

Displaced Borders: The Written Traumatic Borderline between Pskov Province and Chechnya

By Mari Ristolainen

Abstract

This article examines the narrative construction of borders through an analysis of “non-professional writing” produced by the residents of Pskov. It discusses the construction of national borders and the symbolic meanings invested in them, with the empirical focus being placed on the symbolic Russian-Chechen border. The theoretical essence is the realization that due to the constructive and narrative natures of border production, the creation of a national borderline does not necessarily pre-suppose that the two sides share a geographical border. The article also addresses questions of traumatic memory and links border production with the concept of cultural trauma. By asking where Russia’s borders currently located, this article provides an example of the cultural construction and symbolic displacement of the “national border”, and a representation of how the national b/ordering processes differ when viewed from both “bottom up” and “top-down” perspectives in the contemporary Russian Federation.

Keywords: Russia, Chechnya, Pskov Province, Chechen wars, cultural trauma, b/ordering, border displacement, non-professional writing

Introduction

Открывайте, ангела, в небеса ворота...
к вам с поклоном навсегда в храм шестая рота.¹

Angels, open the gates of heaven...
The sixth company is humbly coming to your sanctum forever.²

National borders territorialize our thinking and provide parameters that we need to live within. Nevertheless, borders are not just territorial lines that can be drawn by governments and maintained by politicians with “top-down” policies. Borders are dynamic processes of cultural production and negotiation that take place far away from the parliaments and cabinets. Focusing on “local texts” about Chechnya from the Pskov province (Pskovskaia oblast) in Russia, this article looks to show how traumatic events have delocalized the notion of border and turned it into a shifting and multi-layered concept. The concept “local text” in this article is understood as non-professional writing (poems, short stories) by the residents of Pskov, self-published in self-paid books, newspaper articles or on the internet. The main research questions posed by this article are: Where are Russia’s borders currently located? What signifies a border? How does a border come into existence and become meaningful? What makes borders significant and relevant? This article argues that “national borders” are no longer perceived as geographical locations and physical lines on the map. “National borders” exist in certain topographical location – de jure – but their de facto symbolic location differs from the topographical location. For instance, “national borders” can be drawn up or constructed between areas that have no geographical connection between them, but due to for example a traumatic event, a symbolic national border and border-crossing processes are formed between these areas. This article provides an example of the cultural construction and symbolic displacement of the “national border”, and a representation of how the national b/ordering processes differ when viewed from both “bottom up” and “top-down” perspectives in the contemporary Russian Federation.

Where are Russia’s Borders Located?

“Russia starts here!” – an advertising slogan plastered on city busses in Pskov (Amos 2011). Both the Soviet and contemporary Russian local history books lump together modern Russia and the medieval Rus when constructing the image of Pskov province as a strong historical border region, emphasizing that the city of Pskov was involved in 123 wars between 1116 and 1709 and has only been occupied twice: in 1918 and in the 1940s (Bologov: 1970; Ivanov, 1994). Today Pskov province borders the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, (the European Union and NATO) and Belarus (the Commonwealth of Belarus and Russia). The geograph-

ical location of Pskov at the border has strongly influenced the economic development of the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Alexseev & Vagin 1999: 46).



Pskov province and its bordering nations © Wikimedia Commons.³

Pskov province has been a major defensive outpost on Russia's western border for centuries. The geographical location has also influenced the positioning of the Russian Armed Forces. Today, Pskov province is famous for its 76th Airborne Division that has been a part of hostilities in Chechnya, South Ossetia, Georgia, and Ukraine, and which suffered heavy casualties, especially during the Chechnyan conflict.

Pskov province is undisputedly a geographical border region, but one may ask if in fact the post-Soviet border formation has really taken place in the minds of Pskovians and what has influenced this "bordering" and border formation process. The Russian Federation's national border, EU border, and NATO border all exist with border poles, fences, border guards, and passport controls. Yet, it seems that in people's minds that this post-Soviet border is still rather vague – in a way it has been either not recognized or not signified. This observation is based on my ten years' experience of researching Pskov Province – its people and texts (cf. Ristolainen 2008). Comparatively, several studies have shown that in Estonia (on the other side of the border), the state border with Russia has a totally different political and symbolic significance than in Russia. Estonia is a small country that regained its independence after almost fifty traumatic years of Soviet occupation and started a whole new nation-building process with the border construction (for more on the border formation from the Estonian point of view see for instance: Merritt 2000 and Assmuth 2005). The actions of the Russian Federation have demonstrated great power complexes, for example by prolonging the signing of

the border agreement, arguing about the proper location of the borderline, strongly protecting the rights of the “cultural Russians”⁴ in Estonia and Latvia, and insisting upon its rights in the “near abroad”⁵ atmosphere. These actions have served to diminish the meaning of the border and their neighbour as an independent country. The border agreement between Russia and Estonia was finally signed in February 2014, some 23 years after it regained its independence in 1991.

Consequently, from the point of view of Russia, it is important to ask where Russia’s borders are exactly located and asserted in people’s minds, and how they become established. One approach to this question is to take border mobility and dislocation as a hypothetical starting point. Already in the late 1990s, Etienne Balibar offered a provocative opening for the discussion of the presence/ absence of borders by arguing that “borders are no longer at the border” (Balibar 1998: 217). According to Balibar, borders are vacillating – “borders have stopped marking the limits where politics ends because the community [contract/origin] ends” (Balibar 1998: 220). Recently researchers have again started to speak about the dislocation and relocation of borders. Hastings Donnan (2010) has observed how borders have become more porous, and observes how the “visibility” of state borders has begun to diminish. Henk van Houtum (2013: 173–174) declares that the word border is a verb and that borders can be drawn anywhere. According to Chris Rumford (2006: 156–157) borders are no longer national but may take many different forms, and the important borders in people’s lives do not remain fixed. Personal circumstances influence how we experience borders and where we locate them (Rumford 2006: 159). Contemporary border producing practices seem to be analysed increasingly through the concepts of dislocation and/or relocation (e.g. the instability of European borders since the disintegration of the Soviet Union; the post-Cold War world order; global work force mobility; human trade; the alleged crisis of the nation state, etc.).

Moreover, modern warfare no longer crosses borders in the strict sense. To defend one’s Motherland is to undertake something other than just attacking an enemy’s expansionism at the border (Balibar 1998: 218). A good example of the relationship between modern warfare and the dislocation of borders is the global “War on terror” and the United States’ naval base in Guantanamo Bay that holds prisoners of war captured in Afghanistan (Vaughan-Williams 2009: 29–32). After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the border between a “safe home” and the “unsafe world” has become confused – dislocated. Furthermore, new technologies have enabled new targets for warfare and made borders even more dislocated. For instance, the increased use of unmanned aerial vehicles in contemporary conflicts (see, Kreps & Kaag 2012), and the cyber wars and assaults that operate in cyberspace cause more and more disruption and further the dislocation of borders.

These notes on “border dislocation” could also be applied to the context of post-Soviet “border formation”, where Pskovian soldiers have been part of war operations far from their home and the closest state border. Moreover, the Pskov

76th Airborne division suffered heavy casualties during the wars in Chechnya, so bringing a certain contact, perception and reality to events that occur away from the geographical proximity of “home”.

What Signifies Russia’s Borders?

In order to clarify the statement that borders have become displaced, the signifying factors that construct borders and/or make borders relevant for people need to be determined. In Russian tradition, the concept of “border” (*granitsa*) has a distinctive socio-psychological meaning. The “Russian border”, either artificial or natural, is initially a defence line protecting us, from the hostile them (others). (Solomeshch 2001.) The Soviet Union had both international and internal borders located in the country’s territorial periphery, often inhabited by non-Russian nationalities who were considered to be hostile to the Soviet rule (Chandler 1998: 10–11). After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Soviet people were deliberately taught to think of themselves as being surrounded by enemies, “the imperialists”, who would crush them if they could. The perception of “enemy” has been repeatedly deployed, both to mobilise against actual external danger, and also to justify the struggle against a supposed enemy on domestic ground (Fateev 1999: 102–104; Solomeshch 2001; Gudkov 2005: 14–15). The concept of enemy (or rather the “lack of enemy”) could also be used to explain the Russian behaviour in the prolonged negotiations concerning the Estonian-Russian border agreement. As Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia, stated in the border agreement’s signing event: “We never considered Estonia our enemy” (Lavrov 2014). Perhaps this is a reason why it has been so challenging – both officially and in people’s minds – to recognize the national border between Russia and Estonia. Moreover, the “lack of enemy” concept could be used to comprehend the “transferring” of the border in Crimea, and the extremely disrespectful attitude of Russia toward the borders of a sovereign Ukraine.

Consequently, it can be stated that in order for the border to be “real”, i.e. “to exist”, there needs to be an “enemy” behind it. Therefore, the concept of “enemy” can be seen as one signifying factor in both the external and internal border formation processes in Russia. Moreover, it has to be noted that especially during the Cold War, the concept of “enemy” was present in many countries national consciousness and thus influenced their border formation (see, for instance: Robin 2003). After the events of 9/11, “enemies” were brought back to peoples’ everyday lives on a global scale and accordingly, the concept of an “enemy” in border formation processes could perhaps be more globally applied.

Where is the Enemy – There is the Border?

Where do enemies emerge from and who are they? In the Soviet Union, enemies were created as a product of state propaganda and used as a tool for controlling timid people (Fateev 1999: 70). War creates enemies. Just as with the Soviet Union, Russia has undergone many wars and border disputes during its Post-Soviet existence. The Chechen wars – the first Chechen war 1994–1995 and the second Chechen war 2000–2009 – serve as an example of both how to create an enemy and of dislocated borders.

In general, foreign military observers consider the Chechen wars poorly planned operations initiated under horrible conditions. Poorly trained Russian forces were fighting in cities against Chechen fighters who knew the city layouts by heart. The Chechen fighters had also been part of the Soviet armed forces and thus had an excellent knowledge of Russian military tactics and procedures. Moreover, they spoke Russian and could easily listen to communications. These mounting difficulties created a significant degree of combat stress among soldiers whom it was felt that nobody really cared about (Thomas & O’Hara 2000: 46; Olikier 2001; Oushakine 2009: 180–181; Sieca-Kozlowski 2013). These “unreasonable” circumstances created a hatred and enmity among many of the Russians. Enmity creates enemies – Enemies create war – War creates enemies, and so a vicious circle is created.

Pskov province is located about 2,500 kilometres from the Chechen Republic and has no geographical connection with Chechnya. Nevertheless, Pskov province’s militarily strategic position has brought the border of the Chechen Republic close – closer than many Pskovians ever wanted. Consequently, we can ask if an enemy is identified, then does this define the existence or perception of the border?



The Caucasus region and Chechnya © Wikimedia Commons.⁶

Chechnya is located on Russia's south-western border squeezed in between Ukraine, Georgia and Kazakhstan. The country and its people have been defined by war and issues of recognition over centuries (Evangelista 2002: 1–2).

Under the cover of heavy fog, late in the night of February 29 in 2000, Chechen fighters overtook a company of paratroopers from the Pskov Airborne Division near a village called Ulus-Kert in a remote mountain valley. In four bloody hours, the Chechens destroyed the company, killing 84 paratroopers who were mostly originally from the Pskov province. Only six survived. At first, Russian military officers declared that a military victory had been won and did not admit this, the heaviest single loss of the entire second Chechen war (Wilmoth & Tsouras 2001: 91–93; Blandy 2002: 14–15).

However, only a week earlier, 25 soldiers from another Pskov detachment had been killed in a mountain battle – Pskov had suffered more than a hundred dead in one week. For comparison, in the first Chechen war of 1994–1995, a total of 120 men from Pskov had been killed (Blandy 2002: 16). A week after the battle of Ulus-Kert, the Russian military officials admitted the heavy losses. It was impossible to ignore them because the casualties were from one unit, from one province, so the inhabitants of the province all knew about the losses. (Wilmoth & Tsouras 2001: 96; Blandy 2002: 22). Consequently, conditions of collective trauma grew among the Pskovians, resulting both from this terrible war episode and also from the insult given by the ruling power.

How do Borders Emerge from Traumatic Conditions?

The battle of Ulus-Kert formed a cultural trauma that the Pskovians began to narrate immediately after their sons returned home in caskets. For the Pskovians, Ulus-Kert became a focal point that appears as a border between a ground of death and their own living space. In many frontier areas, e.g. in Europe, North America and Australia, a border crossing may be associated with death (Houtumn & Boedeltje 2009: 226; Weber & Pickering 2011). According to Weber & Pickering (2011: 5), border related deaths occur at the physical border, *en route*, in offshore or onshore detention, during deportation, on forced return to one's homeland, and even within the community as a result of a hate crime, labour exploitation, withholding of subsistence, or the promotion of conditions of legal and social precariousness. Through deaths, the displaced border may be experienced as both universal and continuously present. The perception of this type of dislocated border as a "landscape of death" can be observed at the US-Mexican border, where border crossings, death and disappearances are becoming a form of cultural trauma for migrants, their families and communities. Moreover, recent Latino and Mexican literary representations (i.e. border writings) are "cementing" the border as a space associated with death and loss. (Caminero-Santangelo 2010: 308, 310.)

How did certain events become widely represented and thus regarded as a cultural trauma? According to Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004: 8–10), cultural trauma is constructed by repeating and mutually reinforcing a particular event. A historical event (or something similar) must “be remembered, or made to be remembered” (Smelser 2004: 36), i.e. it must be “narrativised” to the point where it becomes an essential part of memory associated with profound collective pain (Caminero-Santangelo 2010: 310). In this case, cultural trauma becomes a phenomenon in which the primary carriers of the actual trauma (i.e. the eyewitness soldiers, mothers and relatives who lost their sons, etc.) are extended to the larger society, and how this society (and in particular the non-primary carriers of a traumatic event) reinforce the memory of the event. Jennifer Yusin (2009: 459–460) has formulated a so-called “geography of trauma” in which, according to her, border becomes “a trope for understanding how historical specificity and trauma exist simultaneously, and how our historical understanding equally emerges from the realities we cannot deny and from the traumas that we cannot know”. Consequently, border writing supports the “geography of trauma” and offers a new form of knowledge: “information about and understanding of the present to the past in terms of the possibilities of the future” (Hicks 1991: xxxi). This also explains how “new” and “displaced” borders may emerge, like those in the case of the Pskovian paratroopers.

Following the battle of Ulus-Kert, several publications and internet pages containing poems and short stories dedicated to the event emerged. Pskovians were seeking, through writing, to understand and rehabilitate the traumatic events. In this case, such writing can be considered as a “contact zone” between borders and traumatic events. As a result, expressing a traumatic event in writing becomes a significant new source of border formation and dislocation for the Pskovian collective consciousness.

A Written Borderline

The following section aims to explain how the borderline between Pskov and Ulus-Kert is expressed in the texts written by Pskovians, and how “border displacement” occurs in this local non-professional writing. The main research material consists of a book called “*A step into immortality*” (*Shag v bessmertie*) edited by Oleg Dement’ev and Vladimir Klevtsov, first published in August 2000. In addition to this publication, internet texts, newspaper-published poems, and songs have been used as research material. These texts are written both by the relatives of the deceased soldiers and by other citizens of Pskov. Similar types of local commemorative books to the deceased soldiers of the Soviet-Afghan and Chechen wars exist for instance in Altai, and these types of books can be characterized as being textual equivalents of portable memorial sites dedicated to traumatic events (Oushakine 2009: 237–238).

The first edition of the book “*A step into immortality*” was compiled only a couple months after the battle of Ulus-Kert and contained only a short article and the biographical details of the deceased paratroopers. The first edition was presented as a gift to President Vladimir Putin when he visited Pskov on August 2, 2000, on the Day of the Paratroopers⁷. The second edition was published following the president’s visit in in 2001. It contained extensive new material and some texts written by relatives. New editions followed and the book became both broader and more versatile. The latest, 6th edition (2007) of the book contains a detailed description of the battle of Ulus-Kert, and the names and pictures of all the deceased paratroopers. In addition, the editors have collected more texts, poems and photographs from the relatives and other Pskovians that needed to work out their collective sorrow, for example by looking for explanations for why their sons died:

Alexander did not know that failing commanders had asked to fire at themselves (kill themselves). The soldiers panicked and random shooting started. And one of the enemy bullets took the life of a soldier. (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 178)⁸

The whole village cried. The fellow villagers did not know that the commandoes from the 76-th Airborne Division had got on the trail of bandit formations that were going to break into Dagestan. Ninety soldiers battled against almost three thousands warriors. Nobody supported the commandoes, because the “businessmen of war” from Moscow had forbidden it. When will the names of these people will be published? (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 180)⁹

His gun was overheated from the shots. And suddenly a bullet hit him in the chest. The soul of a soldier-commando departed to eternal rest, to the white sun... (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 187)¹⁰

The 6th edition is both a critique of the aftermath of the battle of Ulus-Kert, and a longing obituary by the bereaved who demand explanations and recognition from the State. Oleg Dement’ev stated that the facts contained in the 6th edition are about 80% correct and he had received “no complaints” from the Army (Dement’ev 2013).¹¹ It has to be noted that there is a tenacious rumour that the Chechens offered to spare the paratroopers’ lives if they let the rebels pass on their way to Dagestan, however the Russians are reputed to have refused (Osborn 2006). The slow and misleading explanations and unpleasant rumours made the process of grieving even harder for the relatives of the deceased soldiers. Many Pskovians wondered what they were fighting for and for what cause did they die. “Everybody cried. Many questions were thrown in the air: Why in peaceful Russia are young men dying, and the main thing – for what? There are no answers yet.”¹²



Picture 1: *“Under the protection of two fathers”* (courtesy of Oleg Dement’ev 2013). Irina Panova – a girl who was eight months old when she lost both her father and godfather. (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 256–257)

Most of the texts connect the battle of Ulus-Kert to the battlegrounds of the Second World War, and some as far back as the “border disputes” of the Napoleonic wars. Here, the factual geographical location of the Pskov region on the frontlines of WWII is connected with a mental frontline with Chechnya – connected with unresolved mourning resulting from significant losses. The concept of border as “a ground of death” joins these battlegrounds together and forms an example of the displacement of borders in written form; as borders which emerge from traumatic conditions.

For centuries
You were proud of your shield
Also during troubled years
On father’s land and father’s house.
During the days of Napoleon
And in the forty-first there was no paradise.

Almost three burning years
The Pskov Province resisted,
It did not bend in front of the enemy.
So it was, and indeed will be.

From old soldiers you learned –
You have not lost your honour!
You covered yourself with high glory,
Your arrows have now been laid down.

The two-headed eagle did not flee
Its wing-bearing regiments.

The boys will go, with other eagles,
But the battle will not be forgotten,
In the name of the servicemen's Motherland
On the turn of the two centuries...
We bow without words.¹³

Many of the studied texts connect, combine, compare and find familiar aspects between two geographical locations, such as Pskov and Ulus-Kert, or the Caucasus area and different Russian cities. These examples endorse the suggestion that borders are indeed vacillating and unpredictable. Borders are present everywhere as “enemies” surround us and have become more invisible and volatile (cf. the global rhetoric on the “War on Terror”).

Winged infantry
I didn't leave fire ...
Forgive, the sixth company,
Russia and me.

Lost, immortal
You became real
In the fight under Ulus-Kert,
As in the fight for Moscow.

Forever guilty
In front of you is the country,
That didn't save
A Russian soldier

Farewell, the sixth company,
Gone for centuries, –
Immortal infantry
Heavenly regiment.¹⁴

Local memorial events have been organized all over the Pskov region where local music ensembles play and amateur poets present their poems dedicated to the diseased soldiers and so share the sorrow in the community. Through these events, the symbolic national border and also a border-crossing becomes a shared experience, and these performances recognize and validate the displaced border.

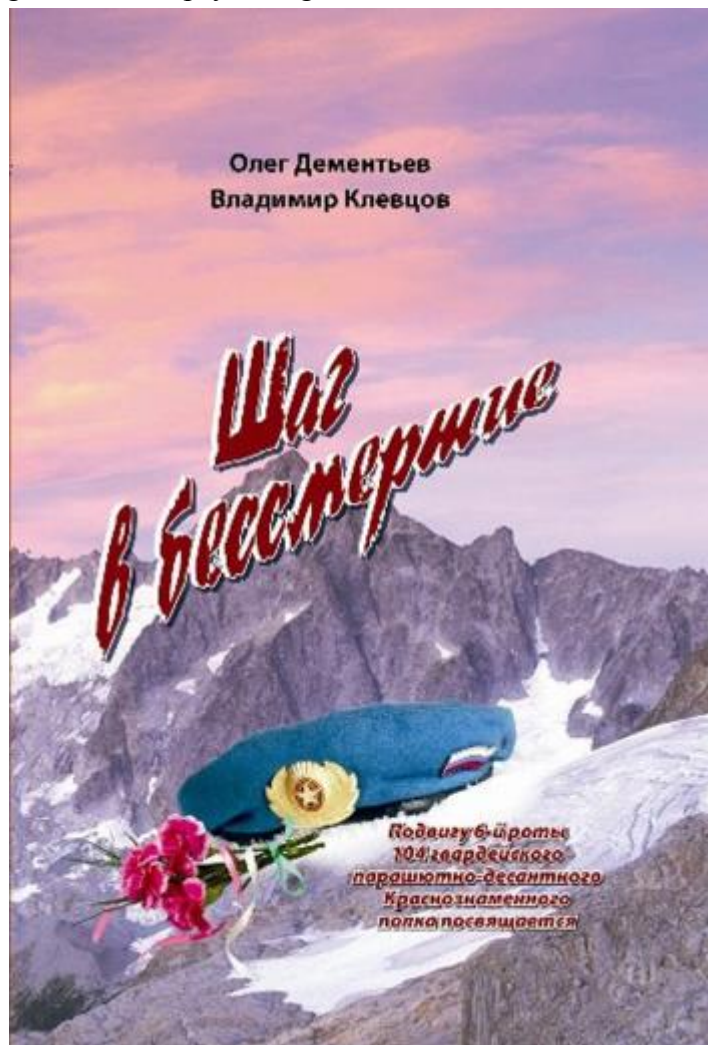
Argun gorge ... Death and hell ...
A paratrooper doesn't have a way back.
Also the battle-order is short,
The last in life – this time.

Fire isn't ceased,
And after the fight – a bad dream ...
Our boys, why did you have to go to Chechnya to die in war?
Beautiful, strong, young
To shoot and fall in scorching heat, in smoke?¹⁵

These examples also demonstrate how local writing presents us with an insight as to the effects of trauma on the individual and community. Local writing identifies what is destroyed by war and also indicates the new borders and structures, such as patriotic education, that emerge from the traumatic or post-traumatic condition.

B/ordering from Local Trauma to National Entertainment and Patriotic Education

The two Chechen wars have been both a tragic and much disputed topic in Russia for the past 20 years. Motives to speak about Chechnya have been very different, including political, ideological, social, psychological, or even commercial aims. There is little official public discussion of the Chechen wars. However, the internet provides a new forum in which these “painful topics” may be discussed (Ristolainen 2014). Still, the image of the “Chechen enemy” has been deliberately constructed and maintained, for instance by the mass media and especially by the State controlled main TV-channels. Many Russians consider the Chechens to be bloodthirsty barbarians, and the Russian government has certainly used this image for their own advantage. (Zvereva 2005: 303–304.) It seems rather deliberate that Chechnya has remained one of the world’s most poorly understood conflict zones.¹⁶



Picture 2: Cover of the 1st edition, 2000
(courtesy of Oleg Dement'ev 2013)

The interpretations and uses of the book “*A step into immortality*” have changed considerably over the years. This can be demonstrated clearly just by

looking at how the cover pictures have changed from a peaceful mountain scene with flowers, to a picture of a “Rambo” style soldier of fortune.

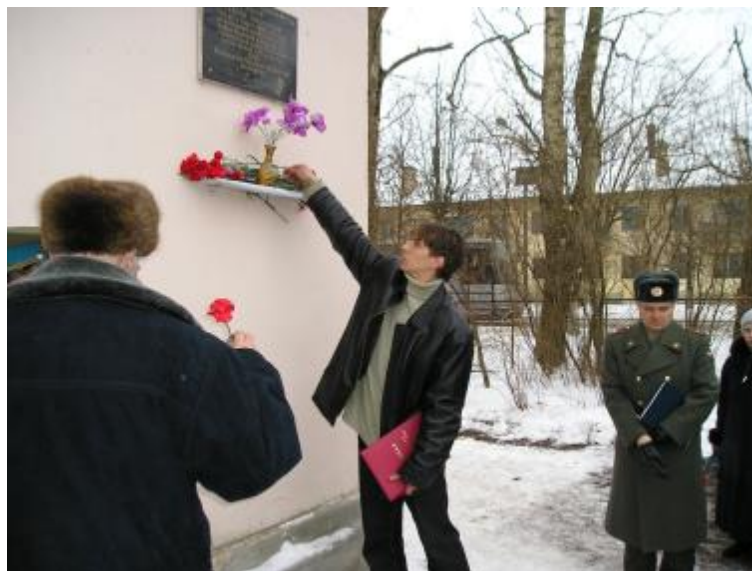


Picture 3: Cover of the 6th edition, 2007 (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007)

In general, the battle of Ulus-Kert has been interpreted in Russia in two ways: firstly, as a defeat for the Russian military, and secondly, as a glorious last stand

made by the paratroopers. The latter confirms the Pskov Airborne Division's reputation as an elite force whose war efforts and sacrifice were quickly preserved in heroic myth. Officially, the battle of Ulus-Kert has been seen as an example of bravery and sacrifice, with the paratroopers made to look like heroes and martyrs who fell in the name of the Motherland, antiterrorism and the soldier brotherhood. Twenty-two of the fallen were posthumously awarded the highest title of honour in the Russian Federation – the Hero of Russia, and the rest received the Order of Courage state decoration. The five survivors were also awarded the Order of Courage. (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 24–64.)

In honour of the sixth company, a massive parachute-shaped monument was erected in Pskov in 2002. In addition, a column in a Pskov square named “The Hero-Paratroopers” (*Ploshchad' Geroev-desantnikov*) and several other memorial plaques around the Pskov region (cf. Picture 4) have been dedicated to the Pskov paratroopers. In Moscow, an illegal memorial obelisk dedicated to the sixth company was erected in a street named after the first officially recognised Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov in 2007. To top it all, one of the streets in the Chechen capital Grozny was also named in honour of the Pskov paratroopers (Chadaev 2008). These monuments can be seen as symbolic “boundary pillars” and a confirmation of the border displacement – to form a borderline of their own from Pskov, through Moscow, to Grozny. Moreover, remembering death in these “living places” crosses the border between life and death, and thus the traumatic border becomes continuous (cf. “the landscape of death” at the Mexico-US border).



Picture 4: A memorial plaque on the wall of a Novorzhevian school (Pskov province) in honour of a local soldier killed in the battle of Ulus-Kert.
© Pavel Mikhailov.¹⁷

The entertainment industry arrived after the “monumentalisation” of this displaced border. A bizarre musical “*Warriors of Spirit*” (*Voiny dukha*) had its prem-

iere in 2004, and was based on the heroic deeds of the Pskovian paratroopers, where the protagonist fights *Superhero*, a henchman of the evil *Provider* (Rachkova 2004; Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 300–301). In addition, several oversimplifying films were made of the battle of Ulus-Kert (Regamey 2007).¹⁸ For instance, a film called *Breakthrough* (*Proryv*) 2006 was Kremlin-funded and although the battle ends in defeat, it represents the battle of Ulus-Kert as an example of sacrifice, bravery and patriotism. In the film the Chechens are characterised as an army of extremists, mercenaries and drug-addicts, with an intent to take hostages and harm innocent civilians in the near towns and villages. (Osborn 2006.)

The book “*A step into immortality*” was also included in a national program entitled: “*Patriotic education of the citizens of the Russian Federation for 2006–2010*”. “Patriotic Education Programs” demonstrate a revival of the policy of State Patriotism in Russia that includes many Soviet features, such as centralized control, curricular rigidity and political-ideological functions (Rapoport 2009, 141–142). According to Oleg Dement'ev (2013), he was offered 1.1 million Rubles for printing 10,000 colour copies of the book on high grade paper. However, this tempting offer would have meant that he would have lost the copyright of the work. Dement'ev refused and was offered 600,000 Rubles for a black-and-white version. He refused again and took out a personal loan – the 6th edition was published in 2007. (Dement'ev 2013.)

Being included as part of the patriotic education program changed the nature of the book. It shows how the Patriotic Education Program uses the book to portray how the “enemy” fighting on one side of the border can be represented, by way of a contrast to “us” – the heroes fighting on the other side. The enemy “other” is from particular place, Chechnya, that promotes terrorism, and the terrorist threat is global and interconnected. Within the Patriotic Education Program, the book becomes a boundary narrative emphasizing the evil nature of Chechens and thus represents a border that divides the Russian state and the anti-Russian (Chechen) narratives that should be “educated” through patriotism.

This new explication of the book cements the image of Chechnya as an enemy and validates the written borderline between Pskov and Chechnya. The “bottom to top” texts about the battle of Ulus-Kert and the faith of the Pskovian paratroopers are used in creating “top-down” b/ordering processes. All in all, this is a striking example of how a local trauma has been turned into a vehicle of national entertainment and patriotism.

Conclusion: Unreasonable War and its Displaced Borders

This article has defined a paradigm that reshapes the representations of borders in the contemporary world. It provides an example of cultural construction and symbolic displacement of a “national border” and a representation of how the national b/ordering processes differ when viewed from “the bottom up” and “top-down”

perspectives in the contemporary Russian Federation. A geographical border, although real and supported by national policies, has a diminished meaning when not support or honoured by a “written border”. The tragic case of the Pskovian paratroopers reveals how Russia’s borders have become displaced. Traumatic events tend to indicate the existence of borders, beyond mere geographical lines or political policies. In this case, borders become meaningful in peoples’ minds through the unreasonable conditions of war that cause traumas. These traumas are written “from the bottom up” by ordinary people. Their literary representations (i.e. border writings) reinforce the border as being a space associated with traumatic events, and with the enemy on the other side of what has become a displaced border. These representations have then been used by agencies including the government and entertaining industries, by reinforcing the heroic myth and strengthening the notion of a displaced border for their own advantage. “Top-down” agencies alter the social perception of national cohesion and belonging by turning local trauma into national entertainment, and a form of patriotism that leads to a clear differentiation between “us” and the “enemy”. A written borderline between Pskov province and Chechnya, also represents a symbolic national border and has been established and signified by a collective adoption of a traumatic event. There are not many borders that can’t be crossed, yet this type of displaced border may be so momentous and resilient that it may seem insurmountable.

Unreasonable war

Draw me a world that is like day,
That it would be possible to look at it from above.
Draw me a world where there is no evil,
That there was no death from the cruel war.
Never to collect broken windows,
Not to re-implant the pulled-out hair.
The killed people – the forgotten question,
And in hearts of mothers the intruded fear.
Burning tanks here and there,
To understand nothing, totally ludicrous, totally ludicrous ...
On a shoulder a machine gun, you run at random,
Only the knock of a machine gun is carried far away.
To see a bird flying far away,
But only smoke and carrion crows, only carrion crows,
The injured faces of the killed friends ...
More and more crosses, more and more crosses.
Draw me a world that is like day,
That it would be possible to look at it from above.
Draw me a world where there is no evil,
That there was no death from the cruel war.¹⁹

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Notes

- ¹ A quote from a song called *Shestaia rota* (Sixth company) by Stanislav Konopliannikov, album "*Nikto krome nas!*", 2009.
- ² *Note on transliteration and translation*: With the exception of some commonly occurring names, Russian words are transliterated according to the Library of Congress system. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.
- ³ Wikimedia Commons: File: Map of Russia – Pskov Oblast (2008-03).svg, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Russia_-_Pskov_Oblast_%282008-03%29.svg (accessed 08 May 14).
- ⁴ 'Cultural Russians' is a term for the 'Russian speakers' living in Estonia used widely in academic literature. It refers to the dominant language and cultural association of these people without political connotations. See more in: Merritt 2000.
- ⁵ 'Near abroad' (*blizhnee zarubezh'ee*) is a post-Soviet term for the independent republics which lie near to or border Russia. 'Near abroad' also refers to Russia's political and economic influence on these countries that belong to Russia's 'sphere of influence', and are strategically vital for Russia. (Humphrey 2009: 41–42.)
- ⁶ Wikimedia Commons: File: Chechnya and Caucasus.png, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Chechnya_and_Caucasus.png (accessed 08 May 14).
- ⁷ Most specializations in the Russian armed forces have their own annual holidays.
- ⁸ "Александр не знал, что гибнущие командиры вызвали огонь на себя. В рядах боевиков началась паника, поднялась беспорядочная стрельба. И одна и вражеских пуль оборвала жизнь гвардейца." (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 178.)
- ⁹ "Плакало все село. Не знали односельчане, что десантники из 76-й воздушно-десантной дивизии встали на пути бандитских формирований, которые прорывались в Дагестан. 90 гвардейцев сражались почти с тремя тысячами боевиков. Десанникам не было никакой поддержки, так как ее запретили оказывать «бизнесмены войны» из Москвы. Когда будут обнародованы имена?" (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 180.)
- ¹⁰ "Его автомат раскалится от выстрелов. И вдруг пуля ударила в грудь. Душа гвардейца-десантника улетала в вечный покой, к белому солнцу..." (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 187.)
- ¹¹ I interviewed Oleg Dement'ev via e-mail on February 2, 2013. All photographs reprinted from the book "Step in immortality" are republished here with his permission.
- ¹² "Плакали все. И носились в воздухе вопросы: почему в мирной России гибнут молодые парни? А главное – за что? Ответа пока нет." (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 177.)
- ¹³ Памяти псковских десантников погибших в Чечне // С. Макашин // На протяжении столетий // Гордилась ты своим щитом // Когда дожилось лихолетье // На отчий край и

- отчий дом. // Во времена Наполеона // И в сорок первом был не рай. // Почти три года опаленный // Сопровивлялся Псковский край, // Перед врагами не склонившись. // Так было, будет, так и есть. // У старых воинов учились – // Свою не уронили честь! // Покрыв себя высокой славой, // Легли сейчас твои стрелки. // Не уберег орел двуглавый // Свои крылатые полки. // Пойдут парней, других орлов, // Но не забудутся сраженья, // Во имя Родины служенье // На перекрестке двух веков... // Склоняем головы без слов. (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 307.)
- ¹⁴ Крылатая пехота // Не вышла из огня... // Прости, шестая рота, // Россию и меня. // Погибшая, бессмертной // Ты стала наяву // В бою под Улус-Кертотом, // Как в битве за Москву. // Навеки виновата // Перед тобой страна, // Что русского солдата // Не сберегла она. // Прощай, шестая рота, // Ушедшая в века, - // Бессмертная пехота // Небесного полка. (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 6.)
- ¹⁵ Аргунское ущелье... Смерть и ад... // Десанту нет пути назад. // И краток боевой приказ, // Последний в жизни – в этот раз. // Не прекращается огонь, // А поле боя – страшный сон... // Мальчишки наши, почему // В чеченскую вам умирать войну? // Красивым, сильным, молодым // Стрелять и падать в пекло, в дым? (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 237.)
- ¹⁶ Just recently a book was put together and published called “*Everyone’s silent memories*”, where a network of young civic activists collected personal memoirs in several Russian cities about life before the Chechen wars, life at war and the aftermath of the wars. The book is available for download on the site of the Civic Assistance Committee and should soon be translated into English (cf. *Kazhdyi molchit o svoem: istoria odnoi voyny*. Moskva, Grahdanskoe sodeitstvie, 2013).
- ¹⁷ Originally this picture was published in Ristolainen 2008 (Picture 90, colour photograph attachment). For more on the Novorzhevian monuments see: Baschmakoff & Ristolainen 2005 and Ristolainen 2008: 87–98.
- ¹⁸ Films: *The honour is mine (Chest’ imeiu)* 2004; *The Storm Gate (Grozovye Vorota)* 2006; *Breakthrough (Proryv)* 2006; *Russian sacrifice (Russkaia zhertva)*, 2008.
- ¹⁹ Непонятная война // Нарисуйте мне мир, что похожий на день, // Чтоб можно было посмотреть на него с высоты. // Нарисуйте мне мир, да чтоб не было зла, // Чтоб не было смерти от жестокой войны. // Разбитые окна никогда не собрать, // Вырванный волос не вставить назад. // Убитые люди – забытый вопрос, // А в сердца матерей вторгшийся страх. // Горящие танки то там, то здесь, // Ничего не понять, полный бред, полный бред... // На плече автомат, бежишь наугад, // Лишь стук пулемета уносится вдаль. // Увидеть бы птицу, летящую вдаль, // Но только дым, да воронье, лишь воронье, // Разбитые лица убитых друзей... // Все больше крестов, все больше крестов. // Нарисуйте мне мир, что похожий на день, // Чтоб можно было смотреть на него с высоты. // Нарисуйте мне мир, да чтоб не было зла. // Чтоб не было смерти от жестокой войны. (Dement'ev & Klevtsov 2007: 272–273.)

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