

## **If the Borders Could Tell: The Hybrid Identity of the Border in the Karelian Borderland**

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### **Abstract**

This paper analyses the nature of the border. The paper poses the question of whether a border, in this case the national border between Finland and Russia in the Finnish Karelian border region, can have its own distinctive identity[ies], and if so, could the border itself be or become a hybrid – a border subject. To examine the hybridization process of the border, this paper draws on individual experiences of the border that are illustrated using interview material. In addition, by analysing historical documents, literature and historiography, the paper shows how the border has affected people's relationship with the border itself and also their perception of regional landscapes, regional memories and identity. On the other hand, this process can be reversed by exploring how people have changed and embodied the border. The paper utilises the framework of John Perry's theory of "reflective knowledge", where both conscious experience and the knowledge it yields differ from physical knowledge that is explicitly characterized in terms of empirical facts. Exploring these relationships enhances our understanding of the role of "private knowledge" and its contribution to the understanding of borders.

**Keywords:** Border, identity, hybrid, reflective knowledge, private knowledge

## Introduction

Interviewer: “Do you agree with those people who claim that national borders will eventually disappear because they will simply lose their significance in the globalized world?”

Interviewee 1: “Hmp ... This idea seems just like those people who want to stay as unmarried partners, you know. Like cohabiting, not willing to commit but unwilling to live alone. People like that will learn that the world can suddenly become a void that exhausts you to death, simply because you don’t know who you are or where you belong. But if you have a home country ..., not everybody has, mind you, ... and if it is not in the middle of a civil war or somehow made totally incapable of sustaining life, then no matter how down trodden you are, your home country takes you in. Ask any of the Karelian evacuees.” [A seventy-nine year old farmer currently living in the Karelian borderlands in Parikkala, Finland.]

Interviewer: “How did it feel when the national border was established almost in your backyard?”

Interviewee 2: “Well, I must say like Abraham Lincoln has once said that ... ‘You can fool some of the people all the time, and all the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.’ Regardless of all the nonsense in the name of diplomacy, that border doesn’t fool me or anybody else, ever. It’s a lie” [An eighty year old male from the Karelian borderlands who has lived in Canada since 1954].

Interviewer: “So, what comes to your mind when you think of the Border [the national border between Finland and Russia]?”

Interviewee 3: “Tragedy, Power, but mostly ... well, at least recently, mostly Compassion.” [A forty year old female, Finnish-American citizen originally from Turku, who lived in the USA for twenty-four years.]

In two groups of Finns living in North America and one in the borderlands of Finnish Karelia, their experiences of the national border between Finland and Russia evoke hair raising, maddening, and saddening stories, which can at the same time be found to be heart-warming, inspirational and uplifting. It seems that the perception and meaning of the national state border between Russia and Finland can be talked about and referred to with contradictory definitions and explanations. The national border invokes painful memories of war, loss, and death, consequently, generating strong feelings of hate and fear. On the other hand, the border can inspire wisdom, forgiveness, and optimism, gained through diversified experiences of life away from the border as well as from life on the border. Even an initial indifference toward the border or a sense of its declining relevance and significance as a generalizing organizer in political and social life (see: Ohmae 1995: 5; Guehenno 1995: 1–19), turned to avid interest or even concern, when questions started to revolve around the Finnish-Russian state border’s role in the whole system of world borders. Issues such as how a global rather than national approach to the Finnish-Russian state border impacts one’s own national and individual identity formation arose amongst many of the interviewees. Does the Finnish-Russian state border (also the most eastern border

of the EU), function as a dividing line between Finland and Russia or between the EU and Russia – and what is Finland’s position in this formation? Also, the common sense national identity (Billig 1995; Anderson 2003) is problematized when debating the questions of the eastern national state border’s role and place in global trade, immigration, food and energy systems. Furthermore, notions of Finland’s sovereignty are challenged when its political engagement and responsibilities in international economic and military co-operation, and its involvement in international humane organizations are determined. It therefore asks the question as to whether issues such as these that have traditionally been represented by the empirical realities of the state border, can be transcended into a phenomenological human consideration? The sheer diversity of the national borders might also provide a reason why the identity and nature of borders has not attracted much scholarly attention (Zimmerbauer 2011).

Due to the diversity of attitudes, opinions, and approaches towards the Finnish-Russian national border, as well as the incongruity and inner conflict that it reveals, this paper raises great confusion: What is a national state border in its essence? Are national state borders, such as the Finnish-Russian national border merely artificial, administrative socio-political constructions that once established become “uncontroversial and clearly defined in law” or are they a human matter, realized and manifested in a direct relationship with people who either live or have lived within the spaces marked by them? Is the Border real, personally true? These initial questions led to the general undertaking of this paper, so as to examine the nature of the Finnish-Russian national border from an ontological point of view. The organizing argument of this article states that due to the varied and often controversial nature of the national state border between Finland and Russia (from now on, the Border), the Border can be represented as a character with multiple personalities, each of which has its own distinctive identity. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the Border has given birth to its multiple personalities through its interaction with people, and these people’s ways to conceptualize, imagine and create expectations for it, therefore, giving the Border its own identity. However, the Border’s identity formation is not a one-way process. While such identities are being formed, the Border simultaneously moulds its creators’ identity by structuring new realities. In other words, the Border’s characteristic of “being many” and also its continuous identity formation amidst the lived and on-going heterogeneous experiences of its creators, suggests a process of hybridization. Therefore, the paper poses the question whether the Border itself can be understood as a hybrid, in the same way as other traditionally defined hybrid entities in Border Studies such as borderlands and border-landers. When applying the concept of hybrid to the investigation of the identity of the Finnish national border, the complex relationship of power and hegemony that underlie both the ideology of hybridization and border identity formation is revealed.

The philosophical framework for the ontological inquiry in this study is based on John Perry's argumentation of "reflexive knowledge". Perry's ontological inquiry is based on Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger's phenomenological reasoning that starts from the premise that knowledge is not just accumulated information, but is gained through experience. Border researchers in various academic fields – history, political science, geography, sociology, and anthropology – have gathered vast amounts of knowledge about different borders. Their research has been mainly concerned with analyses of the constitutional, legal, social, and economic realities of borders. However, this type of knowledge, as valuable as it is for understanding such a complex phenomenon as "border", is, to use John Perry's term "subject level knowledge". According to Perry, the accumulated subject level knowledge is "physical" knowledge that has not been consciously experienced (Perry 2001: 15–19). Physical knowledge, even though efficiently applied to real life, with its emphasis on empirical predicates alone, is not able to entirely reveal the complex relation between knowledge and reality. What Perry is suggesting is that physical knowledge, through its scientific analysis, distances itself from the phenomenon it is investigating. Therefore, the acquired physical knowledge is not consciously aware of the ontological system or nature of the phenomenon, and consequently, is not able to provide a conscious experience of the reality that it represents.

Perry calls this knowledge of a conscious experience of reality "reflective knowledge": "Reflexive content places conditions not just on the objects and properties a thought or utterance is about, but also 'on the utterances or thoughts themselves'" (Perry 2001: 21). In other words, when a person consciously experiences for example, the border, something new is learnt, namely what it is like to know the border or have conscious experience of the Border. Perry continues his argument by stating that an ontological approach does not necessarily establish any new scientific fact, but rather deepens the understanding of the phenomenon: "The mistake is to think that when we learn something new about the world, we learn a new fact that we didn't know before, rather than knowing the same thing but in a different way" (Perry 2001: 16).

Examining the results that reflective knowledge can yield about the characteristics of the Border as a "being" or as "an experience" in ontological inquiry might open up different knowledge about the nature of the Finnish-Russian national border, thus challenging habitual ways of thinking of the Border and its relation to reality.

Accessing conscious experience of the Border and ontologically identifying its multiple personalities is accomplished by utilizing postcolonial investigations into the hybrid subjectivity. As well as scholarly work, identity narratives have strongly focused on the historical and contemporary hybrid identity of geographical and cultural borderlands and their inhabitants, but not on the border itself (see: Anzaldúa 1987; Bhabha 1994; Eker & van Houtum 2008). In these

studies, the metaphor of hybrid has been employed when people, cultures, languages and traditions are understood as being heterogeneous or “a composite” (see: e.g. Kapchan & Strong 1999: 240). Understanding the Border as a hybrid allows mixing of its political, cultural, ethnic, and geographical definitions, thus creating the Border as an offspring of diverse individual experiences (mental and physical) that resist any strict empirical explanation or description. The question is whether an inanimate object such as a border can live a life from birth to death, or otherwise undergo a development from beginning to end. Perhaps a more important and more difficult question remains whether the Border has its own distinctive identity in its own right, especially now when the significance of the existence of state borders is under dispute. The answer to this question is best found in personal testimonies – each telling in its own unique voice about distinctive personal experiences of the Border – witnessing the Border’s continuous and tangible presence in their lives. Therefore, the data collection for this study was primarily carried out through open-ended interviews with the exception of one question that was posed to everyone: “If you had to give the Finnish-Russian national border a descriptive name, what would it be?” Interviews were conducted in Finnish and English.<sup>1</sup> Additional research that paralleled the observations of the interviewees concerning the nature of the border and their border experiences was conducted by researching pertinent literature, biographies and newspaper texts. The objective was to identify border related patterns of feelings, thoughts, motivations and activities from various periods in history. These patterns were derived from 32 random interviews, conducted in the North and South Karelian provinces of Finland and in Seattle USA and Vancouver Canada. These patterns were then analysed and organized into six ontological levels. These levels were named according to the most commonly used nouns that expressed interviewees’ views of the Border. This analysis was used to gain an insight into the “psyche” of the Border, which has in turn unconsciously or consciously directed people’s reactions to their own social and physical environment and their behavior towards otherness. William Zartman’s eloquent comment that “[b]orders ran across land but through people” (Zartman 2010), or Schack’s (2000: 203) argument that “borders do not come and go, but they persist in people’s mind even if the political agenda changes”, both support the idea of considering the border as an ontological phenomenon. Furthermore, the mental process evolving from this ontological experience arises not only from arbitrary political contracts, but from the lived experiences of many.

### **Border as a Seeping War Wound**

The evolution of the national state border between Finland and the Soviet Union was long, complicated, and violent. The first national border between Finland and the Soviet Union was established when both countries were in the middle of civil

wars in 1918. The second national border was established in the chaotic conditions of the Second World War, the Winter War, and the Continuation War. A new border was drawn in 1944, which once again divided Finland from the Soviet Union but this time with the distinction that Finland had to cede 3.3 million hectares of its territory in Karelia and the Arctic to the Soviet Union. In consequence, a region that was home to over 400,000 Finns in the Karelian territory was incorporated into the Soviet Union, resulting in the Karelian Diaspora (Singelton 1981). This border, unlike the previous state border established in 1918, was a concession, established under duress, costing the lives of over 25,000 people (2% of the total Finnish population), and leaving 10,000 permanently injured. Yet, like the state border in 1918, the current state border signifies Finland's independence, and with the distinction that only by paying US\$300,000,000 to the Soviet Union for war reparations would the border finally be redeemed (Singelton & Upton 1998: 130–133). However, these clinical numbers represent the situation only on the Finnish side of the border. The trauma and the terrible cost that the Soviets had to pay for their war is not addressed in this paper, but what existed on both sides of the border was a reciprocal tragedy which has subsequently been separated by the drawing of the new state border.

It is well established that during the immediate post-war period, the Border was passionately hated. Although the terrible experience of the war was over, transforming the official statistics (i.e. physical knowledge) of massive casualties, land losses, split families, the permanently injured, orphans, evacuees, the tremendous shortage of daily necessities, and the overall uncertainty about the future into everyday life, meant a painful encounter with a new reality that the war, and consequently, the new Border had created. On the first ontological level, the Border is named, imagined, and identified as a Seeping War Wound. The word "seeping" demonstrates the war's continuous presence that is not manifested in battles, bombings or death, but in the new everyday reality that still penetrates through every level of Finnish daily life.

One of the seeping wounds that infected the minds of Finns was the massive level of reparations paid to the Soviet Union. For years, the borderlanders who lived through these times first-hand (e.g. in the Parikkala Municipality) had to witness how the Finnish trains "loaded with riches just vanished beyond the Border and returned clunking and empty" (Eeva 2013, pers.comm., 6 August). Eeva continues: "There was something unnatural and eerie about how they just disappeared. I mean, of course the trains disappeared from one's line of sight, but disappearing behind the Border, it was almost like crossing the line between life and death and disappearing into never ending, fathomless darkness." Enni, a seventy-nine year old woman from Parikkala, attested to the tone and atmosphere created by the Border: "We used to invent all kinds of stories about the Border. In the evenings we scared each other by speculating what would happen if we crossed the Border. We, as children, did not know the meaning of the Border, but

we sensed from our parents' talk that it was something terrible, something that kills you if you get too close to it." (Enni 2013, pers.comm., 6 August). Pirkko, an eighty-year old woman remembers how she as a child knew that it was the "Ryssä" (a derogatory name for a Russian) who lived on the other side of the Border and killed everybody who came too close to it (Pirkko 2013, pers.comm., 6 August). These dialogues offer valuable insight into the struggle to understand the nature and identity of the Border, its power and its ruthlessness, and how it is still "porous", allowing the horrors of the war to seep through, reminding people how hard they still have to work before the Border is secured.

The Border was to be demarcated on the ground and physically reconstructed. Border demarcation pillars were erected and fences were built to make the Border a visible authority that defines and enforces the political territorial legitimacy of the nation state. When the national border shifts, the land changes, and therefore a new geographical reality sets in. This new geographical reality in turn requires a new cartographic reality to show where the new Finland begins and ends in the east. The new geographical reality and the consequent factual cartographic representation of Finland demanded that Finns gained a new psychological and social self-understanding - a sense of belonging and a sense of distinctiveness – of their new nation-space and of their home region. The new geographical reality was especially hard to conceive for the evacuees, but also for over one thousand Finnish farmers whose land had been split by the Border. Rebordering and remapping resulted in these farmers becoming the landowners of a land mutilated by the physical, politically-imposed Border, whose static, unyielding personality was reflected in a new map.

How were the Finns able to grasp the meaning of this new geography? Heikki, an eighty-two year old borderland farmer from South-Karelia, told about an incident from his childhood that illustrates the difficulty to conceptualize the effects of the geographical displacement of land cessions, and the Border moving to his backyard and splitting his land in two. In addition, Heikki's story adds local perception to the understanding of space, and more particularly, to the understanding of land and its relationship to the international border (e.g., Flynn 1997; Lenz 2003). Heikki's family, and especially his father, can be defined as deeply indigenous to the region, meaning that the family defines themselves by their home region, their land, and the length of their residency in the area for many generations. Heikki describes his father as a man to whom the land had inherent power. His father knew each section of his land by its own name, characteristics, vulnerabilities, and strengths. The land was an essential part of him. Losing his land when the new Border was established was the same as losing part of himself: "He never talked about it, but he was never the same. It was as if he was sleepwalking, just repeating that 'we have to get by with less'" (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 23 August). Heikki continues that it was only when his father had gone to the village to see the vicar that he literally came face to face with the

new geographical reality. In the rectory he saw the new government map of Finland hanging on the wall. Heikki, who had accompanied his father to the rectory, describes the moment:

Father greeted the Vicar first, but then forgot him when he saw the map on the wall. He just stared at it, and then walked to it, and with his finger he started to follow the newly inscribed eastern borderline all the way from the south end to the northern tip. He continued doing this for quite a while and then suddenly said: 'Hard to believe how much weight the Maiden Finland has lost'. (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 23 August)

Although cartographic knowledge of space is allegedly objective and based on the empirical science of cartography, a map, as John B. Harley has argued, "delimits the totality of experience" (Harley 1988: 59). Maps produce physical knowledge, and what they create is map space that is "a socially empty commodity, a geometrical landscape of cold, non-human facts" (Harley 1988: 66). The way Heikki's father conceived Finland in the new state map was by visualizing the Border through "the wounded cartography", through the metaphorical image of the Maiden Finland embedded in the collective imagination of the Finns during the oppressive years of the Russian colonisation of Finland. The new geographical interpretation represented by the new government map was confronted by the indigenous and familiar definition of land and the nation state. Simultaneously, the nation's symbol of a Maiden Finland and Heikki's father's farm shared the same geographical fate: Land contraction equated to amputation on both national and private levels. Heikki's father's interpretation of the new geographical reality reinforces Harley's argument that it is more fruitful to consider maps as "socially constructed perspectives on the world, rather than as neutral and value-free representations" (Harley 1988: 58). Heikki's Father's story can be understood not only as a timely historical record of the experience of border demarcation, but also as an emotionally sincere attempt to gain an understanding and establish order on an unreal and confusing situation that the Border had created. Heikki continues: "It was hard for my dad to believe that he was forbidden to go to his own fields or walk in his own forest. You can see them, but you are forbidden to go there or work the land. Dad left his best axe on the other side. That really stank" (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 23 August). To Heikki's father, the Border had created a land that was absent in hard political reality, but present in his loss.

### **The Border as a Police Presence**

Borderlands are generally thought to be challenging areas to live in. As Gloria Anzaldúa has observed, the borderlands are the "places of contradictions, [...] a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (Anzaldúa 1987: 19, 25). William Zartman argues that "the nature and conditions of the borderland is affected by the nature of the border itself (Zartman

2010: 5), and thus offers a justification as to why the Border can hybridize its residents. Anzaldúa's description of the difficulties of living in borderlands can directly be applied to the context of the Finnish Karelian borderland after the war. The Border had transformed from a Seeping War Wound into a relative Police Presence that through its aggravating presence, radically reconstructed the lives of the Finns and especially the lives of the borderlanders. Parikkala Municipality had lost 35% of its land and shared 30 km of the eastern border with the Soviet Union that had now become the new eastern borderland of Finland – thus its inhabitants became new border subjects. The newborn borderlanders, like any new species, were forced to evolve and adapt to the particularities of the new environment. Although the citizens of Finland were free to exercise their civil rights, the proximity of the Border posed challenges to these rights in everyday life. The borderland as a repressive environment was a reality that was further enhanced with rules and regulations strictly defined by the Finnish-Soviet treaty. In addition to the Border, the new borderlanders had to recognize a new frontier zone and frontier zone restrictions. The zone – three kilometres wide – was a highly restricted area which civilians were not allowed to enter without a special permit. In their daily lives, people were recommended to live quietly and carefully. It was illegal to drive with lights on after dark and taking photographs was strictly forbidden (Juvonen 1996: 622). Even the local Saturday evening dances were discontinued (Pekka 2013, pers.comm., 20 August).

Aili, an eighty-two year old woman from Parikkala remembers how she and her siblings, “almost whispered when we talked. We just waited for something terrible to happen ... like the Border not holding, and it [the War] starts all over again (Aili 2013, pers.comm., 20 August). The uncertainty in securing Finland's sovereignty was foregrounded by President Paasikivi who stated in 1949 that: “It is not impossible that the Kremlin, if the opportunity introduces itself, wouldn't finish off Finland, and invade Finland by making use of our own Communists, as it did in the Baltic states. Our war against the Soviet Union has not secured our position” (cited Talvi 1959: 129). The Border, drawn by the “winners” of the war, loomed as a defining presence over Finland's independence.

While the Border was being physically constructed, the Border became Finland's prime foreign policy concern. Borderlanders, Finns, and even some foreign citizens visiting the borderlands often indulged in transgressive behavior or enacted other forms of resistant agency. Illegal border-crossings (although not surprising because the Border was not yet completely built), damaging and even stealing the boundary markers, illegal photography, and shooting across the Border (Juvonen 1996: 656) contested the existence of the Border and its legitimacy as a means for the Soviets to exercise, control and reaffirm their power over Finland. Tauno, a ninety-two year old borderlander from the Parikkala Municipality looks back on those times a mischievous grin on his face: “Well, one had to needle the situation little, just to let the steam out. I don't remember any

serious conflicts. It was those *'desantti'*<sup>2</sup> that we feared the most as children (Tauno 2013, pers.comm., 22 August). Clearly these acts had potential to provoke further hostility, and therefore expedited the construction of the Border.

An uncomfortable silence shrouded the new borderland. The borderlanders in Parikkala Municipality did not fit into the traditional definition of borderlanders as have previously been described by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Emily Hicks, as people who are “informed by two codes of reference” (Hicks 1991: 226) such as biculturalism, bilingualism, or who have a bi-conception of reality. On the physical level, the Border gradually manifested itself in a two-meter high barbed wire fence, watchtowers, warning signs, and the desolate buffer zone which followed the ragged contours of the Border. The Border became one of the most strictly controlled and monitored borders in the world. For over seventy years it was closed and silent. “It felt like the world is really flat and the end of the world is the Border. Sometimes it was easy to pretend that there was nothing beyond the Border. It was the Border who was our neighbour, not the Soviet Union.” On the ontological level of the Border as a Police Presence, the Border had created a controlled space where, in the controlled reality, people had to learn to accept the distinctive, institutionalized reality of the Border which was embedded in international law.

### **The Border as a Protector**

It is notable that when asked “What does the Border mean to you?”, Uuno Kailas’s poem “*Raja*” (Trans. The Border, Kailas 1932) was recited from beginning to end by eight different interviewees. The first and the last stanza of the poem are the same, and they were strongly emphasized and recited by the interviewees:

Raja railona aukeaa (Like a chasm runs the border)  
Edessä Aasia, Itä. (In front, Asia, the East)  
Takana Länttä ja Eurooppaa; (Behind, Europe, the West)  
varjelen, vartija, sitä. (Like a sentry, I stand guard) (Kailas 1932: 247.)

The Border referred to in this poem is the original state border between the Soviet Union and Finland established in 1918. The Border of 1918 provides a distinctive social and cultural construction for Finland as a nation, and as a political entity whose self-definition is constructed against Russia. Kailas’s poem shows a strong antagonism between East and West, portraying Finland as the guardian of Western culture against an invasion from the East on the Finnish-Soviet border. In the 1930s, “*Raja*” illustrated commonly held discursive constructions of the East and the West, peculiar to European imaginations of Russia and the Soviet Union. In Kailas’s poem, the Border is understood to hedge against the Soviets who, at the time, were seen as a diabolic entity, irremediably outside the western civilized world. Although the state border between Finland and the Soviet Union shifted in

1944 due to the treaty of settlement, the *Raja* (the Border) in Kailas's poem also created the ontological reality of the current Border with its confrontational stance and self-aware defiance. The interviewees reminisced how they had heard this poem recited repeatedly during and after the war by their parents and grandparents. At the end of World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War, they learnt to recite it themselves. The Border had thus shifted from its position as a Police Presence to an understanding of the Border as a sovereign line, the Protector. In so doing, the Border continued to confirm the status of Finland as an internationally recognized independent nation-state.

During the Cold War, once again, "*Raja*" (the Border) manifested itself as a dividing line in a drastically polarized world that was divided between East and West politically, culturally, militarily and economically. This new geopolitical border, both physical and mental, was personified by the metaphor of the Iron Curtain, and on the eastern front of the West, it descended on the Finnish-Soviet national border. However, for small countries such as Finland, this new geopolitical binarism was not a simple black and white issue. Finland had to re-invent itself in a way that was non-threatening to both the East or the West. While the Soviet Union was moving halfway across Europe executing its imperialist and ideological aspirations, and the West was doing the same on the other side of Europe, Finland started to promote its new foreign policy that was later known as Paasikivi-Kekkonen line. The name refers to Finland's two successive presidents, Juho Kusti Paasikivi (1945–1956) and Urho Kekkonen (1956–1981), who both saw neutrality as the only way for Finland to survive as a sovereign nation in a divided world.

After the war, Finland found itself geopolitically in an in-between position, balanced between the Eastern and Western blocks, not wanting to belong to either one but acknowledging that diplomatically sound relations with the Soviet Union must form its political basis for both international and domestic politics. As early as in 1944, President Paasikivi comprehended that Finland's most difficult and challenging task was to invent a new form of interaction with the superpowers but, especially, with the Soviet Union. Paasikivi described Finland's predicament as follows: "Finland's problem, relating to its foreign policy is our relations with the Soviet Union. Everything else is politically secondary to this. [ ...] Finland must avoid anti-Soviet and hostile politics toward the Soviet Union. [...] We must strive for this regardless of all the disappointments we have already and will have to endure still" (Paasikivi 1985). Paasikivi created a framework for a comprehensive philosophy and strategy for a national effort to retain independence – the problem was, how to achieve these ends?

The new, but precarious establishment of the political, military, and ideological order in Europe and the rest of the world resulted in Finland finding a way to politically assure that it wanted to be a neutrally sovereign nation state. However, Finland's neutrality as well as its sovereignty was questioned by both the

international and domestic community. One reason for this was perhaps the treaty of the *Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance* between Finland and the Soviet Union in 1948 – also known as the YYA Treaty – that simply made Finland appear as an ally to the Soviet Union. There were many political scientists and international politicians in Europe and the USA who anticipated that Finland would most likely slide “behind the Iron Curtain” (Wuorinen 1954: 657; Karsh 1986: 265). The interviewees described the Border as “a tightrope on which the Finns had to dance without any safety net” (Tauno 2013, pers.comm., 22 August); or as an “unfamiliar bog where bog holes were impossible to pinpoint” (Aili 2013, pers.comm., 20 August). Ralf Törnngren, a Finnish-Swedish politician, called the situation “a puzzling phenomenon” or “exceptional”, because Finland’s position during the Cold War was impossible to describe with any of the conventional labels of international politics (Törnngren 1961: 161; Holsti 1986: 643). The YYA Treaty and the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line offered complex considerations on the issues of sovereignty and created a relativistic ambience that questioned the exercise of overt political power, influence and intimidation in an asymmetrical power relationship such as existed between Finland and the Soviet Union. The Border found itself running between Finland and the Soviet Union, but with two shadowy, parallel borders. The YYA Treaty from the Soviet side and Kekkonen-Paasikivi Line from the Finnish side flanked the Border as its “personal bodyguards” (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 22 August). The outer wall of defence –*Raja* – the Border in Kailas’s poem, had changed into a diplomatic template where political, economic, and cultural borders were negotiated.

The Border as such represents the state, and it either confirms or contradicts expectations bestowed upon it. The Paasikivi-Kekkonen line and the YYA Treaty divided opinions in Finland between those who saw these foreign policies as state failure, forcing Finland to accept a submissive posture toward the Soviet Union (see: Krosby 1960: 234), and those who acknowledged them as the only reliable and reasonable course of action to take, in order to retain Finland’s independence (see: Wuorinen 1954; Spencer 1958; Treverton 1982). The YYA Treaty and Paasikivi-Kekkonen line as national imperatives, however complex and compromising they were in detailed application, were able to create and maintain a reasonable balance between Finland and the East-West partition. As a marker of sovereignty, the Border between Finland and the Soviet Union was founded on the principle of building strength through appeasement and cautious diplomacy. It went entirely against the superpowers’ accelerating rearmament programs and their race to establish ideological, military, and economic hegemony. However, the Border outlasted the Cold War protecting if not overall sovereignty of Finland, then at least the political status quo.

## The Border as a Neighbour

The impact of time on identity formation is fundamental. Time has a ripple effect on everything that exists physically or mentally. From the point of departure, time allows people and their entire individual existence to immerse in a larger, ever expanding history of human consciousness that both delineates and blurs, century by century the evolution of human forms, activities, and the language that signifies their reality. This is also the case with the phenomenon of borders. Borders evolve through time, demonstrating a trajectory that reacts to and reflects socioeconomic, ideological and global political conditions. As Paasi and Prokkola term it (2008: 17), this “historical path-dependence” of borders creates a contextualized empirical, historical, and cultural reality for the Border. This in turn influences the ways in which the Border’s identity forms, the way people experience the Border, and the reality it creates. Although it is certainly a valid argument that “borders do not exist merely in space but also in time” (Paasi & Prokkola 2008: 17), it does not mean that “historical path-dependence” – a contextual approach – permanently affixes borders to any discrete historical moment or period. Rather, the borders serve as a time corridor where memory narratives, such as nationalist practices, iconographies and personal narratives can travel freely between the past and present, thus refuting Hegelian conventional thinking of the past as a linear forward movement governed by the clearly defined laws of causality.

The last years of 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s created drastically new configurations of identity formation for the Finnish – Russian state border. The YYA Treaty was dissolved, the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia was reborn, and Finland joined the EU. The ontological reality of the Border as a “defence line” changed into a commonly institutionalized and internationalized frontier. Efficient and professional border control policies on both sides of the Border were standardized, and the border officials started to cooperate more closely with one another, displaying an understanding that managing the overall security of the Border is a mutual task. The Border itself became more porous. Cross-border traveling for private citizens of Finland and Russia became relatively easy, and trade, scientific and technical cooperation formed new opportunities for authentic and unguarded interaction between Finns and Russians after decades of silence and non-activity.

From the 1990s to the present, the Border, although not anymore the ultimate divider and guardian between Finland and the Soviet Union, maintains its solid political identity as an agent of sovereignty for both Finland and Russia. On the other hand, ambivalent emotional and psychological associations with the Border fragment any efforts to define the Border unequivocally. Heikki describes this more lenient and liberal attitude toward Russia that illuminates the open or unfinished identity of the border’s ‘being-in-time’:

Of course it is a relief that the Soviet Union is no more, but the token of its existence is permanently branded on my land, country, and in me. I am older than the Border. In my earlier childhood, it did not exist. Then it came and separated us from the Soviets; and now us from Russians [...] The wise say that time makes history of us. Well, I am almost history ... [a long pause] I am just wondering ... how my 'pal' over there [motioning with his hand toward the direction of the borderline] fares throughout history. (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 23 August).

Heikki's comment echoes Wilson and Donnan's observation that borders can eventually serve as a physical record of a state's past and present relations with its neighbours (1998: 9). The records that can be accessed through accurate documentary evidence (physical knowledge) create but also limit the Border's identity, as well as the reality it creates, in a sequential or temporal manner, thus resulting in erecting a hard-and-fast boundary between the past and present. Heikki's comment shows that temporal dimensions of the Border form a continuum where the past can be drawn into the space of the present, and where even the future may be speculated. From an ontological perspective, Heikki's observation attests to the validity of the insight that as important as accessing the factual accuracy of the Border is, to access individual accounts of the Border based on experiences, attitudes, and stories of the Border is also important. These individual accounts or 'ghost histories' of the Border illustrate the manifold relationship between the Border and the memory. They interrupt the movement of coherent and ordered historical progression by introducing discontinuous, repetitive, contradictory and fragmented data that contests the belief that the past can be pinned down, or that there can be a singular historical truth of the Border at any given time.

Sometimes the Border carries narratives of memory that emerge from the past so strongly, that they cannot be contained in history books or historical documents. They emerge in the midst of the present like spectres, with the power to 'spectralize' or haunt the present reality. One of the most powerful spectres that came to fore in interviews was the first nation state border between Finland and the Soviet Union, established in 1918 when Finland declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Kaisa, an eighty year old North-Karelian Finn elaborates: "This border [meaning the Border of 1918] is a real border of Finland [...] Yes, I know it doesn't exist anymore, but it is nevertheless a real border of Finland ... [a long pause] hm ... at least in the way I understand Finland. That it doesn't exist anymore, doesn't make it less real" (Kaisa 2013, pers.comm., 26 August). Kaisa's comment raises the question of the role and significance of these 'ghost histories' of the Border, and how they permeate through people's lives, experiences, and understanding of the current Border.

'Ghost histories' of the Border operate both on conscious and unconscious levels, as can be seen in Arvi Perttu's novel, *Skumbria* (2011). In *Skumbria*, the undercurrent theme is Finland's relations with Russia, but perhaps more specifically, the relationships between people living in the Karelia borderland that

straddles the current international border between Finland and Russia. The novel is situated in the era after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but reflects upon and flashes back to Soviet times. The more open border allows transnational processes such as cross border traveling and collaborating in economic, cultural, and scientific arenas. However, the historical legacy of the Communist regime and the two consecutive wars between the Soviet Union and Finland during the Second World War exerts influence in the background.

The spectre of the first nation-state border between Finland and the Soviet Union is raised in a dialogue between a Finnish speaking Russian-Karelian Pauli who has married a Finn and now lives in Finland, and Hannu, a Finn.

Hannu: "Nature in Finland is the best there is the world."

Pauli: "Well, the nature in our Karelia [Russian Karelia] is exactly the same."

Hannu: "No wonder. It is the part of the Old Finland."

Pauli thinks to himself: "I didn't start correcting him." (Perttu 2011: 193)

In this awkward dialogue, the historical pattern of the Border and its spectral dimensions become evident. The 'Old Finland' with its ghost national border with Russia has not yet found its place between its historic-political representation and the contemporary Finnish reality. The border between past and present is blurred, indicating that the past is not finished and left behind. The 'Old Finland', left on the other side of the current Finnish-Russian national border, is still embedded in Finland's geographical memory and the understanding of Finland's territory. The 'Old Finland' with its ghost Karelia, demarcated by the Border of 1918, still represents a cultural-aesthetic utopia, a birth place of Finnish identity and origin, but the on other hand, it represents a geographical utopia which was lost in the war. Hannu sings the praises of the beautiful nature of Finland, extending it quite naturally, to include the 'Old Finland'; politically distant and unattainable, but not so historically or culturally. Using Amy Novak's concept, this "historical gaze" penetrates the boundaries between past and present, and transgresses the state border (Novak 2004). What has been, in this case 'Old Finland', does not necessarily mean that any meaning or value has been lost or dislocated. In the dialogue, Hannu's unconditional and absolute view of the source of the beauty of 'Old Finland' is established through a confirmation of what he already knew to be "true". His knowledge is based on those meaning-making images – the life experiences and Finnish mythology of Karelia as an ancestral land and a homeland of Finnish origin, which formed Karelia into a national collective and enshrined it in the cultural imagination. Hannu is so certain about his authoritative knowledge that he casts a suspicious, if not out-rightly contemptuous, eye on anybody who claims to know different. His peremptory attitude, unfortunately, renders Pauli silent.

Somehow, the historical, topographical and geographical reality of Karelia is negotiated between the real and imaginative, between the current nation-state

border and the ghost nation-state border. As much as 'Old Finland' is real to Hannu as a part of Finland's historical totality and existential reality, it is unreal to Pauli as a Russian-Finn. Hannu's view is countered by Pauli, who understands Karelia not as a historical, lost utopia still culturally belonging to Finland, but as a real geographical and physical space in Russia, where real people live and exist in 'real time'. Is Pauli's comment, "I didn't start correcting him" a disarticulation evoking the postcolonial strategy of "the East is speaking back to the West" and conveying his sense of not belonging, or simply his unwillingness to belong to a Karelia as defined by Finns? What is there to be corrected? What does he know that Finns do not know, and how does he know that what he knows is correct? Pauli's countering-silence brings forward the competing Russian discourses of personal experience of the contemporary Karelia, and confronts the Finnish collective national history and memory of 'Old Finland'. Pauli's confrontation, although through silence, destabilizes the reader's (if not Hannu's) conventional ideological and political constructions of Karelia as an undifferentiated historical, psychological, and sociocultural collective space for Finns. Ghosts – be they spectral borders, phantom lands, people, ideas, or beliefs – are real in the sense that they always evoke response by forcing the present to encounter the past.

### **Border as a Wailing Wall**

As demonstrated above, state borders do not exist in a contextual vacuum but are embedded and shaped in ethno-national distinctions, and geopolitical and socioeconomic influences. They are linked in many ways to the past, as they are simultaneously constitutive of the present and the future. The next ontological level – the Border as a Wailing Wall, is perhaps the most personal level where the Border creates an ontological reality and where encounters with the Border become an intimate and private experience, a kind of personal psychological biography. The Border's identity as a Wailing Wall (also known as a Western Wall, so providing an interesting parallel to Kailas's *Raja*) denotes a separation from something beyond our senses; promises that are yet to be fulfilled; regret and lamentation; the longing for something deeply felt but rationally unattainable; and finally, atonement. Although Finland had survived the war, and Finns were restored to their geographic and political nation, they had yet to be restored to their relationship with death, life after the war, themselves, and with the 'enemy'. The mental world projected by the Border through the metaphor of a Wailing Wall, manifolds the constructions of presence, splitting into 'normal' chronological time and psychological time, both of which both run parallel to each other. Psychological time refers to the time that addresses the degree of significance a certain person assigns to his past, present, and future. This entwined awareness of inner-outer, present-past, known-unknown-becoming are so strongly emphasized in encounters with the Border, that they become core constituents of

the psychological structures of the Border, as well as of the person who experiences the Border either consciously or unconsciously.

However, to come to understand or even identify the psychological structures of the Border and the barriers that hinder them from being realized (e.g. ideologies, beliefs, bias) is a complicated psychological process that requires both chronological time and psychological time to renounce exact time frames. Consequently, when existential certainty – produced by framing human existence and experience within exact time frames – disappears, the interpretation of experience is no longer bound to an objective or empirically defined reality, but yields to a new way of interpretation through perception, emotion, and imagination. Furthermore, what makes this process even more difficult, is that the effects of the Border on one's psyche may occur unnoticed, and, consequently, remain abstract and 'impersonal'. They might never be realized or perhaps after many years, may return unexpectedly. They can be directly felt through a personal encounter, or indirectly through somebody else's experience or through family history (Hirsch & Miller 2011: 6). In the following example, the primary encounter with the Border had happened two generations before, but the role of the Border's psychological effect can still be felt after decades have passed. Frank, a fifty-seven year old Canadian, reflects on his father's encounter with the Border:

Dad visited Finland about ten years ago. He comes from Karelia, I don't know the name of the place, but it is now on the Russian side of the Border. He really had wanted to see this place for years [...] You know .... Dad is a tough guy (chuckles) ... he has that *sisu* ... see, being a real Finn and all (more chuckles). But a few years back he told me that he had cried like a baby when he had visited their old homestead back in Karelia. It wasn't the old home that made him cry; he didn't remember it actually. It was that darn Border and everything it entails (Frank 2013, pers.comm., May 27).

What did the Border entail that caused such a strong emotional reaction in Frank's father? The root-seeking phenomenon of Frank's father and his effort to connect with the past entailed crossing the Border, but crossing to what? His roots, the point of origin and his family history were technically located simultaneously in two countries, Finland and Russia. He did not have any exact memories about his old home; his memories about Finland were based on general facts, a few photographs of his relatives, stories about his parents' experiences of Finland, and the Finnish language he was still able to speak. His sense of remembering and belonging, together with vague memories only pointed to the past but were unable to be manifested.

Did Frank's father really visit Finland when he visited their old homestead in Karelia? To do this, he must have temporarily reversed chronological time in order to re-enact the sense of proximity to the reality he wanted to revisit. If he was successful, then he crossed the Border from Finland to Finland. If he failed to reverse the time, he crossed the Border from Finland to Russia. In psychological

time, he therefore exists in two mental planes: past and present. Marita Struken argues that the purpose of re-enactments such as time reversals, is not to represent the past events, but to produce an effect that is independent of the accounts of the others, such as eyewitnesses, photographs or other material objects. What is left is the effect – an aura of historical reality– that the re-enactment process presents (Struken 2011: 287). In other words, Frank’s father does not participate in these past events, but rather in the transmission of the effects which emanate from the events. In this context, the Border, no matter whether it exists in either chronological or psychological time, becomes a Wailing Wall as it is always present in externalizing the pain associated with the past.

Other interviewees expressed similar accounts to Frank’s father. The next example shows how the Border affects the subconscious. Liisa, a forty-year old Finn, living in the USA comments:

My family comes from Turku. As far as I know, we do not have any family ties with Karelians. I have always taken the Border as a self-evident fact. I feel gratitude for sure but as I said, I have never thought about it, really. But my son is now an exchange student in the Helsinki area and visited St. Petersburg with his friends. It is amazing how close it is to Finland ... you just cross the Border ... and there it is. Never thought about it. My son has experienced something totally unknown to me... crossing *that* (Liisa’s emphasis) Border. I think I cried a little ... I somehow feel upset for no reason, right? (Liisa 2013, pers.comm., May 25).

“*That* border” is a loaded expression that sparks an affective response in Liisa. Where does this response come from? Liisa’s response, although not understood cognitively, demonstrates the Border’s centrality in individual and collective consciousness and memory. What happened in the bordering process in Finland after the war, is tantamount to the Finns’ understanding of themselves and the world around them. “*That* border” being physical, is also psychological. Liisa’s affective response that she is not able to reason reveals some unacknowledged issue, feeling, or experience associated with “*that* border”. Like the Wailing Wall, the Border is multi-layered in the way that personal, interpersonal, political, and social aspects come together, thus inducing different mental states. Will people such as Liisa repress, remember, transcend, or forget the Border? This is an open question that does not have any correct answer. These interviews support that the borders become psychological i.e. they create a personal mental spaces. They also reflect Graham Green’s observation of power of the borders to create the bizarre atmosphere created by the psyche or inner recesses of the mind:

The border means more than a customs house, a passport officer, a man with a gun. Over there everything is going to be different; life is never going to be the same [...]  
The atmosphere of the border – it is like starting over again; there is something about it like a good confession: poised for a few happy moments between sin and sin. When people die on the border they call it ‘happy death’ (Green 1971: 14).

On a psychological level, the Border and a Wailing Wall are alike, separating but bringing together, becoming a threshold or a passage, an instructor or a

messenger that gives us a perspective on how understandings of human intersubjectivity or relationality are crucial for human survival.

## **Border as a Dream Maker**

The last ontological level of the Border as a Dream Maker is still evolving. The main issue that repeatedly emerged from the interviews concerned the burning and current question of establishing an open border between Finland and Russia. The question of the open border is acute, especially, in the Parikkala Municipality<sup>3</sup> where an old border-crossing checkpoint is planned to be transformed into an international border crossing point. Furthermore, discussions of signing a visa-waiver program between Finland and Russia have raised concerns in Parikkala. On the other hand, these debordering developments would ensure “easy” trans-nationalism (a reality that paradoxically preceded nation states and national borders (Vertoveck 1999), which could ensure economic growth on a national level and create the influx of needed revenue for local businesses in peripheral areas. While these developments offer undisputedly valid argumentation for improving economy, they also produce counter arguments. Questions of security on individual, national and global levels, ecological threats, and the fear of land confiscation for the purposes of cross-border logistics have caused people to view the new debordering plans with a degree of caution. Heikki views the situation as following: “We get along with Russians. They can now travel freely to Finland. Why do we have to change the situation by insisting on creating a visa-free zone? It is the same as asking for troubles” (Heikki 2013, pers.comm. 23 August). Pirkko continues in the same vein: “If we open the Border, does it mean that we will have the same rights in Russia as Russians have in Finland? Can we travel to Russia without visa, buy land, and expect service in Finnish? I don’t think so, and therefore, we should proceed cautiously” (Pirkko 2014, pers.comm. 13 October). Uncertainty; not knowing about potential impacts the open border could have, and not knowing whether the more permeable border occurs only in one direction – thus furthering asymmetrical relationship between Finland and Russia – perpetuate some of these fears and suspicions. Ambiguous and overly optimistic comments from politicians, local administrators and businesses have not mitigated fears or elicited trust in decision-making procedures, but rather made the borderlanders irritated. For example, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Member of the European Parliament, promotes debordering processes in her interview for *Parikkalan-Rautjärven Sanomat*<sup>4</sup>: “I would compare exemption from visa to the end of the rainbow. It is very close and worth travelling towards. It has a great impact on regional economy and on the whole EU” (“Viisumivapaus ja raja-asema tukevat toisiaan” 2013: 4). The issue in the Parikkala borderland is not the desire to tighten the border controls and make the Border less permeable. Rather the problem is to determine a degree of porosity of

the Border. Tauno comments on Sirpa Pietikäinen's interview: "Russia is an opportunity, but it cannot provide any economic miracle to Finland. What is it exactly they [politicians] try to sell? Some kind of a fairy tale? Our Border enables us to proceed cautiously; we don't have to leap (Tauno 2014, pers.comm. 13 October). The Border as a Dream maker reveals the need to include a more locally participatory approach to decision making concerning the Border even if the Border is now heavily impacted by the forces of globalization.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, the research goal was to identify the multiple personalities of the Border (the Finnish-Russian national border). These draw mainly from socio-historical origins, evolved in response to external pressures, economic incentives, societal and legal demands, and modes of ideological conditioning. Although the Border has been described as a living entity that bears specific names that illustrate its ontological nature, this does not mean that the Border's identity is fixed at the moment of the conception of these names. The names are not rigid designators, and so do not dictate ways of thinking about the Border and its character through the changing apprehensions of time. Rather, the names help move the Border from an empirical or physical reality, to a more volatile and humane space which allows disparate identities of the Border to become more visible, easier to reflect upon, and consequently allows us to understand the reciprocal relationship between the Border and people. This reciprocity also enables us to explore the processes of hybridization which arises from contact. Names help to identify each hybrid occurrence that the Border goes through, and also the hybridizing processes people go through when they attribute these names to the Border. These processes revealed contesting ideological and political narratives that both established and dismantled the Finnish state border, depending upon the speaker's viewpoint.

The interviews and texts strengthened the notion that the concept of border (be it conceptualized in topographical, political, symbolic or aesthetic manifestations), "cannot, however, be taken only at face value" (Schimanski & Wolfe 2010). In that case, can they then be taken at their hybrid value? The ontological identity of the Border is emphasized at each of these hybrid levels. Once experienced and reflected upon, the hybrid nature of the Border shifts or relocates the Border from being an epistemological object to a subaltern agency, which enables us to create a site where individual voices have both recognition and significance. The Border between Finland and Russia serves as a medium for these voices – it can and will talk, if we are willing to listen.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The author does translation from Finnish to English.
- <sup>2</sup> They were paratroops who worked behind enemy lines. They often worked as spies or saboteurs (e.g., Haapanen Atso (2013): *Viholliset keskelläämme: Desantit Suomessa 1939–1944*).
- <sup>3</sup> Parikkala is a border town in South-east Finland.
- <sup>4</sup> *Parikkalan-Rautjärven Sanomat* is a regional newspaper issued twice a week.

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Research materials include personal comments from and interviews of the following anonymized informants:

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Eeva, 2013, pers. Comm., 6 August  
Enni, 2013, pers.comm., 6 August  
Frank, 2013, pers.comm., May 27  
Heikki, 2013, pers.comm., 23 August  
Kaisa, 2013, pers.comm., 26 August  
Liisa, 2013, pers.comm., May 25  
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