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EDITORIAL

Introduction

OLGA DAVYDOVA-MINGUET
Guest editor
University of Eastern Finland
olga.davydova-minguet@uef.fi

PIRJO PÖLLÄNEN
University of Eastern Finland

This *Barents Studies* issue discusses something that is already "gone", namely the pre-war realities of the Finnish-Russian borderland. Articles collected here concentrate on the border between Russia and Finland, and particularly between two regions which belong(ed) to the Barents Euro-Arctic Council: the Republic of Karelia of the Russian Federation and the province of North Karelia in Finland. The inclusion of the Republic of Karelia (in 1997) and Finnish North Karelia (in 2016) in the Barents council was envisioned to strengthen cooperation between administrative bodies, businesses, and citizens. The membership was to promote everyday contacts and enhance peace, sustainability, and security in the region. The war against Ukraine that Russia started on 24 February 2022 suspended Russian membership in the Council.

Since February 2022, we have all lived in a new reality, and the future is in many ways open. Were there warning signs that we could have read better? Could the war have been prevented? How do people adjust to the new realities of a shifting geopolitical situation? These questions are painfully relevant both in terms of the recent past and what now looks like turning into a war of attrition.

The articles in this collection were originally written for the final publication of the international research project Images of Russia across Eurasia: Memory, identities, conflicts, carried out in five countries in 2015–2017. Estonia, Moldova, and Kazakhstan represented post-Soviet countries, Poland stood for post-Socialist Eastern Central European countries, and Finland and France served as "old European" countries. The researchers of this international project had Estonian, Moldovan, Russian, Finnish, Polish, and French citizenships, which did not always correspond with their ethnic backgrounds. The project was funded by the European Era-Net research programme and national research funding bodies, in Finland by the Academy of Finland.

The final publication was planned to be issued in Russia, but already in 2018–2019 the findings and ideas of the project started to feel somewhat incompatible with Russian official scientific discourse. Also, only the Finnish team seemed to be willing and prepared to publish their contributions in a Russian publishing house, while the other teams hesitated. In the end, already written articles remained unpublished. Now some of them have been revised and collected for this issue, keeping in mind the new international and geopolitical milieu.

The funding application of the project was written in 2015, when after the first shock of Russia's annexation of Crimea, the new status quo was already established. Russia became the target of European and American sanctions and issued its own "counter-sanctions", but the "open" border regime between Finland and Russia, one of the main achievements of the post-Soviet period, was still in place, and the cross-border traffic involving local dwellers from both sides of the border continued. Not only did Russian tourism to Finland revive after the drop in the value of the Russian rouble in 2014, but transborder cooperation was sustained in projects funded by EU-Russian cooperation programmes. Everyday transnational connections also continued. They had been established between people living in the border regions since the opening of the border in the early 1990s and the start of Russian immigration to Finland. Still, the affective condition of mistrust, insecurity, and fear began to grow in Finland. The articles of this volume analyse the changing perceptions of neighbouring Russia in the Finnish North Karelian border region during this historical period.

Images of Russia in Finland have long been multilayered. They have also changed over time. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the common view on Russia was based on the idea of opening the border and enhancing socio-economic development in the neighbouring regions through new neighbouring relations. Russia was seen as a potential opportunity for Finnish economic development, especially its eastern border areas. Russia was nevertheless seen as a threat, too. There was a sense of fear in the image of Russia. One of the open questions seemed to be whether it was possible to understand Russia. (See, for example, Kivinen and Vähäkylä 2015; Lounasmeri 2011; Tarkka 2015; Vihavainen 2004; Widomski 2015.)

The Finnish team of the international research project was especially interested in the possibility to study the lived experience of, and feelings towards, Russia among the people living on the border. The project idea stressed the necessity of studying images of Russia in the neighbouring countries from the experiences of the diverse populations

in these areas. In contrast to the previous studies of Russia's images in Finland, Russian-speakers were taken as one of the population groups that needed to be studied together with Finnish-speakers, who make up the majority of the population. So, the starting point of the project combined different angles on the image of Russia: the point of view of the border as known and experienced by the majority and minority populations; as represented in media; and the perspective of areas situated close to the border. The images of Russia had to be studied as existing in everyday consciousness, gained through own experience, produced, disseminated, and discussed in media, existing in historical memory – which were all envisioned to be diverse in different groups. The view adopted on the border area between Finland and Russia in the project and in this publication is based on the understanding of border not as a line drawn on a flat geographic map, but as a borderscape produced by bunches of multilayered and co-constitutive processes, practices, narratives, and representations (Brambilla 2015, 2021). The explicit aim of the project was to enhance understanding of multilayered perceptions of Russia, to look at Russia's image situated in time and space marked by post-Soviet developments, cross-border contacts, and the changed geopolitical situation.

The articles of this volume present some findings and ideas raised throughout the project within the Finnish team of the consortium. The articles are written on the basis of ethnographic, interview, and media materials collected during the project. Three articles written by members of the project team are supplemented by Henrik Nielsen's study of the perceptions of Russia among international and Finnish students from Joensuu who participated in a study tour to Russia.

The opening article of the collection, "Images of the Russian threat as printed at the border", is an analysis by Teemu Oivo, who has examined coverage concerning Russia in the North Karelian daily paper Karjalainen in 2016. Oivo studies the images and ideas about Russia that were widely discussed in relation to daily politics and were widely aired predominantly by the Finnish-speaking population. The article concentrates on the mediatized debate about Russia as a threat, and also reflects on the impact of the medium (traditional printed newspaper) on the character of the images. Oivo discerns and discusses different layers of threat-laden images of Russia in relation to international, national, and regional politics. He finds it intriguing that Russia's threatening image is associated with certain historical periods, such as the period of independence, but is almost absent from the discussion of the period when Finland was a part of the Russian Empire. As a distinctive feature of the border region, attitudes towards Russians are somewhat uneasy regardless of the locals' familiarity with Russian people. What

journalists strive to do is keep Russians and the threatening Russian state regime separate from one another. In Oivo's findings, the journalism of *Karjalainen* clearly separated geopolitically threatening "Russia from afar" and its high-ranking actors from familiar, down-to-earth "Russia from nearby", which included tourists and Russian-speaking immigrants living in North Karelia. While Russia's image as a geopolitical threat has been balanced by the image of Russia as an economic opportunity on the regional level, Oivo comes to the conclusion that Russia's image rests on a selective remembrance of historical events and participates in re-producing the perception of Russia as exceptional compared to other great powers. At the same time, *Karjalainen* creates multilayered representations of Russia, distinguishing the Russian state regime from Russian people and Russia as a place, the manner of which is now, according to Oivo, changing.

Henrik Nielsen's article "Us and Them: Cross-border interactions between Finland and Russia" delves into the changes of the dichotomous construction of "us and them" through the prism of cross-border interactions on the Finnish-Russian border. Nielsen's theoretical premise is the discussion on the concept of Other that is needed for the definition of national Self. Nations result from the definition of their borders, not vice versa, Nielsen argues. Both borders and nations may also be seen as dynamic, constantly changing concepts. Historically, Finnish actors have constructed Finnishness as distinct and opposite to Russianness. Nielsen's semi-structured interviews of employees of Finnish NGOs and his analysis of questionnaires targeting Finnish students before and after their study trip to Russia, help him establish that in the views of Finnish actors, the "Us vs. Them" construction had lost its sharpness. The border between Finland and Russia was seen rather as an opportunity for cooperation. The hostilities of the past were history. As in the journalism of *Karjalainen*, the interviewees made a distinction between the Russian regime and the Russian people. That Russia is different only applied to the functioning of institutions rather than to "national characters". Nielsen argues that the "Us vs. Them" dichotomy was barely noticeable in personal cross-border interactions. This article also can be seen as a strong statement in the discussion on building a fence on the Finnish-Russian border. Nielsen warns that the fence, if built, will have serious consequences on the interactions over the border and the attitudes of future generations towards Russia and Russians.

In the next article, "The unbearable lightness of everyday border: Meanings of closeness of the border for Russian-speaking immigrants in the Finnish border area", Olga Davydova-Minguet and Pirjo Pöllänen present their findings of ethnographic studies

among Russian-speaking dwellers of North Karelian border municipalities. The article is based on the authors' long-term ethnographic work in the rural border area and interviews with Russian and Finnish speakers conducted during the project. Living on the border involves many mundane, often unnoticed everyday routines that are connected with the border and border crossings. The understanding of everyday comes from feminist studies, where it has been conceptualized as something repetitive, routinized, and gendered, which typically goes unnoticed in ordinary life. The interactions over the border are approached from the perspective of everyday transnationalism and neighbourliness, with mundane reproduction of social ties, habits, and interactions. The authors ponder how the atmosphere of the border area has changed after the annexation of Crimea, and how it has affected the everyday transnationalism of Russian-speakers. While Nielsen found in his study that Finnish participants of cross-border cooperation did not shelve their common projects, many shifts occurred in Russian-speaking immigrants' everyday transnationalism: the atmosphere of the border became more strained and unpredictable, thus affecting border crossings and transnational care as an essential element of transnational familyhood. Additionally, tensions and ruptures had appeared in relations between family members, relatives, and friends. These changes, although not visible, were experienced as adding tensions in transnational living over the border and between people on the Finnish side of the border. They also made some border-dwellers refuse to be interviewed. One of the factors that produced these divisions was identified as transnational use of Russian state-controlled media. Russian-speaking immigrants live at the crossroads of Finnish and Russian mediaspheres and perceive this as highly conflictual. In this environment, Russian-speakers have developed a new "post-Crimean" way of communication with their Russian-speaking acquaintances which excludes political and societal conversations.

The last article of the collection, Olga Davydova-Minguet's "Maybe we've gotten a little better against them". Russian speakers' positionings in racializing "migration crisis" speech" continues the analysis of the mindsets among Russian-speakers. In 2015, during the European "migration crisis", over 30 000 asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, and other Middle East and African countries arrived in Finland. Some of them ended up in reception centres for asylum seekers in North Karelia. This influx of asylum seekers prompted different reactions within Finnish society from the wave of solidarity and help to openly racist attacks. The article discusses boundary formation within a multiethnic Finnish society, where Russian-speaking immigrants are considered as an already established part of community. They assess their position not only in relation to local Finns, but also related to newcomers. During the fieldwork of the project,

Russian-speaking and Finnish-speaking dwellers of the border region were asked about their attitudes towards new immigrants. The majority of Russian-speaking respondents expressed a negative stance on this issue. In the analysis, these opinions are set in the "national" framework of the formation of racialized hierarchies in an immigration society. Additionally, the view on Russian-speakers as transnational media users is applied to understand the harsh character of the speech. It seems that the interviewees' opinions have been shaped by the "immigration-critical" discourse that has gained a strong foothold in Finland. The opinions also reflect the geopolitical views created by the Russian mainstream media, which many Russian-speakers in Finland use as their primary source of information and entertainment. In the interview speech, asylum seekers were racialized and presented as not belonging in Finland.

Davydova-Minguet's article continues the analysis of the impact of media on the formation of opinions: while Oivo analysed a regionally operating printed newspaper as a medium conditioning the appearance of some opinions and disappearance of others, Davydova-Minguet presents transnationally operating Russian TV and social media as having a great impact on the views and language style of Russian-speaking immigrants. Transnational mediatized discourse on the "unsuitability" of asylum seekers in Europe and Finland is grounded in populist anti-immigration speech and was used by the interviewed Russian-speakers instrumentally to discursively improve their position in the Finnish racialized ethnic hierarchy.

Since the beginning of the Russian war in Ukraine, the situation on the border and beyond has changed further. Finland is in the process of joining NATO, which the vast majority of population supports. Most Finnish companies operating on the Russian market have withdrawn their businesses from Russia, but some are still present. Academic cooperation with Russian research institutions has been suspended by decisions taken by the Academy of Finland and the Ministry of Education.

Since the beginning of the mobilization of reservists in Russia in September 2022, Finland has denied entry of Russian citizens holding a tourist visa, excluding visits on the basis of family ties. All political parties in the parliament now support the building of a border fence first in southeastern parts of the border, and later along the entire border with Russia. Obviously, feelings of fear, disapproval, and distrust are now on the surface and guide these decisions. Still, the border- crossing points go on functioning, and the traffic over the border now consists predominantly of people who have transnational care and family duties and obligations over the border. Although the broadcasting of

Russian TV channels through Finnish cable television operators has stopped, Russian-speaking inhabitants of Finland still are involved in Russian mediaspheres through social media and internationally operating internet television companies.

How will the decisions on cutting connections with the other side of the border impact on the future relations with Russia and Russians – those who live in Russia and those already in Finland – and more broadly in Scandinavian or European countries? How do they impact already in the production of "Us", members of Finnish or more broadly European society? As Henrik Nielsen states in his article, these measures are part of the spectacularization of the border, conveying the message that people who live on, or have connections with, the other side of the border are dangerous. It is obvious that bordering processes have become fuelled and the whole borderscape stained by the war.

Nevertheless, the question of everyday security in multiethnic Finnish society and elsewhere in Europe is linked to the issue of good population relations. These relations intersect with images of Others and Us: good population relations among heterogenous immigrant groups, majority populations, and, in our context, between Finnish and Russian speakers depend on public discussions and politics. Questions of how to live on a border which is being fortified, and what kind of future is being envisioned, should be discussed with this turn to re/bordering and borderscapes in mind.

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ARTICLES

Images of the Russian threat as printed at the border

TEEMU OIVO
University of Helsinki, University of Eastern Finland
teemu.oivo@uef.fi

ABSTRACT

Since Finland's declaration of independence from Russia in 1917, the actuality of threats emanating from images of Russia has been one of the most debated topics in Finnish academic, political, and open discussion forums alike. Reflecting on previous studies, I have qualitatively examined how threats associated with such images were represented and challenged in 2016. My case study is based on an analysis of *Karjalainen,* the provincial newspaper of North Karelia, which borders another Barents Euro-Arctic Region, the Republic of Karelia, a subject of the Russian Federation. The daily media discussions on the pages of *Karjalainen* provide a view to the intersection of regional, national, and international news. I compare the newspaper contents to threats associated with Russia as recognized in previous research literature. The threat images are represented contextually in different ways when they are related to history, contemporary international affairs, the Russian people, and border life, as well as the less visible topics of the economy and the environment. The newspaper content rehearses the dominant image of Russia as a geopolitical threat, but even those who wrote about this, often problematized simplified images of an entire country.

Keywords: Country images, Russia, threat, regional media, border region

INTRODUCTION

The Finnish image of Russia is connected to several national debates and policies in Finland such as dual citizenship policy, arms acquisitions, energy politics, and relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). From the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, Finnish national identity was primarily determined in negation of Russianness. During the first decades of Finnish independence after 1917 up until World War II, relations between the two countries were distant and at times hostile (Paasi 1996). After fighting one another during the Second World War, relations between Finland and the Soviet Union turned pragmatic and formally celebrated.

Pragmatic relations prevailed past the collapse of the Soviet system. Following the illegal annexation of Crimea and the invasion of eastern Ukraine by Russia in 2014, Finland joined the sanctions block against Russia, but pragmatic relations continued. Finnish businesses, such as the state-owned energy company Fortum, invested in expensive projects in Russia and cooperated with Russian state companies – Rosatom, for example – until Russia initiated their major and widely condemned invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 (Yle News 2022).

Surveys through the 2010s indicated that 68–75% of Finnish respondents viewed Russia as at least a partly negative influence on Finnish security (MTS 2020, 44). News of the Russian government's actions against the domestic opposition, as well as elections meddling and military operations abroad have commonly led to increased concerns. Russian media and authorities, and a few Finnish commentators, have blamed Western media for Russia's negative country image (Oivo 2021). While scholars have generally not shared this critique against Finnish journalism, research does acknowledge the prevalent image of Russia as a controversial subject with many faces in the Finnish media (Paasi 1996; Lounasmeri 2011; Laine 2015).

In this article, I will contribute to the general discussion about the image(s) of Russia by examining daily media content and asking how threats associated with these images were represented in 2016. At the beginning of 2016, Russia allowed or directed refugees to its Finnish and Norwegian borders (more about this later in the article) in a controversial move, and Donald Trump's rise to become President of the United States stirred speculations about a new era in international politics. My research case is the Finnish regional newspaper *Karjalainen* in the eastern border province of North Karelia.

This study is a continuation of research conducted between 2016 and 2017, where I used the same data to study the discursive fear of Russia and how it produced geospatial identities (Oivo 2017). Now, with six years of hindsight, I reflect on the year 2016 and examine the textual and graphic content in *Karjalainen* through qualitative content analysis. I aim to categorize how the different threats associated with images of Russia, previously described in the relevant research literature, were presented in this regional daily paper. As a supplementary method, I apply discursive analysis to scrutinize the related perceptions and knowledge that enable and disable the actualisation of different representations.

In what follows, I review the ways in which previous research literature has examined images of Russia in Finland. In previous studies, regional contexts have generally been

only a secondary focus, which is a gap that current research seeks to fill. Provincial media provides an interesting case where the content's producers and audiences appropriate local, national, and international flows of news (Paasi 1996; Ojajärvi 2014). In the third section, I present my case study's regional context with the newspaper *Karjalainen*, and the research methods. The empirical analysis sections start with an examination of how the previously recognized threat images stemming from history and Russia's great power characteristics were represented in *Karjalainen*. The state-centred image of Russia influences not only people's attitudes towards the Russian regime and Finnish security politics, but also has an impact on other spheres, including ordinary Russians. Hence, I expand the analytical perspective, first to the representations of the Russian people. I will review the Russian-associated threat perceptions from the regional perspective of North Karelia, and, in the last analysis section, will highlight previously recognized threat images that were not represented in the newspaper, most notably environmental issues.

STUDIES OF THE RUSSIAN IMAGE

In this section, I review state-of-the-art research related to the images of Russia in Finnish public media. Overall, the images of Russia are diverse and vary across place and time. In many Eastern European countries, the history of the Second World War and Soviet influence are a powerful force in memory politics, impacting political conflicts today. This makes the starting point of understanding Russia different compared to many Western European states (Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014). Images of Russia have been studied, for example, in othering and European identity production (e.g. Neumann 1999), transnationalism among Russian émigrés (Kissau and Hunger 2010), and internationally comparative history education (Christophe et al. 2019).

Images of Russia in Finland have attracted much academic interest, especially because the topic is highly relevant in Finnish national identity and security studies. Historians and geographers have provided a strong basis in this area, using inclusive historiographical perspectives from archives, policies, autobiographies, schoolbooks, and interviews (Klinge 1972; Immonen 1987; Karemaa 1995; Paasi 1996; Rentola 2005). Interview studies have been conducted by social and anthropological researchers on attitudes related to Russians and the Russian-speaking population in Finland (Raittila 2011; Brylka et al. 2015), while quantitative survey studies have investigated views on Russian immigrants in Finland (Sjöblom-Immala 2013) and nuclear security in Russia (Eränen 2001).

Mobile devices have made news media almost an omnipresent source of new and reproduced information, but it also has to be acknowledged that news tend to attract

criticism more often than other sources of information on country images, such as first-hand experiences, education, and popular culture. Images of Russia in Finnish media have been studied through differing frames, including content and discourse analyses for print (e.g. Lounasmeri 2011a), television, and online media (Ojala and Pantti 2017; Oivo 2022).

Among the Finnish newspapers, images of Russia in the *Helsingin Sanomat* have been carefully scrutinized due to its status as the biggest daily paper in Finland and thanks to the usability of its archives (e.g. Jouhki 2015; Laine 2015; Väistö 2019). In comparison to *Die Welt*, *The Guardian*, and *Dagens Nyheter*, representations of Russia in *Helsingin Sanomat* have been somewhat reserved (Ojala and Pantti 2017). The most relevant peer study for this article is that by Ojajärvi and Valtonen (2011), who did a frame analysis of Russia in Finnish newspapers and internet discussion forums and also interviewed newspaper editors in 2006–2010. Based on these previous studies, the main categories of threat associated with images of Russia in Finland stem from Russia's unpredictable otherness, history, power politics, and potential to cause environmental damage. In the analysis sections I will reflect on and elaborate these categories against the news representations.

ZOOMING IN ON A REGIONAL NEWSPAPER

To examine perspectives in the border regions on the images of threat posed by Russia in Finland in 2016, I have focused on a provincial daily newspaper *Karjalainen*, which is one of the main public forums of North Karelia. I will first introduce my selection of research material, the consequent regional perspective, and my research methods.

With the provinces of Lapland, Oulu, and Kainuu, North Karelia is the fourth Barents Euro-Arctic Region of Finland. It is the easternmost Finnish province and can be characterized as a "periphery" due to its aging and scarce population. The border station Niirala-Värtsilä separates Finland from, and connects it to, another Barents Euro-Arctic Region, the Republic of Karelia of the Russian Federation. Cross-border tourism and trade significantly decreased in 2014–2016 following the fall of the rouble's exchange value and the limits to trade imposed by international sanctions between Russia and the EU (Nieminen 2016, 115–118). Still, the vicinity of the border has also attracted people from Russia to travel and move into North Karelia (Varjonen et al. 2017, 11).

My primary research material consists of 139 paper issues of *Karjalainen* from 1 July–15 November 2016. I selected the starting date purely for work economic reasons and

the end date to include a week of discussion after the 2016 US presidential election. I read these issues at the time of their publication, scanning all the content referring to Russia and Russians. This provided a more immediate reading experience than would be common for many readers of daily newspapers like *Karjalainen*. I took notes about the contents and photographed all illustrated coverage. In this article, I refer to the publication date as "day/month", as all the examined content comes from 2016.

Together with three other regional newspapers, *Karjalainen* is a member of the weekly editorial group "Sunnuntaisuomalainen" (freely translated as The Sunday Finn). Because the members of this group share some contents, a part of the content produced by *Karjalainen*'s journalists is published in other Finnish regional newspapers and vice versa. Moreover, many of the published international news articles come from national and international news agencies. Alongside the national and global elements, the regional perspective of *Karjalainen* caters to its target audience and journalists who reside in North Karelia.

The basic structure of *Karjalainen* is typical for Finnish newspapers: the first pages include a summary of the issue's stories, followed by editorials, op-eds, topical news, culture and history articles, the opinions section, advertisements, announcements, entertainment news, television sections, and short news. Most of the messages in the opinions section are short text messages referred to in this article as "SMS". While the basic opinion pieces are usually published under the writer's own name, the SMS messages are anonymous, which may lower the threshold to make daring public statements.

The scale of representations on Russia and Russians in a newspaper like *Karjalainen* is limited by ethical editorial policy that excludes hate speech and offensive content. As such, *Karjalainen* represents arguably a more established public forum than, for example, do provincial internet forums, where there is less moderation of published messages (Oivo 2017). Moreover, *Karjalainen* published several messages in the opinions section that notably contradicted the paper's editorials. The opinions section provides an interesting perspective on how newspaper readers reflect and at times even challenge the top-bottom-dominated representations of the world.

Although the popularity of newspapers is gradually falling, Finnish newspapers have managed to hold on to their readers relatively well in international comparison. Also, the Finnish press profile is regionally oriented (Lehtisaari et al. 2012, 12). In 2016, the subscription of *Karjalainen* was 35 435 (Media Audit Finland 2017). Newspapers

in Finland have a loyal readership in all age groups. While the print newspaper is most popular among the older demographics, it was generally a more popular news format as a whole in 2016 than the digital version (Merikoski 2016). The social role of Finnish provincial newspapers has been regarded as constructing a regional identity (Paasi 1996; Ojajärvi 2014). The relation between the opinion sections of Finnish newspapers and the public opinion has often been referred to as a "hazy reflection", in accordance with the thesis of David Grey and Trevor Brown (Ojajärvi and Valtonen 2011; Laine 2015).

As an analytical tool, I have mainly applied qualitative content analysis, which was developed to recognize contextual themes from samples of medium-sized data through manual examination. The researcher expands the contexts of empirics by descriptively reflecting it against contextualizing material (Drisko and Maschi 2015, 2, 81–120), seen here as the relevant research literature. I extend this approach with elements of Foucauldian discourse analysis by problematizing textual and graphic media contents as representations of knowledge and perceptions that function as common principles for constituting and making claims about subjects (Husa 1995), in this case Russia and Russians. The discursive threat images produce action from everyday exchanges across the Finnish-Russian border to the constitution of political questions and choices. Additionally, I problematize the inevitability of the represented threat images by posing the Foucauldian question of how things could be different.

RUSSIA OF THE PAST

In the examination period of July–November 2016, the main themes of discussions in *Karjalainen* reflected the period's news agenda: the new Finnish customs regulations for petrol and cigarettes; shorter working hours at the Niirala-Värtsilä border-crossing point; doping allegations of Russian athletes in the Sochi Winter Olympics; the transfer of Russian Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad; violations of Finnish airspace by the Russian Air Force; Russian involvement in Syria; and speculations of Russian interference with elections abroad, including the 2016 American presidential elections. In addition, there were some more sporadic topics, particularly on the regional level. News articles, arguably with a strong truth authority, had seemingly neutral tones and minimal visible "handprints" of the author. Opinion pieces, editorials, and op-eds were much more transparently subjective. The references to causal connections in these texts were more straightforward than in the news articles. I will start the empirical review and analysis by looking at presentations and representations of the geopolitical threat image in *Karjalainen*.

Ojajärvi and Valtonen (2011) have concluded that the Second World War, NATO, and Russian otherness are consistent Russian-related topic frames in Finnish newspapers, regardless of the daily news agenda. This conclusion is based on an analysis of press content between 2006 and 2010, which preceded Russia's occupation of Crimea and involvement in war in eastern Ukrainian territories beginning in 2014. In this regard, my observations from *Karjalainen* in 2016 and re-reading in 2022 suggest that little has changed in the relevance of the topics related to Russia. While *Karjalainen* was careful to refer to the conflict as "war", Ukraine and Russia were represented as embroiled in a territorial struggle which produced something of a war map in a news article about peace negotiations in Berlin (20/10).

Like academic literature, discussions on the pages of *Karjalainen* rarely disputed the notion that frictions in the image of Russia in Finland stemmed from history. Scholars are divided over the nature of Finnish antagonism towards Russia: is it historically more ethnically xenophobic (Immonen 1987; Karemaa 1995) or ideological and political (Klinge 1972; Vihavainen 2013)? The national threat image of Russia was notably instrumentalized in uniting a politically fragmented Finland in the first decades of independence in the 1920s and 1930s (Paasi 1996). The demand to maintain aspects of this historical threat image was recognizable in Finland even in the 1990s after the disappearance of the political and military threats of the Soviet Union (Moisio 1998).

In this regard, it is interesting that discussions in *Karjalainen* of the period when Finland was a part of the Russian Empire (1809–1917) were virtually disconnected from Russian threat images associated with the post-1917 period. Representations of this 1809–1917 era were generally conflict-free, and even positive. Supporting the textual presentations, the graphics accompanying these articles were calm and often painting-like. The articles included stories of St Petersburg as a city where Joensuu dwellers hoped to find a better life (18/10), portrayed a Russian merchant who established a historical guesthouse in North Karelia (14/9), depicted a statue of the Czarist two-headed eagle that was erected for the glory of Pielisjoki's grand canal project (30/7), and featured Russian cartographers that mapped most of Finland (26/10). This kind of micro-historical perspective is somewhat characteristic of regional newspapers (Ojajärvi 2014).

Like the articles about pre-independence Finland, the articles related to the Winter War and Continuation War in WWII also presented microhistories. These stories focused on small Finnish units, individuals, historic buildings, and even war dogs that tried to

survive the war. The USSR and its citizens were rarely mentioned, usually impersonally as the opposing party in the wars (2/7, 1/8, 12/10, 14/10, 16/10). While the reasons for, and perpetrators of, the two wars were not deliberated over in the history articles of *Karjalainen,* in the opinions section the USSR and Russia were at times referred to as rogue states due to the wars and the harsh terms of the subsequent peace treaty concluded with Finland. This image of a dangerous historical Russian state also discursively shaped representations of some topical news articles, particularly those that covered Russia's involvement in events in Ukraine (e.g. 3/8 and 11/8).

The Soviet threat in the informative articles of *Karjalainen* was often personified by Joseph Stalin and his era, but there were strong historic threat perceptions drawn from later Soviet regimes as well. In the September 9 issue of *Karjalainen*, an article about Urho Kekkonen, president of Finland in 1956–1982, argued that Kekkonen and his active cooperation with the Soviet leadership saved Finland from being "devoured" by the USSR. While this article was mainly about Kekkonen's successful cooperation with the Soviet leaders, the detail mentioned above provided the story with its key meaning. The essential Soviet threat was briefly referred to as common knowledge in the national narrative of Finland.

UNUSUAL GREAT POWER

The discussion in *Karjalainen*'s letters section showed how deductive information about Russia's past constituted knowledge of the geopolitical "true nature" of contemporary Russia. The "true nature" translated into a notion of Russia as a great power posing a military threat to countries such as Finland. As in classical geopolitics (e.g. Kelly 2016), a popular embedded idea represented in *Karjalainen* implied that great powers have their inherent interests, tendencies, and concerns related to international relations. In the discussions about world politics, the misuses of power by Russia and Western states alike against smaller states were often referred to accordingly. In terms of Finland's sovereignty, however, Russia was the only threat:

After all, Russia is a mysterious and unpredictable neighbour. We have seen this (not experienced it ourselves yet)….Neutrality could perhaps lead to strong defiance against Finland, perhaps a conflict of sorts unless we join NATO. (opinion piece 22/7)

In *Karjalainen*, representing Russia as a great power implied an idea of an antagonistic game between great power states that undermines international affairs. As noted in previous research on the Finnish press (e.g. Jouhki 2015), the Western community was

represented clearly as Finland's group of international identification in juxtaposition to Russia. During the US presidential election campaign in 2016, it was often speculated that the election of Donald Trump could lead to the United States "retreating" from the Baltic region, letting Russia fill the void and increase its influence over countries in the region. This concern crystallized in an article of *Karjalainen* on November 11 when the (in)famous member of the Russian *Duma* and party leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky was portrayed in a centrefold picture toasting to celebrate Trump's election victory (10/11). Zhirinovsky was referred to as "the eater of Finland" after suggesting that Russia reclaim lands previously within the Imperial Russian borders, including Finland (see Paananen 2015). While this raised Finnish suspicions towards Russia, the image of geopolitical threat discursively excluded ideas of common national interests between Russians and Finns in *Karjalainen's* news and discussion sections.

Possible mutual interests between Russia and Finland may explain the particularity in *Karjalainen's* overall media image of Russia. Previous research has noted that media images of Russian-related threats are balanced by ideas of economic opportunities with Russia (Lounasmeri 2011a). This was also the case in *Karjalainen*, which featured the positive potential of Russian trade and tourism in the regional context. For example, when the Barents Euro-Arctic Council accepted the membership application of North Karelia in November 2016, *Karjalainen* made much of the possibilities for the province to develop its traffic corridor with towns in the Russian Republic of Karelia (14/11). On a global level, however, this balancing element in the overall image of Russia was virtually absent.

The 2016 US presidential elections became a popular example of the image of Russia as resorting to covert measures to influence countries during and particularly after elections. There were also plenty of other examples reproducing this image. The decision of Montenegro to join NATO was reported by quoting stern objections from senior Russian politicians whose attitudes towards the alliance were clearly antagonistic (28/9, 1/10). The decision to join NATO also led to opposition demonstrations on the streets of Montenegro, commonly seen as orchestrated by Russia, "at least according to Montenegro's western-minded government", as argued in *Karjalainen's* news piece (28/9). In the context of other regional countries such as Moldova, where the recently elected president considered joining the Eurasian Economic Union, *Karjalainen* saw this as presenting his people with "the iron fist of Putin" (12/11). In Georgia, the representation was more neutral. An odds-on-favourite party in the Georgian parliamentary elections was said to strive for neutralized relations with Russia (6/10). While the

suggestions about Russian involvement in other countries' elections were not associated with Finland in any news article, the news agenda can indicate what journalists expect their subscribers to be concerned about.

In the letters section, when discussion arose about whether Finland should apply for NATO membership or not, the Russian threat was part and parcel of the debate. This discussion problematized claims of legitimate threats, justified fears, and Finnish security policy choices. The Russian threat was commonly suggested to serve as a manipulative instrument in the Finnish political power play. The threat image was claimed as biased either by downplaying or exaggerating it. One opinion piece, for example, speculated that the Finnish mass media cultivated the image of the Russian threat to boost support for NATO membership, whereas the Finnish Defence Forces used the concept to justify expensive military equipment purchases (Opinion piece, 13/7).

The state-centric geopolitical emphasis is quite common in news journalism, because the news criteria highlight urgency, danger, and negativity that are less prominent in transnational, regional, and local everyday life. However, the contents of *Karjalainen* portrayed several cases where Russian (geo)politics were connected to less conventional news spheres. Such cases included doping allegations against the Russian Sochi Olympic team (18/7, 22/7), trends of Russian tourism in Turkey and Finland (11/8, 27/9), and Russian tourists suspected of espionage in Sweden (22/9). On a few occasions, the association of geopolitics with unconventional contexts was not even acknowledged. For example, interviews with an author and a visual artist, who both had a background in Russia and the USSR, casually led to discussions about Russian politics (11/9, 12/10).

The contents of *Karjalainen* support the thesis by Laine (2015) and Pietiläinen (2011) that the news articles themselves rarely suggest directly that Russia is a military threat to Finland. The portrayal of *Karjalainen's* news articles on conflicts in Ukraine and Syria pointed to the possibility of inaccuracy of sources, qualifying arguments with the caption "according to sources". The paper in fact emphasized the intrinsic bias associated with reporting on conflicts by running an article which was headlined "Only hand-picked truths from East Aleppo", highlighting a journalist's point of view on the war in Syria (27/10).

Graphic representations of Russian military force alone can reproduce pre-existing perceptions of Russian geopolitical threats. These images are easy to digest even for those who just scan newspaper texts. The articles in *Karjalainen* about Russian state-level

politics typically used archival images of the people involved. The image of military threat was reproduced more clearly through news graphics than through textual contents. Besides the war images and maps from eastern Ukraine and Syria, the violation of Finnish airspace by a Russian fighter featured a map of the Baltic Sea with a fighter plane (8/10). In the opinions section of *Karjalainen*, this graphically produced presentation of the Russian (increasing) military might was a notable grievance:

Russian arms exports have been the largest in the world since 2012 and grow like mushrooms. It has so much hardware that there is no room for it in Baltic Sea airspace. Yeah. No reason to fear Russia! (SMS 16/10)

The sarcastic remark at the end of this message refers to previous messages claiming that people should not fear Russia. It manifests how perceptions of the temporal severity of threats vary in different forms of speech. Overall, the representation of Russian military potential in *Karjalainen* was intertwined with the memory of Moscow's historical actions. This constituted an image of Russia as a great power whose reliability is questionable. While the articles on history also provided alternative historical images of Russia, the images of geopolitical threat entailed influential discursive knowledge about an essentially hostile and manipulative Russia that cannot fundamentally change to enable a less threatening relationship with Moscow.

PEOPLE UNDER THE STATE SHADOW

It is difficult to assess the degree to which the threat perceptions of Russia in *Karjalainen* are strictly associated with the state and not with the Russian people. It is nonetheless important to consider the need and possibilities to fight prejudice. Based on survey research in 2012, Brylka, Mähönen, and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2015) concluded that the perceived threat related to Russians is not concrete, but rather the phenomenon of Russian immigration to Finland was considered a threat particularly among Finns with a strong national self-identification. Subsequent research has supported the thesis that Finnish prejudices against Russians are connected to general xenophobia (Krivonos 2019).

Pentti Raittila (2011) found that when asked about negative perceptions of Russians, his Finnish interviewees often replied by talking about the perceptions of their acquaintances and people they had met, instead of their own prejudices. This suggests that Finns are discouraged to admit their own negative perceptions, which is why they are filtered and depersonalized. Similarly, I did not recognize explicitly negative attitudes against Russians in *Karjalainen*, which is partially due to the journalistic filter: many

statements in the letters section and journalistic stories claimed that such attitudes are covert but real. Hence, the outspoken general perceptions and meta-discussion can provide an important perspective on how the threat images of Russia can produce unwanted subject relations between people.

In *Karjalainen* it was popularly believed that fear, prejudice, and other negative attitudes that Finns harbour against Russians were grounded in lacking personal experiences with Russians and life in Russia. This was suggested, for example, in an article about the reluctance and reservations of Finnish students to head to Russia for exchange studies. The reluctance was deplored in an interview by a student who had experience as an au pair in Petrozavodsk and as an exchange student in St Petersburg (4/10). This article encouraged Finns to meet Russians and travel to Russia. The prevalent public attitude in Finland towards Russia was considered neither rational nor desirable. A few messages in the opinions section referred to the perception of negative attitudes towards Russians as a myth, a misunderstanding: "There is no fear against Russians. Only fear against Russia, and it is based on history and the current day" (SMS 9/11).

The effort to disconnect negative attitudes towards the state regime from the Russian people also manifested a popular concern that unconscious association could cause undesirable confusion between the two. An editorial of *Karjalainen* referred to this concern in commenting on news about controversial property purchases in strategic Finnish military locations by Russian citizens. These were construed as suspicious efforts to establish secret bases. The editor-in-chief emphasized that the property issue, fed by already existing attitudes and perceptions, could create collateral damage by promoting bad behaviour against ordinary Russians:

Talking openly about the murky deeds of Russians was long fought off by the will to avoid increasing racism towards Russian tourists and shoppers. They should not be placed under suspicion now either. (4/11)

The illustrations representing ordinary Russians worked to prevent the alienation of common Russian citizens, which was also the editorial line of *Karjalainen*. Russian politicians were often presented in close-up archival images or talking behind a cabinet desk, while average Russian people were characteristically portrayed in full body photographs and active movement. In addition to images in local sports news (3/7, 17/7), illustrations of ordinary Russians featured a jogging man in an article about Russian compatriots in Estonia (20/8), a woman walking on the street in an article

about Russian tourism in Finland (21/10), and in an item about hot water regulations in St Petersburg, a woman washing her hair (30/8). These stories familiarized readers with people who were dealing with topical issues.

Besides xenophobia, a prominent news topic in 2017 was the fear of Russia's using its "compatriots' policies" to exert influence in Finland through dual citizens holding security-related offices (Oivo 2022). During the investigated period, *Karjalainen* carried one news article about a bill to exclude these persons from national security-related employment (8/10). The background section explained, in passive voice, that the Finnish government had initiated this process after Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, which Moscow justified by citing a need to defend its compatriots there. The article also noted that one-third of Finnish citizens with multiple citizenship have a Russian background. However, the visibility of this aspect of the story was arguably diminished as it was only mentioned at the end of the article.

Previous interview studies have noted that corruption and crime are examples of otherwise rare concrete threat images that Finns have related to Russians (Raittila 2011). There is even a concept of "eastern criminality" (*itärikollisuus*) in the Finnish language, which refers to Russian, and to a lesser degree Estonian, organized crime. In *Karjalainen*, such images were barely featured at all. They were generally implied in descriptions of the social order in Russia and were rarely accompanied by illustrations. For me, the most notable example of this genre was an article commemorating the investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya (7/10). It was noted that Politkovskaya's unsolved murder makes little difference to people who deal with multiple problems related to the everyday life in Russia. *Karjalainen's* discussion section referred on a few occasions to issues with the legal order as an established part of the image of Russia. While this image was not often on display, its unquestionability entails a strong discursive power, associating the Russian threat images not only with the Russian state but also with the Russian people.

THREAT ON THE BORDER

There is a well-known saying in Finland: "We cannot fix geography". Finland's geostrategic vicinity to Russia, and St Petersburg particularly, is a fundamental factor in Finnish security politics. This commonly held belief was also manifested in the geopolitical reasoning in *Karjalainen.* However, the association of Russia's geographical vicinity with security concerns was represented as an exception to the "normal" in North Karelia. In this section, I will review how Russia is seen from the perspective of closeness.

Previous interview studies with senior residents (Laurén 2012) and youth (Limnéll and Rantapelkonen 2017) of the (south)eastern Finnish border region conclude that border inhabitants worry relatively little about Russia. Studies suggest that the prejudices and fears of Finns towards Russians have gradually lessened as personal encounters have increased. At the same time, Limnéll and Rantapelkonen (2017) have observed more concerns over Russia among the youth living in the Finnish southeast than in the western parts of the country. This shows that there are generational and other intersectional differences between people's threat images that the approach of current research does not catch. In *Karjalainen* the representations of Russians and Russian regions along the Finnish border plainly contradicted the threat images associated with Russia. Russian border regions near Finland were portrayed as sharing challenges, interests, and opportunities with North Karelia. Images of the Russia nearby predominantly depicted people on the move as illustrated in the previous section.

Generally, there was little implication that the proximity of North Karelia to Russia would give residents of the border region cause for more concern than to people living in other areas of Finland. Instead, the demilitarized Åland archipelago between Finland and Sweden was identified as being more threatened due to its geostrategic importance (3/8, 20/10, 23/10, 3/11). Everyday life close to the Russian border appeared to dissolve active concerns and frictions, but it also embedded a certain passive risk awareness.

In a special section of *Karjalainen* dedicated to the municipality of Tohmajärvi (10/12), a local resident mentioned in an interview that during the Soviet era, her friends from other parts of Finland often asked if the border's vicinity made her scared. While the interviewee downplayed the fear her friends had anticipated, she also quipped, as an afterthought, that "the Finnish Border Guard is close anyway". Recalling and bringing up this old question and the added remark about the Border Guard refer to passive and externalized concerns recognized previously by Raittila (2011).

The position of the people writing about their first-hand experiences with the Russia nearby often fundamentally differed from general threat images of Russia – and this was often highlighted by the respondents themselves, too. In the opinions section, there was much discussion about issues related to the daily visits of border inhabitants to Russia, especially to refuel their cars. The SMS quoted below refers drily to the geopolitical threat in a regional everyday context: "At least there is no fear of Russia occupying Finland through Niirala, they are way too slow at that crossing point for it" (SMS

16/10). The direct military threat was at times even made fun of by pointing out how alien the idea was from the perspective of actual everyday experiences on the border.

Unconventional threat images have also been observed from the border perspective. On October 17, *Karjalainen* published a report about a questions and answers session in Joensuu between pensioners and a representative of the Finnish Border Guard. One of the key issues discussed at the meeting was the recent rise in the number of asylum seekers to Finland from Russia's border areas. This took place at border stations in north Finland in late 2015 and early 2016 when Russian border officials unexpectedly gave 1 741 asylum seekers access to the border zone (see Virkkunen and Piipponen 2019). The representative of the Finnish Border Guard explained that the admittance of the asylum seekers to the border did not violate official agreements. However, he characterized this as a "bizarre episode", because it contradicted the established practice of not admitting civilians to Russia's border zone without proper documents. He added that in common sense reasoning, the asylum seekers did not appear on the border out of the blue (17/10). This asylum-seeker scenario was exceptional in *Karjalainen* as other articles regarding the Russian Border and Customs officials presented them in familiar ways, for example conducting bilateral cooperation with their Finnish colleagues (14/8, 14/9, 21/10, 3/11).

Overall, the closeness and familiarity of the Russia nearby represented a very different image compared to the more distant Russia of geopolitics. The down-to-earth scale of regional issues and the personal experiences that represented relationships with Russians as equals produced empowered positions for Finns and North Karelians. Images of the Russian-Finnish border area balanced the geopolitical threat images with transregional cooperation opportunities.

THREATS OUT OF SIGHT

All the threat images of Russia acknowledged in previous literature were not explicitly manifested on the pages of *Karjalainen.* In this section I review how some of them were merely hinted at or not represented in the period of current research. They are nevertheless relevant as proposed by previous research. The non-represented images can be interpreted as exclusions in discursive production and as reminders also to researchers that things could be different.

There are several established, indirect ways of referring to Russia without mentioning it. These innuendos can be connected to the Finnish historical narrative and collective

memory about the time when negative references to the USSR were a taboo (Lounasmeri 2011b; Pietiläinen 2011). Several articles in *Karjalainen* discussed Finland's topical hard security concerns, but did not elaborate what these concerns were (column 13/9, news 13/8, 28/9, 2/11 editorials 1/10 and 20/10). In the absence of other established security threats in the Finnish imagination, a familiar chain of ideas enabled readers to associate these vague threats with Russia. The opinions section particularly carried several indirect references to Russia through euphemisms such as "the neighbour" and the "east". The writers expected readers to recognize Russia from such euphemisms, which implies familiarity with these shorthand, veiled references. This way of writing reproduces not only a collective memory, but also an image of a continuous, mysterious, exceptional, and unpredictable Russia.

Previous research has found that the military threat in the media images of Russia have a notable counterforce in representations of economic opportunities (Lounasmeri 2011a). In *Karjalainen,* however, the opportunities of Russian trade and tourism were barely referred to, and only on the border regional context. By the logic of "no news is good news", the absence of Russian economic opportunities from *Karjalainen's* contents does not mean that they do not exist. Sakari Höysniemi's (2022) interview study with Finnish experts on energy issues shows that the discourse of Russia as a reliable and profit-interested energy producer is strong compared to the concerns about its political risks.

Another relatively absent side of the image of Russia in *Karjalainen* was the environment and energy politics, but this could be due to the relatively limited timeframe. Similarly, Niko Väistö's (2019, 20) study of the representations of Russian nature in *Helsingin Sanomat* in 2008–2016 found comparatively little content about the topic. Yet, Väistö recognized that *Helsingin Sanomat* represented Russian nature fairly regularly as a collection of environmental issues that characterize Russian state and society. Nature in Russia was cast in the role of a carbon sink swallowing carbon emissions, but it was also portrayed, as were the many Russian peoples living close to nature, as being threatened by the state (Väistö 2019).

I propose that the unrepresented perceptions and knowledge of Russian-related environmental issues in *Karjalainen* were inactive due to the temporal news agenda. According to Raittila (2011), images of environmental threat are notably connected to the news agenda, and in 2011, the fear of Russian nuclear plants and the remembrance of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster increased in the immediate aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan. Russian-related environmental topics in regional

newspapers have previously been recognized as having grass-roots perspectives, such as road damage from import and export trucks (Ojajärvi and Valtonen 2011, 26). These local issues were briefly reported also in *Karjalainen*, but they were rarely referred to in the opinions section. A lone opinion piece participating in the popular discussion about the Finnish plans to shorten opening hours at the Niirala-Wärtsilä border-crossing point (for budget reasons) pointed out that the plan threatened to increase vehicle traffic on the winding roads of the region (15/9).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

I have examined how *Karjalainen*, a daily newspaper in the Finnish border region, covered and represented threats associated with Russian-related images in 2016. This was not an exceptionally dramatic year in terms of the image of Russia in Finland in comparison to 2014 or 2022. It was rather a year when familiar threat images became gradually more established and believable through their recurring representation in the media. At the time, the threat image of Russia as being involved in election meddling was rather new, but it was represented in line with an established image of Russia as a suspicious, and at times antagonistic, opponent of western democracies. My research observations support previous conclusions (Pietiläinen 2011, Laine 2015) that daily presentations of Russia in media did not notably essentialize Russia as a threat. Rather, the threat and the images of Russia overall were clearly a diverse sum of diverse current events, national history, personal experiences, as well as impressions from public opinion and political values.

In *Karjalainen*, the most notable facet that the newspaper illustrations added to the threat image was the military potential of Russia. Despite its prior existence, this image understandably featured far less in the opinion surveys before Russia started the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, a good proportion of the illustrations in *Karjalainen* were plain archival photographs of Russian politicians, and I was not able to draw conclusions on what kinds of messages they mediated.

Generally, ideas of environmental and human security have expanded traditional conceptions of security beyond the realist view of military and institutional security. However, in 2016, traditional geopolitical conceptions of security appeared as the primary threat image associated with Russia. Based on my previous immersion in the discussions, it was no surprise that the military threat was presented against the backdrop of the Finno-Soviet wars in the discussions section of the *Karjalainen*. It was more unexpected that the representations of the Soviet state and its peoples were

virtually absent in informative articles on these wars. The microhistorical perspective in these articles can be interpreted as an effort by the editors not to reproduce images of the national enemy and aggressive relations. Intriguingly, the most undisputed threat image of Russia in the historical discussions of *Karjalainen* was not related to the Finno-Soviet wars, but to the idea that the Soviet Union still wanted to "devour" Finland after Stalin's death.

The selective remembrance of Russian history in *Karjalainen* often embedded geopolitical logics and perceptions of Russia's threatening essence as a historical great power. This was not balanced by references to cultural and economic opportunities with Russia on the international level, making Russia seem exceptional in comparison to other great powers. These opportunities balanced Russia's image only in the regional contexts where threat images were presented more as exceptional or disconnected from the "reality on the ground". By the time of Russia's reinvasion of Ukraine in 2022, these positive images may seem distant, but they are still a recent part of the regional collective memories.

Karjalainen's content underlines how media discourse encourages society to separate the generally pejorative geopolitical image of Russia from the people and Russia as a place. The separation of these different "faces" of Russia offered a viable alternative to comprehend Russia in a way that does not pose harm to average Russian people. Sanctioning Russia for its aggression against Ukraine in 2022 has challenged what used to be a powerful discourse and deserves further attention from researchers and public authorities alike.

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BARENTS STUDIES: *Looking at Russia's images from the Finnish border*
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Us and Them: Cross-border interaction between Finland and Russia

HENRIK DORF NIELSEN
Department of Geographical and Historical Studies, University of Eastern Finland, henrik.nielsen@uef.fi

ABSTRACT

This article investigates cross-border interactions on the Finnish-Russian border to promote a better understanding of the current "Us and Them" construction between Finns and Russians. Typically constructed along and in combination with borders, this dichotomy holds both positive and negative representations that must be balanced to maintain a nation's identity without creating unnecessary distancing from the Other. During the long history of interaction between Finland and Russia, Finns have frequently considered Russians an Other when creating a national identity. The data comprises interviews and questionnaires collected among Finns who engage in cross-border interactions, and the results show that Russians no longer play a prominent role as an Other to the Finnish self. While differences between the Finnish and Russian societies continue to exist, the "Us and Them" dichotomy in personal cross-border interactions is barely noticeable. Rather than being an enemy, the Other has become a stranger, yet one with whom the Finns share common ground. The findings also indicate that the Russian-Ukrainian war, at least initially, did not discourage Finns and Russians from engaging in cross-border cooperation.

Keywords: Us and Them, Russia, cross-border cooperation, identity

INTRODUCTION

In political discussions, borders are often portrayed as solid and enduring, perhaps even as permanent solutions to various problems such as crime and unwanted migration. Donald Trump's successful presidential campaign, and much of his popularity, is one of the best examples but far from the only one. His campaign was built around the idea that a wall on the United States (US)-Mexican border would solve long-standing problems with the Other(s), who did not belong with the US people and who posed a danger to the American way of life. The notion of the Other is simple, and in geographical border studies also a notably simple conceptualization. It

is, nonetheless, also used by the European Union (EU) in creating what is sometimes referred to as Fortress Europe, an internally borderless European region with strong external borders to keep out unwanted people and goods. The Finnish-Russian border is a part of the external EU border and has been redrawn several times, most recently after WWII, when Finland had to cede some of its eastern territory to the Soviet Union as an outcome of the peace negotiations. After WWII, the cold war closed the border almost entirely and made it the symbol of West vs East – capitalism versus communism – or simply "Us vs Them".

Although the Cold War ended decades ago and the borders have since opened, much of the negative "Us vs Them" rhetoric has remained, as nations have continued to portray Russia as an Other (Nielsen 2019). Currently, some view Russia as an enemy, both before and after Russia started its attack on Ukraine in February 2022. Peter Viggo Jacobsen from the Royal Danish Defence College encourages us to consider the term "war" in a broader sense and has suggested that while the so-called Western world is not involved in an open and direct military conflict with Russia, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Russia's involvement in the 2016 US presidential election, and its misinformation campaigns are, effectively, acts of war (Jacobsen 2022). Jacobsen's statement carries even more weight today as the war on information, history, and "truth" has led to censorship of Russian media in the EU and media in general in Russia. Russia is upset about what they call NATO's expansion into their sphere of interest, and has repeatedly warned Finland of military consequences if Finland joins the alliance (YLE 2018; RT 2021; Vänttinen 2022a). Despite tensions between Russia and Finland, cross-border cooperation and interaction continued on the Finnish-Russian border up until the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war. This interaction has been both rather extensive and successful and was even exempted from the EU sanctions against Russia following its annexation of Crimea that otherwise stopped cross-border cooperation (Fritsch et al. 2015). Russia's incorporation of Crimea was fundamentally viewed as just that, annexation rather than occupation, which enabled continued cooperation. Post-February 2022, this has not been possible. Hence, cross-border cooperation has halted, and the war has also led Finland (and Sweden) to apply for NATO membership. These events have further strained the Finnish-Russian relations, and while Moscow has vowed to respond, they have yet to do so.

The state border between Finland and Russia has not changed since WWII, yet it has a history of movement and change, as have the attitudes of "Us" (the Finns) and "Them" (the Russians) (Laine 2013). This study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of

this construction and deconstruction when Finns encounter Russians. A key question is: how is the "Us and Them" expressed in cross-border interaction between Finns and Russians, and has it changed because of the war between Russia and Ukraine? The meeting of Finns and Russians is particularly noteworthy because it is set in a context of supranational geopolitical security, (dis)trust, and longing (Koch and Vainikka 2019; Nielsen 2021). If the EU (and NATO) wish to find a way to cooperate in the near future, the key to establishing relations might very well be found in the Finnish-Russian relationship. Finland has previously been viewed as a gateway to (or gatekeeper for) Russia, and considering Russia's other EU neighbours, Finland might reassume that role.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Rather than considering the "Us and Them" construction from a purely theoretical perspective, I have interpreted it within the context of the Finnish-Russian border. The geographical space of the Finnish-Russian borderlands relates not only to knowing the terrain and where the border (crossing) is located. It also includes a "special extension" (Sayer 2000, 110) of humans and the relations they form in the creation of borders often distant from the territorial limits (Newman 2003). Thus, considering the "Us and Them" construction in the context of borders and through the lens of human geography rather than in a void allows for a broader and historically founded understanding of how it has been used to create Finland, further enabling the study to adopt a more applicable practical approach. The contextualization is also an acknowledgement: because borders are created by humans, they are not static or the same around the world, but influenced by the people who create, dismantle, and uphold them every day.

The politics of creating a nation is well suited for the establishment of an "Us and Them" narrative (Marker and Hendricks 2019), and Finland is no exception in this regard. Scholars have argued that Finland, even during its autonomy under Russian rule in 1809–1917, was not a nation but "…a territorial expansion of Russian military power…" (Paasi 1996, 82). There was no real connectiveness between the people living within the territory. As such, Finland did not grow out of a common culture or identity but was rather created (Klinge 1982; 1980).

Creating an identity, be it national or personal, requires an Other different from one's nation or oneself. Much of the Finnish identity has been built on not being Russian (or Swedish), as exemplified by the slogan "Swedes we are no longer, Russians we cannot become; Let us be Finns." (Klinge 1992, 94). This was used in the fight for independence around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Creating separation and

setting up some form of boundary between "Us" and those who are different, is normal; thus, in order for Finland to establish itself, it needed to create some distance and form boundaries to untie the close historical and cultural ties shared with both Sweden and Russia. By creating and upholding these boundaries, it is possible to maintain one's identity (Oommen 1995).

The "Us and Them" construction has had a long and impactful history in Finnish-Russian relations, though no real consensus exists as to how it fits in these relations. Some have argued that the term "Russians" has been politicized and used as a pre-meditated tool in creating "Them" (Kangas 2011; Jerman 2004). Others believe that the "Us and Them" dichotomy originates from a God-complex-like attitude that the Finns have developed to come to terms with their proximity to Russia (Kangas 2011). Finally, there are those who tend to interpret the dichotomy as a convenient means of healing internal wounds caused by the civil war (Kirby 1979; Kangas 2011). Yet, regardless of the reasoning, there seems to be a consensus that the "Us and Them" construction exists and has existed long before Finland became independent.
The borders between "Us and Them" are as significant as physical borders in terms of how people understand themselves in relation to Others, and they also help people make sense of the world around them (García 2021). As mentioned earlier, Finland had to create an "Other", yet this was not sufficient as it did not have an "Us". Once Finland achieved independence in late 1917, the lack of a common identity became evident as a civil war erupted less than two months later (Modeen 1995). The war did not completely put an end to the divide, yet the winning side attempted to place as much distance between Finland and Russia as possible. When Finland was attacked by the Soviet Union in 1939, the nation had to put its differences aside and stand united to fend off the much larger enemy. Not only did this help to create a notion of an external enemy, but it also raised the national mood and established common ground based on a narrative of freedom that all could support. Having shared suffering and glory can be stronger than any physical border in bringing a nation together (Walker 2018).

Borderlands

The Finnish borders had been ill defined and fluctuating over centuries. Until independence in 1917, and to a lesser extent until the end of WWII, one can argue that both the Finnish (eastern) border and identity fluctuated and changed. Finland has been a part of Sweden and Russia, just as parts of Russia used to be part of an autonomous Finland. The changing borders mean that today, there are traces of Swedish culture in Finland, just as traces of Finnish culture are present in parts of Russia and vice versa.

This leads to a more complex picture of the border and underlines the idea of borders as indistinct, fluctuating, and overlapping constructions rather than permanent clear-cut lines on maps.

Scholars have long argued that the state and cultural borders do not always align. In his book *Dansk Grænselære* (Danish border teaching), Eskildsen (1936) used a variety of examples from architecture to eye colour to prove the existence of Danish culture in northern Germany and to claim that the Danish (cultural) border was effectively located south of the current state border. Although several arguments in Eskildsen's book do not translate well into current scientific standards, the idea of a difference in state and cultural borders persists (see, e.g. Rasmussen 2017) and is, in essence, a confirmation that border(land)s are wide and intertwined and have entangled identities.

Borders between "Us and Them"

Thomas (2016) argues that societies and states are products of borders, not the other way round. This implies that the concept of the Other is created by a border which is used to establish a divide between the people on either side of it by removing them physically and mentally from each other. It also indicates that if that border is removed, the Other would cease to exist. However, this does not occur instantaneously, and merely co-existing in the borderlands does not automatically create understanding and respect; rather, these must be built. The Iron Curtain is an example of how a border (the Berlin Wall) can create a divide where there did not use to be one. In Germany, it is still possible even 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, to see and hear Germans speak about the differences between former East and West Germany. This highlights that the social and cultural effects of borders outlast the physical borders themselves (Khosravi 2019). Also, one should note that borders, much like identity, are reproduced and renegotiated, and constitute multi-layered, dynamic concepts that are constantly being challenged (Thomas 2016; Zimmerbauer 2011; Balibar 2002).

The removal of borders is only the first step in demolishing the "Us and Them" rhetoric and (re)building an understanding that extends across the divide. However, in this lies a paradox, as borders simultaneously create safety and violence (Van de Vliert 2020; Jones 2012). This oxymoron can help explain why, following a period of extensive focus on globalisation and the 1990s idea of a borderless world, people are now experiencing the building of border walls and fences as a new norm across the world and on such a scale that it has reached an all-time high (Thomas 2016). Hard border rhetoric tends to

lead to alienation of the Other (Olsen 2014), not only because of the border itself but also due to the "spectacularisation of the border" (Brambilla 2021, 83), which simplifies its otherwise complex nature.

Brown (2008) argues that building walls along borders most often does not concern the prevention of, for example, smuggling or trafficking; rather, these walls are designed to demonstrate decisiveness and are part of domestic rather than international politics. There has been a change in the way people are approached and in how the border is described, which plays a large role in how those on the other side of the border are seen. Similarly, the meanings applied to others have changed (Nielsen 2020; Dear 2013). Borders are as dynamic as they are porous, and accompanying the constant alternations are changes in who and what can cross a border and when they can do so (Konrad 2015). Thomas (2016) calls this phenomenon a circular movement, indicating that different people associate different meanings with borders at various times, and in different spaces. The theorization of the concept of borders thus becomes elusive and subjective.

Borders help sharpen/create a gap between "Us and Them" (Van de Vliert 2020), but they also aid in creating a common identity. To label them as purely negative would be erroneous; they are multifaceted in nature. When the Soviet Union collapsed, many Russians found themselves in an identity vacuum where norms, culture, and rules were all open to interpretation, leading them to question who they were as individuals and as a people (Walker 2018). In contrast, the Estonians re-gained their independence and national identity not because the Soviet borders were dismantled but because a new border between Russia and Estonia was established. Although several factors can explain the void in Russian identity, one should recognize the change in the "Us and Them" rhetoric as having had a substantial impact. The "Us and Them" division was a part of a very large propaganda apparatus put in place to create a dichotomy between "Us" (the Soviets/communists) and "Them" (the Western world). In addition, the dichotomy was further strengthened, as creating a boundary to generate a feeling of identity, safety, and belonging is a natural human process (Van de Vliert 2020).

The challenge that remains is to balance the "Us and Them" dichotomy in such terms that people, on the one hand, do not create unnecessary, or even hostile, borders by building themselves up while putting the Other down and, on the other hand, are still able to uphold their identity. By leaning on Bauman's (1990) idea regarding the differences between enemies and strangers, we can soften the rigid conceptualization of the Other as someone who is, by definition, against us. While an enemy is our counterpart,

a stranger is neither enemy nor friend; the concept of a stranger, thus, merely involves creating an Other who is not negative. When engaging with people with whom we do not necessarily share a common understanding or a so-called universal truth, we lack a platform that can facilitate understanding. Creating such a platform demands the ability to view matters from someone else's perspective, no matter how different this may be from one's own (Marker and Hendricks 2019). This is not the same as agreeing with someone, but it is an acknowledgement that different perspectives can exist in a given situation, just as a border has two sides.

METHODS

My article draws on two sets of data collected before the Russian-Ukrainian war in connection with and as an extension to the EuroCORECODE collaborative research project "(Un)familiarity as signs of European times: Scrutinizing historical representations of otherness and contemporary daily practices in border regions". The first set consists of questionnaires collected among two groups of students from the University of Eastern Finland visiting Russia. The data were collected on a coach on the way to Russia and again on the coach when leaving Russia. While one group visited St Petersburg in conjunction with a course on Northwest Russia, the other group did so on a recreational trip organized by the student union at the University of Eastern Finland. The fact that the purposes of the two trips were different was not noticeable in the data.

Originally, 225 questionnaires were collected, half before and the other half after the trip. However, because the majority of the respondents turned out to be international exchange and degree students, and as the focus in this article is solely on the Finnish-Russian "Us and Them" dichotomy, only the 11 questionnaires completed by the Finnish students are utilized here. The questionnaire included closed, semi-open, and open-ended questions, though the data was subsequently condensed to focus on the semi-open and open-ended ones, that is, the qualitative part of the questionnaire. These questions concerned the students' perceptions of the Other, the differences between Russians and Finns, and the reasoning for wanting to cross the border. The respondents, all students at the University of Eastern Finland, had diverse experiences of Russia. Some spoke Russian while others did not, and one had lived in Russia while another had never been there. The respondents were distributed evenly between the ages of 21 and 29, but there was an obvious gender imbalance, as an overwhelming proportion of the respondents were female. Only one respondent was male. This bias was deemed to have a minimal effect as no significant gender differences were found in the total sample of 225 respondents. The 11 Finnish students are referred to as "the students" in the following sections.

The second data set consists of nine semi-structured interviews conducted with agents of governmental, educational, and non-governmental organizations (NGO) engaged in cross-border cooperation with Russian partners. The interviews were approached in a manner which follows the conceptualization by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) of the research interview as a mining process in which the researcher chips away at the raw data to uncover the essence. Of the nine interviews, six were conducted with NGO agents, two with members of local government institutions in North Karelia, Finland, and one with a representative of an educational institution also located in North Karelia. In total, eight were from North Karelia and one from Southwest Finland (Turku). The interviews focused on differences in the respondents' perceptions, both in terms of the general perception of Russia and Russians and on a more personal/work-related level, in cross-border interaction/cooperation situations. The study also sought to clarify the reasons behind the interaction. Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the remaining two had to be carried out online. As in the first data set, the interviewees had diverse backgrounds in terms of Russian language skills and experience in working on cross-border projects with Russian partners. Two-thirds of the interviewees were male. As the group comprised both governmental and non-governmental cross-border agents, they are referred to as "agents" in subsequent discussions to distinguish them from the students in the first data set. The last interview was conducted in late autumn of 2021, a few months before the Russian-Ukrainian war and before sanctions were imposed on Russia. In March 2022, all nine interviewees were contacted and asked to answer additional questions in light of the war. In total, five of the nine replied (via e-mail) to the questions, which focused on their current connection to their cross-border partners and willingness to resume cooperation if possible. One should note that at the time, there was a significant degree of uncertainty regarding how the war would develop and how long it would last. The replies should therefore be interpreted as a reflection of that particular time.

Combining questionnaire and interview data can cause the data to deviate, thus rendering it difficult to extract any profound conclusions. Therefore, the rationale behind combining these two sets has not been to compare results but to broaden the data pool so that it includes not only respondents who work professionally at cross-border cooperation but also those who made the deliberate choice to travel to Russia and meet the Other. Together, these two sets highlight the "Us and Them" rhetoric from a higher (local government) perspective and from a work, study, and personal (recreational) standpoint. The study also involves an individual-focused approach, which places

emphasis on individuals' experiences. Interviews allow for richer and more detailed information, whereas questionnaires enable a larger sample. To bridge the gap, the questionnaires include both semi-open and open-ended questions. Furthermore, the questions were designed to resemble each other as much as was allowed by the different target groups. The study aimed to gain a better and a more holistic representation of Finns to reach more general conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, cross-border cooperation agents seem to view their engagement differently from the students, implying a difference in the two data sets. While NGO agents' approach to cooperation with Russia involved a sense of naturalness, the students seem to have made a more conscious choice. Rather than viewing the border as a hindrance, the agents see it as an opportunity, or they do not see it at all. The cooperation is, in many ways, a natural extension of the local area that would otherwise end the border. The students, for the most part, also view the cross-border engagement as an opportunity but appear to place more emphasis on Russia being different. This was typically expressed in their hopes that the trip could function as boosting their future career, without specifying what that career might be. For example, they simply stated that "…[Going to Russia is a good opportunity] because of my future profession." (Female, aged 29). They view travelling to Russia, and subsequently learning more about the country, as something different that will make them stand out from other students and job seekers. This difference is rather subtle, but it becomes more noticeable when compared to the views of the Joensuu Scouts, who, instead of seeing their links to Russia as international cooperation rather see it as cooperation with a neighbouring area. The scouts were among those organizations who started the cooperation as soon as it became possible. "Scouting restarted in Russia after [the] collapse of the Soviet Union… Finnish scouts went to start it…" (Joensuu Scouts). While the scouts were asked by Russians to meet them, other Finnish agents first took the initiative to propose cross-border cooperation. There was thus interest from both sides. The fact that there was no real hesitation to initiate cross-border cooperation is likely connected to the ability or willingness to look past old hostilities, especially the wars between Finland and Russia during WWII and the resentment that ensued. When asked directly whether the past or the geopolitical situation up until 2022 had affected the cooperation, the informants felt that the past or the current situation did not matter very much, if at all, and if it did, only in terms of framework considerations, such as funding for the cooperation, not in relation to personal interactions.

"Us" and "Them"

While the data sets show that Finns have an interest in Russia, it has to be acknowledged that the data is rather biased, given that only people interacting with Russia and Russians were included. Those Finns who have no interest in this regard are much less likely to work in positions where they would engage in cross-border cooperation with Russia, just as students who would not participate in a trip to Russia. Therefore, one must first assume that those with no or very little interest in Russia are not represented in the study. However, although some students displayed a very negative perception of Russia, they still wanted to visit the country and also pay a revisit, even if their perceptions remained unchanged after the trip. This suggests that interest does not automatically imply positive perceptions. Yet, more data is required, especially from those who have no plans to engage in cross-border interaction with Russia, before any clear conclusions can be drawn.

Most informants had both positive and negative statements to make about Russia and Russians, and several expressed mixed feelings towards both the country and the people. Nonetheless, an obvious difference was detected: the rhetoric of "Us and Them" seemed much more evident when the informants spoke about the Russian system and not about the people. "When I think of the authorities, etc., my impression is quite negative, but when I think about… 'common people' [Russians], it is positive." (Finnish female, aged 27). The most extreme descriptions were also the most negative. The most noticeable aspect about these informants was that they drew heavily on the "Us and Them" discourse by comparing the Finns and the Russians to claim that "People in Finland are friendlier... [and] smile more…" (Female, aged 22). The "Us and Them" rhetoric also involves more positive portrayals; thus, the distinction is not only related to negative conceptualisations.

> One always have [sic] to keep in mind that a Russian is more suspicious, but as the cooperation evolves, the bond gets stronger. It [cooperation] pretty much leans on persons [personal relations]. (Joensuu Diabetes Association)

An adjective used to describe Russians was "superficial", which is particularly noteworthy and paradoxical as many of the remaining respondents, both students and agents, described Russians as slow to open up, but proving warm and generous once they did. "They are cold to outsiders; you don't get to know them easily but when you do, they are warm-hearted people… [who] never give up" (Female, aged 21) and "… when a Russian starts to trust… [(s)he] is a true friend…[with whom it is] possible to

have deep meaningful conversations… [and they] call problems by their real name" (Joensuu Diabetes Association). This makes one ask whether the superficiality lies in the description of Russians, rather than in the Russians themselves. Furthermore, the description of Russians as slow to smile and having few but close friends is similar to the way in which many foreigners living in Finland describe Finns. The description of Russians as a tenacious people has also been applied to Finns. The Finnish word "*sisu*" can be translated as "grit", but it has a more complex meaning given that it relates to Finnish national culture and the narrative of perseverance even under the most difficult of circumstances – be it extreme winter weather or facing what seems an overwhelming enemy. These are also qualities associated with Russians. In fact, Walker (2018) has identified a similar perseverance in how President Vladimir Putin has sought to rebuild Russian national coherence and pride.

The informants who had negative perceptions were not the only ones to describe differences between themselves and Russians. Without being very specific and without including an "Us and Them" rhetoric, the agents and some students recognized a difference that sometimes complicates cooperation. This difference pertains to how certain matters are conducted instead of being targeted at Russians themselves. The difference thus appears to be more related to the legal and bureaucratic issues of cooperation efforts, the working culture, and institutional structures rather than personal differences.

> I think Russian partners trust the Finnish partners very much, and Finnish partners have very good attitude[s] towards the Russians…Finnish experts, working in Finland, got used to the Finnish context, and sometimes they just forget that it might work a little differently in other countries. So, I think there is also a very important learning process on the Finnish side in these projects. (Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association)

Close to home

After their visit to Russia, the students seemed to find a common thread. Both student trips were made to St Petersburg, yet many of the students wrote that they did not consider this city a good example of Russia or that it somehow presented a distorted picture of Russia. In this regard, the image of St Petersburg is seen to be at odds with the image of the rest of the country. And yet, while St Petersburg does differ in many respects from other parts and cities in Russia, it remains just as much a part of Russia as Vladivostok, Petrozavodsk, and other places, if not more, based on its cultural and historical importance and the sheer number of inhabitants.

For the agents, most of the cooperation takes place with partners in the adjacent areas ceded to the Soviet Union after WWII. Sharing a positive attachment to the area or its cultural traits is notably a factor that shakes the "Us and Them" perspective. In some cases, the agents showed a distinct affection when speaking about Russian Karelia and how traces of Finland were still visible in some places. Furthermore, descriptions of how some foods are similar but eaten in a different way also contributed to bonding moments and established common ground.

Cross-border cooperation in a new geopolitical world

When President Putin gave the order to attack Ukraine, he expanded the divide that had been building between Russia and the EU (and others) to the point where cross-border cooperation became impossible. The (mis)information war that Jacobsen (2022) had mentioned just weeks before the actual war broke out became clear to all. As a result, the "Us and Them" dichotomy has never been more distinct since the Cold War.

In Finland, the view on Russia has shifted significantly. Previously, Russia was perhaps viewed as a difficult neighbour, but few would argue that it posed a military threat to Finnish sovereignty. The sentiments have since changed: polls show that 84% of Finns now consider Russia a military threat, an increase of 24 percentage points in less than one year (Haavisto 2022). A year ago, the numbers were some 25 percentage points higher than in the previous poll (Vänttinen 2021b). Still, the polls also show that the majority of Finns continue to regard Russians as pleasant people (Haavisto 2022). It is the view of Russia as a military threat that has led to so far unseen action: more than 80% of Finns now support membership in NATO (YLE 2022A). This is a dramatic shift from 2017, the year of the last poll before the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In 2017, only 21% of Finns were in favour of NATO membership (YLE 2022B), but the subsequent developments have led Finland to apply for membership. For decades, Russia has warned Finland against joining NATO whenever the subject was aired, but since it became clear that Finland was more likely than not to join NATO, Russia apparently had a change of heart and claimed that it no longer saw this as a threat (YLE 2022C).

In the first few months of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the NGOs were ready to continue cross-border cooperation when it was again possible. Although the course of the war may change this attitude, it does reflect the findings of the polls that most Finns still have a positive attitude towards Russians if not towards the Russian government, a source of much concern. This is in line with findings from previous research (see, e.g., Nielsen 2019).

In addition to applying for NATO membership, Finland has also been discussing building a border fence along parts of its 1300-kilometre-long border with Russia (YLE 2022D). While the majority in the Finnish parliament seem to support this suggestion, building a border fence can be viewed as a step to further escalate a tense situation. Several scholars have argued that building walls along borders to prevent violence and hate often backfires and may ultimately invite the very factors against which they intended to protect people (Brown 2010; Eghigian 2008). Furthermore, a fence along the border will not offer any real protection against an invading army, as modern warfare is notably more advanced than the requirements to deal with such a simple structure. What it will do is add to the spectacularization of an otherwise peaceful border. Building border fences also involves constructing negative narratives about the border and the people on the other side, as it conveys the message that the neighbouring people are dangerous to the extent that one needs protecting from them (Brown 2010).

CONCLUSION

This study has addressed the following questions: how has the "Us and Them" dichotomy been expressed in the cross-border interaction between Finns and Russians, and has it changed because of the Russian-Ukrainian war? One of the questionnaire respondents who was not Finnish and thus not eligible for this study, wrote down that no matter where one comes from, people are essentially the same. This corresponds to Thomas (2016) argument that borders create societies rather than the other way round. However, people do not live in a borderless world but in societies with multi-layered borders (Müller-Funk 2021). These societies influence and change people, sometimes to the extreme where they create a persistent rhetoric of "Us and Them", but this is not the case herein.

The "Us and Them" dichotomy between Finns and Russians in this study is closer to Bauman's (1990) conceptualization of the Stranger rather than that of the Enemy, someone who is different but not necessarily in a negative way. Russia(ns) has certainly played the role of the enemy in the past (see e.g., Apunen 2008; Kangas 2011), and the border has notably created two very different societies. Nonetheless, this study found that positive memories of Russian Karelia outweigh the negative feelings of losing the area nowadays. The area has become, in a sense, a phantom limb for many Finns. Though it is no longer a part of the Finnish state, an emotional and cultural connection remains. Rather than representing an issue in Finnish-Russian relations, it creates common ground to promote understanding and to narrow the gap between "Us" and "Them". While examples of a sharp "Us and Them" rhetoric exist, the case in this study represents an exception,

and overall, there does not seem to be any need to distinguish oneself from the Other. While Russia has been used in the past as an Other to help form the Finnish identity, this is no longer necessary. However, this study only accounts for those who have chosen to engage in cross-border interactions. In the wider Finnish society, one cannot rule out the presence of groups of people who perpetuate a strong "Us vs Them" rhetoric, even though the majority of Finns continue to have a positive perspective on Russians.

The largest gap between "Us" and "Them" emerged in areas concerning legal, economic, and political structures, and although all had encountered them, none had been discouraged by them. Undoubtedly, the cultural exchange that takes place in these cross-border interactions –whether-business related, through scouts, or purely touristic in nature – is a powerful tool in establishing positive and long-term relations (Valenza and Bossuyt 2019). In this regard, one can see a change in the "Us and Them" relations. The rhetoric has been stronger in the past but has softened over time. It also confirms the findings of other studies that have shown similar results after the opening of a border (see e.g., Olsen 2014). However, the Russian-Ukrainian war poses a significant challenge to cross-border relations. With the perception of Russia rapidly declining, which was also evident prior to the war, one might see a generation of Finns growing up with a border fence as the norm and fewer opportunities to interact across the border. For example, scouts' cooperation and educational cooperation may halt or become severely limited. Time and space play a key role: if the war persists longer and spreads to, for example, Moldova or central Asia, it can affect the willingness and possibility to cooperate and interact.

There has been a willingness on both sides of the border to establish common ground. This willingness has been stronger than a mindset focusing on how the Other is different. It is a common factor that perhaps speaks to the determination that both sides possess and is an example of their similarity. Considering that this was evident against a very tense supranational political backdrop sets the Finnish-Russian border apart from Russia's other borders. Together with the Finnish NGOs' willingness to resume cooperative efforts, it suggests that although long-lasting cross-border cooperation has generally been rare and difficult to establish (O'Dowd 2002), this border area might constitute one of those rare cases. Finally, the perception of Russia seems to be changing rapidly. While the majority of Finns have remained positive towards Russians and although the NGOs said they were willing to resume their cooperation after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it would be premature to conclude that the war has not changed the "Us and Them" rhetoric. That will be for further research to ascertain.

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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

OLGA DAVYDOVA-MINGUET
University of Eastern Finland, Karelian Institute
olga.davydova-minguet@uef.fi

PIRJO PÖLLÄNEN
University of Eastern Finland, Department of Social Sciences
pirjo.pollanen@uef.fi

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. Intermarriages 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[i] 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 neighbourness 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

Prezident" (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 neighbourness 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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BARENTS STUDIES: *Looking at Russia's images from the Finnish border*
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"Maybe we've gotten a little better against them". Russian speakers' positionings in racializing "migration crisis" speech

OLGA DAVYDOVA-MINGUET
Karelian Institute
Faculty of Social and Business Studies
University of Eastern Finland
olga.davydova-minguet@uef.fi

ABSTRACT

The article ponders boundary formation within a multiethnic society, more precisely in the community of border dwellers on the Finnish side of the Finnish-Russian border. Russian-speaking immigrants are considered as an already established part of this community. They assess their position not only in relation to the local Finns, but also related to the newcomers, that is, asylum seekers who appeared in rural Finnish border areas in 2015. The article is based on interview material collected in the summer of 2016 among Russian-speaking immigrants living in Eastern Finland (21 interviews). Aside questions on images of Russia, respondents were asked about their views on the arrival of asylum seekers. Most respondents expressed a negative stance on the "migration crisis". In the analysis, these views are set in the "national" framework of the formation of racialized hierarchies in an immigration society. Additionally, the view on Russian speakers as transnational media users is applied to understand the harsh character of the speech. It seems that the interviewees' opinions are shaped by Finnish "immigration-critical" discourse that has gained a strong position in Finland. The opinions also reflect the geopolitical views created by the Russian mainstream media, which many Russian speakers in Finland use as their primary source of information and entertainment. In the interview speech, asylum seekers are racialized and presented as not belonging in Finland. Transnationally mediated discourse on the "unsuitability" of asylum seekers in Europe and Finland leans on populist anti-immigration speech and is used instrumentally to discursively improve one's own position in the Finnish racialized ethnic hierarchy.

Keywords: Russian speakers, Finland, bordering, racial hierarchies, "immigration crisis"

INTRODUCTION

Over a million asylum seekers from Syria and other Middle Eastern and African countries made their way to Europe in 2015. About 30 000 of them ended up in Finland, with an impact both on the majority population and other immigrant groups. This phenomenon tends to be viewed primarily on a "national" scale: how it has been responded to in a particular nation not only by authorities, political parties, and civil society, but also in a particular national media space, and what discourses, movements, and actors it has strengthened or weakened. In this way, "the nation" can be presented as internally monoethnic, facing the "influx" of internally similar "migrants" (see Kotilainen and Laine 2021).

However, today's European societies are in many ways diverse and multicultural, and it is worth looking both at the majority–new minority relationship and the (older) minority–(newer) minority relationship. It is also relevant to ask what dynamics the appearance of new immigrants has created or reinforced in a multiethnic context. Societies and populations should be seen as spaces of (ethnic) bordering and power struggle both among the national majority and among a wide range of minorities, including those with an immigrant background. This is not to claim that these groups are somehow clearly defined, but rather that their boundaries and identities are also changing and constantly constructed in different (discursive) practices.

In this article, I will analyse perceptions of the "refugee crisis" (as the dominant discourses framed it) among Russian-speaking immigrants who live in sparsely populated Finnish border municipalities. The analysis is based on studies of racism in multiethnic globalized societies. Immigrant minorities living in Europe are part of the societies of the countries of destination and the countries of departure, and are therefore included in the racial orders of both the "host countries" and the "countries of origin". At the same time, through their own media involvement, groups with an immigrant background connect in different ways to national and transnational mediascapes. I will examine how Russian-speaking people who have moved to Finland position themselves in interview speech towards the newcomers who arrived in Finland in 2015, and will consider the factors influencing this positioning.

INTERVIEW SPEECH

The data of the article consists of interviews conducted in the spring and summer of 2016 with 21 Russian-speaking residents of the province of North Karelia. The interviews focused on images of Russia in Finland, and the fieldwork was carried out in small

North Karelian border municipalities. Russian-speaking immigrants were recruited by snowballing. They were mainly middle-aged, employed, or unemployed people who had lived in Finland from two to more than twenty years. Only one interviewee was under the age of 30, the others were between (approximately) 40 and 70 years of age. The semi-structured interviews were conducted by the members of the research team primarily in Russian and transcribed verbatim. The interviewer and the interviewees did not know each other before.

Our research group was particularly interested in how the everyday experience of Russia which unites the Finnish- and Russian-speaking border residents might affect how Russia is perceived. Additionally, interviewees were asked about their attitudes towards the border, including the visa-free regime and the entry of asylum seekers which was still in fresh memory. At the time of the interviews, there were three reception centres for asylum seekers in North Karelia, and the asylum seekers were a prominent phenomenon in small remote areas as well as a hotly debated topic in the local and national media and among local residents. As a sideline, the interviews also enquired about the interviewees' media use to find out where people get information about Russia. The interviews were analysed thematically: the texts were coded, and the themes that emerged were analysed in relation to each other, and in relation to the context of Finnish and Russian dominant discourses (Ruusuvuori et al. 2010). However, the material used in this article is not strictly limited to the interview data, as my research approach is ethnographic: broadly, I am interested in the everyday life of Russian speakers in Finland and the themes that arise from it, and I also view myself as part of my research field because of a similar background and lifestyle with the research participants. Together with my colleague Pirjo Pöllänen, we have discussed this everyday ethnographic approach in numerous articles (see, e.g. Pöllänen and Davydova-Minguet 2017; 2022), emphasizing that our views on the phenomenon under study are being formed and shaped by overlapping and simultaneous processes of long-term stay and being in the field, analysis, and writing.

By including media use and mediascapes in the analysis of interview speech, I seek to highlight the transnational factor influencing the views of Russian speakers. Today, participation in the different mediascapes created by electronic media must be kept in mind as an intrinsic circumstance of our everyday lives. (Hedge 2016.) My methodological approach is thus transnational: in addition to the multi-local and multi-temporal nature of research, it means that social processes are seen as fundamentally borderless and at the same time border-creating (see Khagram & Levitt 2008).

The article explores what hierarchies are built in the speech of Russian-speaking immigrants on the "migration crisis", what linguistic means are used to build them, and what positions are created for "oneself", "us". I also depict the themes and images that connect the interview speech with the language and discourse of Russian media. In conclusion, I place my analysis in the context of a multiethnic Finland and consider the commonalities between this small-scale study and the wider political developments in Finland, Russia, and the EU.

In the next section, I present the Russian-speaking minority in Finland from the perspective of the experiences of inequality. For different people, these experiences are not the same, but may be related to family history, ethnic background, income level, gender, or age. During the 2000s, experiences of inequality and "non-fitting" have been exacerbated by the aggressive foreign politics of Russia, the conflict between Russia and the "West", the annexation of Crimea, and the war in eastern Ukraine.

RUSSIAN SPEAKERS AND AFFECTS OF INEQUALITIES

"Russian speakers" is a rather loose definition that can be used broadly or narrowly. Strictly speaking, it refers to people whose mother tongue is registered in the Finnish population register as Russian. In Finland, it is still possible to register only one language as the native tongue. At the end of 2020, there were 84 190 persons registered as Russian speakers (Statistics Finland 2021). When used in a broader sense – to refer to people for whom Russian may be a second language or who for some reason have not wanted to register themselves or their children as Russian speakers – there are considerably more people who speak Russian in Finland.

It is customary to distinguish between the migration to Finland that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the so-called Old Russians, who are mainly descendants of citizens of the Russian Empire who moved to Finland in the 19th or early 20th century in the turmoil of the Russian revolution and the collapse of the Russian empire. "Old Russians" are people of Russian background born in Finland, their strongest language is usually Swedish or Finnish, and their connections with modern Russia are weak and mostly historical. However, they may have a common experience of some degree of racism and discrimination or such experiences may have been narrated as family memory, namely racist naming, difficulties in daily life, and attempts to hide the Russian background and change names. (See Jerman 2004; Baschmakoff and Leinonen 2001; Immonen 1987.)

The majority of today's Russian-speakers in Finland have arrived in the country since 1990 in different ways from different countries of the former Soviet Union. Expanding the so-called remigration procedure to cover persons of Finnish ethnic background and their family members in 1990 resulted in immigration of approximately 30 000 persons. This migration channel was closed in 2016. It was based on the presumed biological, cultural, and linguistic "Finnishness" of the returnees, and their perceived "Russianness" was conceptualized as a sort of unwanted outcome. Societal discussion and administrative practices aimed at a more precise definition of proper Finnishness that would qualify for "returning" to Finland, and its separation from Russianness. These discursive and material practices influenced the hierarchization of different kinds of constructions of "Finnishness" and re-enhanced the image of "Russianness" as something that does not belong in Finland. (Laari 1997; Davydova and Heikkinen 2004; Davydova 2009.)

Another significant immigration channel, marriage migration, has been an important route to Finland especially for Russian-speaking women. Migration through marriage has reinforced the image of the dominant masculine "West" and the dependent and caring feminine "East" (Sirkkilä 2006). Women from the "East" have to balance on the racialized notion of "gender equality" as an inherent part of Finnishness and whiteness (Krivonos and Diatlova 2020). The dissolution of the economic and social security system following the collapse of Soviet socialism, the liberalization of the post-Soviet gender order, and the opening of national borders have all made more visible the "shadow of a whore" associated with Russian-speaking women in Finland (see Uimonen 2010; Davydova and Kozoulia 2009). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Russian-speaking women found themselves in the position of an ethno-sexual other, which was consolidated in different everyday practices, such as border crossing, especially in the Finnish-Russian border areas (Davydova and Pöllänen 2010).

In the early 1990s, when Russian immigration was new in Finland, it was often discussed as an "unexpected" and seemingly accidental phenomenon. Surveys of attitudes in the 1990s and 2000s showed that stereotyped "Russians" remained at the bottom of ethnic hierarchies together with the Somali. (See Jaakkola 2009, 52–60; Puuronen 2011). However, gradually by the 2010s, Russian- speakers have become a fairly common part of everyday neighbourhoods, especially in eastern Finland. Still, studies on their socio-economic situation show that the Russian speakers are often overqualified, have difficulties finding employment, and have a lower-than-average income level. (Varjonen et al. 2017.) Studies of the 2010s have highlighted the high level of discrimination and racism experienced by

Russian-speakers, for example in recruitment situations or as everyday racism (Ahmad 2020; Puuronen 2011; Krivonos 2019).

The favourable economic development in Russia at the beginning of the 2000s resulted in growing trade and tourism between Finland and Russia. In particular, Finnish border municipalities viewed local Russian-speakers as a valuable asset for the economy. However, this positive trend grew increasingly fragile under the sequence of international conflicts with Russian involvement, such as the dispute in 2007 over the monument to the Soviet soldiers in Tallinn, war in Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea, and the beginning of the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014. These mediatized conflicts highlighted the transnational character of media involvement among Russian-speakers and made it clear that they were being targeted by Russian diaspora politics (Davydova-Minguet 2014; Davydova-Minguet et al. 2016, 2019).

Since the annexation of Crimea, the everyday transnationalism of Russian-speakers has been politicized by both Russia and Finland. Amid the political debate on dual citizenship in Finland and the legislative changes which restricted such citizens' access to security-related jobs and training, Russian-speakers felt that these were primarily directed at them. (Oivo 2021.) Everyday ties with Russia, such as transnational family relations or residential property ownership, became securitized in Finland. Russian-speakers found themselves "between a rock and a hard place" (Oivo et al. 2021). Russia, on the other hand, through its mediatized diaspora and politics of memory, has sought to tie them ever more tightly to their country of origin, while securitizing international ties within the country. (Davydova-Minguet 2014, 2021; Davydova-Minguet 2019.)

In its immigration and integration politics and actions, Finland, the immigrants' new home country, promotes their integration, inclusion, and employment as well as multiculturalism. Yet, maintaining people's spontaneous ties to Russia is securitized at some level. Finland and Russia also have notably different official positions on many issues of international politics and democracy, and portray them in a notably different manner in national media. This raises suspicions, mistrust, and feelings of insecurity among Russian-speakers. Many issues have become difficult to discuss, the agenda and discussion in the Finnish-language media are perceived by many as exclusionary, and Russian-language social media often provides space where emotions and doubts can be verbalized. Simultaneously, social media has become extremely conflictual (Oivo and Davydova-Minguet 2019; Oivo et al. 2021).

The affects of inequalities and insecurities of the contemporary multiethnic society should be seen as part of wider global developments and the historical, economic, cultural, and social dimensions therein. In the following, I present the theoretical discussions applied in the processing of the material.

BORDERING THROUGH RACIAL ORDER IN A TRANSNATIONALLY CONNECTED AREA

Current migrations take place in complex networks of relationships at different levels and involving national and international contexts and histories. I approach the migration of Russian-speakers to Finland as a transnational process and examine their position in the increasingly multiethnic Finnish society as multi-level, flexible positionings that in different ways entangle and intersect Finnish and transnationally operating (Russian) discourses and orders.

The border region is a place that allows relatively easy and mundane maintenance of cross-border relations but also emphasizes the national nature of many phenomena. National identities are heightened in border areas due to often conflictual border history and guarding practices. Individualizing and identifying border-crossing practices inevitably remind people of their "true" and single national belonging. The border region, functioning as a contact zone with the territories on the other side, simultaneously carries the function of bordering – de-territorialized re-creation of the border between people, institutions, imaginaries, identities. Where cities (megapolises) can "naturally" create an image of diversity and openness, the symbolism and practices of border areas work primarily dichotomously, producing separation from the neighbour, even if the border area dwellers' actual everyday lives are rather transnational. (Davydova and Pöllänen 2010; Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2018; Zhurzhenko 2011.)

The border has an ambivalent character: it both enables (controlled) inter-border contact and is perceived as an essential element of defining and preserving the "national self", the national identity of the territory and the people living there. Studies in ontological security unfold the entanglement of senses of endangered ontological security that are fertile breeding grounds for different crises, and well as for populist and nationalist calls to reinforce different borders, to secure the "national self". Groups that experience their position as somehow weak can find their ontological security – the feeling of the stability of the social system and the continuity of their "place in the world" – somehow threatened, and turn to "clear" and "traditional" identities that are

promoted and exploited by populist political forces worldwide, including Russia and Finland (see Kinnvall 2017, 2019; Davydova-Minguet 2020; Koposov 2021).

The "migration crisis" of 2015 was largely perceived in Finland and other European countries as a threat posed to national borders, states, communities, and identities by non-European asylum seekers. (Kotilainen and Laine 2021.) This reaction endangered the adherence to basic principles of the post-WWII European system, such as the primacy of human rights, including freedom of movement. According to James Scott (2019), a widespread European reaction to the "migration crisis" of 2015, which increased not only cultural nationalism and populism but also a revanchist securitization of national selves and borders, had securitized mobility overall, creating a perception of mobility as rootlessness and a potential threat. The "migration crisis" strengthened illiberal, racialized understandings of culture, belonging, citizenship, and nationality. In border areas, this was reinforced by the very presence of border and border crossings in people's everyday lives.

My view on Russian-speaking immigrants' speech on "migration crisis" is based on the idea of a racial order that permeates Western, including Russian, societies and determines their internal (interethnic) relations (see Puuronen 2011; Rastas 2004, 2018; Krivonos 2019). Although Finland and Nordic countries more generally have long sought to eradicate the concepts of race and racism from public debate, they are key terms for conceptualizing and analysing diverse and intersectionally formed inequalities and hierarchies. Traces of colonialism are present in societies perceived as "white" and "non-colonial" in the guise of normative "whiteness" and belittling racism. (Rastas 2018; Keskinen et al. 2016; Tlostanova 2018.) As a concept, "racial order" compares to "gender order": whiteness (like masculinity) is implicitly seen as the norm, privileged and valuable, thus placing other racialized bodies as "second" and inferior. Like the gender order, the racial order appears self-evident and is therefore invisible for majorities. "Racial order" is tied to social power: while white Finnishness is the norm, other racialized subjects struggle to gain access. (Puuronen 2011.) Whiteness must be seen as a racial dominance, or at least as a privileged position. Whiteness, then, is not the neutral background against which the coloured "race" becomes visible but is an essential part of the racial system. (Lundström 2014; Krivonos 2019.)

In her dissertation on young Russian-speaking immigrants (2019), sociologist Daria Krivonos analyses the internal hierarchies of whiteness in Finland. In the context of

immigration, even white immigrant bodies become racialized depending on where they come from. Krivonos (2019) paints a picture of post-colonial and post-socialist Europe as a region permeated by racial hierarchies, in which the white subjects of the former "second world" of collapsed state socialism are still seen as "deficient" and inferior to those of the "first world" of "old" European states. When they move to the "West," they feel, on the one hand, that they have been placed in a lower position than the "local" whites, and, on the other hand, that they have been forced to struggle and compete for "suitability" with other racialized immigrants. In this struggle, they become racialized themselves and simultaneously they racialize others. The internal hierarchies of, and struggles for, whiteness are often overshadowed by the "clear" confrontations of whiteness and non-whiteness, West and East, global North and South. Their conceptualization in a postcolonial context seems to "fade" the "second modernity" of collapsed state socialism, making visible only the "first" and the "third" worlds. (Krivonos 2019; Tlostanova 2018.)

However, whiteness and racialization in the context of the country of immigration are not, in my view, sufficient as perspectives for the analysis of Russian-speakers' opinions on the "migration crisis". The Russian post-Soviet way of constructing ethnicized and racialized hierarchies must also be taken into account as a factor that is always present in transnational everyday lives of Russian-speakers in Finland. Especially for people living near the border, making the journey back to what used to be home and maintaining family relations and friendships across the border are self-evident everyday activities. The ease of maintaining relationships is guaranteed also by the use of internet-based media. Interpersonal and mediatized transnational contacts between Russian-speakers who live on both sides of the border make images and ideas produced on the Russian side feel "natural" among the Russian-speakers on the Finnish side. The character of border areas and their emphasis on clear-cut national belongings accentuates racial orders of both bordering entities.

Our previous research (Davydova-Minguet et al. 2016, 2019; Davydova-Minguet 2017; Sotkasiira 2017) has revealed that the Russian-speakers' media use in Finland is both intensive and rather polarized. It follows a trend initiated by the revolution in media technology: young people increasingly follow social and internet-based media, while the older generations often continue to use media, mainly television, in a ritualistic and entertainment-seeking way. For them, Russian television channels constitute the main source of information and entertainment. In particular, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2013–2014, the annexation of Crimea by Russia,

and the following war in eastern Ukraine, as well as news coverage of these events in Russian state-aligned media (including most TV channels and ever-expanding domination on the internet) and Finnish media (primarily television and internet-based outlets) have led to Russian speakers' affective division into those who consider Russia's official and popular interpretation of events correct and those who do not. Media use to some extent reveals positionings in this conflict, and largely in the conflict between Russia and the "West", which in Russian mainstream discourse is also presented as a conflict between Russian "traditional values" and Western "liberalism".

Throughout the 2000s, the governing circles in Russia have created a multidimensional system of control over the main medium, television broadcasting. The discourse on migration and migrants produced by the most popular Russian TV channels before the "migration crisis" of 2015 was twofold, one concerning immigration from non-European countries to the EU, and the other pertaining to labour migration from post-Soviet Central Asian states to Russia, especially to Moscow. Migration has remained an ever-present theme on Russian TV channels due to coverage of different "western" or Russian negative events. Already in the 2010s, the discourse on migration oscillated between obedience to (more restrained) Kremlin wordings and attempts to provoke opinions on the issue on television talk shows and news programmes. Overall, migration has been presented as happening from radically different (compared to Russian or European) cultures, which makes it incompatible with the societies of arrival. Immigrants themselves have been portrayed through discourses of "Islamization", "ethnic criminality", "parasitism", and through different threats that the immigrants pose to Russian/European cultures, societies, public health, and so on. While European governments have been criticized and mocked for their alleged inability to cope with "completely uncontrollable" immigration, Russia is being presented as inherently multiethnic and able to govern immigration, sometimes with force. The discourse on migration on Russian TV has remained blatantly racializing, creating opposition between "us" and "them" ("Russians" and "migrants", and "Russia" and "Europe"), often not only biased in presenting events, but also staging them to produce certain images of "us" and "them". (See Hutchings and Tolz 2015, 221–246; Mitrohin 2017.)

In the following, I will analyse what the Russian-speaking interviewees living in the Finnish border area said about the "migration crisis" of 2015. I have kept in mind both perceived racialization and inequalities, and the possible influence of world views and images produced by Russian state-controlled media. In such a way, I hope to be able to illustrate and interpret the bordering process among Russian-speakers in Finnish border areas.

PRODUCING RACIALIZED HIERARCHIES IN INTERVIEW SPEECH

In the interviews, we primarily discussed what Russia meant to Russian-speaking individuals living in the border regions of Finland. However, at the end of each interview, we asked whether the recent arrival of asylum seekers had had any effect on the position of Russian-speakers in Finland. The responses ranged from very brief to very broad. In the analysis of the interview speech concerning views on the arrival of asylum seekers in 2015, I have identified the following themes: construction of the image of newcomers as incompatible with the status of refugee; claiming that the newcomers' culture is incompatible with Finnish culture; construction of "immigrants" as detrimental for Finnish economy; and construction of the own position as knowledgeable about the migrants and the international situation. These themes impacted in positioning "us" as fitting and "naturally" belonging in Finland, whereas "immigrants" were constructed as inferior and problematic.

Asylum seekers were relatively commonly referred to as lacking the "right" image of a refugee in need of asylum (see Malkki 1995). This way of speaking was quite common among the interviewees and in Finland in general.

> I consider refugees to be people who have really suffered. For example, children whose parents have lost their lives, old people whose children have died may suffer. <…> But when an adult, a broad-shouldered young man, dressed in brand new clothes, [is] seeking asylum. And not political. But because there is a war in his country. This looks idiotic. I think this is wrong. <…> Go defend your own country. Why are you leaving your own country? Go defend it. I think so. (Woman, in her fifties.)

The image of a proper refugee is highly gendered. In the example above, views on asylum seekers are based on the nationalist heteronormative concept of nationality and citizenship, where the citizen, especially the young man, has a duty to defend the homeland and "womenandchildren" against the enemy, and where the war otherwise frames proper masculinity and citizenship. The "right" man and citizen is a warrior and defender, and cannot therefore seek asylum. (Tickner 2004; Nagel 2000; Jokinen 2019, 17–32.) The politics of remembrance, referring to World War II in Finland and in Russia, reinforces this conservative notion of male citizenship rooted in the heroic war narrative. (Davydova-Minguet 2018, 2019.)

The "right" need for asylum and assistance could also be questioned by arguing that asylum seekers are "really" motivated by the possibility to benefit from Western countries.

> They want money. Where are they heading, the majority? To Germany, where they are still given money. I'm telling you, these who come here are not poor. They are rich and come to benefit even more. (Woman, in her forties.)

The influence of the discourse of Russian television is particularly obvious in this quotation. Russian reports on the 2015 "migration crisis" concentrated mostly on Europe and Germany, which were cast as incapable of dealing with the "migration crisis" and forced to accept immigrants by external forces. They neglected the needs of their own citizens, who therefore had to compete with the immigrants for social welfare. The way of portraying asylum seekers through the discourse of misuse of social welfare systems of European countries resonates with the classified position of Russian-speaking immigrants in the "west": they are commonly unemployed or precariously employed people and are often entitled to social benefits.

The view on asylum seekers as misusers of the refugee status was also questioned by some interviewees – who nevertheless argued against the common view. A distortion in this view was created by questioning the duty to "defend the fatherland" or young men's "wealth". Such views emphasized the similarities between them and the speaker. However, this position was presented with hesitation and was not common.

> When I hear people talk that they have expensive smartphones, they have everything, and they come to us, and we have to maintain them. I just think, whether I've got my own personal jet or a palace, I was the richest woman in the world, but if there was a war, of course I would flee it. (Woman, in her fifties.)

The "incompatibility" of asylum seekers in Finland and the Finnish labour market was conceptualized mostly in cultural and gendered terms. The common image of a Muslim woman, "incapable to work", is a telling example. The view that new immigrants are unsuitable to the Finnish society precisely because of cultural differences, is common. These views could be grounded in the "knowledge" about "Eastern" cultures, which interviewees situated in their Soviet or post-Soviet experience.

> The migrants, Syria is a country where women will never come to work, never in their lives. So, these migrant women are simply a heavy burden. Can a small Finland, which already has a lot of its own unemployed, still support immigrants at the required level? I doubt it. First, cultures are very different. Culture is closer to Uzbekistan, it is said. I know what Muslims are. They are completely different

> people, completely. They never adapt to Finnish life the way Finns expect, no matter how they are taught, in any courses or schools. (Woman, in her fifties.)

When white immigrants from Russia move to Finland, they become part of a neoliberal postfordist economy and welfare society, where, depending on their economic, cultural and social capital, or class position, they struggle for status and livelihood (Krivonos 2019). In the analysed interview speech, asylum seekers were presented, at least in part, as competitors of "Russians" in the labour market. In Finland, the *immigration consensus* of the 2000s (Könönen 2015) was achieved around the idea of labour migration: ideal "useful immigrants" do not need the society's resources to adapt. Quite the opposite, they pay taxes, which benefits the society. Simultaneously, immigrants' labour is exploited in low-paid and irregular jobs. Regardless the exploitation, many asylum seekers or undocumented migrants view these jobs as attractive channels of earning a living and (un)achieving legal status in Finland. Immigrants from Russia who arrive in Finland mostly through family ties, ethnic background, study, or work, often see newer immigrants as competitors in these lower labour-market positions (Krivonos 2019). The anti-immigration discourse typically builds on common disillusion in the precarious labour market and life. It is closely linked with anti-EU and anti-globalization discourses. These help speakers present themselves as "local" and thus "deserving" members of Finnish society.

> After Finland's accession to the EU, the economy began to collapse, independence has been lost, there are no jobs, no matter how many immigrants there are. I'm a professional car driver, I haven't been able to find a job for two years, and simultaneously my Russian friends work in Finnish cars. <…> The more immigrants there are at work, the lower the economic growth. <…> I believe we must first offer (work) to those who want to work, who are able to work, and to those who just have to work. And only then provide places for migrants. (Man, in his fifties.)

The reason behind the arrival of asylum seekers, the Syrian war, was described as an abstract geopolitical conflict between the "West" and Russia, in which Russia was forced into the position of an underdog. Still, the entry of asylum seekers was also seen as a kind of deserved punishment for the actions taken by "Europe" or "America" against Russia. The talk of a conflict between "the West" and Russia also concerned Ukraine, which was seen as a field of confrontation and struggle between them. Russia was spoken of as misunderstood and mistreated, but still right. Especially

in these respects, the interview speech echoed the explanatory patterns of political entertainment on Russian television (see Davydova-Minguet et al. 2016; Gulenko 2021). This speech is contemptuous, aggressive, follows conspiracy theory models, and is often overtly racist.

Interviewees' speech on asylum seekers was driven by Russian-language clichés, which are transferred to discuss the situation in Finland and Europe from the Russian discourse on immigration concerning labour migration from Central Asian states to Russia. Finland is presented as a kind of resource which external powers try to misuse. This kind of speech is exemplified by expressions such as "not elastic" (*ne rezinovaya*, not made from rubber), which creates an impression of limited national physical and economic space, threatened by new immigrants, and belonging to those who have arrived "here" before and thus have more rights to this space. In such speech, Finland can even be spoken of as "our own" area and place.

> Both Russia and America are contributing to this immigration crisis, unfortunately. But Europe is not elastic (made of rubber). There are not enough resources and there will be fewer and fewer of them in the future. And this only affects us, the taxpayers. (Woman, in her forties.)

The "migration crisis" was presented as part of an international geopolitical game, where the main players – "America", Western presidents and elites – were blamed for using new migrants as a weapon against "the ordinary people" or weaker European countries, such as Finland. Once again, this kind of talk about the reasons for the arrival of asylum seekers resonates not only with Finnish anti-immigrant discourse but also with the discourse of state-controlled Russian media. In this space, an abundance of information is used to obscure the actual developments of events and to create in the media users' a position of well-informed viewers competent in international politics.

> Let's imagine that I was the President of Finland. And an American would have told me: you have to take a million refugees, or three million. I would say to any American, be it President, Clinton, Churchill, whatever: if you need it, then take it, we don't need it. I'm not going, just because you scrambled there, you scattered everything, people are fleeing, and now the people of my state have to feed these refugees. … You take these refugees, feed them, press those new dollars with your printing press. … We did not do this, and if you have done it, be responsible for it. (Man, in his seventies.)

The talk of a "migration crisis" has thus been largely negative and bordering, with few exceptions. Those speaking empathetically about asylum seekers and questioning common ways of speaking also tended to be otherwise critical of Russia, its president, geopolitics, and the media. In general, asylum seekers were presented as a mass, unsuitable in and a burden to Finland, which set the Russian-speakers as local and well-integrated "people of the north" together with other Finnish locals. However, some interviewees saw that the status of "Russians" as a group had improved due to the influx of asylum seekers: Russian immigration was no longer seen as a "problem", as new groups had taken this place.

> To my recollection and understanding, the immigration of Russians to Finland has been considered negative. We visited Helsinki with my son, there was a lot of these immigrants. We visited now in the spring and a year ago too. There weren't really any dark people at the time. Now there are a lot of them. <…> Before them, we were already negative immigrants. Maybe we've gotten a little better against them. I don't know (laughs). (Woman, in her forties.)

DISCUSSION: HOW TO POSITION THIS SPEECH?

The opinions of Russian-speaking interviewees about asylum seekers and the "migration crisis" that began in 2015 were not surprising – if anything, it was surprising that people expressed them to the interviewer in face-to-face conversation. In the Russian-language social media produced in Finland, this type of speech is rather widespread. Images of "us" "Russians" are produced by comparing, valuing, and racializing the "others". This type of banalized speech easily erupts when one's "own" status is perceived as somehow trampled or threatened (Davydova 2021; Oivo 2021).

The study of the hierarchization of immigrants in the Finnish context has a long tradition (e.g., Jaakkola 2009; Avonius and Kestilä-Kekkonen 2018; Brylka et al. 2017; Könönen 2015; Krivonos 2019; Davydova 2009). Critical whiteness studies provide a valuable perspective for this, taking into account the different histories and the new constellations of whiteness and racism. Transnationalism as a methodological approach broadens the context under study and brings together the migrants' actual connections to their countries of origin – and to the discourses and power relations that pass through them. These contexts need to be factored into considerations of what types of policy and practical measures could mitigate these sharp attitudes.
In the research, the rise and mainstreaming of racist and anti-immigrant attitudes is linked to neoliberal capitalism and its connection to a state that produces an

image of itself as the sole guarantor of security (Lorey 2015). Additional factors that promote populist, exclusivist, and racist opinions and movements are the general climate of insecurity, precarization, the crumbling of the working class (Mäkinen 2017), and hollowing out of the welfare state, combined with the ever-evolving possibilities of information and communication technologies (Horsti 2014) and the deep-rooted image of Finns as an ethnic-cultural community and nation (Tervonen 2014, Laari 1997).

Experiences and perceptions of, and influences from, Russia must also be taken into the account among factors adding to the insecurity and dissatisfaction among Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland. In Russia, the collapse of state socialism and the experiences of entering neoliberal capitalism have remained largely unaddressed in societal discussion and popular culture. State-controlled media has channelled the sense of resentment to mocking democracy and the "West" and to glorifying Soviet times. Contemporary Russia simultaneously evokes feelings of bitterness and disappointment as well as pride and love (see Davydova-Minguet & Pöllänen in this volume). The Russian discourse concerning the "West", and the entangled discourses that blame and securitize asylum seekers offer Russian speakers outside Russia strong discursive means to "strengthen" their own position in the neoliberal post-socialist Russian and Finnish contexts.

In addition to their already racializing ways of presenting migration, the main Russian media channels staged the "migration crisis" of 2015 by exploiting events and themes that constructed asylum seekers as a threat not only to "Europe" but especially to Russian speakers in Europe. The "case of Lisa", a 13-year-old daughter of Russian-speaking immigrants in Berlin revealed links that connect Russian-speakers in Germany with German populist parties and anti-migrant movements, Russian media, and Russian diaspora politics. The story of kidnapping and raping the girl by "immigrants" was fabricated by one of the central Russian TV channels after Lisa had disappeared from her home for a night which she spent at her boyfriend's place. This was presented on Russian television as a ruthless kidnapping and rape by recently arrived asylum seekers. As a result, many Russian-speakers in Germany joined anti-migration protests organized by the populist AfD party. Asylum-seeking immigrants were constructed as sexually violent, while Russian-speaking immigrants were cast as vulnerable and in need of protection in European countries. The case also showed the manipulative power of Russian television and its connections with anti-EU political movements in immigration countries. (See Mitrohin 2017.)

Paradoxically, Russian-speakers seem to be simultaneously "present" and "absent" in the Finnish media landscape (see Davydova-Minguet 2017; Sotkasiira 2017; Davydova-Minguet et al. 2016). Transnational media use is their lived reality, and the integration of transnational media landscapes into the national media is difficult. To increase the resilience of Finnish society requires paying more attention to multilingualism and multiculturalism in national media strategies. Russian-speakers and other people from immigrant backgrounds should be equally involved in working life, education, and in symbolically prominent positions in society. Enabling an open and broad reflection of the relationship between Finland and Russia – of Finnishness and Russianness – as well as questioning and dismantling the discourses produced in Russian state-controlled media would contribute to the inclusion of Russian-language discussion in Finnish societal debate. This should be acknowledged as part of an anti-racist agenda in contemporary Finnish society.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Postcolonial reading of the history of urbanism in the Circumpolar North

AUNI HAAPALA
Faculty of education, University of Lapland
auni.haapala@ulapland.fi

PETER HEMMERSAM
Making the Arctic city: The history and future of urbanism in the Circumpolar North
London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021. 254 p.

The Arctic is still rarely associated with 'urban' even if urbanization has evolved and shaped the local communities and environments in the northern latitudes, especially since the twentieth century. Today, circumpolar cities and towns are home to millions. In this regard, Peter Hemmersam's *Making the Arctic city: The history and future of urbanism in the Circumpolar North* is a highly welcome and comprehensive piece of work, taking on the ambitious task of tracing the underlying ideas, planning visions, and the political, cultural, and historical circumstances that have influenced the extraordinary urban development and city-building across Arctic regions over the past century. The book draws from research literature on Arctic territories, urban planning, and architecture, and it also benefits from the author's fieldwork in several cities and towns over the years. For a researcher and a fairly new resident of the Finnish circumpolar city of Rovaniemi, the book provided not only academic reading but a captivating broader context to reflect on my personal relationship with and experiences about my city.

By exploring the roots and history of urbanism across the Arctic, the book sets out to take a critical look at the current conceptualization of an Arctic City – which the author argues has largely remained uncontested. Hemmersam's starting point in approaching circumpolar urbanism is the recognition of the 'Arctic' as a historically contested and colonized, yet not unified space, where the urban development has been characterized by the power imbalance with southern societies. As Hemmersam argues, the persistent narratives of the Arctic as 'empty', 'undeveloped', 'unique', and 'extreme' have had a powerful effect on the states, planners, and architects' visions to design cities in the North and for the North. For example, these narratives are reflected in the

historical conceptualization of Arctic cities as 'frontier towns, indigenous cultural hubs, industrial dystopias, climate change capitals or as sites of technological modernization and development' (pp. 4–5). In particular, the advocating themes throughout the book are the systematic disregard of local and indigenous voices in the urban planning processes, and the close entanglements between city-building and the domination of northern nature.

The book contains nine chapters, divided into three different parts. The first part is a general introduction to the history of urban development and the study of urbanism in the Arctic. It further elaborates on how the idea of a particular Arctic City started to arise in the 1950s in opposition to the modernist southern urban planning visions applied in many Arctic regions.

The second part of the book narrows down to investigate the urban planning and architectural histories, and prospects for the future in three localities: the Russian North, the Canadian North, and Greenland. Each case is given a chapter, and the text is well supported by visual materials, such as photographs, zone plans, and urban design illustrations. While there are significant differences between the urban development pathways in the case areas, Hemmersam argues that the underlying colonial logic and power imbalance have been present in all of them. He illustrates how the modernist urban visions have been systematically adopted from the South to the 'undeveloped' northern periphery, how locals and indigenous peoples' voices have been to a great extent ignored, and how the urban strategies have been dominated by the goal of economic growth and/or social well-being. This has materialized especially through nature's extraction and efforts to control the harsh climate through experimentation of modern radical technologies and architecture.

The final part of the book returns to the question of how Arctic urbanism is, or should be, approached and reconstructed. In one conclusion, Hemmersam lists various categorizations that illustrate the different ideas and dimensions of Arctic urbanism. In particular, the historical and contemporary challenges and perceptions that guide Arctic urban development are condensed into five interacting dimensions formulated by the author: Arctic City as utopian, postcolonial, provisional, experimental, and ecological. While the categorizations are interesting and resonate with the previous chapters, I was left to hope for a more nuanced and further-reaching discussion about them. What should we learn from these categorizations? How could and should they be approached in the continuous efforts to decolonize Arctic cities?

Urbanism in the Arctic is a peripheral theme both in Arctic research and the broad field of urban studies. Thus, the book provides a comprehensive contribution to the yet marginal investigation of the topic. Through its engagement in the postcolonial study of circumpolar urban planning histories, it offers new tools to approach the topic also outside the Arctic region, enriching the dominant urban planning discourse with critical insights from northernmost urbanism.

All in all, the application of the postcolonial perspective can indeed be seen as a great asset of the book. However, while Hemmersam excellently problematizes, for example, the disregard of indigenous people's voices in the urban planning processes, the book itself does not give visible room to the indigenous or locals' interpretations of their cities, city-building, or the future visions emerging from 'below'. Reflecting on my experience in the city of Rovaniemi, the local future visions are many, and heated debates are ongoing on local newspapers and social media platforms. In Rovaniemi, the effect of tourism on the livability of urban spaces for residents is one of the key issues today. In fact, in addition to the planners, architects, and distant policymakers from outside, the Arctic City and city spaces are constantly (re)negotiated and (re)made by the diverse groups of circumpolar city-dwellers through their everyday lives. Hopefully, this book serves as an inspiration for scholars across disciplines to continue exploring the makings of an Arctic City especially through hearing the spectrum of voices on the local grounds.

To conclude, *Making the Arctic city* offers a compelling angle to enhance our understanding of the persistent colonial perceptions and imaginaries that have largely influenced Arctic urban development and city-building in all circumpolar regions, including the Barents region. Most circumpolar cities may have rather short histories, but the book is a crucial reminder that these cities are far from historyless. With its main scope on the planning and design perspective, the book makes relevant critical reading for scholars, students, and practitioners in the fields of urban planning and design, architecture – and beyond. It would certainly be of interest to scholars and students in the multidisciplinary field of Arctic studies wishing to broaden their perspective on the Arctic towards questions of 'urban'.

BARENTS STUDIES: *Looking at Russia's images from the Finnish border*
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YOUNG RESEARCHERS OF THE BARENTS REGION

Pauliina Lukinmaa

PhD, Project Researcher,
Philosophical Faculty, University of Eastern Finland
pauliina.lukinmaa@uef.fi

In my doctoral project based at the University of Eastern Finland, I applied the ethnographic research method to examining how LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer-identifying) activists in St Petersburg form their practices, identify as activists, and create their own places. The data collection took place in 2017–2019 in a socio-political atmosphere that is further tense and oppressive towards minorities. As the 'capital' of Russian LGBTIQ+ activism, St Petersburg has wide local, national and transnational networks, and various initiatives and groups dealing with LGBTIQ+ related topics. Not surprisingly, the city has become a popular destination for LGBTIQ+ people from provincial cities and towns across Russia and even beyond state borders.

I also approached the St Petersburg activist scene through annual LGBTIQ+ festivals. In 2013, I did my university internship at an LGBTIQ+ initiative which was then registered as a civil society organization. My job description included aiding in both communication and the practicalities of the festival's international guests. In these couple of months, I met wonderful people, made friends, and was welcomed as a team member – despite being a foreigner who asked silly questions and whose Russian skills left a lot to be desired. Because I had a good time and felt that I was doing something important, and also felt accepted, I decided to continue volunteering for other events and activities of some LGBT organizations in St Petersburg. After all, the city is less than 400 kilometres away from Helsinki and had frequent bus and train connections.

I also did my student exchange at the European University in St Petersburg, familiarizing myself with Gender Studies, among other topics. My master's dissertation in social anthropology at the University of Tampere, Finland, investigated LGBTIQ+ activists' work since the implementation of the 'gay propaganda law' in 2013. The law prohibits neutral discussion on LGBTIQ+ people among minors, but in practice it has also made impossible the public recognition of LGBTIQ+ people and several types of activities where LGBTIQ+ topics could be mentioned. In 2016–2018, I worked as a project coordinator at a development NGO (non-governmental organization) in Finland on two international projects, both cooperating with civil society organizations in Russia. This made me realize the challenges of cross-border cooperation between Finland and Russia. Firstly, our Russian colleagues operate in a remarkably more restricted environment and need to include a carefully planned risk analysis in whatever they do. Not only do they need to be prepared for sudden surprises, but they often work with highly limited and unsteady budgets, too. Secondly, the cross-border cooperation was fragile, because only relatively short-term project-based funding was available.

Several LGBT initiatives in Russia have moved their staff and offices abroad. These processes have led me ask how transnationally dispersed LGBTIQ+ activists from St Petersburg construct their activism during times of intensified control and geopolitical tensions.

Furthermore, I argue that the cooperation between Finnish and Russian civil society organizations and initiatives has remained limited and temporary in Finland, because we are separated from Russian NGOs' substance-related knowledge and daily field of work. The operating environments unarguably differ, but Finland seems to lack knowledge of and even interest in the civil society actors in Russia. This hinders recognizing the similarities, such as the civil society actors' common challenges and targets. Regrettably, during the ongoing war in Ukraine, these fragile connections now rely only on a few, temporally limited personal connections.

While working on one of the projects in 2016, I approached professors at the University of Eastern Finland with plans to continue research of the LGBTIQ+ activist movement in St Petersburg. In the course of 2013–2016, several of my activist acquaintances in St Petersburg emigrated from Russia for various reasons, mostly to Western Europe and to the United States. I sensed that LGBTIQ+ activism in St Petersburg was becoming further transnational and networked. It received unseen local and international attention, often from vantage points that were contrary to each other. This tense operating environment puzzled me and I was eager to head back to St Petersburg to conduct long-term fieldwork. Financial support from the Saastamoinen Foundation enabled me to do ethnographic fieldwork in St Petersburg for four months in 2017.

Finally, in January 2018, I had a chance to focus on research and start analysing the interviews I had collected during the field trips and make a couple of more trips to St Petersburg. Unlike many PhD candidates within the EU today, I was offered an early-stage researcher position at the University of Eastern Finland for 2018–2021. I was very lucky to be able to solely focus on my research without agonizing over short funding periods and frequent application processes. The work contract also gave me the liberty to run my project in the direction that I wanted. Yet, I must admit that it was a challenge at times to be one's own boss. Luckily, the study intersects with cultural, Russian, Gender and Queer Studies as well as ethnography and anthropology – a relatively unusual combination. This has given me a chance to meet various networks of researchers that together form a polyphonic group of experts. These meetings have made me wish that the Russian researchers would meet with each other far more often. These circles have also challenged me with complex theoretical and methodological questions, guiding and directing me to sharpen my analysis.

I defended my PhD dissertation on September 23, 2022. Now new research ideas are maturing in me. The tragic war in Ukraine and the related transnational aspects have turned into a daily topic also in my life. This time with further intensity, LGBTIQ+ activists are again emigrating or trying to emigrate from Russia. The EU and the US are imposing further sanctions on Russia, which cast long shadows also on the Russian opposition. The political atmosphere in Russia has grown to be more tense, and the regime has expanded the restrictions on the freedom of assembly and speech. As with the 'gay propaganda' law, for example, these legislative amendments aim at silencing multivocal public discussion. As a result, they enabled the regime to frame the war as a 'special operation' in the eyes of many citizens. Even though LGBTIQ+ activists in Russia have experience of working under repression, the situation is now more difficult because of the financial hardships caused by the war, increased patriarchal public discourse, and sweeping censure. Police surveillance covers effectively social media platforms that act as an important alternative public space. There are rumours that general mobilization would soon take place in Russia. This would close the state borders for men between 18–60 years. LGBTIQ+ activists with sufficient resources and contacts to lawyers as well as aid from other activists who have left Russia, have crossed the state borders to work, study, or seek asylum. Several LGBT initiatives in Russia have moved their staff and offices abroad. These processes have led me ask how transnationally dispersed LGBTIQ+ activists from St Petersburg construct their activism during times of intensified control and geopolitical tensions. I'm charting the available options to see if I could investigate this question in postdoctoral research.

Anssi Neuvonen

PhD student, Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland
anssi.neuvonen@uef.fi

As a PhD student, I'm a doctoral researcher at the Karelian Institute in the University of Eastern Finland and a member of the Urban Karelianity research project. Funded by the Karjalaisen Kulttuurin Edistämissäätiö (KKES, a foundation for the promotion of Karelian culture), this project seeks to open new perspectives for research on Karelian identities.

I completed my MA in 2016 after studying general and Finnish history, sociology, sociology of arts, philosophy, musicology, and arts at the University of Eastern Finland. My master's thesis focused on the art concept of the early 20th-century French writer Marcel Proust as based on his letters and literary works.

In 2019, I got the opportunity to start working in the Urban Karelianity research project led by professor Maria Lähteenmäki. The purpose of the project is to see Karelia from a fresh perspective, through the eyes of the urbanized generations born after the Second World War. The conjunctive question in the project's sub-studies is how the significances connected to urban Karelian identities are seen, experienced, described, and determined by the third and fourth generations of (young) urbanized Karelians and, for their part, by the elderly generations who have needed to adjust to living in the cities. Traditional archival materials are complemented by new digital sources and platforms.

My doctoral dissertation focuses on Karelianness in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, examining self-images and identity narratives of associations and persons who identify themselves as Karelians. My interest is in ethnic-cultural discourses and different ways of remembering, which help in the analysis of how Karelianness has been constructed in this new kind of urban environment farther west than geographic Karelia. My main source materials comprise a questionnaire, interviews, and oral history collections.

Since becoming the capital of Finland in 1812, Helsinki has grown to be Finland's centre of migration and multiculturalism. Due to several migration waves, different Karelias (as regional viewpoints) and different Karelians (as groups) have met each other in the capital region. Thus, multiple layers of Karelianness have been produced in the urban and social space of the area – and can now be recognized there. Among the first associations manifesting their Karelianness in Helsinki were student nations that arrived when the university moved from Turku to Helsinki in the late 1820s. In the early 20th century, the migration wave from Russian Karelia to Finland led to the establishment of Karjalan Sivistysseura (the Karelian Cultural Society). In the Second World War, more than 400 000 people were evacuated from Finnish Karelia, which led to the foundation

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of several evacuee Karelian associations – most notably Karjalan Liitto (the Karelian Association) – in Helsinki. Also, associations connected to Finland's North Karelia were founded in the capital region as part of Finland's urbanization in the second half of the 20th century, and associations connected to Russian Karelia were established after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, new kinds of Karelian associations have emerged and been active in the early 21st century.

It has been fascinating to analyse what kind of urbanized Karelian layers exist in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and what kind of articulations might be fading. It's a complex matter who have been seen (or identifying themselves) as Karelians and what Karelianness has meant in different contexts: the meanings of Karelianness have followed the political climate of each era. After the Second World War, evacuee Karelian narratives and a sense of loss were dominant in Finland (also, most of the associations and persons that took part in my research have evacuee backgrounds). In the early 21st century, the status of the Karelian language in Finland has improved, which is also linked to the EU's minority policy, while some associations in Helsinki are approaching Karelianness through cultural activities (such as music, science, and laments). This at a time when some of their members might not have specific geographic or family-based connections to Karelia.

In our research group's latest article, Karelianness in the urban space of Helsinki was analysed through places of memory. The key conclusion was that urban Karelianness in Helsinki appears as layers of time associated with, firstly, Karelianistic Karelia and Kalevala enthusiasm, and secondly, evacuee Karelian layers built after the Second World War. Urban Karelianness in the city space of present-day Helsinki is fragmented, and collective representations of Karelianness are manifested mainly through numerous evacuee and recreational associations.

I'm captivated by cultural themes. For more than ten years, I have worked as an artist in international music projects, which has also involved touring and working around Europe and North America. Currently I'm living and working remotely on the outskirts of urban settlement, next to a nature conservation area in Kuopio, Finland. My goal for the future is to stay inspired and learn from others.

Teemu Oivo

Postdoctoral researcher, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki;
Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland
teemu.oivo@uef.fi

I'm a researcher of Russia, (trans-)national belonging, and information dissemination in public media discourse. My doctoral dissertation, which I defended in 2021, focused on reasoning Russian nation-ness for transnational audiences, on how the self is extended, the 'other' alienated, and order constituted. Themes of my past and current research include identities, nationalism, (trans-)national and civic belonging, border identities, problematic information, media literacy, and textual content distribution. I have used discourse analysis, content analysis, and netnography as methods. On a more general level, I seek to enlighten the frictions and specifics in mediated transnational communications.

As a relatively young scholar, I have had dual affiliation with the Karelian Institute (University of Eastern Finland) and Aleksanteri Institute (University of Helsinki) for several years. Currently, I work in a Kone Foundation-funded research project Flowision, where we scrutinize how state actors, corporations, journalists, experts, and civic activists work with (in)visibilities of energy and waste flows in Finland and Russia. My second current project is the Academy of Finland-funded project on transnational death, which examines what death-related practices reveal about transnationalism in Finnish and Russian social contexts. As often happens in academic careers, my research profile has developed gradually and piece by piece through several research projects.

My academic journey started at the University of Lapland in my hometown of Rovaniemi in 2008, when I started my BA studies in political science. I envisaged working in the public sector, an international organization, or a political party, so I chose to study Russian language and culture as my secondary subject as an additional skill – a fourth language in addition to Finnish, English, and Swedish.

I decided to profile myself as an expert of Russian social and political matters in 2009 and did two student exchanges, first in the State University of Petrozavodsk in 2010 and then at the Federal University Named after Mikhail Lomonosov (in Yakutsk) in 2012. Already in my BA and MA theses, I started using social media discussions and news media publications as my research material.

Under the supervision of professor Lassi Heininen, I studied the discourses of foreign agents in Russian news media between 2012 and 2013 for my master's thesis. I have since often conducted 'Foucauldian' discourse analysis and examined the othering of Russian/foreign through knowledge categories. I also established contact with the Aleksanteri Institute by completing their nationwide master's programme.

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Soon after graduating, I moved to Joensuu in 2014 to participate in the Academy of Finland-funded project Flexible Ethnicities, where I also wrote two peer-reviewed articles on discursive Karelianness and Russianness in Russian language online discussions. The project was organized within the Karelian Institute of the University of Eastern Finland, where I have been affiliated ever since. The bond to Joensuu was further consolidated in 2015 when I embarked on the doctoral programme in social and cultural Encounters (human geography) under the supervision of professor Paul Fryer and professor (since 2021) Olga Davydova-Minguet.

I started full-time research in 2015 in a project on Russian speakers as media users in Finland (2015–2016). I studied information influence in Russian national and transnational media, especially in television news and talk shows discussing the downing of the Malaysian passenger plane MH17 in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. In particular, I analysed how the representations of Western journalism produced the subjectivity of a Russian media user. While this project lasted less than a year, I have often returned to the related perspectives on Russian state media influence, conceptualization of problematic information (such as disinformation and propaganda), not to mention the insightful research outputs of my colleagues in this project.

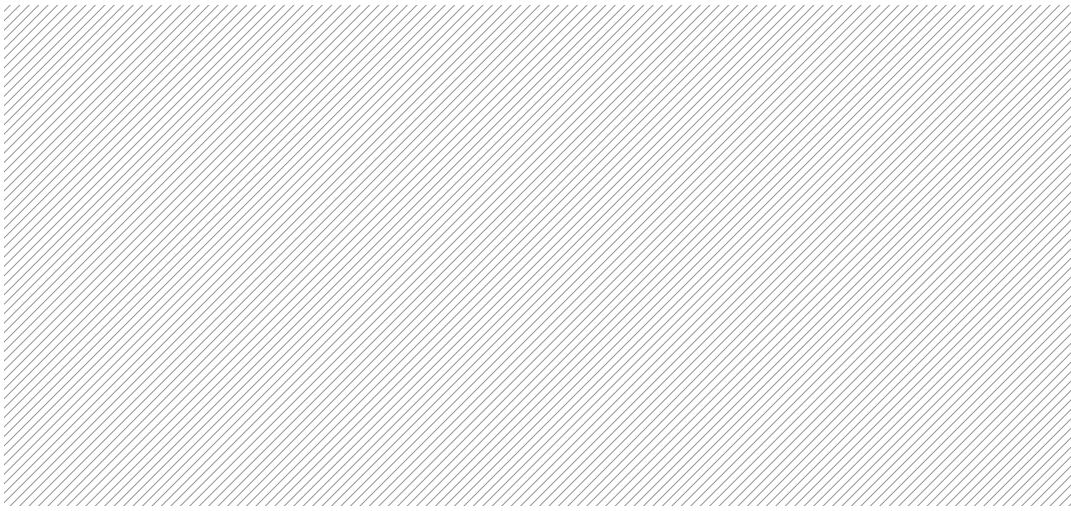
The following research project tackled perceptions of Russia across Eurasia through memory, image, and conflict (2016–2017), which included research cases from Finland, Estonia, Poland, Moldova, and Kazakhstan. This was the first time I studied Finnish discussions and the only time so far when I have studied non-digital media, namely the regional (North Karelia) newspaper *Karjalainen*. As supportive research material, I examined the North Karelian section at the online forum Suomi24. After documenting all the Russian-related newspaper content from July to mid-November 2016, I focused on the identities and subjectivities that the perception of Russia discursively produced. As the perception of Russia is a timely topic, I took a new look at this research material for the current issue of *Barents Studies Journal* and used qualitative content analysis from the perspective of early 2022. However, it should be noted that I wrote the basis of this article before the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Multilayered Borders of Global Security, "GLASE" (2017–2019), is the biggest research project I've been involved in thus far. The project spanned several years and involves several scholars from four different institutions. In this project, I examined security aspects related to the dual citizenship discussion in Finland from 2014 to 2018. In three research articles that emerged from GLASE, I considered how policymakers securitized the transnational bonds of Russian-speakers in Finland, frictions between national and everyday securities from the perspective of Finland's Russian-speakers, and perceptions of citizenship as membership in online discussions. In the project Flexible Ethnicities I had already applied specific methods for analysing discussions on online platforms, but in GLASE I more specifically utilized netnography to systematically select and contextualize online contents. I have since given a couple of lectures on how to conduct online research as well as discourse analysis.

The first research project that formally affiliated me with the University of Helsinki and the first that was completely separated from my doctoral dissertation was Strategies of Persuasion: Russian Propaganda in the Algorithmic Age (2019–2020). In this project, we were interested in the dissemination and tailoring of Russian propaganda for audiences in different countries. In my case study, I examined how Finland's counter online media platforms curated Kremlin's strategic narratives through contents from Russian state-affiliated international news agencies Sputnik and RT. Unlike in my dissertation research, in this case I did not examine discursive Russianness, but conducted content analysis on the dissemination of potentially problematic information.

I continued to do research on the dissemination of problematic information on the internet's alternative web pages. The next research project, on the ancient Finnish kings, was a computational study of pseudohistory, medievalism, and history politics in contemporary Finland and Russia (2020), where I got to work with colleagues from the University of Turku and the University of Tallinn. This project enabled me to test new research approaches when working together with computer analysts to examine the formulation of a pseudo-historical cluster on the Russian language internet. The related article is currently awaiting approval.

While my research perspective on Russia is mediated – 'virtual' in a way – I consider the physical world first-hand experience important here as in any social and area studies. Besides my two exchanges in Petrozavodsk and Yakutsk and several shorter trips, I have lived in Russia during two three-month-internship periods, first when working at the Finnish embassy in Moscow from December 2013 to the end of February 2014 and 18 months later in the House of Finland in St Petersburg. Currently, a mediated image of Russia as a country is all that I get, but transnational lives and social bonds remain even during the times of war. We have moved from the pandemic era of travel restrictions to precarious international relations following Russia's most recent invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Obviously, the war is devastating first and foremost for the Ukrainians and Ukraine. As an academic professional and a citizen, I seek to be a part of the transnational and international community contributing to a better, more peaceful, united, and sustainable future for us all.



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