

# Border Crossing from the Ethnosexual Perspective: A Case Study of the Finnish-Russian Border<sup>1</sup>

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## Prologue

Crossing the border at Niirala-Värtsilä: An illustration of the border crossing process on the Finnish-Russian border

*The trip from Joensuu to Tohmajärvi and Uusi-Värtsilä, which are the villages on the Finnish side of the border area next to the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint, takes one hour and runs through the sparsely inhabited countryside of Eastern Finland. In Tohmajärvi and Uusi-Värtsilä, one can easily recognize the presence of the border: the available services are focused on the the potential border crossers (e.g., travel agencies providing visas and car insurance to drivers bound for Russia; electronics stores and recreational activities catering to Russian tourists; advertisements are also in Russian in many places).*

*The checkpoint area on the Finnish side starts from the sign “Border zone.” After that, one has to choose the appropriate lane (buses, EU citizens, non-EU citizens) and abide by the traffic lights directing vehicles to proceed. After having been given a green light, the vehicle approaches the Finnish checkpoint, and the driver and all passengers proceed to passport control. Passports, visas and automobile registrations are checked all at once. If traffic is light, this process doesn’t take more than a few minutes. After this, the gate opens automatically, and one is allowed to drive (approx. 0.5 km) to the Russian side. The border can be crossed only by vehicle.*

*The Russian checkpoint begins at a gate guarded by a border guard. Sometimes there is a queue of cars and lorries lined up before the gate. The border guard motions to vehicles one by one to approach the gate and checks passports and visas. Then the vehicle is allowed to proceed to the Russian checkpoint, where the appropriate lane must be chosen, just like on the Finnish side. The border guard monitors the different lanes and directs the vehicles. When it is their turn, the driver and all passengers step out from the car and the border guard checks it. They are then allowed to proceed to the small passport control kiosk,<sup>2</sup> which is situated in the middle of the lanes. Once the*

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<sup>2</sup> Passport and customs control for the cars is organized in small kiosks. In practice this means that drivers are queuing and waiting their turn outdoors, although the customs area has a roof. Even in summer time, this place is rather cold and windy, and experienced car drivers take this into the account.

*passports are checked, the driver proceeds further to customs control by car and the passengers proceed to the customs building.*

*The driver must fill out a customs declaration in duplicate and join the queue for the customs kiosk while the passengers go inside the customs building. The queues take place mostly in front of the customs for the drivers and cars. One by one drivers give their documents (custom declarations, passports, registration books and insurance documents) to the customs officer, who then fills in the clearance decision, which the driver then signs. After that the driver proceeds to his/her car and waits for the customs officer to check the car and issue the clearance decision. When all the vehicles from the same group are checked, the gate opens and the drivers can pick up their passengers from the pedestrian area.*

*The passengers' route from passport control to one's "own" vehicle goes through an electronic security gate to the waiting room in the customs building. It is also possible that one is subjected to a more precise custom control procedure and is demanded to bring one's own belongings, which are then manually checked by customs officers. The first possible place to change currency is in the customs building. Passengers have to wait for their drivers in a waiting room not equipped with seating, sometimes for quite some time.*

*Once the passengers and drivers are reunited beyond the customs gate, they still have one more gate to go through. This gate is the final portion of the checkpoint area, at which point everyone's passport is checked once again in order to make sure that they have been stamped. When the border guard opens the gate and the border is crossed, one enters Russia. The checkpoint is open 24/7.*

*Once having passed the checkpoint area<sup>3</sup> and entered into Russia, these border crossers have diverse destinations and purposes. One group of border crossers is made up of Finns who just pop into Russia and buy fuel, tobacco products and then return straight back to Finland. These border crossers are taking advantage of the narrow market area on the Russian side. Sometimes Finnish border crossers who aim to buy fuel and tobacco products continue on their way until "Fuel Hill" (the unofficial name of one of the market places in Finnish), which is about 1.5 km from the checkpoint. Although many Finns stop on their way to Fuel Hill, many people crossing the border have different destinations: Värtsilä, Sortavala or farther into the Karelian Republic or even farther into Russia. Especially Russian-passport holding border crossers are likely going farther than just the market area.*

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<sup>3</sup> We have divided the border area into three different areas: the checkpoint area, market area and village/living area. The market area is divided into two segments: a) fuel stations and a small market area, which is about 0.5 km from the checkpoint and consists of about ten stores and kiosks selling groceries, tobacco products, alcohol and other products aimed mainly towards Finnish border crossers; b) the extended market area covers also the place referred to in Finnish as *Öljymäki* – "Fuel hill," where all kinds of souvenirs, groceries and alcohol and tobacco products are available. At first glance these shops are reminiscent of the tax free shops of ferries or airports. Coffee shops and small restaurants are also located on "Fuel Hill."

## Introduction

This article concentrates on an analysis of the border crossing process at the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint area from a gender perspective. We ask, is the border crossing, as described above, gender neutral? The physical framework of this article is located at Niirala-Värtsilä, which is the fourth most active checkpoint on the Finnish-Russian border with about a million border crossings yearly. The total amount of border crossings between Russia and Finland is over 7 million per year, the southern crossing points Vaalimaa, Nuijamaa and Imatra being the busiest ones.<sup>4</sup> In our view on the checkpoint, we will discuss the concept of the border/checkpoint through two theoretical and empirical dimensions. The first aspect is to ponder the border as an ethnosexual frontier.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, we scrutinize how the actual bodily practices, for example, care, take place on the border. We also look at the gendered nationality and nationalized gender of the border.

As researchers we represent different scientific backgrounds: on the one hand, the theoretical starting point is connected to cultural studies of ethnicity, and on the other hand it can be found in social political studies of immigration. We also have different national and ethnic backgrounds and personal histories.<sup>6</sup> It is natural that we see the social world differently due to our previous experiences and life courses, but still we share a common understanding of social reality as constantly being under construction, in an in-between stage. Our study then is inevitably both interdisciplinary and intersectional, but also multilocal and transnational.<sup>7</sup> The theories of transnationalism underline, on the one hand, the multiplicity of networks and connections that go beyond the borders and boundaries of the nation state but, on the other hand, draw attention to the unequal power relations within these connections.<sup>8</sup> Although we do not discuss transnational theories in an explicit way in this article, it is part of the wider theoretical framework of our study, because border crossing is one expression of everyday transnationalism.<sup>9</sup>

In order to understand the grounds of the study, it is important to illustrate the border area of the Finnish-Russian border in North Karelia and the Republic of Karelia. Both North Karelia on the Finnish side and the Republic of Karelia on the Russian side represent poor and peripheral areas of

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics of Ministry of Interior (2009) [http://www.intermin.fi/rvl/home.nsf/files/47802DFAB0026E11C22577CF0049802F/\\$file/henkiloiden\\_rajatarkastukset\\_ulkoraja\\_2009.pdf](http://www.intermin.fi/rvl/home.nsf/files/47802DFAB0026E11C22577CF0049802F/$file/henkiloiden_rajatarkastukset_ulkoraja_2009.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Pirjo has lived in North Karelia, Joensuu almost all of her life except for short, temporary stays abroad. Olga immigrated to North Karelia almost 20 years ago from Petrozavodsk and has lived there more or less permanently.

<sup>7</sup> George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 24 (1995), pp. 95-117; Ulla Vuorela and Deborah Bryceson, *The Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p.23.

<sup>9</sup> Olga Davydova, *Suomalaisena, venäläisenä ja kolmantena. Etnisyysdiskursseja transnationaalissa tilassa* (Joensuu: Joensuun yliopistopaino, 2009).

their respective countries.<sup>10</sup> This checkpoint has three dimensions. Firstly, it is a border crossing point for local people who want to visit the other side of the border (e.g., for the purpose of shopping or visiting friends). Secondly, it is a regional border, a crossing point for people all over North Karelia and the Republic of Karelia. In addition the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint is the border between the EU and Russia. The third dimension of the checkpoint's functions is apparent primarily on a political level but does influence the everyday life of border crossers as well (e.g., border crossing and customs regulations for EU/non-EU citizens). This article concentrates on the local and regional aspects of the border.

We look at the border crossing as an everyday practice. "Everyday" is a widely used concept especially in the social sciences and humanities.<sup>11</sup> In terms of this article everyday is conceptualized as a set of particular acts which are characterized by routines, repetition and difficulty to become conscious of. Whereas routines and repetition are important in defining the everyday, then also understanding of "blurring everyday" is central. In our lives we are surrounded by everyday and everyday actions, although all the actions happening daily, cannot be defined as everyday. We consider border crossing as an everyday act for those people living in border areas (e.g. migrants, fuel buyers, bus drivers), who habitually on an everyday basis experience the border, for whom the border becomes a routine lived experience. In this article the everyday becomes important both from the theoretical and conceptual perspective, but also as a methodology for this study. Crucial in this study is the personal involvement of the researched and the researchers in the border crossing practice (everyday ethnography).

On the everyday level, the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint plays nowadays a significant role at both the local and regional level. The checkpoint is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is a popular "market place": Finnish customers buy fuel, tobacco, alcohol etc.,<sup>12</sup> and Russian customers purchase clothes, electronics etc. Russian-Finnish marriages can also be seen as one expression of interaction in the border area. Economically, Sortavala, a Russian town of 20,000 inhabitants and situated 70 km from the checkpoint, for example, benefits from the transit transportation of goods. Day trips from Finland to the Karelian Republic and vice versa are a common occurrence among those living in the border area, presuming that the border crosser has a valid visa. In addition, during recent years the border region has gained wider interest among the wealthy in Russia. Their influence can be seen in the border areas of North Karelia, where they buy real estate, make use of developments in the tourism infrastructure and visit Finland regularly.

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<sup>10</sup> Aleksandr Izotov, "Suljetun rajakaupungin vaiheita," in Pekka Hakamies, Ilkka Liikanen & Heikki Simola (eds.), *Sortavala rajakaupunki* (Joensuu: Publications of Karelian Institute University of Joensuu, 2001); pp. 91-110. Heikki Eskelinen and Dmitri Zimine, "Sortavala 1990-luvulla: paikallistalouden murros raja-alueella," in Pekka Hakamies, Liikanen and Simola (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp.169-182.

<sup>11</sup> Eeva Jokinen, *Aikuisten arki* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2005); Johanna Uotinen, *Merkkillinen kone. Informaatioteknologia, kokemus ja kertomus* (Joensuu: Joensuun yliopiston humanistisia julkaisuja, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> All commercial infrastructure on the Russian side was developed during the last decade due to the checkpoint and Finnish tourism.

## Border and Power

In our article we concentrate on the concrete checkpoint at Niirala-Värtsilä, which we find both important and interesting from the point of view of the intersections of gender, nationality and sexuality. The empirical findings of our study refer also to the more general gender conventions and ethnosexual orders in the (bordering) societies. To start with it is important to explain how we understand the border and establish the theoretical framework of our border study.

In many ways it is possible to argue that the border and the actual border crossing point, or checkpoint, represents a point of condensation of power. This is the concrete place where the nation state gains its physical and symbolic shape and its borders are guarded through performance.<sup>13</sup> Within the border-crossing regime between non-EU and EU-states, the checkpoint can be defined as a locale where a peacetime, cold war takes place. Although it is said that the world is getting smaller and borders are becoming more and more transparent and unrecognizable, this is not the case of the glocal Niirala-Värtsilä border crossing point in Karelia. “The transparency of the border” may be the case inside the EU,<sup>14</sup> but on its external borders the regime has not changed. The Finnish-Russian border has been highly controlled and even contested and redrawn during WWII. During the Soviet era, it acted as the border between states and their economical-political blocs, and it is now even considered to be “the border between continents,” i.e., the EU and the non-EU. The influence of the EU is also apparent, for example, on the Slovakian-Ukrainian border, which according to Buzalka and Benč has become even more restrictive since Slovakia joined the EU.<sup>15</sup>

In this border area, both states (Russia and Finland) are visibly displaying their physical and military strength by guarding their geographical-spatial and symbolic spaces and physical borders. Within these activities, which at the same time are both the performance of power and the source of productive power, the particular subject’s positions and their enactments are in the production. As other researchers have pointed out, the implicit border subject is embodied as a masculine entity. Although some women are employed in the border guard and customs services, they are still put into a practice interaction that the “national imagination” defines as masculine.<sup>16</sup> Actually, national imagery places the female body not on the edge of the nation but at its centre. When crossing the border, the masculinity of the checkpoint becomes obvious: in addition to the masculine defence

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<sup>13</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> According to a recent study of European border policy, European border regimes are not only intended to exclude people trying to enter Europe, but they construct multifaceted divisions and hierarchies within the EU, too. Enrica Rigo, *Rajojen Eurooppa* (Helsinki: Like, 2009); Julia Twigg, *Bathing: The Body and Community Care* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Juraj Buzalka and Vladimír Benč, “EU Border Monitoring: Slovak-Ukrainian Border Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod and Vel’ké Slemence/Mali Selmenci,” The report prepared by Juraj Buzalka and Vladimír Benč, the Research Center of the the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava and Prešov, Slovakia, November 2007. In [sfpa.sk/dok/FINAL\\_REPORT\\_SK\\_19.11\\_1.doc](http://sfpa.sk/dok/FINAL_REPORT_SK_19.11_1.doc)

<sup>16</sup> Sylvia Walby, “Woman and Nation,” in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation* (New York: Verso, 1996) pp. 235-255; Nira Yuval-Davies, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997).

taking place at the institutional level, the majority of those crossing the border are also men.<sup>17</sup> They are, for example, truck drivers, goods traffickers, petrol purchasers and weekend tourists. This all can be defined as a male dominance of the border, and the masculine character of the border's performative. Of course there are women on the border also. However, the place and position of the women on the border seems to be secondary, subjected and maybe even instrumental. Women are those who work in the assistant positions at the checkpoint, take care of the family members of the car drivers, and serve as cashiers and waitresses in the shops and service stations in the border area.

### Alternative Definitions of the Border

A border can be seen as an ethnosexual frontier. Joane Nagel defines ethnosexual frontiers as “the territories that lie at the intersections of racial, ethnic, or national boundaries.”<sup>18</sup> They are “erotic locations and exotic destinations that are surveilled and supervised, patrolled and policed, regulated and restricted, but that are constantly penetrated by individuals forging sexual links with ethnic Others across ethnic borders. Ethnosexual frontiers are sites where ethnicity is sexualized, and sexuality is racialized, ethnicized, and nationalized.”

On the other hand, the border can be seen as a kind of *no-place* or better yet, as an *in-between space*.<sup>19</sup> This in-between space in social studies refers to the stage of transition from one space or state of affairs to another. For example, one has left her/his homeland but has not yet entered into a new space or place.<sup>20</sup> Within the context of the border, for example, behaviour of weekend travellers changes immediately after the checkpoint. In terms of vocabulary, a woman becomes a “whore,” and with regards to table manners a cup of coffee is instead a bottle of beer.

According to Pablo Vila,<sup>21</sup> living along the Mexican-US border becomes hard for locals because this space/place functions as a kind of in-between space, where visitors do not follow the rules of the surrounding society. According to the findings of Vila, it seems that there is a shared attitude that true morality exists somewhere beyond the border area. The border area also has a party image of sorts, and, most importantly, two kinds of sexual images are linked to the border area: men heavily partaking in homosexual interactions and all women being prostitutes. Referring to Vila and others studying the Mexico-US border is important for this study because it offers a sound theoretical and methodological background. We are interested in the everyday practices and conjured images

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<sup>17</sup> Although it seems that in this matter there are variations according to time of year, time of day, and day of the week.

<sup>18</sup> Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Nadejda Alexandrova and Dawn Lyon, “Imaginary Geographies: Border-places and ‘Home’ in the Narratives of Migrant Women,” Luisa Passerini, Dawn Lyon, Enrica Capussotti, and Ioanna Lalioutou (eds.), *Women Migrants from East to West. Gender, Mobility and Belonging in Contemporary Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> Ulla Kosonen, *Naisia työn reunoilla. Elämäkokemusta ja ikäsyrajintää* (SoPhi: Juväskylän Yliopisto, 2003); Luce Irigaray, *Sukupuolieron etiikka* (Tampere: Gaudeamus, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Pablo Vila (ed.), *Ethnography at the Border* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

behind these everyday practices, which inevitably are influencing human lives. One of these conjured images is referred to in the article of Pirjo Uimonen<sup>22</sup> as the *shadow of the whore*. For example, a few years ago in Finland there was a court case in which a Russian woman living in the Niirala-Värtsilä border area accused a Finnish magazine of using a photo of her in the context of prostitution. In other words this means that in this particular area all Russian (or Russian-looking) females are potential prostitutes, and this image/attitude inevitably affects the lives of women both in this area and while crossing the border.<sup>23</sup>

### Border Ethnography

Methodologically, our study is embedded in the tradition of the ethnography of everyday life.<sup>24</sup> Everyday ethnography has its roots in social ethnography and refers to a more holistic way of doing research and an interest in knowledge rather than, for example, a way of collecting data, which is the case in “classical ethnography.” We are specifically interested in the gendered everyday practices taking place in the context of the border.

Our ethnographical data consists of observations from the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint, materials from local newspapers and ongoing discussions (interviews) with those crossing the border. The observed data is gathered during our frequent border crossings by car and bus. Being inhabitants of the border region, crossing the border is a part of our everyday lives: we cross the border for the purpose of purchasing various goods (groceries, fuel, tobacco products, etc.), taking care of the affairs of the family members on the Russian side, or just relaxing (e.g., visits to beauty salons). Some of these border crossings were undertaken with the goal of systematically collecting data (via an observation form or by photographing the checkpoint and market area), and sometimes these border crossings were the result of other activities (e.g., being a guide or interpreter for various groups). However, our data is extensive, involving altogether hundreds of crossings. During these trips the researchers have also had the opportunity to talk with other border crossers and inhabitants of the border area. In a way our methodological understanding comes close to autoethnography.<sup>25</sup>

The process of data analysis can be described as thematic. We started by reviewing our field

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<sup>22</sup> Pirjo Uimonen, “Images of Russians on an Internet Discussion Board,” Paper presented in Joensuu 24 March 2010 (unpublished).

<sup>23</sup> Aino Saarinen, “Venäläiset maahanmuuttajanaiset ‘naisystävällisessä’ Pohjolassa: Kansalaisuus ja stigmatisoitunut identiteetti,” Tuomas Martikainen and Marja Tiilikainen (eds.), *Maahanmuuttajanaiset: kotoutuminen, perhe, työ* Väestötutkimuslaitoksen julkaisusarja, D 46/2007 (Helsinki: Väestöliitto, 2007), pp. 125-146.

<sup>24</sup> Luisa Passerini, Dawn Lyon, Enrica Capussotti, and Ioanna Lalioutou (eds.), *Women Migrants from East to West. Gender, Mobility and Belonging in Contemporary Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007); Silva Tedre, “Hoivan sanattomat sopimukset,” *Joensuun yliopiston yhteiskuntatieteellisiä julkaisuja* (Nro 40, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Olga Davydova, “Rituaali, identiteetti ja yllirajaisuus,” *Elore* (2005) [http://cc.joensuu.fi/~loristi/1\\_05/elore1\\_05\\_sisallys.htm](http://cc.joensuu.fi/~loristi/1_05/elore1_05_sisallys.htm); Johanna Uotinen, “Aistimuksellisuus, autoetnografia ja ruumiillinen tietäminen,” *Elore* (2010) [http://www.elore.fi/arkisto/1\\_10/katsart\\_uotinen\\_1\\_10.pdf](http://www.elore.fi/arkisto/1_10/katsart_uotinen_1_10.pdf)

notes and recalling our border crossing experiences while asking ourselves: what are the gender specific elements of the border crossing process?

### **Ethosexual Dimension**

The collapse of the Soviet Union not only opened its former borders to more intensive traffic but also incorporated the post-Soviet states into the neoliberal, capitalist world order. This has had a crucial impact on the development of the socio-economic and sex/gender order of the border areas. The female body has become all the while a more and more commercialized object, and femininity has become a kind of social capital for women.<sup>26</sup> Within the context of the border, this means that the power-relations in everyday contacts and relationships are led by the “Westerners” and these relations have an impact on the sex/gender order of both societies.

In order to develop the idea of an ethosexual frontier, we refer to Nagel’s conceptualization of those who cross ethnic boundaries (and national borders).<sup>27</sup> She argues that boundaries can be penetrated in four ways depending on the permanency of the intended stay on the other side. These categories are *ethnocultural settlers*, *adventurers*, *sojourners* and *invaders*. In the case of Niirala-Värtsilä, the categories of sojourners and ethnocultural settlers especially become self-evidently subliminal. They are the actual border crossers and caretakers, but the atmosphere and infrastructure of the checkpoint area creates the feeling of a continuous ethosexual adventure. This can be perceived, for example, from the amount of souvenirs with pornographic elements (e.g., pictures of naked female bodies on lighters and towels) for sale in the market area on the Russian side.

In fact, the settlers, who in this case are the female Russian immigrant spouses in Finnish-Russian marriages, are the significant actors both in the ethosexual frontier and on the checkpoint. Their position can be described as ambivalent. On the level of attitudes, 63% of Finns would not like to marry a Russian.<sup>28</sup> In practice, one-third of Finnish men who are married to a non-Finn have a Russian spouse whereas only 5.5% of Finnish women in intermarriages are married to a Russian man.<sup>29</sup> On a practical level, the actors involved (settlers and their spouses) can somehow overcome this ethosexual power relation and go about their everyday lives in-between and on both sides of the border. But on the level of imagery, the ethosexual frontier creates an atmosphere within which the representations and interpretations of Finnishness or Russianness are rather narrow and are in line with stereotypical conceptions of “East” and “West” as feminine and masculine, carers and care

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<sup>26</sup> Anna Temkina, “Gendernyi poryadok (Severnyi Tadjikistan),” S. Kasymova (ed.), *Gender: Traditsiia i sovremennost* (Dushanbe, 2005), pp. 6–91. <http://old.eu.spb.ru/socio/staff/files/temkina.pdf>. Anna Temkina, *Seksual'naya zhizn' zhenshtchiny: mezhdru podchineniem i svobodoi* (Sankt-Petersburge: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Nagel, *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> Magdaleena Jaakkola, “Suomalaisten suhtautuminen maahanmuuttajiin 1987-2003,” *Työministeriö, Opetusministeriö Työpoliittinen tutkimus* 286 (2005).

<sup>29</sup> Statistics Finland, 2006. However, Russian men are the fourth most popular spouses for Finnish women with a foreign spouse. Jonna Roos, “Monikulttuuriset perheet Suomessa,” in Päivi Oksi-Walter, Jonna Roos, Ritva Viertola-Cavallari (eds.), *Monikulttuurinen perhe* (Helsinki: Kustannus Oy Arkki, 2009), pp. 129-156.



receivers.<sup>30</sup>

In our understanding we see the checkpoint as a concrete and symbolic place, whereby the ethnic and national boundary converges with a spatial, geographical, legal and institutional border. Within the context of border crossing and the checkpoint, the concepts of citizenship, nationality and ethnicity are significant. The notion of citizenship defines the relationship between the individual and the state(s) and refers to the legal status of the border crosser. For example, a person with dual citizenship (Russian and Finnish) can cross the border without a visa. Instead, the concept of nationality is more complicated, loose and fuzzy. Nationality is a complicated cluster of national feelings, experiences, stories and affiliations and is a strong entity of gendered symbols.<sup>31</sup>

While crossing the borders, the individual becomes nationally labelled: one's dress, make-up, gestures, tastes and preferences, knowledge and entire habitus actually becomes encoded and decoded in terms of nationality.<sup>32</sup> As an example of this can be mentioned the image of a Finnish man in his Adidas sweat pants, meanwhile a Russian woman is expected to walk with high heels. Also, individuals themselves start to reflect and experience their behaviour and the actions of the authorities as national. In this national way of thinking space and infrastructure is also perceived as national.

Ethnicity refers to the more subtle and hierarchical relationship within the national order of things. Ethnicity comes into question when the border is crossed for more permanent purposes. Russian tourists in Joensuu can behave "in a Russian way" without paying attention to the prejudices and expectations of the surrounding society while an immigrant woman is compelled to control, evaluate and reflect on her behaviour and appearance as an ethnic "Other."<sup>33</sup> This can be observed, for example, by noting the different speaking styles when using Russian in public places in Joensuu or elsewhere in Finland: Russian tourists talk openly and out loud about their affairs while immigrants avoid loud conversations both in Russian and in incorrect Finnish. Also, in discussing the lack of willingness to learn Russian at schools in Finland it is noted that even pupils of Russian origin prefer not to speak or learn Russian. At the checkpoint, national and ethnic orders overlap each other, but, on the other hand, they can bypass each other all together. While crossing the border, the ethnic one – a Russian migrant woman – becomes national, gets back to "her own" national space and order,

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<sup>30</sup> Hannu Sirkkilä, "Suomalaismiesten käsityksiä thaimaalaisista vaimoistaan," Tuomas Martikainen (ed.), *Ylirajainen kulttuuri. Etnisyys Suomessa 2000-luvulla* (Helsinki: SKS, 2006), pp. 126-143; Anni Reuter and Eve Kyntäjä, "Kansainvälinen avioliitto ja stigma," in Tuomas Martikainen (ed.), *Ylirajainen kulttuuri. Etnisyys Suomessa 2000-luvulla* (Helsinki: SKS, 2006), pp. 104-125.

<sup>31</sup> Tuula Gordon, Katri Komulainen, Kirsti Lempiäinen (eds.), *Suomineitonen hei! Kansallisuuden sukupuoli* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Dawn Lyon, "Moral and Cultural Boundaries in Representations of Migrants: Italy and the Netherlands in Comparative Perspective," in Luisa Passerini, Dawn Lyon, Enrica Capussotti and Ioanna Lalitou (eds.), *Women Migrants from East to West: Gender, Mobility and Belonging in Contemporary Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 212-227; Karmela Liebkind, Simo Mannila, Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, Magdalena Jaakkola, Eve Kyntäjä, and Anni Reuter (eds.), *Venäläinen, virolainen, suomalainen: Kolmen maahanmuuttajaryhmän kotoutuminen Suomeen* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Aino Saarinen, "Venäläiset maahanmuuttajanaiset 'naisystävällisessä' Pohjolassa: Kansalaisuus ja stigmatisoitunut identiteetti," in Tuomas Martikainen and Marja Tiilikainen (eds.), *Maahanmuuttajanaiset: kotoutuminen, perhe, työ* Väestöntutkimuslaitoksen julkaisusarja, D 46/2007.

no matter if her citizenship is Russian or Finnish. In this sense border crossing can be seen as empowering.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, because the checkpoint is a liminal space, a female body marked as national (Russian) can be more easily sexualized than in a space with a more stable moral order, for example in a marketplace in central Finland.

The experience of Olga crossing the border just a few years ago can be presented as one example of these subtle, volatile and fluid conceptualizations. While going through Finnish customs on her way to Petrozavodsk, she noticed a poster in Finnish with large text reading: “Don’t commit suicide by fucking” (*Älä pane itseäsi hengiltä*). Under this large text there was a little picture of a condom, and it was at the time part of the Finnish Red Cross’ campaign against HIV/AIDS. Originally, it was not designed to be placed at the border but was later on display on the ferries between Finland and Estonia. In the context of the ethnosexual frontier (the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint) this well-intentioned campaign became a means of othering. Imagine, being a woman and being met with such a message; one begins to ponder who has to be protected from whom. Can a Russian woman going back to her native country be assumed to commit suicide by “fucking”? Who is the subject, the active component, of this message and who is the object? What is their nationality? Whose body is wealthy and healthy and whose is dirty and deceased; who is worthy of being warned and protected?

It is not only your sex/gender that matters. Your body also has other kind of marks and significant meanings that affect your given position at the checkpoint. A Russian woman is treated and positioned differently than a Finnish woman at the checkpoint for example. Bodily experiences in the border crossing process are inevitably intersectional. In general terms it is possible to say that women of Russian origin are more vulnerable to the gazes of men at the border zone than women of Finnish origin, who in this sense can be said to occupy a safer position. For example, one of our counterparts of Russian origin has told us that she puts a lot of thought into what she wears to cross the border. She explains that she deliberately chooses modest and less eye-catching clothes in order to cross the border as smoothly and uneventfully as possible. During the border crossing process the gender intersects with age and nationality: the “shadow of the whore”<sup>35</sup> is cast on a Russian speaking

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<sup>34</sup> The Finnish writer of Finnish-Estonian origin Sofi Oksanen writes in her autobiographical novel about her childhood experiences. Her mother restricted her way of dressing, use of Estonian language and behavior depending on where they were, in Finland or in Estonia. The main character of the novel explains that the only private place, where she could dress up in a way she wanted was in the Estonian countryside in her grandmother’s place. In other places she had to look like a standard western girl: wearing jeans and a t-shirt. It was also important not to look like an “Estonian whore” wearing miniskirts and make-up. The same kind of ethno-sexual stereotypes are exploited in the recent Estonian movie “Kinnunen.” Estonian women are desirable because of their female-like behavior and feminine outlook, and this is the reason for Finnish men to travel to Estonia to look for a wife. In this movie Estonian women are represented as opposite to the Finnish women, who are androgynous and too independent. In addition, the representation of the Russian woman as a whore when Kinnunen does not succeed in finding a wife among Estonian women, the local “mafia” offers him paid company, who has a Russian name. Sofi Oksanen, *Stalinin lehmät* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> Pirjo Uimonen, “Keep the Nation Clean! Negotiating the Norms of Female Purity,” in Joni Virkkunen, Olga Davydova, Pirjo Uimonen (eds.), *Ethnosexual Processes in Finland and Russia* (Kikumora publications: Helsinki, 2010), pp.185-207.

woman while her Finnish “sister” is maybe marked as curious and odd but still decent. Within the border area, the bodies of Russian women become ethnicized through sexualization. This intersectionality can also be seen from the perspective of age. Young women, in this respect, find themselves in a more vulnerable position as a border crosser than older women. One can also argue that the most dubious position is the case of a young Russian woman. For example, when applying for visa to Schengen countries she has to be prepared to present evidence of her decent and legal intentions in the “West.” However, Aino Saarinen has pointed out that, regardless of age, women of Russian origin are vulnerable to sexual harassment.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the long history of contacts between Finns and Russians, the ethnosexual order has not remained the same. At different stages it has had its own constellations.<sup>37</sup> Our interest is in the changes that have occurred since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The opening of the Finnish-Russian border to average citizens of both sides has made everyday contacts possible on the local level as well. The neoliberal world order that has commercialized the female body together with the increasing amount of contacts between Finns (men) and Russians (women) have influenced the image of Russian women abroad. In the “West” Russian women are firstly seen as prostitutes and “easy catches”. This becomes emphasized in the border regions: for example, in letters to the editor of North Karelian newspapers local women underline their purity and morality in contrast to the imagined and homogenized “Russian women.”<sup>38</sup>

Nagel defines the ethnosexual frontier and its intruders both through eroticism and exoticism.<sup>39</sup> In the ethnosexual frontier of North Karelia, the image of Russian women is both erotized and exotized. However, everyday encounters with Russians have become quite common, and nowadays this exoticism is connected merely to the body and habitus of Asian or African woman. According to the local press of the Republic of Karelia, the ethnosexual frontier occurs in terms of a drunken, fat, elderly Finnish man watching a striptease and buying sexual services in particular hotels and bars of Sortavala. The image of the Russian woman/girl producing these services is in general terms a victimized, passive object who has connections to criminal activities. In the North Karelian media, the ethnosexual frontier can be detected in, for example, the advertisements for sexual services in local newspapers (e.g., ads for “Estonian cats” or “guaranteed sexual satisfaction”

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<sup>36</sup> Aino Saarinen “Venäläiset maahanmuuttajanaiset ‘naisystävällisessä’ Pohjolassa: Kansalaisuus ja stigmatisoitunut identiteetti,” in Tuomas Martikainen and Marja Tiilikainen (eds.), *Maahanmuuttajanaiset: kotoutuminen, perhe, työ* Väestöntutkimuslaitoksen julkaisusarja, D 46/2007.

<sup>37</sup> Kaija Heikkinen, “The Question of Gender and Ethnicity in the War Memoirs of Finnish Women,” Joni Virkkunen, Olga Davydova, Pirjo Uimonen (eds.), *Ethnosexual Processes in Finland and Russia* (Helsinki: Kikumora publications: 2010) pp.185-207; Anni Kangas, *The Knight, the Beast and the Treasure: A Semiotic Inquiry into the Finnish Political Imaginary on Russia, 1918-1930* (Tampere: Tampereen yliopistopaino Oy, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> Nagel, *op. cit.*; Aino Saarinen, “Venäläiset maahanmuuttajanaiset ‘naisystävällisessä’ Pohjolassa: Kansalaisuus ja stigmatisoitunut identiteetti,” Tuomas Martikainen and Marja Tiilikainen (eds.), *Maahanmuuttajanaiset: kotoutuminen, perhe, työ* Väestöntutkimuslaitoksen julkaisusarja, D 46/2007; Pirjo Uimonen, “Images of Russians on an Internet Discussion Board” (unpublished paper).

<sup>39</sup> Nagel, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

provided by ladies from St. Petersburg, Vyborg or Sortavala). Although it is unknown who are the actual providers of these services and what is their nationality or ethnic background, the representation of a Russian or Estonian woman improves the attractiveness of such ads. The attraction is guaranteed by bringing to the fore and explicitly pointing out that the body and habitus of Russian and Estonian woman is in general conceived as oversexualized.

The oversexualization in the ethnosexual frontier can be identified most blatantly in the checkpoint area. During the last decade many entrepreneurs have realized the business-related opportunities in the border crossing area (the fuel, tobacco and alcohol sales market and meeting the demands of weekend travellers), and due to this there is a tiny “village” composed of shops and petrol stations situated next to the Värtsilä railway station. The checkpoint area is about five kilometres from the Värtsilä village centre. Instead of the usual tourist souvenirs depicting architectural or geographical landmarks, souvenirs in these shops and petrol stations (e.g., cigarette lighters or towels), along with a wide variety of sex magazines, showcase images of naked women and make the sexuality and the visual features of the ethnosexual frontier explicit to onlookers. The amount of condoms next to the cash registers astonishes the average (female) border crosser as she pays for her cup of coffee or tank of petrol. This all becomes even more peculiar when one looks over to the thin selection of books at one of the petrol stations just next to the border. Out of three books, one is inevitably anomalous: *Sex tourism: pro and con*. It is written in Russian, and one might ask, just who is the intended audience in this particular place? Undoubtedly, it is not aimed at the female border crosser.

### **The Body (and Care) in Border Crossing**

In our understanding of crossing the border we see it as a bodily experience. Also emotions are involved in the border crossing action/procedure. The senses of unpredictability and uncertainty are characteristic for all the stages of the process. When approaching border crossing as a bodily experience, the concept of care becomes a fruitful analytical tool. It should be noted, that uncertainty and unpredictability are always present in care: you never know beforehand when the person in need of care has to go to toilet or is hungry. Theoretical studies of care have proved that despite the fact that different cultures have their own care cultures, there are still some universal aspects of the concept of care. Firstly, care can be considered as bodywork; the human body is caring for another human body, literally or figuratively. Secondly, in all cultures care is always considered to be female work. And this makes the concept of care also very significant in the context of the border. Care is one gendered practice that takes place in the border context at the checkpoint. Issues of responsibility are inevitably taken into consideration when discussing care, raising the question: whose responsibility is it to care for this person?<sup>40</sup>

At the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint there are multiple ways of *caring* (caring about, taking

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<sup>40</sup> Pirjo Pöllänen, “Arjen käytännöt ja perhesuhteet venäläis-suomalaisissa perheissä,” in Eija Sevón and Marianne Notko (eds.), *Perhesuhteet puntarissa* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2008), pp. 153-165.

care of, care-giving and care-receiving).<sup>41</sup> Care is a type of interaction between humans, and it can take place both in the public and private spheres. It can be organized through personal contacts or sought publicly through the organized care sector. Within the context of the checkpoint, we concentrate on the informal care organized through personal contacts. In this case, although the care is informal (mostly based on family relations), it occurs in a highly policed and controlled public space. By paying attention to this informal care, we can also disclose the ideologies of care and its esteem in the bordering societies and, more broadly, under the conditions of the border crossing. Inevitably, it also sheds light on the gender order(s). In our data the essence of care becomes visible within the context of the border in many significant ways.

In our view it is worth paying attention to the formal and informal ways of organizing care. For example, care becomes a public matter when a (male) bus driver is taking care of someone while on duty. We have observed bus drivers forced to take care of their drunken tourist passengers and their personal belongings in order to expedite the border-crossing process. Also during the common drill of Finnish and Russian fire brigades and rescuers care was explicitly visible when common actions in the situations of big fires or car accidents were practiced. However, (the transnational) female care is different; it is informal and private.

According to the data, Russian immigrant women care for their elderly relatives transnationally in various ways. For example, a woman regularly goes to Russia to attend to the affairs of her mother, who lives in an elderly care home. These can be, for example, organizing of the place in the elderly care home, applying for a visa to Finland for possible visits, or taking care of the way of payment of pension<sup>42</sup> or a personal bank account. The most extreme case of transnational care according to our data is the story of a Russian woman who crosses the border twice a day to take care (feeding, bathing, cleaning, keeping company, etc.) of her mother living in an elderly care home close to the border on the Russian side.

How do women provide care on the checkpoint? Women help their elderly relatives, their children or sometimes even drunken husbands to cross the border. Because Russian family culture is based on the extended family ideology, it is logical that intergenerational bonds are involved also in a transnational context, and women are fulfilling their role as a care provider within the context of the border as well. However, this does not always go smoothly. Stories told by women of Russian origin living in Finland highlight examples of such instances, as they explain how insecure and chaotic they feel when the border closed for several days during the Russian “putsch” of August 1991. According to our data the situation seemed unbearable for the only daughter of elderly parents who found herself on the Finnish side, cut off from her family by the closed border and knowing nothing about the future development of the international political situation. The same feeling of insecurity and

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<sup>41</sup> Bernice Fisher and Joan Tronto, “Toward Feminist Theory of Caring,” Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson (eds.), *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 35-62.

<sup>42</sup> In Russia pensions are paid by the post office, and a (post-office employee usually a woman) brings money in cash to the pensioner's home address. If the pensioner wants to receive the pension through a bank account, it requires special arrangements.

uncertainty was described by a woman whose relatives lived in Saint Petersburg during the Georgian War in August 2008. She relayed her concerns regarding the situation under which Finland is a part of the EU and the development of the war and possible sanctions and geopolitical development is unclear.

There is one crucial reason why care is worth analyzing within the context of the border. As we know from previous studies on care, it is very much physical work. In social care the human body is inevitably present; the care provider is using her body while providing care and the receiver of care has to assign her/his body in order to be taken care of.<sup>43</sup> But the border can also be seen as a physical object, at least if we consider the ethnographical studies made on the Mexico-US border.<sup>44</sup> There are many body-related issues that frame border crossing. The human body is inevitably present in the everyday interactions of the border. For example, such a simple and invisible function as the need to go to the toilet becomes problematic and complicated when the spatial placement of these bodies is highly controlled, as in the case of the checkpoint. The situation becomes even more problematic in terms of care. On the Russian side of the checkpoint, there are two small toilets in the customs building: one for women, one for men. Sex-separated public toilets are a source of difficulty in the context of care. People taking care of a person of the opposite sex must choose between bringing her/him into a toilet not designated for her/his sex or entering a toilet not designated for her/his own sex. In addition, the toilets in the customs buildings are so small in size that it is physically rather challenging to accommodate multiple people.<sup>45</sup> If one happens to travel with infants or children, the need to go to the toilet is sometimes unavoidable, but these kinds of border crossers are not implicit subjects of the border. While crossing the borders through airports, there are several special toilets designed for invalids or people with small children. They are bigger and equipped with special instructions, for example, for changing diapers. These kinds of toilets are lacking at the Niirala-Värtsilä checkpoint, and we have witnessed a situation when a mother had to change her baby's diaper on the table of a café situated near the border. There are no toilets for the people queuing in the cars or buses to the checkpoint on both sides of the border. According to Pirjo's experience, the atmosphere of the border area felt so sexually loaded that she did not dare to take her three year old daughter to use the washroom on the bank of the road.

## Conclusion

At the checkpoint the dualistic heterosexual gender/sex order is normative. Your physical body represents either a man or a woman. Men are the implicit, as well as explicit, subjects of the checkpoint area. In addition, one's sex defines in which places one is presumed to be and in which

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<sup>43</sup> Silva Tedre, "Hoivan sanattomat sopimukset," *Joensuun yliopiston yhteiskuntatieteellisiä julkaisuja* (1999); Julia Twigg, *Bathing: The Body and Community Care* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>44</sup> Vila, *op. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that looking at crossing the border from the perspective of the body also reveals that border renders some humans into objects. For instance those who are in margins of "normative" corporality and "lifestyle" (i.e. "proper sexual behaviour," disability) are objects also in the context of the border.

actions one is “allowed” to take part. The expected position of women is that of a vehicle passenger, and men are assumed to be the driver. All kinds of exceptions and instances of “misbehaviour” create confusion.

In this article, we attempt to scrutinize the border as a part of an ethnosexual frontier, which is in fact wider than the checkpoint. The area of the checkpoint can be seen as a marrow and condensation of the ethnosexual frontier. As argued earlier, the ethnosexual frontier is a site for the construction of the national and the ethnic “other,” which is highly sexualized. In this frontier boundaries are simultaneously strengthened and eroded, maintained and crossed.

The border area and checkpoint area has a concrete form, and therefore we have likewise dealt with the border crossing process as a concrete and bodily experience. One’s body and bodily feelings are unavoidably present when crossing the border. The clearest example of corporeality on the border is the practice of care. Physical experiences are connected to care and emotions. The essence of the border area (checkpoint) is contingent (insecure/unpredictable), which imposes challenges for the care actions occurring at the checkpoint and also guides the feelings of border crossers.

The border can be seen as functioning on two levels: on the public (inter-state) and also on a private, individual level. Compared to the other post-Soviet and European borders, the Finnish-Russian border has remained exceptionally stable since the end of World War II. Even after the major changes in the political systems in Europe (the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Russian Federation, the formation of the EU and Finland’s joining the EU), border crossing remains strictly controlled by both states. Paradoxically, due to this high level of control, the border crossing process on the level of the individual’s experience (the everyday level) causes feelings of unpredictability and insecurity. This insecurity appears, for example, in the nervous protecting of one’s passport. The significance of the passport in the lives of border crossers has been realized in previous studies as well. According to Alexandrova and Lyon, migrant women who have emigrated to Western Europe from Bulgaria and Hungary “insist on the importance of keeping their documents in order and of respecting the sanctity of the passport.”<sup>46</sup>

Despite the negative feelings connected to the border crossing process, we as well as a million other Finnish or Russian border crossers deal with the border on an everyday basis. In any case, the border crossing is where the public and private intertwine with each other. As women and as researchers, we have attempted to accumulate the knowledge of the border from the gender perspective and to bring forth the gendered character of the border and the practices occurring while crossing the border. We also wish that some gender specific practices, like care, could be taken better into the account when planning the checkpoints.

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<sup>46</sup> Alexandrova and Lyon, “Imaginary Geographies: Border-places and ‘Home’ in the Narratives of Migrant Women,” Luisa Passerini, Dawn Lyon, Enrica Capussotti, and Ioanna Lalioutou (eds.), *Women Migrants from East to West. Gender, Mobility and Belonging in Contemporary Europe* (New York and Oxford: Bergham Books, 2007), pp. 96-99.

