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# The unbearable lightness of everyday border: Meanings of closeness of the border for Russian-speaking immigrants in the Finnish border area

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## ABSTRACT

This article investigates everyday neighbouring relations in the small rural municipality of Tohmajärvi on the Finnish-Russian border. Our focus is on border-related everyday routines from the perspective of Russian immigrants living in Finnish rural border areas and on changes therein after Russia's annexation of Crimea. In feminist studies, "everyday" is understood as something repetitive, routinized, and gendered, which tends to go unnoticed in ordinary life. In border areas, border crossings and everyday transnationalism can be seen as such unrecognized everyday, which was made visible and tangible through the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014. The mood on the Finnish-Russian border has since become more strained and unpredictable, affecting essential elements of transnational familyhood such as border crossings and transnational care. Also, tensions and ruptures have appeared in relations between family members, relatives, and friends. These can be explained, among other factors, by the polarized views on the conflict in the national mediaspheres used by Russian speakers transnationally. The study follows the tradition of border ethnography and is based on ethnographic interview data collected in the rural border area on the Finnish side of the border as part of our fieldwork in 2016.

**Keywords:** Finnish-Russian border, everyday, border crossings, transnational care, border ethnography

## INTRODUCTION

Finnish perceptions of Russia traditionally relate to historical and political discourses and have been created through the ambivalent images of otherness and neighbourliness (e.g., Raittila 2011; Lounasmeri 2011). According to Pentti Raittila (2011), the perception of Russia in Finland is three-tiered. On the profound deep cultural level, Russia is perceived as an eternal threat, or through religious and cultural unfamiliarity. On the so-called long-term political level, the image of Russia is affected by such historical periods as Finnish autonomy within the Russian empire (1809–1917) and the post-WWII era of good relations with the Soviet Union. On the third level, which reflects the on-going politics, the perception of Russia is based on contemporary news in the media. Obviously, Raittila's (2011) classification lacks the everyday-level perception of Russia, which stems from first-hand experience of dealing with Russian family members, friends, and acquaintances, travelling to Russia, and having different ties to the other side of the border. In our study, we propose to add the everyday experienced level to these three dimensions of the perception of Russia in Finland. Constructed within everyday interaction on the local, regional, and transnational levels, this everyday level is indispensable in Finnish local border-dweller communities among both Russian-speaking and Finnish-speaking inhabitants.

According to previous studies published in Finnish in the 2010s, the image of Russia seems fragmented and ambivalent. While there are several different ways of seeing Russia and Russianness (e.g., Lounasmeri 2011), the discourse of otherness concerning Russia and Russians is still prevalent. For example, in a book about Russian speakers in Finland, Antero Leitzinger (2016, 70) first gives an overview of Russian immigration to Finland and then notes:

Russian immigration to Finland has always been a special threat to Finns because of the geopolitical relations between Finland and Russia. It is not that the Russian habits are too strange as such. It is the short distance [between Finland and Russia] which has turned their temporary residence and employment in Finland, their peddling and holiday cottages into a political problem.

Contrary to the previous studies, this article concentrates on different kinds of experiences of everyday transnationalism in the Finnish border region.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the relative opening of the border, cross-border contacts among local dwellers have increased. "Everyday" has become transnational

in many ways. The positive atmosphere towards Russia, Russians, and border crossings, which has become characteristic and natural in the Finnish border areas, has shifted the formerly prevalent discourse of unfamiliarity towards a discourse that stresses friendly neighbourliness on the local and regional level (see also Nilsen in this volume). The creation of this atmosphere has, however, taken 25 years of steady growth and normalization of everyday transnational contacts over the border, and an increase in Russian immigration and tourism to Finland. The regular, long-term, and routine interaction between locals and newcomers has altered the former perceptions of Russia and Russians. The “others” have become individuals with distinctive human features instead of being mere representatives of nations or ethnicities.

This steady and peaceful change towards friendly neighbourly cooperation was ruptured in 2014 by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine/EU. The geopolitical change has also had an impact on the border-dwellers’ transnational everyday lives and neighbourly relations. In addition, on the Finnish national level, Russia is more and more perceived as a military and societal threat (see Riiheläinen 2017). The border regime between Finland and Russia has changed during the past decade, and the long-term political-level perception of Russia in Finland has entered a post-Crimean era (see e.g., Oivo et al. 2021). Geopolitical insecurities have overshadowed the everyday in the Finnish-Russian border regions, where the local communities have been haunted by a sense of threat and fear ever since 2014.

To contextualize this study, we need to look at the presence of Russian speakers in Finland. In 2020, 84 190 residents in Finland had Russian as their mother tongue (Statistics Finland 2021), which makes Russians the largest population group with a native tongue other than Finnish. Russian immigrants live mainly in big cities (Helsinki, Turku, Tampere) and in the southeast of Finland, but there are also Russian speakers in the rural areas and small municipalities close to the Finnish-Russian border in eastern Finland. As an example of a small rural municipality, we use Tohmajärvi in the province of North Karelia, the easternmost Finnish region. North Karelia has 302 kilometres of common border with the Republic of Karelia of the Russian Federation. Russian immigrants have been present in North Karelia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the opening of the border crossing point in Niirala-Värtsilä, 20 kilometres from Tohmajärvi. In rural areas, Russian immigration is a gendered phenomenon. Inter marriages of Finnish men and Russian women are common in eastern rural areas of Finland (Pöllänen 2013).

## BORDER ETHNOGRAPHY

Our methodology is based on the tradition of everyday-life ethnography (see Vila 2003; Jokinen 2005; Passerini et al. (eds.) 2007), which refers to a holistic way of doing research and to an interest in knowledge rather than, for example, a way of collecting data. We see everyday as a tool for understanding human minds, their behaviour, daily practices, interactions, and communication. De Certeau (1984) understands the everyday as a setting for practices (tactics) of those who need to act in the pre-established and spatialized power relations and creatively translate and transform them, thus making visible the interaction between structures and actors in a modern society. We lean on an understanding of the everyday as something that is marked by routines, habits, and repetition, and as something that is, in a way, unrecognized by the actors. (Felski 2000; Jokinen 2005.) The everyday becomes visible and acknowledged when it is contradicted by something that is perceived as extraordinary. When we face something extraordinary (such as disease, falling in love, death, birth, “migration”, war), our everyday routines are broken, until this new situation becomes so familiar and part of the routines that it becomes the new everyday. (Jokinen 2005; Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2020.)

In our study, we are specifically interested in the everyday practices in the border region in the context of the changed geopolitical situation. Border ethnography (e.g. Vila 2003; Buzalka and Benč 2007) is a form of ethnography which takes place in concrete border regions. Border ethnographic studies have concentrated on the locations which have geopolitical, historical, or current ruptures. In Europe, such studies have been focused on the borders of the so-called east and west (e.g. Green 1997), and another location that has fostered this kind of study is the US-Mexico border (e.g. Vila 2003).

We chose the border region of North Karelia as a place of study because several factors define its pioneering character in developing neighbouring relations between Finland and Russia on the everyday level. As the fourth busiest checkpoint between Finland and Russia, Niirala-Värtsilä brings vitality and an exceptional multi-ethnic atmosphere to this area. The influence of the border-crossing point is remarkable. Until 2020, approximately 1.5 million border crossings took place in Niirala-Värtsilä per year. In addition to serving as a location of our fieldwork, Tohmajärvi can be presented as a metaphor of home for a Russian migrant (woman) in the rural border area in Finland. Tohmajärvi is a typical rural municipality where a typical Russian migrant wife is living her everyday life. The municipality has 4 361 inhabitants (2018), about 200 of whom speak a foreign language as their mother tongue. Most of them have moved to this village from the

adjacent areas of Russia or previously the Soviet Union. The proportion of Russian speakers in the whole population of Tohmajärvi is about 4%, which is the fifth highest share in Finland.

Our study is part of a continuum of long-term ethnographic research of this border region (see Davydova and Pöllänen 2010; 2011). The study is based on the ethnographic interview data set which was collected in a rural border area on the Finnish side of the border during our fieldwork in 2016 and is supplemented by focus group interviews conducted in 2021–2022. The main data set for this article was collected in 2016 and is composed of semi-structured interviews among Russian speakers (21) and local Finnish speakers living in the border region (26). In both groups, the interviews had the same themes, but the exact wordings of the questions could vary according to how the ethnographic interview proceeded. The interviews were focused on six thematic areas: perceptions of Russia in Finland, everyday life in the border area, border-crossing practices, transnational family networks and social relations, media use, and views on recent geopolitical developments (such as the annexation of Crimea and the influx of asylum seekers in 2015).

Most of the Russian-speaking interviewees were women (16). The interviews took place in the homes of our participants, in their workplaces, and in the social employment sites organized for unemployed people by the municipal authorities. Conducted in Russian and Finnish, the interviews lasted from one to two hours. The interviewees had lived in Finland for two to over 20 years, and they represented all the common migration channels (remigration, marriage migration, and labour migration). The interviews conducted among Finnish speakers serve as a sounding board and reflective background. The interviewees were recruited by snowballing: informants were contacted through the first contact, who then introduced the researchers to more informants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The data from 2016 is supplemented with focus group interviews conducted in the MATILDE project<sup>i</sup> with Russian speakers living in the border region (Kitee municipality). Four researchers were involved in the discussions of two focus groups with 7–13 informants. Each focus group lasted approximately two to three hours and took place in late 2021 and the beginning of 2022. The topics discussed were language acquisition and integration in remote rural areas, issues of everyday life on the border, and the influence of most recent geopolitical developments.

In addition to the interviews, our long-term ethnographic data consist of (auto)ethnographic observations of the border, border crossings, border area, and migration in North Karelia since the beginning of the 2000s. Also, data collection is an ongoing process that continues in our current research projects.

This paper examines everyday neighbourliness and the challenges of transnational everyday life on the Finnish-Russian border from the perspective of Russian immigrants living in the rural border areas. Firstly, we ask how transnational everyday life on the border has changed in the post-Crimean era, after Russia annexed Crimea and started the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Secondly, we look at the perceptions of Russia and Russians in the border region in Finland, and how these impact the everyday lives of Russian migrants on this border.

In the following sections, we analyse our data by ethnographic methods from the perspective of the lived everyday. The interviews are analysed by content analysis (see Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2002). We have applied this method in its classical manner: it represents “a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from the text” (Weber 1990, 9), in our case from interviews. As Weber (1990, 4) points out, this method can be used for many purposes. In our study, the relevant purposes are to “reflect cultural patterns of groups, institutions, or societies” and to “reveal the focus of individual, group, institutional, or societal attention” in the context of “everyday” in the border region. The analytical themes are created by detecting key questions based on our theoretical understanding of the research topic as well as on conclusions from our previous studies on this topic. We chose content analysis as a methodological tool to identify any thematic structures running throughout the interview data, because it “brings meaning to a recurrent topic or experiences and its various manifestations” (Graneheim et al. 2017, 32).

## **THE CHANGING EVERYDAY IN THE BORDER REGION**

Rita Felski (2000) points out that although the concept of everyday has a long history (e.g., de Certeau 1984), it has remained rather abstract, philosophical, and general. And yet, the feminist understanding of everyday concentrates on concrete, particular, and enormous variations in human lives across cultural contexts. When talking about everyday practices, attention has to be paid to daily or everyday routines, which need repeating regularly, day after day. As Jokinen (2005; see also Felski 2000) recognises, we have the everyday (routines) everywhere, but not everything amounts to everyday (routines). The repeated routines are valuable empirical tools if we are to analyse the

practices of Russian migrants. The everyday practices can be “insignificant” doings, such as doing the dishes, going to work, caring, visiting friends and relatives, family celebrations, or regular border crossings (e.g., Russian immigrant women in North Karelia who care for their relatives on the other side of the border, or buying fuel, or petty trade on the Slovakia-Ukraine border (see Buzalka and Benč 2007).

In feminist understanding, the concept of everyday is connected to the division of male and female labour (Felski 2000). According to Jokinen (2005, 14–15), gender is inevitably present in everyday life and everyday routines. The female body is associated with home and household work. Women attend to “little obvious things” at home (such as taking care of children and cooking food). Traditionally, women’s place is in the private sphere, at home. Men are responsible for society and institutional power. Men’s place is in the public sphere. It is also commonly thought that everyday routines belong to the private sphere only, but it must be understood that everyday life extends beyond it (Jokinen 2005, 27–28).

The concept of everyday is wider than just repeated routines at home. The everyday can happen anywhere. As Jokinen (2005, 7) points out, the everyday is blurring, and it is not easy to reach the everyday as a core or a tool of (theoretical) study. The everyday is inevitable, paradoxically blurring and escaping entities at the same time. All humans are surrounded by everydayness, but perhaps women’s everyday is more visible, as they are usually responsible for running what the everyday entails (e.g., care). So, everyday is different depending on gender, age, ethnicity, legal status in the society, place of origin and residence, and so on.

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain at the beginning of the 1990s, interactions between local people on both sides of the Finnish-Russian border have increased consistently. The border crossing has become an everyday routine for the local residents. On an everyday level, this can be seen in the number of marriages between Finnish men and Russian women, and also in immigration from Russia through other channels, such as on the basis of Finnish ancestry, education, or work. Migrants and their family members cross the border between Finland and Russia daily and for different purposes: women often have care responsibilities on the Russian side, Russian immigrants also visit the border area on the Russian side to buy groceries, tobacco, and fuel, and to maintain social networks. Also, Finnish inhabitants of the border regions have “found” the neighbouring regions of Russia as habitual shopping and recreation areas. Despite the familiarity of crossing the border, many obstacles to cross-border interaction still

exist. For example, crossing the border requires a valid visa and passport, and sending money (e.g., remittances) from Finland to Russia or vice versa can still be an expensive and complicated process, although it has become more transparent. Additionally, the border crossing is a slow process of paperwork and might be unpredictable because of new rules or traffic jams. (See Davydova and Pöllänen 2010; 2011; Davydova 2009; Davydova-Minguet 2015; Pöllänen 2013.)

In this article, we approach the border and border regions as places of lived transnationality, as routine interactions over the border (see e.g., Vila 2003). It makes sense to use the concept of everyday neighbouring to talk about the everyday routines of migrants, who come from the neighbouring country. Our understanding of everyday neighbouring leans on Martin's (2003, 365) definition of the neighbourhood as a particular type of place, as

locations where human activity is centered upon social reproduction; or daily household activities, social interaction, and engagement with political and economic structures. Neighborhoods derive their meaning or salience from individual and group values and attachments, which develop through daily life habits and interactions.

The neighbourhood can be summarized as a place where everyday life happens. In this definition, routines, habits, and repetition are the main markers of everyday neighbouring.

Since the collapse of the iron curtain, contacts and interactions over the border have become part of people's everyday lives on both sides of the border and have led to the emergence and enlargement of the everyday, habitual, and mundane neighbourhood. This understanding of neighbourhood differs from that of EU policy-oriented neighbourhood policies, which has also become well-established on the level of official regional development interactions in the border area. (See Laine 2016.) Everyday neighbouring grows in everyday interactions within and between places and people who before the opening of the border-crossing point were perceived and marked as Others. During these small processes, former Others become familiar with each other. Things become habitual and normal when they become repeated everyday routines. Everyday habits such as crossing the border decrease prejudices.

The everyday of the Finnish-Russian border region has been rupturing since 2014. Geopolitical changes as well as the coronavirus pandemic have affected the everyday



routines of bordering societies. However, the escalation of enmities between Russia and Ukraine and the EU, which resulted in the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022, has changed everyday neighbouring even more dramatically. Still, it is too early to analyse these changes at this point, which is why this article does not take into account the latest geopolitical changes. Rather, the following sections discuss the impact of the escalating post-Crimean geopolitical situation on everyday life on the Finnish-Russian border.

### **BORDER CROSSING AS AN EVERYDAY PRACTICE IN THE POST-CRIMEAN ERA** **The effects of conflicting relations between states on local dwellers**

In the post-cold war period, the period of a new Russia, crossing the border became everyday reality in the Finnish-Russian border region, including Tohmajärvi. The post-cold war era ended with the occupation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014. This war also started a new era in terms of crossing the border between Finland and Russia. According to our interview data, the most noticeable change was the “disappearance” of Russian tourism. The number of Russian tourists on the Finnish side of the border decreased dramatically, caused economic insecurity for local entrepreneurs, and changed the labour market situation in Tohmajärvi. There was clearly less demand for a Russian-speaking labour force in the local service sector.

Also, the interviews suggest that after 2014 the Finnish-speaking inhabitants of border areas started to view Russia as a security threat. Not all the interviewees saw Russia as a threat to national security, but no one could deny the presence of a new geopolitical situation. This came out as unwillingness to speak about the issue. It seems that the local dwellers perceived the new geopolitical status to be so sensitive and disturbing that they rather concentrated on their everyday affairs instead of reasoning on the international relations between Russia and Finland, and between Russia and the EU.

It also emerged in the interviews conducted with Russian speakers that international politics and Russia's role in it seemed to be a sensitive topic. Russian speakers felt that there were divisions among them in how they viewed Russia's actions in Ukraine. Some condemned Russia, others saw the attack as completely justified, and some refused to talk about the issue at all. Our Russian-speaking interviewees in Tohmajärvi told us that the geopolitical situation was changing their everyday life routines, such as border-crossing processes. After the annexation of Crimea, the border crossing became more unpredictable because of attitudinal changes. The bordering states – Finland and Russia – again grew more suspicious about each other. Since the annexation of Crimea, both Russia and Finland have voiced concerns over dual citizenship, and Russian speakers

who mostly have both Finnish and Russian citizenships have become objects of these suspicions (Oivo and Davydova-Minguet 2019, Oivo 2021).

### CHANGING EVERYDAY TRANSNATIONALISM

At the local level, everyday border-related issues commonly concern the bureaucracy of the border-crossing procedure, such as getting visas, restrictions on checkpoint opening hours, questions about possible closure of the border, long queues, and so on. These issues were also raised in our interviews, especially among the Russian speakers:

The fact that the border is so near, is good, I can quickly get to my mother and children. But the checkpoint is something, it's a long queue if the car is registered in Finland. I lose three hours, four hours, queueing. It's horrible. ... Such torments of hell. Don't worry, you're sort of like home, but you're still ... (laughs) (Female, born 1960.)

Everyday neighbouring is a gendered and ethnicized phenomenon. This can be seen from many border-crossing practices at the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint. For example, Finnish fuel buyers on the Russian side of the border are mostly middle-aged and elderly men, while Russian women who live in Finland frequently care for their relatives transnationally and therefore cross the border regularly and habitually. (Davydova and Pöllänen 2010; 2011.) In Finland, Russian immigrant women are both the main forces of caring and parenting within the families (Pöllänen 2013) and representatives of ethno-sexualized others (Davydova and Pöllänen 2010). According to our ethnographic findings, the border crossing is extremely important for Russian immigrants, because their families and care relations on the Russian side depend on it. The intergenerational care networks constitute a resource in the lives of Russian immigrant women in North Karelia, when, for example, their parents come to care for the grandchildren in Finland, or the networks can be an exacting responsibility, when aged relatives need care on the Russian side. These intergenerational care networks are challenging aspects of everyday life, yet for some immigrant women, the children's grandparents are vitally important in their everyday lives. At the same time, caring obligations are part of the lived everyday for most migrants on the Finnish side of the border.

While a well-organized transnational care network can help Russian immigrant women to cope with everyday care matters, intergenerational care responsibilities can also push immigrant women into care poverty. Care poverty means basically the situation where people in need of care cannot receive assistance from either formal or informal sources.

It also refers to structural inequalities and insufficient social policies. (Kröger 2022.) According to the interviews, Russian immigrant women who live in the border areas of Finland perform normative female practical and emotional over-generational care over the border. They also typically cite their care responsibilities (e.g., need to earn money for their children and elderly relatives in Russia) as a reason for their immigration to Finland. While living in Finland, they are involved in the care networks of their relatives, who may live in the Russian border areas or elsewhere in Finland.

Care is a significant part of Russian migrants' everyday life, sometimes in a very intensive way. In many cases, Russian migrants have moved to North Karelia from the nearby Russian border region. Migrant wives usually have several care duties both in Finland and Russia, and beyond. Caring for relatives on the Russian side is marked by precarious circumstances and affects as a result of the migrant wives' insecure labour market position in Finland and the unpredictability connected to the border and border crossing. (Pöllänen and Davydova-Minguet 2017.) Since 2014, this unpredictability has increased, and Russian migrants living in Finland are concerned: how can they continue their transnational caring for relatives if the border is closed or if it is not safe to travel to Russia? (see Oivo et al. 2021). Rather than making it easier to cross the border, the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint has become a source of unpredictable everyday transnationalism.

The emotions involved in family care vary a great deal. An ambivalence emerges from the mixture of, for example, pity, frustration, dislike, hate, missing, tiredness, and eternal love. In some cases, many of these feelings are present at the same time, and their appearance is linked to the women's circumstances as a whole. According to the interviews, the care can be physical, emotional, and financial. In the words of one of our informants:

- How has your life changed after moving to Finland?
- The first years were hard because they were there, I'm here. But since I went there every week, I still drive, and I continue to drive there. At first, I earned money, I was a breadwinner for the family, so fragmented: children in one place, mother in the other. My heart was divided into two parts. One part in Russia, and the other part in Finland. So I live, half of me here, half there. But in general, life has changed. How has it changed? Probably, when I started to live in Finland, I could afford to go on vacation abroad. I live normally, under normal conditions. I even feel some kind of guilt towards my children, that they do not

see what I see here. And towards my mother. It is now difficult even to bring her to Finland, because she is Ukrainian, and she can get a visa only in Kyiv. And my mother is very sick, she cannot go to Kyiv, especially not to wait for a visa. Therefore, my mother cannot come here. Children can, children come every second week, first one, then another. (Female, born 1960)

## **POST-CRIMEAN ERA FLAMING CONFLICTS IN FAMILY RELATIONS AND FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS**

Russian-speaking interviewees consider the pre-Crimean everyday life different compared to the post-2014 everyday. There is less confidence and trust in relationships among Russian immigrants in the border area in Finland. Different attitudes towards the Russian state's politics have created tensions in many families and other social relations. Increasing distrust of authorities both in Finland and in Russia is also present in Russian migrants' lives, including the unpredictable behaviour of Russian authorities at the border zone. Many Russians keep crossing the border out of necessity, to care for their close ones in Russia.

Russian migrants living in the border region have become nervous and worried about their present and future situation as dual citizens in Finland. (See also Oivo 2021.) There are many kinds of concerns in Russian migrants' everyday lives, caused by both societies, Finnish and Russian. For example, Russian migrants are expected to declare to Russian authorities, if they have been granted a residence permit or nationality by another country, but in their everyday lives, people hesitate whether this is a rational and wise thing to do. Could it somehow affect their properties – such as flats and summer cottages – or some of their rights in Russia? Rumours circulate among Russian speakers concerning these issues, and it is difficult to obtain correct and truthful information. It should also be noted that Russian speakers in Finland are not a homogenous group. There are people who do not trust Finnish authorities, there are people who do not trust Russian authorities, and there are those who do not trust either Russian or Finnish authorities.

For Russian speakers living in Finland, everyday life is ambivalent. While they face the propaganda produced in Russia, this propaganda represents trustworthy information for their relatives living on the Russian side and is a part of their lived everyday. Russian nationalism may seem irrational from the perspective of Finland or the EU, but many Russian speakers continue to regard themselves as “patriots of their country”. Some informants feel that Russia is under threat but will be protected against the enemy by “nash

President” (our president). Some migrants express their Russian patriotism openly.

Did you ask how to avoid conflicts with Russia? Don't touch Russians. Don't touch them at all. Americans don't bother at all, you live there on your continent, so live there, who touches you at all? We'll figure it out on our own here. Never understand these <Russian> people? Now, no matter how bad the situation is, it's terribly bad: prices are rising, and inflation is constantly higher, everything is bad, very bad, life is hard, announce that somewhere someone has stepped on our tail, everyone will rise. Everybody. Even I will leave here. You understood it when you asked about Crimea. I immediately said that Crimea is ours. (Interview in spring 2016, F, 1968)

For those Russian-speaking immigrants who openly oppose “nash Prezident”, it is sometimes difficult to maintain relationships with other Russian speakers and relatives in Russia. It requires avoiding many themes in conversations, especially those concerning Russian politics.

According to our focus group interview conducted in February 2022, a week before Russia attacked Ukraine, it seemed that those Russian speakers who had migrated to Finland more recently were commonly supporters of the political opposition. In effect, they are political refugees even if they have migrated using residence permits for study or work. It is hard for them to get along with those Russians who have been living in Finland for a longer period and who do not understand the politicized everyday reality in Russia today. In their everyday lives and contacts in Finnish localities, Russian speakers try to maintain their networks without mentioning such sensitive issues as politics and religious beliefs.

Still, even those who support Russia's actions in Ukraine view Russia as a problematic country. They may share their own experiences in Russia with the interviewer with bitterness, and their “patriotism” may look rather conflictual and ambivalent. As one of the informants said:

Russia is a big country. It's not mine. My country is the Soviet Union. It doesn't exist anymore. And if they ask me: “Are you Russian?”, I say: “No, I'm Soviet.” Because I can't say that I'm Russian. One half of me is Ukrainian, my mum is Ukrainian, the second half, my dad, is Russian. So, I'm not Russian, I'm not Ukrainian, I have every right to be Soviet. I believe that my very core is the

Soviet Union. And Russia, probably, is a good country, I don't know. ... The Soviet Union is my whole life, it's my childhood. I was happy, I was growing up, I was studying, I knew that I would have a future, the future of my children. In my opinion, for a person, it is always good when there is a system. In the Soviet Union, whatever it was, a system existed. Then the whole system was broken, everything was broken. Russia did not make its own system. Now we have a huge country without a system, it's chaos. And the Soviet Union is my home, my grandfather is Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. (Laughs) Probably, he is the grandfather of all the children of Soviet times. (Female, 1968)

### **MEDIATIZED EVERYDAY LIFE**

People's everyday lives are not separated from the media. Quite the opposite, the media surrounds and permeates our everyday lives. In general terms, the media use of our informants is transnational. However, Russian speakers use Russian media more commonly than Finnish speakers, but also many of our Finnish-speaking interviewees told us that they followed both Finnish and Russian and international media. Transnational media consumption is more common for those Finns who are involved with Russia professionally (working in tourism, engineering, or regional development), whereas the Russian speakers' media use is more ritualistic. They use media produced in Russia for purposes of recreation and entertainment, drawing on the ways and habits that have followed them throughout their lives. (See Davydova-Minguet et al. 2016; Sotkasiira 2017.) Although Russian speakers' media use appears to be very diverse, they tend to "dwell" predominantly in the Russian media sphere. The use of Finnish media seems to be more occasional and located in public spaces (coffee shops, workplaces), while Russian media is associated with home or private internet-based devices.

When asked about the sources of information about Russia, Russian speakers typically started to compare Finnish and Russian media. They were often confused and reluctant to speak about media use and present-day political news. Some even refused to be interviewed, while others conducted the interview in such a way that they could direct the conversation to practical and everyday issues rather than political topics. The question about media consumption could be interpreted as enquiring about political opinions and affiliations in a highly polarized and politicized situation. The Russian speakers' media use can be seen as a transnational bordering practice, which instead of producing everyday neighbourliness can create images of hostility, enmity, and confusion.

- How often do you hear something about Russia? From the media, for example.
- In Finland, I hear very little about Russia and only negative things. And from Russia's side about Finland, when the Finnish President comes to ask to cancel the sanctions, you know it. I said earlier that we in Russia have more information about Finland than there is in Finland about Russia. The <Finnish> media is silent about such things. The President came to Finland. That's all. What do they decide, how they decide, is silenced.
- Do you watch Russian TV here?
- Of course. Through the satellite and the Internet. Now the access is free.
- Are there any specific programmes that you prefer to watch?
- I like politics, mostly. The central <Russian> channels. Sports, now the Olympics. And the movies. ...
- Do you read the Finnish press?
- Unfortunately, it's hard for me to read the Finnish press. I can't do it. I can understand, but it's hard to read. I need to read ahead, then back. It's hard. (Male, 1965)

The most used media is Russian television, which in research is argued to function as the main instrument of producing present-day Russian nationalism and mobilization of masses in support of Russian government policy. (See Khaldarova 2021; Alyukov 2022; Tolz and Teper 2018.) The adoption of the Russian television-produced discourse comes in the interviews in a very unequivocal way. Teemu Oivo (Davydova-Minguet et al. 2016) has identified the ways in which official political shows on Russian television profile their viewers by presenting them as intelligent, humane, well-informed, and reasonable followers of international politics. The Western viewer is constructed as misinformed and naïve, and the rhetoric of Russian political commentaries is aggressive and derogatory. Involvement in the Russian tv discourse was clearly exemplified by one of our Russian-speaking interviewees. The following quotation from the interview presents both the argumentation and style of the discourse used in the political talk shows of Russian state-controlled television:

- What do you think about the events in Ukraine?
- I have such a concept. Friends don't have to act like, today you're a friend, tomorrow you're an enemy. It shouldn't be like that. And here it turns out that we were friends all the way, milked this Russia like a cash cow, and then, as it got worse, Russia is an enemy, no longer a brother. (laughs) You can't do that guys. <...> You were presented with legal requirements. You borrowed 3 billion, did you get the gas? We are fulfilling our contracts. Why don't you do it? <...> Well,

if there is nothing to pay with, come honestly, say: Putin, we are in a difficult situation now, you either give us a respite, or something else. You were given all these opportunities: they gave you a respite, and they gave this and that, they met all the conditions. No, not like this, not like that. And then they impudently declare: we don't want to talk about this topic at all. <...> Everywhere people are good, but the family, as they say, has its black sheep. The only thing I don't like, is that Poroshenko, the leaders like him, they are traitors to their people, but the people, why do you tolerate it? Get up and say: get out, comrade Poroshenko, so that your foot is not here. Why are you silent and complaining? What to complain about? This is your country, put things in order in your country. Why the hell do you let an American poke his nose here, lead you, dictate? This is wrong, I think. If you are friends and brothers, then behave like this. But today they are brothers, and tomorrow they are enemy number one. (Male, 1937.)

However, Russian speakers in Finland are not a homogenous group in terms of media use, either. The division between those who support Putin's governance and those who belong to the political opposition can also be seen in media consumption. For Putin's supporters, for example, the political talk shows on Russian television are the main source of information. It seems that those who only or mainly follow Russian government-controlled media find it difficult to understand that relations between Russia and Ukraine are not exactly how Russian television represents them to be. This causes conflicts even between family members: relatives who live in Russia or Finland are at odds with those who live in Ukraine. Likewise, media-consumption-based divides, and consequently, worldview divides may occur between generations of the same family. Most Russian speakers have decided not to speak about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict with other Russian speakers in general. Russian speakers have developed a new, "post-Crimean" way of communication with their Russian-speaking acquaintances, excluding political and societal conversations.

The prevalence of Russian media in Russian speakers' mediascapes also impacted their opinions of Finnish media. Many of our interviewees said that Finnish media presents Russia only in a negative light, and the real history of Crimea that proves its belonging to Russia had not been presented in Finnish media at all. At least before the war in 2022, some Russian speakers living in Finland thought that because most Finns were affected by Finnish media propaganda, they did not understand the historical background of the Crimean situation. Those Russian speakers who followed Russian state-affiliated media often felt that the Finnish fear of Russia was unjustified, not grounded in reality.



However, some interviewees were hesitant about this, referring to the events of the Second World War.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study clearly pointed out that the everyday lives of Russian speakers in the Finnish border areas were affected by two key transnational phenomena: the closeness of the border enabling transnational care, and the borderless media landscapes making the consumption of Russian media possible. The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the beginning of the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014 had an obvious impact on this transnational way of living. Crossing the Finnish-Russian border had become more unpredictable than before, while confidence in the continuation of the transnational everyday had been eroded to the point of becoming fragile. Many Russian speakers lost their jobs or their livelihoods were affected by decreased Russian tourism. These developments, in turn, affected the ways of transnational caring (see Pöllänen and Davydova-Minguet 2017).

The overall atmosphere of the border areas had become more strained. This was manifested in the views of Finnish speakers who after the long post-Soviet period of detente had started to fear Russia again. Finns' views on Russia were also influenced by business interests. Preserving good neighbourly relations with Russia was seen as essential. Likewise, in their interviews the Russian speakers portrayed themselves as good neighbours but also felt that Finns received wrong information about Russia in the Finnish media and did not understand Russia. The post-Crimean atmosphere enhanced mutual distrust in many subtle ways. In the interconnected and intertwined world of today, international crises with Russian involvement affect everyday neighbourliness in Russia's adjacent areas, including Russian-speaking populations who remain connected to their Russian places and communities of origin.

The transnational media involvement of Russian speakers living abroad plays a significant role in the construction of their feelings of belonging. Following Russian television coverage, in particular, and Russian social media involvement not only spread the Russian official worldview but also produced a sense of co-presence with and belonging to the "whole nation", which is "righteously" Russian and not Finnish. Russian television keeps producing yet more news programmes and political talk shows – infotainment – at this time of international crises, creating more tensions both among Russian speakers and among Russian and Finnish speakers.

Additionally, the character of Russian immigration is changing. Already before the beginning of full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, “new” Russian speakers appeared in Finland, also in the rural borderlands. These migrants had emigrated from Russia for political reasons. The war will bring to Finland Russian-speaking refugees from both Ukraine and Russia. These people will presumably be less understanding of present-day Russia than those who have arrived earlier. New tensions and increasing fragility of the everyday on the border can be expected.

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