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Tudor, Alyosa, and Piro Rexhepi. 2021. “Connecting the ‘posts’ to confront racial capitalism’s coloniality.” In In *Postcolonial and postsocialist dialogues: Intersections, opacities, challenges in feminist theorizing and practice*, edited by Redi Koobak, Madina Tlostanova and Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, 193-208. London and New York: Routledge.

Ušumović, Neven. 2009. *Makovo zrno*. Edited by Roman Simić Bodrožić. Zagreb: Profil.

Ušumović, Neven. 2021. *A csalogány nyelve*. Translated by István Ladányi. Novi Sad: Forum.

Varga, Bálint. 2022. “1878. Ausztria-Magyarország elfoglalja Bosznia-Hercegovinát.” In *Magyarország globális története 1869-2022*, edited by Laczó, Ferenc and Varga Bálint, 31–34. Budapest: Corvina.

Vaughan-Williams, Nick. ([2009]; 2012). *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Virág, Zoltán. 2010. “Az azúr enciklopédistája (Tolnai Ottó írásművészetéről)” in *A szomszédság kapui*, 54–67. Zenta: zEtna.

Vukadinović, Dejana. 2021. “Balkan i književnost: Bekim Sejranović »stranac u Sloveniji, stranac u Hrvatskoj, u Bosni, i bilo gde drugo na svetu«” in *BBC News na srpskom*. Last accessed 11/8/2022 https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/balkan-61510704

Wank, Solomon. 1997. “The Disintegration of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires: A Comparative Analysis.” In *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective.* Edited by Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, 94-121. Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe.

Welch, Richard. 2004. “From Iron Curtain to Fortress Europe and Beyond” in *Challenged Borderlands: Transcending Political and Cultural Boundaries.*

Wilson, Thomas M. and Hastings Donnan. 2012. *A Companion to Border Studies. Chichester, UK: Wiley and Blackwell.*

Wolff, Larry. 1994. *Inventing Eastern Europe*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Worthington, Kim L. 1996. *Self As Narrative : Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction.* New York: Clarendon Press.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1998. “Gender and Nation.” In *Women, Ethnicity, and Nationalism: the Politics of Transition*, edited by Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller, 23-35. London, Routledge.

Zajc, Marko. 2019. “Contemporary Borders as ‘Phantom Borders’. An Introduction.” In *Borders and Administrative Legacies. Special issue of Südosteuropa* 67, no. 3, 297-303.

Zarycki, Tomasz. 2014. *Ideologies of eastness in Central and Eastern Europe.* London: Routledge.