

Preface: Writing at Borders

By Tuulikki Kurki, Saija Kaskinen, Kirsi Laurén & Mari Ristolainen

This special issue is produced within an Academy of Finland funded research project *Writing Cultures and Traditions at Borders* (2010–2014) that has examined writing practices, texts, and amateur and professional writers in the Finland–Russia and Estonia–Russia borderlands. The aim has been to give voice to those people whose perceptions of the borders and borderlands have often been neglected within institutionalised and dominant scholarly and artistic discourses. The research project has focused on the late 20th and early 21st century, and examines writing practices on the borderlands in their societal and historical contexts. Furthermore, the research has recognized the national borderlands as areas home to unique forms of writing cultures.

In this special issue, the practices of writing at borders are presented in an introductory article and four different article pairs. The introductory article written by the *Writing Cultures and Traditions at Borders* research project leader Tuulikki Kurki (University of Eastern Finland), claims that cultural studies and the humanist point of view has significant explanatory potential concerning the various borders and border crossings addressed in multidisciplinary border studies. Cultural and human understandings of borders and border crossings grow on one hand from the research of ethnographic particularities, and of the universal and culturally expressed human experiences of borders and border crossings on the other.

The first article pair examines territory-making and linguistic spaces relating to borders. *Tiiu Jaago* (University of Tartu) observes how Estonians have described political changes, especially the establishment of the Soviet rule in Estonia in the 1940s, in their autobiographical narratives. In the narratives, the relationship between the borders of Estonian territory, the borders of cultural space, and state borders are analyzed with the concepts of ‘continuity’ and ‘discontinuity’. Jaago claims that the entangled interplay of territorial, political and cultural borders reveals the polysemic and ambivalent nature of the concept of ‘border’. She argues that ideas of borders are constructed by three factors: the narrator’s experience of political change in Estonia, the method of narration, and the interpretation of the autobiographical narratives. *Tuulikki Kurki* (University of Eastern Finland) focuses on the construction of a non-Russian language space on the Soviet side of the Russian-Finnish national borderland from the 1940s until the 1970s. The article claims that the non-Russian language space and the national border differ from the official decrees dictated by Moscow, as can be determined from literature stemming from the late 1950s and early 1960s. She claims that the non-Russian language space and

border gradually became more multi-voiced, ambivalent and controversial, and that this subsequently influenced the identity construction of the borderland people.

The following article pair focuses on border crossers and crossovers that are represented in travel narratives and stories. However, both studies discuss texts that are written beyond the official corpus of travel literature in Finland. *Kirsi Laurén* (University of Eastern Finland) analyses the personal written narratives of Finnish tourists who travelled across the sea from Finland to Soviet Estonia during the period of 1965–1991. She uses the concept of “otherness” as an analytical tool when studying the travellers’ experiences of border crossings and cultural encounters. The article concentrates on travellers’ relations and conceptions of Soviet Estonia and their descriptions of facing otherness during their travels. *Kirsti Salmi-Niklander* (University of Helsinki) focuses on border crossings in travel stories in the 19th and early 20th century. The analysis is based on the methodological discussion of small stories and personal experience narratives that can be defined as “local event narratives”. The emphasis is on the aspects of time and space in the travel stories which often demarcate the boundaries of class and gender.

In the third article pair, the concept of border appears in contemporary national and political ideologies, and in people’s direct human experiences of the border. In her article, *Thekla Musäus* (Greifswald University) concentrates on Soviet Communism and Finnish Panfennism, and their influence on both the concrete national border and on more symbolically defined immaterial borders. The most important example of the latter concept are the so called ‘heroic borders.’ Heroic borders illustrate Soviet and Finnish nationalist ambitions which are often motivated by nations’ ideological ambitions. Using rhetorical analysis of the contemporary texts, Thekla Musäus shows how the evolution of international borders and expansionist ideologies complicates the ways in which ethnic, political, cultural and religious boundaries intersect and cross-cut each other. In *Saija Kaskinen’s* (University of Eastern Finland) article, the Finnish-Russian national border is examined utilizing a hybrid methodology. In it, she gives an example of one type of process in which the national border can be seen to become hybrid. The hybridization process of the national border is followed through various individual experiences (hybrid environments) that people have had about the border. In her article, she calls attention to the social and cultural realities that form different levels of hybridity, and which in turn, are embedded in the national border. These levels of hybridity are related to each other in complex ways that illustrate the nature of the national border as an entity of accommodation, resistance and change.

The final two articles focus on dislocated and symbolic borders that may appear as either conceptual or abstract. Dislocation of borders is examined in the constructs of both metaphorical writing and in communication at ‘borders’. In her article, *Mari Ristolainen* (University of Eastern Finland) discusses the figurative construction of Russian national borders and the symbolic meanings invested in them. She argues that borders can be written between areas that have no geographical connection, but

for example, due to a traumatic event, a border and a connection are formed. As such, she argues that whilst a geographical border may be perceived as real and supported by national policies, it has diminished meaning when not recognized or honoured by a 'written border'. In an inter-personal and cultural context of 'border', *Tarja Tantt* (University of Tallinn, University of Eastern Finland) examines metacommunication in conversations between Finnish employment officials and immigrants during service encounters. She suggests that the interactional situation between Finnish officials and immigrant clients forms a symbolic border, and thus an arena of border negotiation, where borders are crossed from one's own culture into a foreign culture. Metacommunication can function as a means of crossing the border, whilst a lack of metacommunication and subsequent silence may form a symbolic boundary to integration, if the client is unfamiliar with the customs and practices of his or her new home country, and if these are not explained.

The articles in this special issue give voice to travelers, borderlanders, amateur and professional writers, migrants, soldiers, and their families who have had direct experiences of borders and border crossings which have in turn expanded understanding of borders. Therefore, the articles reflect critically on ideological discourses that have constructed dominant meanings for the borders and border crossings as well as national margins in Finland, Estonia and north-western Russia. The connecting idea between the articles show that borders and border crossings are seen from the viewpoint of individual experiences and at the level of micro-level encounters, and the crossed borders are not just territorial or topographical but they always include socially constructed symbolic and metaphorical layers. Cultural conventions regulate the narration as well as the construction of these layers. Sometimes, as the articles show, the socially constructed symbolic and metaphoric border may be drawn completely separately from the territorial borders.

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