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# Introduction

## Cultural Production and Negotiation of Northern Borders

The articles we are presenting here were all first given as papers at the 2008 European Conference of the Association of Borderlands Studies, held in Kirkenes in Northern Norway, September 11–13, on the borders of the Arctic and in the Finnish-Kven-Norwegian-Russian-Sami borderland.<sup>1</sup> The theme of the conference was a wide one: the “Cultural Production and Negotiation of Borders.” This theme was intended as an acknowledgement of the increasing focus that has been given recently by geographers and historians to the role of cultural production and negotiation in social and territorial bordering processes. The ongoing spate of movies, documentaries, art projects, novels, websites, festivals and tourist attractions concerning borders has given this aspect of bordering renewed topicality and economic importance, and has attracted research both in the humanities and in the social sciences. The stories such cultural practices and artefacts tell, and the images they project, give extra weight to issues of the location of borders and of border populations. In some cases, the border itself—a wall or a fence—becomes a cultural icon of great significance in the media and in everyday discourse. In a world of mobilities and securities, the outer peripheries of states are clearly linked to their hybridized inner landscapes and even to the bodies of immigrants and other border-crossers themselves. The cultural negotiation of contested borders is a crucial element of ongoing problems of security, freedom of movement, economic differentials, trafficking, fear of the other, etc.; it also promises the possibility of a creative refiguring of borders and cultural border zones into economically and symbolically productive sites of dialogue, crossing, hybridity and creativity. All these phenomena are the product of historical proc-

esses and take place in a shifting historical landscape that both creates a framework for and is formed by cultural practices.

The conference was thus envisaged as an interdisciplinary conference which would cross the academic divide between “border studies” in the social sciences and “border theory”/“border poetics” in the humanities. It aimed to examine the ways in which cultural practices use discursive and semiotic strategies in order to imagine and negotiate the border in its social and historical context and to further our understanding of the role of culture in subjective interactions with the border by border crossers and by border zone dwellers. While focusing on bottom-up perspectives, papers raised questions about the need for localized solutions in top-down policy-making, actualised with the increasing economic significance of cultural production and consumption. They asked who initiates and who benefits from such cultural practices, and what their symbolic effects are for social conditions. They aimed to place cultural processes of bordering in historical contexts and show the role of cultural memory in the formation of borderscapes. They traced the transferability of the border concept to questions of identity, subjectivity and medial exposition as facilitated by cultural practices.

A special focus of the conference was on the region in which it is set: the Norwegian-Russian-Finnish-Kven-Sami borderland and the wider contexts of the North Calotte, Barents and Arctic regions. The Arctic is an area in which the borders of the environment and energy production are being changed and are changing the geographical, historical, imaginative sense of place and space. This is a transborder region of a layered, complex border history, of pressing social and environmental problems and possibilities involving many different cultural identities and ways of life, and of high importance today as a political and cultural hotspot of “Western”-Russian relations within the Arctic and Sub-Arctic context. Kirkenes, an old mining town, lies at a point where the interests of many nations and indigenous/minority groups meet, and has been a place of social, economic, environmental, military and cultural confrontation. It is a site of economic and cultural creativity involving the aspirations and self-narratives of local, national and global elites in an atmosphere of hybridity; mining has been re-established and is regaining its former strength in spite of the current economic recession. It is centrally placed in relation to the ongoing construction and contestation of territorial and symbolic borders in the Arctic Sea against a background of rapid economic development of oil and gas resources. The conference also included a final summing-up panel made up of scholars working from different perspectives on the Norwegian-Russian-Finnish-Kven-Sami borderscape.

The conference included in all 48 papers, 22 of which dealt specifically with borderlands between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Some of the more general papers will be appearing in separate special issues of the *Journal of Borderlands Studies* and *Nordlit*.<sup>2</sup> For the *Journal of Northern Studies* we have selected a group of essays that address the Northern theme of the conference from the viewpoint of different disciplines. Looking at selected borderlands in Northern Scandinavia, they also use historical contextualization and elements of discourse analysis to show how culture takes part in bordering processes, primarily through the construction of imagined border landscapes into which local and national identities can be inscribed.

*Anne Heith* compares various literary treatments of the Korpela movement, a 1930s millenarian grouping in the Finnish-Swedish borderlands. She argues that contemporary author Bengt Pohjanen's treatment represents a disruptive form of nation-writing and that this is connected to his project of creating an alternative imaginary geography of the Torne valley.

*Anastasia Rogova* uses anthropological fieldwork (interview material) among Russians living in the border town of Kirkenes, the site of the conference, to argue that some Russians live in a "borderland" which constitutes another space, outside the space of the Russian-Norwegian divide. By focusing on individual experiences and on discursive phenomena such as jokes and newspaper articles, and placing them in a historical context, she shows how this space has been constructed discursively.

*Jukka Nyysönen* uses border theory to argue that changing bordering processes between Finnish Finland and the Skolt Sami in the Finnish-Norwegian-Russian borderland, as reflected in the writings of two Finnish scholars writing in the 1930s and 1970s respectively, is related to changes in historical context and in Finnish self-definition. He characterizes these changes as postcolonial.

*Rolf Inge Larsen* uses discourse analysis to show that the liturgy used in the consecration of the church in Skibotn in 1931 reveals discourses of ethnic stigmatization and counter-stigmatization in relation to local Sami and Kven populations. These must be read against the background of a Norwegian cultural borderland policy in the face of a perceived "Finnish menace."

*Magnus Rodell* argues that discursive forces created an enemy image of a Russified Finland in Sweden in the late nineteenth century, that various material artefacts were used to reinforce the bordering this image encouraged, and that the fortifications in Boden were a result of a narrative combining representations of northern wilderness, expansionist potential, trade and defence needs.

*Roald Berg* presents historical arguments for adjusting Karl Deutsch's 1950s "pluralistic security community" model for the Scandinavian coun-

tries, bringing in a cultural dimension by invoking Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities. He connects this to the political and infrastructural aspects of national borders.

We hope through this special issue to further put the North on the map of border studies and to give momentum to the study of bordering processes within Northern Studies.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> See report in *La Frontera* (29: 2, 2009) newsletter of the Association for Borderlands Studies, <http://www.absborderlands.org/2laFrontera.html>. The conference was arranged by the Border Poetics research group (<http://uit.no/borderpoetics>) at the University of Tromsø in close cooperation with the History Department and the CEPIN (Citizenship, Encounters and Place Enactment in the North) research school there, the Petrozavodsk State University and vitally, the Barents Institute in Kirkenes itself. Various policy and cultural groups were also involved, such as the Kirkenes cultural production outfit Pikene på broen, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, the Borderlands Museum, the Akademisk Kvarter bookshop, the Pasvikturist tourist agency and the Samovarteatret.
- <sup>2</sup> *Nordlit* open access web site: <[http://www2.uit.no/www/ansatte/organisasjon/publikasjoner?p\\_dimension\\_id=31184&p\\_menu=42435](http://www2.uit.no/www/ansatte/organisasjon/publikasjoner?p_dimension_id=31184&p_menu=42435)>.



Map of parts of Northern Scandinavia and North-West Russia, showing borders and places mentioned in the articles in this special issue. The dotted line marks the Finnish-Russian border 1920–1944, when Finland had a corridor giving access to the Barents Sea. The numbered areas show Skolt Sami *siidas* before resettlement in post-war Finland: 1. Näätämä, 2. Paatsjoki, 3. Petsamo, 4. Muotka, 5. Suonkylä (cf. Nyysönen's article and Sámi Museum Siida map, <http://www.siida.fi/>). The *siidas* overlapped national borders (smaller overlaps into present-day Finland are not marked) and in some cases each other. Map: Frøydis Strand.