Narrating ‘national’ at the margins: Seto and Cossack identity in the Russian-Estonian borderlands

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In summer 1996 I visited the field as part of a research team to study the Setos, a transborder ethnic group that lives in Pechory district in the Pskov region on Russia’s border with Estonia. To our surprise, we discovered another small group of people there, all men, who were in conflict with the Setos. These men behaved aggressively, and distinguished themselves by a style of cultural performance which they referred to as ‘Cossack’.

The name ‘Cossack’ immediately drew a response from us. Even people unfamiliar with Russia’s history are aware of the Cossacks, the mythic defenders of Russia’s territories and borders. However, until recently Cossacks seem to have been the stuff of legends, closely associated with the Russian monarchy and the emigrations of the early twentieth century. In terms of a homeland Cossacks were traditionally linked to the margins of Russia in the south and southeast. One would not expect to find people identifying themselves as Cossacks in the Russian northwest, in the middle of the 1990s. Nor did the local Seto population expect this. To them ‘the Cossacks’ were ‘uninvited guests’, the ‘Others’, whose presence created anxiety and even fear. The tense relationships between the locals and the newcomers took on colonial overtones. Most of the local Setos were elderly and were predominantly women, and they faced an explicitly masculine and militarized group of newcomers who described themselves as Cossacks. Most importantly, these relationships reflected in a vulgar and distorted manner the border dispute being played out between Estonia and Russia over control of these territories, in which ‘the Cossacks’ defined themselves as defenders of Russia and its borders. The Cossacks saw themselves as belonging to this place, in contrast to
the local Setos whom they saw as ethno-cultural Others, who did not belong there and whom they thought should leave.

In this chapter, I argue that the establishment of the border between Russia and Estonia activated Seto and Cossack identity construction in this particular time and place. I examine the intersection of state-scale nationalization projects, enacted through the border, and local-scale narratives and enactments of Seto and Cossack identity. This involves a three-way interaction including the two states’ nationalizing discourses and practices in the border zone, the way in which these state-scale discourses and practices activate Seto and Cossack narratives and enactments of place and identity in the borderland, and finally the way Seto and Cossack discourses and practices interact with one another. In each of these intersecting multiscalar networks, identity is re-narrated and re-enacted in specifically gendered ways. The chapter uses Ghassan Hage’s (1996) work on the cossocktual contexts within which ‘motherland’ and ‘fatherland’ discourses predominate to explore Seto and Cossack narratives and performances of place and identity.

**Conceptual framework: A narrative network approach**

Recent research on place, identity and borders have moved from seeing these categories as static, reified units of analysis to viewing them as dynamic categories of discourse and practice, as interactive and mutually constituted socio-spatial fields (Balibar 2004; Billig 1995; Brah 1996; Brubaker 1996; Donnan and Wilson 1999; Edensor 2002; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Kaiser 2001, 2002; Newman and Paasi 1998; Nikiforova 2004; Smith 1999; Smith et al. 1998; Wilson and Donnan 1998). One of the most promising avenues opened up in the process of this reconceptualization is the emphasis placed on the narrative and performative aspects of place, identity and border. In her study of narrative identity, Somers (1994: 606) points out that ‘one way to avoid the hazards of rigidifying aspects of identity into a misleading categorical entity is to incorporate into the core conception of identity the categorically destabilizing dimensions of time, space, and relationality’. This can be done through narrativity, as it ‘provides an opportunity to infuse the study of identity formation with a relational and historical approach... by emphasizing the embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space’ (Somers 1994: 607).

As noted by Newman and Paasi (1998: 196) in their review of border studies, focusing on narrativity draws our attention to the question of who the narrators of borders are, ‘whose “plots” or “turf”s dominate these narratives, what is included or excluded by them and how the representations of “us” and “them” are produced and reproduced in various social practices, such as the media, education, etc.’. In studying place, identity and borders it is also important to examine how official narratives are contested, re-examined, reconfigured and enacted by people in their daily life, and to study the interactive relationships between the narrators and ‘the narrated’ (Billig 1995; Edensor 2002; Kaiser and Nikiforova 2005).

Even though the demise of the nation state has become a prominent theme in the literature on globalization, it is nonetheless still the case that states act as the main narrators of political borders, since in the world of places states have been empowered to decide where the border is to be drawn and what kind of border regime is to be established. However, it is often the case that the interests of other groups territorially and/or symbolically connected to borderlands come into conflict with the interests of the states. When such situations occur, these groups’ members engage in the process of (re)imagining and (re)narrating the border by constructing their own counter-narratives of place, identity and border in an effort to renegotiate its meaning and reappropriate the border for their own purposes. Such counter-narratives can become a strategy of empowerment for the group, to the extent that they have an effect on state scale border discourses and practices. Borderland activists not only engage in a process of contestation directly with the state, but can also ‘jump up scale’ by bringing in
transnational actors and institutions. Viewed from this perspective every border is polysemic and contested, since it implies that a whole range of narratives are in dialogue with each other, and intertwine, compete, make it to the surface of public debate and gain power or stay silenced until the right conditions emerge. This applies equally to every place and every identity. ‘Struggles over narratives are thus struggles over identity...writing counter-narratives is a crucial strategy when one’s identity is not expressed in the dominant public ones’ (Somers 1994: 631).

‘Nations’ as the preeminent example of the intersection of place, identity and borders should also be seen as mutually constituted, dynamic processes of becoming, rather than as static, unchanging bounded territories and communities of belonging. The construction of a nation is never completed, and its identity boundaries are never fixed, since the narratives that constitute collective identities are constantly changing within interactive multiscalar networks. ‘(N)ations, like any social reality, never reach a stage where they can just ‘exist’; they are not only constructions, but also continually in the making’ (Hage 1996: 465). Dominant groups in nationalizing states have their identities produced, stored, and channelled through a set of institutions, telling a more or less coherent story about what it means to be ‘Us’, while ‘national minorities’ and nationalizing movements often lack such an intrinsic institutional network for the nationalization of their constituents. Nonetheless, even though their practices of nationalization can vary due to the more limited institutional resources on the part of national minorities, their discourses of nationalization are organized and enacted according to the same set of idealized visions.

Similarly, Hage (1996) criticizes the essentialized conception of two radically different kinds of nationalisms (i.e. ‘Western-European/democratic’ and ‘Eastern/Oriental/totalitarian’) and argues instead for the existence of one nationalism, which is two-faceted.

The national imaginary emerges (as) an interrelated two-levelled, gendered construction: a fatherland, conceived as a wilful active national body constituting the imaginary space of governmental and sovereign belonging, and a motherland, conceived as an ordered and pleasing space constituting the imaginary space of functional and homely belonging (Hage 1996: 476-7).

These two gendered concepts occupy different imaginary spaces: motherland is more inclusive of Otherness, while fatherland is a more exclusionary nationalizing space. However, as emphasized by Hage (1996), the two gendered modes of identity construction are ideal types and can only be separated analytically, always complementing each other in every project of nation building. The shifts from exclusive to inclusive discourses and practices within nationalizing narratives are determined by changes in a broader multiscalar context, composed of kaleidoscopic sets of relationships at local, national and transnational scales. Fatherland discourses, which are more militarized and exclusionary towards ethno-national others, tend to predominate when the nation and homeland are viewed by national elites as under threat. The threat may be external or internal, and the border narratives and enactments constructed against this threat seek to protect ethno-national home and identity from the external Other, as well as the Other within. When the threat is perceived as less serious, fatherland discourses tend to give way to motherland discourses, which are more tolerant and more inclusive towards Otherness and seek to domesticate ‘them’. Borders conceived through the motherland imaginary are re-narrated as open ‘bridges’ rather than as strict defensive barriers.

Territorial borders and borderlands of nationalizing states represent spaces where exclusive, fatherland discourses and practices are more likely to be enacted and observed. The reterritorializing space of the former Soviet Union offers numerous examples of such exclusionary nationalization. Compared with
unification processes in Europe, the fatherland-type disjunction of former 'sister republics' - manifested in the establishment of barrier borders, strict visa regimes and lingering territorial disputes - is particularly striking, and the Russian-Estonian border represents an especially prominent example in this regard. This chapter focuses on the processes which are taking place in the southern Russian-Estonian transborder zone, particularly on a constellation of small villages in the district of Pechory in Russia.

**Russian-Estonian borderlands: From a bridge to a barrier**

In different periods of history, following political 'shifts', the social-political space of the modern border region changed more than once from its status as an open frontier zone to a closed borderland. In the narratives of these borderlands the story lines of conflict and contact are deeply intertwined, which allows a story teller to emphasize one or the other side of these borderland relationships. In Soviet and post-Soviet ethnological writings from Russia, these territories have been referred to as an 'ethno-contact zone' between the Finno-Ugric peoples and the Slavs (Gadlo 1998). However, a line of medieval fortresses which runs through these lands suggests a different story. The fortresses of Narva in Estonia and Ivangoord in Russia in the north, and the Orthodox Pechory Monastery on the Russian side, and the fortresses of Vastselina and Izorski in the south, in Estonia and Russia respectively, not only ground in space the distant memory of conflict from 'time immemorial', but also provide a material metaphor for re-narrating these lands today as a historical dividing line between West and East. Since 1991, this idea has been especially prominent in Estonia, where it has gained a particular symbolic meaning for the Estonian nationalizing state and identity, and has been extensively portrayed by the Estonian national elites as a barrier, demarcating two ethno-national place-identities, and even a 'civilizational' fault line, separating Europe and the West from its Other to the East. For example, in justifying Estonia's need for a tightly closed border with Russia, Estonian President Lennart Meri stated that 'It is precisely in the name of European values that Estonia needs a secure border ... Our border is the border of European values' (Lennart Meri 1993, as quoted in G. Smith et al. 1998).

Nonetheless, local narratives also clearly picture these territories in the recent past as a place of contact and connectivity. During the Soviet era, there was no border on the ground, and the rural areas on both sides of the administrative boundary around Pechory functioned as one localized transboundary network, sewing together the deep peripheries of two socialist republics. The distance from the republican centres and their governmental authorities, combined with poor transport connections to the 'main land' and a relatively well-developed network of roads with neighbouring regions across administrative lines, facilitated the formation of a distinct socio-cultural place with a common local identity, which was constructed across ethnic boundaries as well as across the line of the administrative division between Estonia and Russia.

Informal economic networks also contributed to framing this region as a transboundary place. The population freely commuted between the two sides of the boundary, taking advantage of differences in prices, supplies and services. Several villages situated right on this administrative divide lived a 'truly' transboundary daily life. For example, the inhabitants of Krupp (Russia) and neighbouring Saatse (Zacharen'e in Russian, a village in Estonia) worked in one collective farm, which embraced both villages and also neighbouring settlements in the two republics.

Besides secular well-worn routes of villagers' daily life, Orthodoxy and locally performed religious practices stabilized this place as an interactive network of social relationships. It is quite remarkable that since the time of its foundation (fifteenth century) the Orthodox Pechory Monastery has consistently been a very influential political and social act in this region and Russia as a whole, as both a military outpost and a religious centre, and held a special status even in Soviet times, under conditions of atheistic ideology. Krupp, Saatse, and the small surrounding villages
formed an ethnically mixed parish, centred on the church in Saatse. In local discourse the division between parishes was well articulated and emphasized (e.g. ‘this is our parish’, ‘those villages belong to another parish’), and the practices associated with local inhabitants of different parishes also varied. The services in the Saatse church were conducted in two languages, Russian and Estonian. This all creates a picture of a countryside unity-in-diversity lifestyle: the population - Setos, Estonians, Russians - going to the same church, sitting at the same cemetery while visiting their relatives’ graves, talking, and exchanging news and goods. In the words of one local, ‘at the cemetery we were eating their sausages, Estonians were eating our fish...’ (woman, Krupp village, Russian side, interviewed summer 1999).

Since 1991 enforced political borders have severed the ties that bound places and identities on either side of the border to one another and have disrupted the existing transborder space. ‘Having arrived’ (as the locals themselves say) in a ‘sleepy’ rural society, with its daily life arranged according to the laws of nature and agriculture, the border has brought new rules and regulations structured by the presence of the state. With all its signs and institutions, the border has formed a new general cultural background; the ‘border industries’, including visa services and customs and border posts, have become a part of a daily cultural landscape in the towns of Pskov and Pechory and in the villages of the region. The border has appeared as a new centre for this periphery, a core, a basis for building new networks of social relationships and new identities.

In comparison to other parts of the new borderland between Estonia and Russia, some specific conditions resulted in the formation of a distinct cultural space in the administrative area of Pechory district on the Russian side of the border. Three main factors determine this distinctive character: the ethnic composition of the district, the strong influence of the Orthodox Pechory monastery, and the contested political status of these territories. The interplay of these three characteristics, launched by the establishment of the border, changed the cultural landscape of this borderland and encouraged the enactments of ‘Seto’ and ‘Cossack’ identities.

Seto and Cossacks: Ethnic awakening

As one of the leaders of the modern Cossack movement recently reminisced: ‘About ten years ago I thought I was the only person on the planet who felt himself Cossack’ (interview, October 2000, St. Petersburg). It would not be surprising to hear a similar remark made by a Seto leader. Of course, both groups had ‘quietly’ existed before, as expressed in the exercising of some cultural practices in daily life, but the overwhelming processes of ethnic/national awakening in the USSR following the period of political liberalization at the beginning of the 1990s brought them from the level of folklore ensembles and ethnographic museums to active public discussion.

Among Setos and Cossacks there appeared leaders and activists, and the movements’ ideologies started to form. At first glance, these movements seem very different, in terms of both place and identity narratives and enactments.4 ‘The Setos’ are narrated as an aboriginal people living from time immemorial in the borderlands between Russia and Estonia, while Cossack narratives and enactments draw on both ‘ethnic roots’ and also on a pre-Soviet history of service to the Tsar, defending the borders of Orthodoxy and Otechestvo (Fatherland). Cossack discourses and practices developed primarily in a broad area on the southern margins of Russia, from the Black Sea to the Far East. However, Cossack organizations also appeared in many other regions which were not places of traditional Cossack settlement, but where the border of Russia was felt to be under threat, such as the southern border area between Russia and Estonia.

For both Seto and Cossack political and cultural activists, the border has figured as an important resource for their narration of group identity, just as the borderland has been an arena for group identity enactment. Applying Hage’s argument to these two cases,
I will examine the dynamic process of Seto and Cossack identity narrative construction and will demonstrate how motherland/fatherland discourses and practices of nationalism have been enacted through time in both cases. Even though, considered in the long term, both groups' identity narratives and enactments are dominated by one gendered modality over the other, there have been times in the recent history when the alternative gendered discourse of nationalization tended to predominate. I will suggest that these shifts between 'motherland' and 'fatherland' conceptualizations of place and identity occurred in response to fatherland nationalization strategies enacted by the two states, Russia and Estonia, at their political borders.

**Seto borderland enactment**

The demarcation of the border between Estonia and Russia played a crucial role in defining Seto identity. Before the establishment of the border, there was no coherent narrative that depicted what it meant to be 'Seto' or that bounded a Seto identity (on narrative identity, see Somers 1994). Seto social identity was narrated and enacted in everyday life at the local level, structured around parishes, collective farms, and other public spaces. As already mentioned, the Russian-Estonian frontier region was characterized by the high density of links between the neighbouring territories of the two socialist republics. Estonia, with its high living standards, looked very attractive for young people from the villages on the Russian side, 'Setos' and 'Russians' alike. Urbanization also affected the demography of this region, and by the time the border was established the Seto population living permanently in small border villages consisted mainly of women and the elderly whose adult children and their families were living in Estonian (and to less extent in Russian) cities. When the Soviet Union collapsed and the new states began to demarcate their borders, villagers of Seto origin, having migrated from the countryside, were gradually and silently absorbed into the cities of the two dominant neighbouring cultures. There were no serious obstacles to assimilation. Language was not a problem, as the Setos spoke a dialect of Estonian, and most of the young Setos were able to speak Russian. In addition, the word 'Seto' was not officially used, and from the Soviet state's perspective, they were categorized as Estonians in the national census. The dynamics of Seto assimilation, at least until the early 1990s, suggest that 'Seto' culture would have gradually disappeared had the new border not been introduced.

On the maps published in Estonia one can find two demarcation lines between Estonia and Russia: 'a temporary control line' and 'a border line' (e.g., Eesti Atlas 1996; Map of Estonia n.d.; In Time 2001). These lines diverge to a significant extent, especially to the south from the lakes of Pskovskoe and Chudskoe. The temporary control line followed the administrative borders between the Estonian and Russian Socialist Republics and was demarcated by Russia as a state political border, while according to the border line Estonia stretched a bit further to the southeast. This map is an illustration of the border dispute between Estonia and Russia over control of the Pechory district, expressed in Estonia's claim on the return of Pechory and its surrounding territory to Estonia, in line with the Tartu Peace treaty (1920). The 'gap' between the two lines framed the focus of the dispute, namely the contested lands that happened to be part of the territory of 'traditional Seto' settlements.

The territorial dispute between Estonia and Russia over Pechory district brought the name of Seto from the realm of ethnographic museums to high political discourse. The marginal Seto identity suddenly became a trump card in the hands of the politicians arguing for these territories. Thus, when the border dispute arose, essentialist discussions about what the Setos really are and where they truly belong acquired an important position in Estonian discourse and also appeared on the agenda of scientific and political circles in the Russian northwest. Politicians and intellectual elites on both sides became engaged in the process of 'rediscovering' and redefining the meaning of Seto place and identity according to their own contemporary territorial agendas.
Two ‘markers’ of Seto identity—the Seto language, which is close to Estonian, and Orthodox religious affiliation—which made this group marginal in the essentialized national narratives of Estonian-ness and Russian-ness respectively, nonetheless provided the crucible for this remaking. Stressing the language issue, the Estonian side introduced Setos as a ‘separated part of the Estonian people’, whereas the Russian side emphasized the uniqueness of Seto culture and their common Orthodox roots. For instance, fieldwork conducted in 1994 by the Institute of Geography at St. Petersburg State University concluded that the Seto people are an ethnic group with a distinct culture, which has been formed under the cultural influence of the Russian ethnos (Manakov 2002).

Almost ten years later, with the border question still unresolved de jure, Russia reasserted its position by giving Setos their own column as a separate and distinct nationality in the 2002 census. (Despite the fact that according to this census there are fewer than 180 Setos presently living in Russia, this recognition is highly valued by some Seto activists living in Estonia and is used as an argument in negotiations with the Estonian state whose census has no such category). On the Estonian side, the state-scale narration of Seto group identity has undergone a series of transformations along the lines of discursive exclusion/inclusion, departing from a very unfavourable, stigmatizing depiction of Setos as an uneducated people from a backward province who spoke an exotic language and practiced old-fashioned traditions, to the official recognition of Setos as a group with a distinct culture which should be maintained, and finally to the most recent trend of seeing the Setos as a premodern version of Estonian-ness, and Setomaa as one of few outposts of authentic Estonian rural culture in a Westernizing and Americanizing Estonian society (interview, Põlva department of Culture, summer 2002).

In dialogue with and also in opposition to the states’ efforts to redefine ‘the Setos’, Seto activists have been increasingly working on rewriting the Seto narrative from within. As with most national movements in the former Soviet Union, the process of active construction of the Seto collective identity began at the end of the 1980s, several years before the border demarcation. These internal Seto narratives and enactments were based on the idea of Seto cultural restoration, which emphasized feminine representations of place and identity.

Setomaa nationalization project: The construction of motherland
As pointed out above, the two gendered concepts of motherland and fatherland are ideal types and can only be separated analytically, always complementing each other in every project of nation building. The proportions of ‘motherly’ and ‘fatherly’ components are contextually determined, and hence are subject to constant change (Hage 1996). Nevertheless, at different times one gender modality plays a more active role in narrating and enacting national identity and homeland than the other.

The first acquaintance with Seto narratives and enactments of identity leaves no doubt about the role of women and feminine representations in the performance of group identity. Indeed, in public consciousness Seto culture is associated with the image of an elderly woman wearing national dress and playing traditional female roles, those of mother, teacher and keeper of cultural traditions. Long before the ethnic revival at the end of the 1980s, the Seto women’s national costume and traditional silver jewellery, displayed in museums and presented to the public at folklore and religious celebrations, had served as an identity marker of the group (Piho 2001). Knitted mittens, socks and sweaters with a distinct pattern, and beautiful home-woven tablecloths and towels made by Seto women were mentioned with admiration by many Russian informants from neighbouring villages. Another distinct characteristic of Seto culture, the Seto choir tradition of leelo, which involves improvisation and the ability to compose a narrative song at the moment of performance, was also maintained by women and made this group known far beyond the Seto settlements.

In the Seto case motherland discourses tended to predominate, and were apparent not only in cultural performances of the group,
but also in the rhetoric and actions of the movement. The maintenance and promotion of a distinct Seto cultural heritage became the main goal of the movement, initiated mostly by urban settlers with an education in the humanities (Jääts 1998). As Seto culture had been maintained predominantly through oral tradition and a living rural lifestyle, which was under serious risk of disappearing when the Setos moved to cities, it was necessary to find a means of producing a coherent unified group narrative that could be used internally, for bounding the group, as well as for presenting it to the broader public. The creation of a written language and the publication of some key texts, including the folk epic ‘Peko’ that depicted the main historical and cultural pillars of the Seto group imaginary, were among the first steps in this process. Besides these literary sites of memory, other monuments started to appear in different Seto settlements, stabilizing and embedding the fiction of Seto collective memory and identity in space, and paving the way for narrating the territory of Seto settlements as the Seto national homeland, Setomaa. For example, the leelo tradition made its way into the cultural landscape of Setomaa through the site commemorating Seto leelo singers, which was founded in the 1980s in Obinisā, on the Estonian side. Located on a hill at the entrance to the town, the site consists of several stones with the name-plaques of the most famous Seto singers, the glorious song mothers of Seto land. Dominating the site is a three-metre high figure, which represents a Seto song mother in national dress and traditional jewellery, who is looking down from the hill at a picturesque lake and valley. This site elevates song mothers to a position normally reserved for male war heroes and national liberators in most nation-building projects. For example, as I discuss below, this militarized, masculine type of imagery is prominently on display in the case of the Cossacks.

The Seto nation as a ‘fatherland’
As noted above, both fatherland and motherland discourses are present in every national narrative, but depending on changes in the broader social and spatial context one may be emphasized more than the other. Fatherland discourses are more militarized and exclusionary towards ethno-national others and tend to predominate when the nation and homeland are viewed by national elites as under external threat. The closing of the border and the division of ‘Setomaa’ represented just such a threat.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the uneasy relationship between Estonia and Russia, their political orientations and the great symbolic value of the border for the two nation-building projects (for Estonia in particular) left no illusions that this border would remain a ‘space of flows’ as it had been in Soviet times. Several years later, the encouraging negotiations with the European Union about Estonia’s admission widened the emerging discursive gap between the two countries and generated more anxiety along the border. As anticipated, these changes resulted in a gradual closure of the border and a tightening of the border regime for borderland inhabitants. When the border was first established, requests to cross it on religious and other occasions could be dealt with at the local level by supplying lists of names of those who wished to cross to the local border post, but by 2000 this was no longer permitted, and the state introduced a visa regime for everyone. Four thousand borderland inhabitants were given visas free of charge, a sharp decline in the number that had travelled freely across the border in previous years.

Though initially the leitmotif of the Seto movement was cultural, the establishment of the border and its subsequent transformation into a strict barrier led to explicitly politicized narratives and enactments of Seto place and identity. Fighting the two states for freedom of mobility across the border became one of the movement’s activities. Moreover, as a response to the nationalization of state border policies, more strident political claims for recognition of Setos as a ‘nation’ were heard in the declarations of the Seto Congress, along with the idea of cultural revival and maintenance. In 1996 the IV Seto Congress decided to submit an application to join the Unrepresented Nations and
Peoples Organisation at the UN, representing nations without states. The next gathering of the Seto Congress in 1999 went as far as to declare the Setos as a distinct nation with self-identification in the Estonian-Russian border region, to be counted separately by the official census of 2000 (IV Seto Kongress 1997; V Seto Kongress 2000: 79). In 2001, on the threshold of administrative reform in Estonia, Seto political leaders sought to support the establishment of a single Seto county on the basis of three parishes in the centre of the historical Setomaa, and appealed to the government to obtain the status of cultural autonomy for the Setos (Runnel 2003: 73). Based on a discursive analysis of the Seto newspaper Setomaa, Runnel (2003) concludes that while in the beginning Seto ideologists operated with a definition of the Setos as an ethnic group, they now presented the group as a repressed national minority. In Setomaa publications, the government, as well as Estonia as a whole, have been represented as hostile and negative to the Seto movement, whereas everything positive is connected to the movement’s achievements (Runnel 2003: 74). Nowadays, Seto ideologists make ‘visible attempts to “draw” the border discursively between Estonian and Seto culture, and to “cross” the Estonian-Russian state border as if it did not exist’ (Berg 2002: 117).

Thus, the ‘internal’ Seto narrative produced and replicated by Seto elites depicts Setos as a transborder community that has been living on its ancestral land for centuries, and whose daily life and distinct culture should be protected and maintained in its unity despite the current political divide. Seto political elites base their claim to the borderlands on narratives of long-standing if not primordial presence in Setomaa. In summer 2002 we asked one of the leaders of the Seto Congress how he determined the borders of Setomaa, and he replied with a lengthy account of the historical accuracy of these borders, stating that the region of Setomaa is a ‘no man’s land’, a buffer zone between east and west going back 1200 years. He emphasized that this was a trade route, mentioned the pre-Christian religious artifacts found there, and told us about the ‘mystery’ of the distance between the Izborsk and Vastselina

fortresses demarcating the territory – all in an effort to stress the ancient claim that Setos have to Setomaa as the ‘land between’. Several efforts have been made to nationalize the territory of Seto settlements, to stitch together two parts of the whole by (re)narrating this place as an ethno-cultural Seto homeland, the transborder region of Setomaa. Signposts appeared on the Estonian side to mark the borders of Setomaa on the ground; maps of Setomaa and tourist brochures which include the Russian part of Setomaa and tell the story of a divided community have been published; several Seto museums, monuments and important Seto heritage signs have appeared on both sides of the border; and cultural events are staged at different sites within Setomaa each year to help instill a sense of national identity throughout the region. Not surprisingly, most Seto activities that seek to construct a sociospatial imaginary of transborder Setomaa and Setoness are supported financially by the Estonian state, as their objectives fit well with Estonian geopolitical interests and advance the political position of the nationalizing Estonian elites vis-à-vis the political border with Russia. The construction of Setomaa as a Seto national homeland has achieved several goals, as it has not only created a comprehensive visualized Seto narrative for external and internal political consumption, but has also promoted cultural tourism, making the emerging Seto ‘cultural industry’ a big money earner in this region, which is suffering from economic decline.

If the museums on the Russian side commemorate a people and a culture that have gone, the goal of the museums in Estonia is to enact a living culture. The Seto Farm Museum in Värspa is designed to represent a Seto farmstead from the 1920s, but the architectural styles were drawn from all over Setomaa in an effort to nationalize the cultural representation of Seto-ness (interview with museum director, summer 2002). The Värspa Farm Museum also serves as the cultural centre of gravity for Seto preservation and maintenance, aiming to transmit Seto cultural heritage to the next generation. Many events, including cultural gatherings of local people, performances for tourists, as well as song festivals
and Seto Kingdom Days take place on the museum’s grounds. The museum also engages in outreach activities that include teaching Seto handicrafts and cooking.

While the state is building the ‘Seto wall’ (as this border is called by Seto activists), the Seto community not only regenerates old traditions, but also invents new ones, aiming to nationalize Seto cultural identity. This is an interesting example of how political tendencies and dreams about the ‘Seto nation’ are performed in the ‘soft’ sphere of culture and play. Every summer since 1993, a one-day ‘independent Seto Kingdom’ has been proclaimed. This colourful festival of Seto culture has no fixed venue and each year is held in a different village, on either side of the border. There is also no permanent King in the Seto Kingdom. As the newly born legend says, the Seto King is sleeping (because, according to the text provided on a Seto website, ‘the Seto people do not like rulers’) and the Seto people elect his Deputy. Games, dances and songs accompany these jocular elections. This feast appeared as an arena where Seto people from both sides of the border meet ‘to pass laws and show off their symbols as a way of demonstrating their cultural distinctiveness and unity despite the current political divide’ (Berg 1998).

The discourse enacted by Seto activists has achieved some of its goals. A nationalized narrative of Seto place and identity has been constructed, and there is international awareness of ‘the Setos’ and their problems. Perhaps most importantly, Seto activists were effective in forcing Estonia to deal with the problems caused by the border through the creation of a variety of socioeconomic and cultural programmes that support Seto enactments of identity not only on the Estonian side of the border, but also on the Russian side. Interestingly, most of these programmes are run by Estonia’s Interior Ministry, institutionally interiorizing Setos in Russia and the region of Pechory as well (interviews with Seto activists and local political officials in Pechory, officials in Estonia’s Interior Ministry, and the Estonian-language school director in Pechory, summers of 2002 and 2003). Nonetheless, the ultimate goal of this shift to a more prominent fatherland discourse - re-unification of Setos and Setomaa by eliminating the interstate border as a barrier to Seto movement and communal development - was not achieved. During the last few years, there has been a growing recognition that Seto out-migration and high mortality rates among the elderly Setos who remain have doomed a living Seto presence on the Russian side of the border. This has resulted in a shift back to a more prominent place for female narrators and enactors, and feminine narratives and enactments of Seto identity, and so has returned a motherland discourse to a position of prominence.

A handmade postcard on sale at the Seto farm museum in Värska in November 2004 provides a telling visual representation of contemporary gendered roles in Setomaa. The front cover shows a Seto woman in national dress who has turned her profile to the viewer and is walking with vigorous strides. On the back of the postcard is a Seto man whose figure is very relaxed; he is facing the viewer and is standing casually, without visible indication that he might be going anywhere. Most surprising, though, is the fact that the Seto man is there at all, since there are so few images of men in Setomaa. The artist’s idea may have been to bring a man into the Seto picture and to represent a people as a whole, but the way the postcard was designed obviously only emphasized the dominant role which feminine representations and discourses play in the construction and promotion of the Seto group narrative.

The arrival of ‘the Cossacks’

‘Some men wearing a strange uniform appeared on the Russian streets recently. An observer immediately notices the theatricality of their clothes, their numerous orders and medals which are undoubtedly self-made and their craving for high ranks - everyone is a colonel or a general’ (Rossiiskaia Gazeta, 22 January 1999). This is how one newspaper reported the introduction of ‘the Cossacks’ to the public in the 1990s. In the same manner, people enacting a Cossack identity appeared in the Seto areas in the Russian-Estonian borderland. As in the Seto case, for decades Cossack identity
enactments had been limited to folklore-type ensembles of song and dance. However, the dissolution of the USSR, the growth of centrifugal tendencies in Russia, and international and interstate conflicts on the Russian borders stimulated what was narrated as ‘the awakening’, ‘rebirth’ or ‘renaissance’ of the Cossacks (e.g. Khoperskaia and Kharchenko 1998; Markedonov 2001, 2004; Sagnaeva 1998; Tabolina 1998a, 1998b).

The (re)construction of Cossack collective identity began in response to the threat of exclusive, fatherland nationalism posed by Russia itself:

‘The Cossacks’ problem is a problem of a Russian population, living on the margins of the state... Many people in the South fear that tomorrow Russia will turn them down (as she did the millions of Russians in the ‘near abroad’), that they will be kicked out from these lands or, what is even worse, that federal troops will come to ‘protect’ them (V. Novikov, Round Table on the Cossacks’ problems, Smena, N. 90 (21379), 20 April 1996).

At its outset, the Cossack movement had declared as its goal the restoration of the Cossacks’ moral and ideological orders which existed before 1917, and which were rooted in Christian values and the concept of faithfulness to the state. By 1991, however, the movement’s original ethno-cultural and social goals had been relegated to secondary importance, and replaced by emerging political goals. Visual masculine representations, expressed in an emphasis on military uniform and symbols, and often aggressive behaviour, became a public enactment of exclusive fatherland sentiments in the emerging movement. In the context of the ‘atomization’ of Russian society and its transformation into a ‘union of regions’, the idea of national self-determination has become popular among a section of the Cossack leadership (Markedonov 2001). ‘The Cossack rebirth’ was no longer an abstract slogan, but had become real politics with aims of acquiring power (Khoperskaia and Kharchenko 1998: 87). Some Cossack ideologists have demanded the status of a distinct Cossack nationality to be included in their passports, and there have been calls for Cossack autonomous regions. All of these separatist discourses have been fairly typical for the extreme wings of ethnic organizations in post-Soviet space. However, compared with movements based on a clear ethno-territorial idea, the complex nature of the Cossack movement lends to its narratives of place and identity a number of specific features rooted in the historical mechanisms of the formation of ‘the Cossacks’.

The core contradiction of the contemporary Cossack project originates from the complex and multifaceted Cossack history which provides no simple answer to the question of how to narrate and enact a modern Cossack identity in accordance with ethnic and social boundaries in contemporary Russian society. Based on historical roles performed on the territorial margins of the Russian state, Cossack identity is also marginal in the sense that due to its complex past it can be located in two different categorical ‘spaces’, that of ethnicity on the one hand and that of a sociopolitical niche on the other. Under the Tsars, Cossacks held a special position in the Russian military system and in Russian society in general. Cossack identity was constructed around military service and total dedication to the Tsar and the state; these special functions, including border protection, were the main ways Cossack identity was enacted (Sagnaeva 1998). The Cossack community in Tsarist Russia was an inalienable and integral part of the Russian Empire’s fatherland project.

The idea of ‘Cossack ethnicity’, which has become a main element of modern Cossack identity narratives, is not new. When Cossack communities were given areas along the Don and in the Caucasus, some of them began to consider Cossacks a separate people within the Russian Empire. Remoteness from central authority and the absence of state regulatory systems in frontier regions paved the way for the formation of a specific form of government known as ‘Cossack democracy’. This system of
organization—along with other characteristics, such as specific 'Cossack' functions in Tsarist Russia and a different way of life from the rest of the country's population—encouraged the formation of 'ethnic' boundaries between Cossacks and non-Cossacks, and Cossack feelings of autonomy.

At the beginning of the 1990s, these two story lines of Cossack identity became the main focus of contestation over contemporary meanings of Cossackness. This definitional trap has gained particular importance, as it has become a core contradiction in contemporary Cossack narratives and, probably, the main boundary within a very heterogeneous Cossack community-in-the-making. This boundary separates supporters of the ethnic project from those viewing the modern Cossacks as a professional group, a military estate, reconfigured to the realities of contemporary society. The growing movement faced this dilemma even in its early stages when defining the criteria for membership in the group. As it was expressed by Boris Almazov, a writer and the first ataman (leader) of the St. Petersburg Cossack organization Nevskai Stanitsa:

'It was actually planned as an ethnic union of Cossack descendants. But we made a serious mistake. In 1991, at the first krug, I said: 'Guys, we are not a host, we are not an estate—we are a people. And we have to restore ourselves as a people.' They said: 'Well, then there are not enough of us. There are about 300,000 around the world. So if a guy is good, we will admit him. We'll admit everyone' (interview, October 2000).

If Seto identity narratives, spatialized in the contested territories between Estonia and Russia, have been formed in a dialogue with the two states and/or their local representatives (e.g., Pskov oblast' administration in Russia), and against the background of interstate and international relations, those attempting to create a coherent unifying Cossack idea are in constant dialogue with one major 'external' interlocutor—the Russian state, and many 'internal' ones, represented by a variety of Cossack organizations in different regions, pursuing different objectives and political interests. Due to this diversity, the composing of a cohesive Cossack group narrative has proved to be a difficult, even unrealizable task. Nonetheless, there are some ideas which find resonance among all branches of the Cossack movement, among which the concept of a Cossack separate people remains the most powerful.

This major myth of the Cossack movement is built upon the thesis of the genocide of the Cossacks by the Soviet regime. For more than a decade, this idea has been the main impetus for maintaining the discourse of exclusionary fatherland nationalization as the top item on the agenda of the Cossack debate. The legal basis for this is provided by 'the Law on Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples', adopted by the Russian Federation in 1992, which included Cossacks in the list of those who unjustly suffered from the Soviet regime. With reference to this law, some of the Cossack leaders claim rehabilitation, and restoration of historical rights and privileges as they were before 1917.

The popularity of this concept varies by geographic region. As Markedonov points out (2004: 539), 'in different parts of the Russian Federation the neo-Cossack movement demonstrates different attitudes towards the idea of a separate Cossack ethnic identity, which is determined by their interpretations of the Cossack genesis.' The formation of Cossack hosts in the northern Caucasus, beyond the Urals, in Siberia and in the Far East was a consequence of the policy of the Russian Empire and, due to this, is better supported with historical sources, unlike the long and multifaceted story of Cossack frontier communities in the south, which provides a wide range of interpretations.' While the Cossack leaders in the south tend to advocate an autochthonous version of Cossack origins in order to establish the grounds for restitutionist claims, those in the Far East emphasize the connection
with Russia and position themselves as Russia’s national vanguard (Markedonov 2004: 539).

State and Cossacks: Transforming into ‘fatherland’
As indicated above, it would be wrong to speak about the contemporary Cossack movement in generic terms, or to categorize the ‘Cossacks’ of Russia as a unified community-in-the-making. Since the time of its public reappearance, the movement and ‘its people’ have been torn apart along different lines and have experienced serious internal contradictions, which have made the creation of a unified group narrative a complicated task for Cossack ideologists and have also impeded the establishment of relationships with the society and the state.

If the Seto project, counterbalanced even in the moments of political irredentism by a strong cultural component, was comparatively favoured by the Estonian public, and many of its initiatives, especially those which were in accord with state interests, gained support from the Estonian state, the ‘rebirth of the Cossacks’ in Russia provoked a more ambivalent reaction. Public consciousness did not encourage the Cossack revival because of their unusual attire, their vague ideas and equivocal, often aggressive behaviour. Aimed at strengthening the Cossacks, the inclusive principle of membership had the opposite outcome, as it resulted in the integration of marginalized people and even criminals into the Cossack unions. As the quote below shows, at the end of the 1990s public opinion perceived the movement as a bizarre fusion of two mutually exclusive things - criminality and Orthodoxy - entering the realm of Russian politics: ‘Strange Cossack priests and false Cossack generals, many of whom have a well-known criminal past and present, are becoming important elements of a vulgar political circus’ (Nezavisimaja Gazeta, 18 December 1998).

As for the state, its attitude towards ‘neo-Cossacks’ (Markedonov 2001) can also not be viewed as unambiguously subversive or supportive. According to Cossack leaders, the state did not pay proper attention to the Cossack movement, and did not react quickly enough to its requests and needs. That the Cossacks represent ‘a great potential’ for Russia, which is ‘underestimated and underused by the state’, has been the somewhat resentful and indignant leitmotif of Cossack leaders since the movement first appeared. Indeed, the state has been playing the Cossack game as a rather cautious, albeit powerful, player. For a long time, the state’s position had remained unclear, until the military performance and belligerent behaviour of some elements in the movement, its growth in numbers and geographic scope, and the increasing instability in the relationships between the state and national separatist movements in the south heightened the demand for a special state policy. Not surprisingly, the state strongly denied the idea of Cossack ethnicity and took a step towards accommodating the Cossacks within the state fatherland discourse, having articulated its position as follows: ‘the state is interested in the Cossacks merely as a special form of state service. Even the hint of any ethnicity should be excluded from the notion of the Cossacks’ (Segodnia, 1 December 1997). The Cossacks, hence, are viewed by the state as a potentially ‘domesticated otherness’, defined as ‘an otherness which is subjected to a power that has shaped and positioned it such as it can service the needs of the domesticator’ (Hage 1996: 479). It is not difficult to find historical references for this position - the same policy towards ‘the Cossack’ was enacted by Tsarist governments in the period from the end of the seventeenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth century, during which the Cossack ‘nomadic machine of war’ (Deuze and Guattari 1988: 352, cited in Zherebkin 2002: 226) was suppressed and incorporated into the state body, and the Cossacks were transformed by the state into ‘a military-service estate’.

The state’s current ‘domestication’ of Cossacks began in the middle of the 1990s, with the adoption of several important documents, including the Cossack State Register and the Presidential Decree on enlisting the members of the Cossack organizations as border guards. The register, defined as a form of
state registration for Cossack organizations, the members of which are able and willing to carry out state service, provided the platform for a new relationship between Cossacks and the state. The adoption of the register narrated institutionally the division between the two overlapping, coexisting, and conflicting discourses of Cossackness as a professionalized life style and a separate people, where the followers of the former agreed to cooperate with the state on its terms and entered the register, while the advocates of the latter viewed the register with suspicion. Cossack opponents’ main objection is that the register excludes Cossack claims for the status of a distinct ethnic group, and actually labels them as a privileged estate (Khoperskaya and Kharchenko 1998).

Another document, the Federal Program of State Support for Cossack Organizations Included in the State Cossack Register, introduced a set of measures aimed at incorporating the ‘domesticated Other’ within the fatherland discourse of the state. According to this programme, the state will solve the Cossacks’ problems in three stages. During the first stage (1997–2000) it was planned to establish the main administrative bodies managing Cossack organizations. The main objectives of the second stage (2001–2005) are to establish a state system for Cossack troops, to set up a financial system, and to establish a system of personnel training. During the third stage (2006–2010), it is planned to establish a special type of state service: the Cossack service. Members of Cossack organizations who do Cossack service will receive the status of state employee (Segodnia, 1 December 1997).

As expressed in the programme, the main expectations of the state are that Cossack forces will help ‘to diminish national conflicts’ and will become ‘a steel border belt’ (Vremia MN, 24 March 1999). Taking into account historical experience and the fact that many Cossacks are located in the borderland of the northern Caucasus, the Far East and the Transbaikal area, it is supposed that Cossacks will be enlisted to serve on the ‘weakest’ segments of the border. Another clear reference to the former Cossack duties in the Russian Empire is the state policy that aims to establish Cossack settlements on some parts of the state border. It concerns in particular the new borders of Russia with the countries of the former Soviet Union. Under the Federal Program, the Cossacks will receive land for building farmsteads and the right to guard the border (though only on a voluntary basis, as assistants of border guards). For example:

the border with Kazakhstan is half-opened. Unfortunately, the border guards, due to the lack of resources, are not able to ‘lock’ the border. So, the people from neighbouring Kazakhstan steal hay from the Russian territory, fell wood, and smuggle. This segment of the border is also actively used for the traffic of drugs from the CIS countries to Russia. If the Cossacks, who know this area well, appear here (some Cossacks from Kazakhstan are also ready to move over), the raids of the neighbours will be brought to naught (Vremia MN, 19 May 2000).

This rhetoric turns the Cossacks into subjects of the fatherland, a “pure national will”, who can also die for it (Hage 1996: 478).

**Cossack enactments on the Russian-Estonian border**
The border with Estonia is not as extensive as other Russian borders, it is well-equipped, and it does not face the difficulties mentioned above. Nonetheless, it has been viewed as problematic by those enacting a Cossack identity. As a result, in the middle of the 1990s, Pechory district of Pskov region, along with some other parts of Russia that would not be referred to as ‘historically Cossack’ (e.g., Moscow, Kaliningrad and Murmansk), witnessed the appearance of Cossacks. My research shows that the Cossack movement has become institutionalized in many other regions where the state border is problematized, i.e. where, in the opinion of Cossack leaders, the Russian borders and the security of Russia are threatened. Cossack narratives constructed in ‘non-Cossack’
regions play down ethnicity in favour of professionalized enactments of a border identity. In these regions the protection of Russia's borders clearly plays the major role in bringing a Cossack identity into public being. Thus, the Cossack project in 'non-Cossack' regions is becoming an integral part of the broader nationalization project of the Russian state.

As seen above, the political debate between Estonia and Russia over the contested territories along the border was an enduring feature of Russian political discourse. Even nowadays, when the border tensions between the two countries have eased and Estonia has repudiated its cross-border territorial claims, some people in Russia - especially those of a nationalist orientation - see a potential threat in the Estonian policy towards the population of the Pechory region. As noted by the Pskov borderguard detachment, almost half of the population of Pechory and the old Russian town of Izborsk has Estonian passports (Kukhalskaia 2000). And it seems reasonable to suggest that for Cossacks who support the idea of a 'strong state' and whose ideology can be characterized as nationalistic rather than democratic or liberal, the border with such a 'biography' looks fragile. The problematization of border issues and the 'Estonization' of the population in the contested territories provoked a response from Cossacks in the early 1990s.

Newspaper reports and conversations clarified that those men whom we met in 1996 on the Russian side of the border were members of the Cossack organization 'Nevskaia stanitsa', located in St. Petersburg. The 'Nevskaia stanitsa' bought a farmstead previously belonging to a Seto family which - as was the case with many other Seto families - had moved to Estonia, and planned to turn it into a big Cossack settlement (stanitsa). As indicated in a Cossack document found in the archives of the St. Petersburg Migration Service, 'this experience can be taken as a principle for the establishment of the line of the Cossack stanitsas along the border with Estonia on the territories of Pskov and Leningrad regions'. The involvement of the Migration Service is also not accidental - the Cossack family whom I met during my follow-up visit to this borderland in 1999 had moved there from Kazakhstan, where, as in many other former Soviet republics, non-titular Others no longer felt secure, facing nationalizing policies of the Kazakhstan Government.

Visiting this region again in summer 2003, we found neither those people whom we had met in 1996, nor the family we had talked to in 1999. Several new families had moved into this village since our last visit. As one local man explained to us, the reason why this place had been so unstable and fluid in recent years was because there had been a struggle over these territories between different Cossack organizations, those of St. Petersburg and Pskov, both of which wanted to establish a Cossack settlement there. In his words, 'St. Petersburg's guys are more powerful, but Pskov is closer. I think they are still in conflict. Everything gets very complicated when it comes to Cossacks.'

'Are you a member of the Cossack register?', I asked a local Cossack leader. 'No', 'Why?', 'You know, we are sitting here.' Previously, this man was one of the leaders of a Pskov Cossack organization, but the internal conflicts and demagogy pushed him out. While narrating his Cossack identity, he now formulates it through a distinction between 'words' and 'doings', distancing himself and real Cossacks from the discourses and accentuating the practices. His parting from the city of Pskov and the Pskov organization can be interpreted as a move from a politicized public realm to a private 'homely' sphere, spatialized in a remote corner of the Russian-Estonian borderland. As he puts it, he and his fellow 'brother-Cossacks' moved here with their families not to speak Cossack, but to live Cossack:

There are concrete things to do; there are my brother-Cossacks who are next to me, with whom we perform our duties. At the end of the day, someone has to take care of our traditions. There is no need to talk about them; there is a need to live them (interview, summer 2003).
Enacting a Cossack identity includes, first of all, the protection of the borders of Russia and the maintenance of Orthodox traditions: ‘If there is a border, there should be Cossacks. To stand on the border is a duty of every Orthodox Cossack’, the man cited above continued. In his imaginary, ‘Cossacks’ are presented as an integral part of ‘Russia’, where ‘Russia’ is elevated and recontextualized from a materialized nation-state, existing in this time and place, to an idealized concept of eternal Orthodox Patria, which needs not only protection from territorial and spiritual, external and internal Others, but also careful and persistent construction from within. He and his fellows do this work locally, like the Cossacks of similar views who can be found all over Russia and who are also ‘sitting at remote farmsteads’ (сидят на кухорах) and living and acting Cossack traditions locally, unlike those who ‘become Cossacks from one election to the other.’ This broader network community is described by him in family terms – ‘it is difficult to explain our relations, we all are spiritual relatives, for example, I have ten godchildren myself.’ The upbringing of the younger generation in accordance with Orthodox traditions is depicted as the highest priority in their project of building the spiritual Patria. In order to realize it locally, they plan to convert one of the houses in their village into a Sunday school for Cossack children, who would come here from different locations to learn and enact Orthodox Cossack values. As in no other place, this particular borderland provides an inspiring cultural landscape for learning to be Cossack and performing a Cossack identity, as it is structured around such important iconic sites for the Cossack imaginary as the Orthodox Pechory Monastery and the border with ‘the Other’. Placed in a historical and relational context, for the last decade ‘the Other’ in the northwest of Russia has acted differently from the one in the south, which marks the shift in the local Cossack narratives and enactments from a prominent fatherland modality to articulated and enacted practices of motherland nation-building.

Conclusion

The new constellations of places that are being formed in this borderland can by no means be considered as stable, fixed and solid. The networks of social relations making up this place have proved to be so dynamic, and so elusive, that every time before going there and planning which old acquaintances it would be good to meet, I find myself thinking, ‘if they are still there.’ Old Seto inhabitants are moving across the border, some come back to their old houses for the summer, some do not, but the general tendency is obvious: a Seto living culture, if such a thing exists nowadays, is being relocated to the Estonian side of the border, making the transborder Seto community a living memory and a purely discursive construction. The tourist brochures from museums on the Russian side of the border either report that ‘the disappearance of an outstanding distinctive Seto culture’ is well underway or declare that its disappearance is already complete. The very fact of the existence of a private Seto museum in the former Seto village of Sigovo on the Russian side of the border reinforces this message. The organizer and the curator of this museum, Tatiana, a piano teacher, who moved here from St. Petersburg (Leningrad) fifteen years ago (‘escaping from the fuss and vanity of a big city’) is the only permanent inhabitant of this village now. She calls her collection a ‘museum – parting’ (музей-разлука) and vividly tells about those times when life in Sigovo and in neighbouring villages had been in full swing, until the closing down of the border wiped it out.

A Cossack identity has not yet been inscribed into the commemorative landscape and has not made its appearance in tourist texts or official narratives of these borderlands. Instead, it has been playing out ‘live’, and the number of its performers seems to be growing. As newspapers reported in September 2004, by the end of that year 150 Cossack families would be ready to move from Kyrgyzstan to the Pskov region, and more were planning to come in 2005.
The processes of re(de)territorialization of Soviet territory have created the space for the reconceptualization of these two identities. Even though these ‘new’ borderland identities seem very different, they have much in common. Both the border and ideas of the nation have played constitutive roles in the formation of the identity narratives of both groups, and the borderlands of the two states have become the arenas for their identity enactments, which in turn are variously perceived as acts of subversion, or support, of the two new states.

Notes
1. The conceptual framework for this chapter was elaborated together with Robert Kaiser, Professor of Geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA in the course of our collaborative work on the project ‘The Cultural Politics of Memory: Re-imagining the Past to Reclaim the Future in the Estonian-Russian Borderlands’. Most of the materials presented here were collected during our trips to the field in the summers of 2002, 2003, and 2004, and I would have never brought this work to a conclusion without Dr. Kaiser’s friendly and intellectual support. He contributed to this chapter no less than I did, and I am using this chance to express to him my deepest appreciation and gratitude. I am also very grateful to the editors of this volume, Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, for their support and trust. This chapter was written during research leave spent at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies in autumn 2004, and I am grateful to the Collegium and its members for providing a brilliant working environment and fruitful intellectual atmosphere.
2. This project was conducted by the Lake Peipsi Project (Tartu, Estonia).
3. Multiscalar narrative networks are not limited to state-local interactions, and involve transnational actors and institutions as well. However, even though transnational actors such as the UN are briefly mentioned in the text, a full elaboration of this scale is beyond the scope of the present chapter.
4. One of the striking superficial differences is the size of each group as claimed by state elites and activists representing these two groups. Several years ago the estimated number of Setos was about 10-15 000 people, of whom fewer than 1000 lived in Russia (Berg 2002). However, according to the Russian census of 2002, the number of Setos living in Russia had dropped to fewer than 180 people. As for the Cossacks, the census revealed that 140,000 people stated they were Cossacks, although Cossack leaders claim these figures are too low, and report that about 6-8 million Cossacks currently live in Russia (Izvestiya, 18 November 2003).
5. The border dispute between Estonia and Russia stems from the Tartu peace treaty, signed by the Russian Soviet Republic and the Estonian Democratic Republic in February, 1920. According to this treaty, the borderline between Estonia and Russia was moved eastwards, practically coinciding with the line of the Soviet-Estonian front at that time. A significant part of Pskov region, including the towns of Pechory and Izborsk, was given to Estonia. Thus, the whole territory of Setumaa went to the Estonian side. In 1940 Estonia was included in the Soviet Union, and the political border became an internal administrative boundary, the subject for change according to the USSR’s formal procedures. In 1944 some territories, including the territory of Pechory district, were joined with the newly established Pskov region and went formally under the governance of the Russian Republic. When in 1991 Estonia gained independence, the border question became one of the hottest issues in relations between the two countries. Estonia declared itself a successor of the first Estonian Democratic Republic and, following the principle of legal continuity, claimed the Tartu peace treaty of 1920 to be the foundation for Estonian-Russian relations and, hence, the territories of Pechory district to be returned to Estonia. Russia, from its side, started the demarcation of the border along the line that existed under the Soviet Union. For a few years the two sides could not agree on the border. Nowadays there is no border dispute between Estonia and Russia, although a final border agreement has still not been signed.
6. Since the time of its foundation, this site has been actively used for Seto folk festivals and other events. In 2004, the special issue of the magazine Eesti Loodus ("Estonian Nature") dedicated to the nature of this region, placed the image of the site on its cover page, once again declaring this place a Seto national landscape.

7. Boeck (2000) points out that the search for Cossack roots is complicated by researchers’ attempts to find a simple, ‘pure’ version of their genesis, without any cultural symbiosis. Considering the early history of the Don Cossacks, he emphasizes the importance of the frontier as a factor in the process of their origin. As he argues, it is typical in world history that distance from the centre and weak state power in peripheral regions have been common factors in the emergence of new, free communities. People forced to leave their homes as a result of social, economic, or natural disasters settled in areas lying outside the jurisdiction of already existing communities. Thus, frontier regions were incubators for new societies which had no opportunity or desire to reproduce the forms of social life of the centre. As other peoples formed in frontier conditions, Cossacks absorbed elements of different cultures.

8. Nonetheless, as Boeck (2004) emphasizes in relation to the Kuban Cossacks, in different historical periods — during the civil war and the mass emigration of the early twentieth century and in the process of the contemporary ‘Cossack rebirth’ — the participation of the Kuban Cossacks in the Russian imperial project did not automatically lead to ‘Russification’ of their identity; on the contrary, it reinforced their particularistic nationalist sentiments.

References


Newspaper articles:


Myth, rhetoric and political relations at the Istrian border

Lidija Nikočević

The old and new Croatian-Slovenian border

Thirteen years have passed since the establishment of state borders between Slovenia and Croatia, two republics of the former Yugoslavia that were formed into separate states after its disintegration. However, the establishment of these new state borders was not accepted without dispute; almost all the interested parties had objections to the border that was demarcated. Among these interested parties were, of course, the governments of the Republic of Slovenia and of Croatia, and the border populations themselves, whose parishes were frequently traversed by the new border, bringing with it numerous economic and social problems. While the governments had at their disposal the customary ways and means of expressing their own interests, the local inhabitants living beside the border (whose coherence and social compactness was reduced by the introduction of the state frontier) were not even asked for their opinions, nor have they found a way publicly to air their views and attitudes.

The unsolved issues of these maritime and land borders relate largely to the territory of Istria, the peninsula located on the extreme northwest of Croatia. The greater part of Istria belongs to Croatia, a small part to Slovenia (including some twenty kilometres of the Istrian coast), with only one small hamlet (Muggia) in Italian territory. In summer 2001, good will was manifested by Croatia and Slovenia when they agreed finally to sign a border accord. Slovenia was obliged to define its borders as one of the preconditions for its acceptance as a member of the European Union (which it joined on 1 May 2004). For its part, Croatia was interested in ratification of the agreement on border-area trade and