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## **Nested Peripheralisation: Remaking the East-West Border in the Russian-Estonian Borderland**

Alena Pfoser, Loughborough University

### **Abstract**

The break-up of the Cold War order, the eastwards expansion of the European Union into former socialist countries and the more recent economic and humanitarian crises have led to the emergence of new symbolic borders and the reconfiguration of spatial hierarchies within Europe. The article shows how metageographical categories of “Europe”, “East” and “West” and underlying classificatory logics are not only circulated in geopolitical discourses but can be appropriated by ordinary citizens in their everyday life. Using the Russian-Estonian border as a case study, the article examines the recursive negotiations of Europe’s East-West border by people living in the borderland as a response to the geopolitical changes. It highlights three border narratives – the narrative of becoming peripheral/Eastern, the narrative of becoming European, and a narrative contesting the East-West hierarchy by associating the East and one’s own identity with positive things. On both sides of the border, the status as a new periphery does not create unity across the border but rather results in multiple and competing border narratives, in which “Europe” functions as an unstable referent in relation to which one’s position is marked out. This “nested peripheralisation” at Europe’s new margins reflects power relations and uneven local experiences of transformation.

**Keywords:** *Europe, Eastern periphery, symbolic borders, borderland, everyday life*

## Introduction

The break-up of the Cold War order, the eastwards expansion of the European Union into former socialist countries and the more recent economic and humanitarian crises have significantly altered the position of Europe “as a place and as an idea”<sup>1</sup>. While in the context of the fading Cold War division, categories like “East” and “West” lost their traditional referents<sup>2</sup>, this did not necessarily result in the creation of a unified European continent shaped by principles of cooperation and solidarity and a cosmopolitan outlook, as some optimistic commentators believed, but in the reclassification of places and spatial relations and a reconfiguration of hierarchies. Merje Kuus<sup>3</sup>, for example, points out that despite the multiple transformations Eastern Europe has undergone since 1989, the East continues to be Europe’s negative “other” which is selectively reproduced in geopolitical discourses and institutional practices. Rather than a stable location, “Europe” from this perspective appears as a flexible constellation, with states sliding in and out of Europeanness depending, for example, on how they deal with the past, whether they follow political recommendations by European institutions and adopt certain economic and democratic principles. Classificatory processes are rooted in unequal power relations, however as a significant number of scholars have demonstrated, are neither homogeneous nor unidirectional: Eastern European countries are not passive recipients of external (Western) classifications but can appropriate metageographical categories to negotiate their position within the continent and in relation to their neighbours.<sup>4</sup> These processes often take a fractal form as dichotomous classifications at European levels recur at smaller spatial scales within or between nation-states.<sup>5</sup>

Russia and Estonia are particularly interesting cases for studying the remaking of Europe’s symbolic boundaries because they have been recently divided by the EU external border and their border has been characterized as a discursive battlefield shaped by polarized imaginations of political space.<sup>6</sup> Being situated at Europe’s margins, Russia and Estonia have adopted different strategies within these discourses on Europeanness. In Estonian public discourses, the border to Russia has been framed as a deep-seated civilisational divide between the East and the West. Foregrounding its “European” culture and historical heritage, Estonia has framed the fall of the Iron Curtain in terms of

a “return to Europe”, thus pushing the border of the West further eastwards to include herself while making the border with Russia as firm as possible.<sup>7</sup> While discussions over Estonia’s Northern identity indicate a regionalisation of geopolitical identity they remain a secondary geopolitical project in comparison to that of European integration. Although often considered Europe’s “constitutive other”, Russia too has selectively appropriated Europeanness in defining her geopolitical identity and has regularly depicted the Baltics as countries of lower civilisation. Russia’s relationship to Europe however continues to be marked by ambivalence shifting between attempts to achieve European recognition and a Russian *Sonderweg* stressing its cultural distinctiveness.<sup>8</sup>

Focusing on how the East-West border is remade and appropriated in vernacular narratives in the Russian-Estonian borderland, this article further explores the uneven, contested and shifting geographical mappings at Europe’s eastern frontiers. Drawing upon narrative interviews with Russian-speakers living in the border towns of Narva, Estonia, and Ivangorod, Russia, divided by the EU external border, it examines the recursive negotiations and reclassifications of places and spatial relations as the borderland undergoes peripheralisation. In doing so, the article foregrounds the processual dynamics through which borders are made and remade.<sup>9</sup> Authors working in the field of border studies have increasingly turned away from stable and functionalistic depictions of borders emphasizing their dynamism and multiplicity. Borders are created through processes of “bordering, ordering and othering”<sup>10</sup>, marking a difference between here and elsewhere and inscribing it with hierarchical values<sup>11</sup>. The focus on borders’ processual character and multiple determination has been accompanied by a parallel reconsideration of the actors of border-making, “disaggregat(ing) the state and the border in order to conceptualize the multiple actors and sites of borderwork”<sup>12</sup>. Chris Rumford, in particular, has made the argument for a “vernacularisation of border studies”<sup>13</sup>, considering how alongside state actors and political and cultural elites, ordinary citizens are increasingly engaged with the business of demarcating and policing borders. Ordinary citizens are crucial “actors in the constitution of borders, rarely bringing them into being or shifting their location, perhaps (although this is certainly not impossible), but active nevertheless in the processes of legitimisation and fixing of borders”<sup>14</sup>. While Rumford focuses on the regulation of mobility and securitization beyond the state and is less

concerned with the construction of cultural meanings and symbolic character of borders, these insights can also be used for studying the symbolic geographies of the East-West border. Vernacular narratives and experiences of the negotiation of the East-West border have been of relatively little concern in the writing on symbolic geographies, which have focused on boundary narratives by politicians, scholars and intellectuals, aiming to stabilise territory and naturalise relations between people, culture, and space.<sup>15</sup> Categories of “Europe”, “East” and “West” are however not only used in geopolitical discourses but are also employed by ordinary citizens to make sense of the changes in Europe’s border regimes as well as their changing locatedness within it. As I will show, making sense of their lives on Europe's new margins, people in the borderland participate in the making of symbolic borders and adopt and appropriate metageographical categories like “Europe”, “West” and “East” and underlying hierarchical understandings in space in their everyday lives.

Analysing conflicting border narratives, the article not only describes the construction of identity and difference on the level of everyday life, as for example in Ulrike H. Meinhof’s study<sup>16</sup>, but also looks at a much wider range of functions that border narratives have. Alongside micro-practices of inclusion and exclusion, border narratives are used for the articulation of complaints and citizenship claims. This reflects more recent work in the field of border studies that have emphasised how the meanings and practices of borders constitute acts of citizenships, acts that can have post-national characteristics.<sup>17</sup>

The article introduces three border narratives that are adopted in Russian-Estonian borderland: The *narrative of becoming “peripheral”/ “eastern”* focuses on the shift from being the “West in the East” to becoming eastern and backwards due to the geopolitical changes. The second *narrative of becoming “European”* instead foregrounds the emerging differences between both sides and appropriates the East-West hierarchy to associate Estonian Narva with a superior identity. In the third narrative, the *East-West hierarchy is contested* by reversing its valences and associating the East with positive things. This narrative is largely a response to assumptions about Narva’s and Estonia’s Europeanness. I will argue that the multiple ways of bordering in the Russian-Estonian borderland constitute the case of a “*nested peripheralisation*” at Europe's new margins

that reflect power relations and uneven local experiences of transformation. In an article published in 1995, Bakić-Hayden<sup>18</sup> introduced the concept of “nesting orientalisms” in relation to the example of former Yugoslavia to characterise the gradation of inferiority within the East. She showed that assumptions about superiority and inferiority between “West” and “East”, “Europe” and “non-Europe” recur within the margins, and labelling the other as less developed can be used to veil one's ascribed inferiority. This reproduction of the West-East distinction within the oppositional pair resembles mathematical fractals and, as Straughn notes, as a counter reaction to negative labelling processes it leads to the phenomenon of an eastwards-shifting East.<sup>19</sup> In place of Bakić-Hayden's “nesting orientalisms” I use “nested peripheralisation” to characterise the competing ways of ordering space to foreground the sense that all strategies of narrating spatial change are related to the peripheralisation processes that have occurred since 1991. On both sides of the border the status as a new periphery does not create unity across the border but results in parallel and competing projects of imagining space and constructing difference – making claims about one's superior status vis-a-vis the other or using assumptions about one's inferiority and Easternness to argue for symbolic recognition and financial benefits. In particular, people's locatedness on one or the other side of the border and the differing national trajectories and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in Europe shape the how the East-West border is continuously made and remade on the ground.

### **Narva and Ivangorod: Shifting Symbolic and Material Landscapes**

Within the polarised symbolic geographies between Estonia and Russia, the twin towns of Narva and Ivangorod on the Narova River form a terrain of ambivalent and contentious allegiances to East and West. In the past, Narva and Ivangorod experienced changing sovereignties under Danish, Livonian, Swedish and Russian rule and have therefore often been regarded as comprising a contested borderland between Protestantism and Orthodox faiths, “Western” or Russian influence. Despite the changing political rulers, the border towns of Narva and Ivangorod belonged to the same state since the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century and developed as an integrated settlement, with the smaller

Ivangorod forming a suburb of larger Narva.<sup>20</sup> When Estonia gained its independence in 1920, the two towns remained united as in the Tartu Peace treaty demarcated the border 10 km to the east of Narva.<sup>21</sup> Only after World War II, following Estonia's incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1944, was the border redrawn by Stalin using the Narova River as a line of division. The internal border between the Russian and the Estonian Socialist Soviet Republics formed an administrative division; Narva and Ivangorod had separate town halls, and important political decisions had to be made via Tallinn or Leningrad respectively. The border however did not hinder the towns from effectively forming an integrated settlement; over the years they developed a common labour market, public transportation system, infrastructural facilities as well as a unified water supply and canalisation. Despite some symbolic differences – it was considered to be more prestigious to live in Estonian Narva, for example – the sense of a shared space was constitutive of everyday life; the Russian-speaking population who moved to the borderland as part of the Soviet industrialisation programme and replaced its earlier multi-ethnic population, visited friends and relatives across the border, attended cultural events and buried their loved ones on the other side.<sup>22</sup> Since the restoration of Estonia's independence in 1991, the integrated border space has been socially and spatially transformed by the national logics and the economic changes happening with the transition to capitalism.<sup>23</sup> Local elites have started attempts at nationalising the borderlands, thereby marking the border as a dividing line between states and civilisations and selectively mobilising historical memory to reinforce the division.<sup>24</sup> On the level of everyday life, the hardening border regime had a great impact on the lives of the local population and created much frustration on both sides of the border. Alongside other turbulences of the transition, the negative impact of deindustrialisation and the status loss that Russian-speakers in Estonia experienced after the restoration of independence, many people had to rearrange their trans-border family relations, change schools, sell their dachas on the other side, find new jobs. In 1992 Estonia established a visa regime with Russia but first introduced a *propusk* system for locals with relatives on the other side to mitigate some of the negative consequences of the border drawing for the borderland. The simplified border-crossing regime was abolished in 2000 because of Estonia's approaching EU membership. Despite the bureaucratisation of the border-crossing, new forms of border-related interactions and

experiences have emerged since the early 1990s that use the border as a resource in combatting shifting regimes of value.

Examining local negotiations of the changing border regime, the article draws on several months of fieldwork in the borderland between 2010 and 2012 and 58 life-story interviews with people living on both sides of the border. The interviews were semi-structured with large narrative part, focusing on different aspects of life and perceptions of place in the borderland.<sup>25</sup>

### **“Here Is Where Russia Ends”: Becoming a Periphery**

Iuliia, a retired factory worker, had experienced the changes in the border regime particularly intensely. The border ran directly through her family – she was based in Ivangorod, her husband in Narva – and the increasing regulations and queues at the border crossing constituted a violent intrusion into her personal life. Our interview formed for Iuliia a platform to articulate her demands for local cross-border mobility but also to make more general complaints about the lack of care for their predicament by the Russian state:

As far as I know in the whole world everybody who lives in a border town receives some subsidies. Additional work places are created so that people can live comfortably. Here they only take from us, everything is only getting worse and worse. (...) There are no positive incentives so that we could feel that we are representatives of Great Russia, that here is where Russia begins. Here is where Russia ends; this is how it turns out.<sup>26</sup>

Iuliia’s expression “this is where Russia ends” was emblematic for the changes the Russian-Estonian borderland has gone through in the past decades, from being the Soviet Union’s western borderland to becoming a national periphery. During Soviet rule the industrial region around Narva and Ivangorod was considered economically and culturally more advanced than other parts of the Soviet Union due to its distinct historical heritage and developed consumer culture. The fall of socialism, the decline of the local industries and cutting off of relations however turned the once lively social and economic cross-border space into what one participant characterised as an “appendix”, a useless

and remote place without a future. The narrative of peripheralisation was based on assumptions about the reconfiguration of space from being the “West of the East” in the past to becoming eastern and relatively backwards, and was based on a self-description as an inferior East. It was adopted both in Ivangorod and Narva, with mirroring assumptions of one’s own inferiority and related sentiments (nostalgia about the past, indignation or resignation about the present). Elderly people who had own experiences of life under socialism and those who had had difficulties in adapting to the changes contrasted their memories of past wealth and well-being to an alienating present. Becoming “peripheral” or “eastern” was not, however, a uniform or unifying narrative. Rather, “eastern peripherality” was experienced differently on both sides of the border and reflected locally specific idioms of marginality shaped by different national trajectories.

<insert Picture 1 here> *Picture 1: Street on the Parusinka Peninsula, Ivangorod (author’s photo, November 2011)*

Andrei, a retired engineer and active chess player, lived in a small flat on the Parusinka island in Ivangorod, a 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial zone now constituting a particularly desolate part of the town (cf. *Picture*) with crumbled asphalt streets and buildings. Looking out of the window from his kitchen, Andrei reflected on the town’s changing status and his own difficulties of making a living in the present since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

How many destroyed houses do you see if you go for a walk on the Parusinka? There used to be a wonderful restaurant with an interesting interior design at the final bus station. On the other side there was a restaurant and a shop. In the factory thousand people used to work and now maybe a hundred are left. Can you see the red house with the letter “P”? [Andrei pointed to an uncompleted structure] A structure for a military institute was built there that should be moved to Ivangorod from Krasnoe Selo. But then this unfortunate time happened... I don’t have words to describe what is happening now.<sup>27</sup>

The empty and demolished buildings and idle factories of the Parusinka formed in Andrei’s eyes, spatial signs of economic and social decline. The privatisation and

movement of production sites elsewhere had left behind a transformed urban space in which together with the industrial work, local infrastructure, commerce and leisure activities had been closed down. Andrei linked his observations to a more general reflection on Ivangorod's locatedness within Russia:

Putin and Medvedev are people with common sense but they can't bring any order, you know. They care about stability in Russia, and therefore they have to be in power, and to be in power they have to feed the metropolis with millions of voters. Then they will have the majority in the Duma. But we, the province, a remote place (*zakholust'e*) we don't see these changes. There, they move to new flats but here this house is the newest one.

While for Andrei the fall of socialism was the main reason for Ivangorod's peripherality, in his narrative it was interpreted not only in terms of relations between past and present but also in terms spatial relations – as a result of the spatial inequalities between the centre (Moscow and St. Petersburg) and the periphery. Although some of my interlocutors valued “life in the provinces” because of the peacefulness and nature, a sense of being left out of the relative progress happening in the administrative and cultural centres was dominant: “nobody needs us... it is as if we don't exist”, as Iuliia put it. Ivangorod had been cut off from its larger sister Narva, and due to “hyper-centric hierarchical structure of the Russian state”<sup>28</sup> with a concentration of capital, power and signs of a capitalist modernity in its two metropolises it now formed a remote place despite its relative geographical proximity to St. Petersburg.

Deindustrialisation had also affected economic and social life in Estonian Narva, but in contrast to Ivangorod, the peripheralisation process had an additional ethnic dimension, reflecting the different national contexts of the transformation: becoming peripheral was also interpreted as a result of an ethnic nationalisation directed against Narva's Russian-speaking population. A number of policies were adopted in the 1990s to restore national independence and sovereignty after Soviet rule. These policies privileged ethnic Estonians and others who could trace their roots back to the First Estonian Republic and disempowered Russian-speaking Soviet-era migrants who were perceived as occupants or colonists.<sup>29</sup> Being deprived of automatic membership in the national

community, Russian-speakers in Narva felt doubly marginal – excluded both inhabitants of a peripheral post-industrial place and because of their ethnic origin. Mariia, like Andrei a retired engineer, foregrounded the role of “national consciousness” and the national construction of a Russian threat in the peripheralisation process.

During the Soviet times not everything was as bad as they try to imagine it now. There were a lot of things which were much better... I do understand the national consciousness but like this, it was without grounds. How did it turn out? Everything was destroyed and now? (...) now this is a downtrodden district... Why was it done this way? Why? Can it really be that ... they are afraid of Russia and therefore they stain the image of all Russians living here? One should not do this.<sup>30</sup>

Rather than “escaping the east” and “returning to Europe” – a narrative commonly mobilised to frame the transition in a positive way – many of Narva’s Russian-speakers saw themselves as turned into “easterners” by the reconfiguration of Europe’s borders and the logics of the nationalistic and capitalist transformation that accompanied it. Despite shared imaginations of an inferior status, narratives of peripheralisation drew upon diverging experiences and positionalities in Narva and Ivangorod and hardly created an imagination of a common space transcending national borders. As a relational category “peripherality” was bound to a centre; it was used to define one’s place as an internal other within the new national and global geographies. Inhabitants looked inwards from the margins and rarely across the border and articulated claims in relation to their own state as part of their narrative of peripheralisation, demanding state care, financial subsidies and recognition as well as the easing of the border regime. In the statement quoted earlier, Iuliia complained that Ivangorod ought to be Russia’s gate and an embodiment of its greatness. Based on imaginations of how a border town should look like she made use of Ivangorod’s locatedness to articulate her expectations of a better life. Narratives of peripheralisation thus were based on a reinstatement of inferiority – of having become an internal periphery – and simultaneously, a wish to escape it.

### **“Becoming European”: Negotiating Local Differences**

Despite the economic and financial crises and internal divisions, the category of “Europe” is a largely positive trope in the making of symbolic geographies in post-socialist countries and often continues to be associated with economic progress and cultural superiority. In Estonia, the narrative of a “return to Europe” after 1991 has been prominent in Estonia’s political discourse to mark one’s belonging to a superior cultural space and historical trajectory. In contrast to the topos of a “lost modernity” articulated in the narrative of peripheralisation and the self-description as inferior and internal other, the category of “Europe” was also adopted locally to make sense of different trajectories and economic inequalities within the borderland. Narva has seen changes in urban space since the late 1990s: streets have been refurbished, several cafes were opened and also shopping malls have been erected, including cafes and restaurants, a cinema and shops with Western brands. These changes created an image of urban renewal despite the difficult economic situation, which was missing in Ivangorod. Drawing upon the emerging local differences between the sides, uneven national trajectories and older symbolic boundaries in the region, several respondents on both sides of the border interpreted the changes in Narva as westernisation, a spatiotemporal rapprochement to Europe.

*<insert Picture 2 here> Picture 2: Shopping Centre “Fama Keskus”, Narva (author’s photo, Sept 2011)*

At the end of the interviews, I usually showed my respondents several pictures of characteristic sites in the borderland to elicit place-specific memories and meanings. When I showed Elena, a student at the local college, the picture of Fama Keskus, a recently opened shopping center in Narva, she said decisively: “This is already Europe. Hello, hello Europe!” Then she commented on other images of the closed textile manufacturing plant “Krenholm” and the “friendship bridge” between Narva and Ivangorod, both symbols of Soviet Narva:

This is what Narva was. Beautiful, mostly beautiful. The Krenholm factory, the friendship [bridge] and ...[pointing to the picture with the shopping centre] this is already Europe! With all brands, trends, Ray Bans

– look, Germany is everywhere! It is good that we are starting to find a way out (*vyrulivat*). Maybe the salaries will be like in Germany sometime.<sup>31</sup>

Growing up in a working class family constantly lacking money, Elena embraced everything she considered European and was very conscious in her attempts to achieve what she called a “decent life” – primarily reflected in her consumer desires. As Daphne Berdahl notes, consumption works as “a central organizing category and metaphor for the dynamics of East-West relations”,<sup>32</sup> and also for Elena it was mainly by spending her time in the local shopping centre and demonstrating her awareness of brands that she associated herself with “European” places and expressed her ambitions for a better life. In her brief comments on the photographs I presented, Elena describe the coexistence of different places within Narva, assigning them to different times. “Europeanness”, used to characterise the shopping center, has a positive connotation and is linked to a specific imagination of modernity and consumerism that coexists with other inferior places and times that symbolise industrial work and Narva’s connection to Russian Ivangorod. Elena’s narrative was shaped by a hierarchical ordering of spaces in which an imagined “West” served as a model and in which Tallinn ranked higher than Narva, and Germany higher than Estonia. Narva was not completely European but on the way of becoming it. These nesting place identities were particularly important to mark a difference to neighbouring Ivangorod and Russia. According to her, what set Narva and its population apart were not only socioeconomic but also cultural differences based on different imaginations of a “normal life” and consumer desires, or, to put it differently, it was the will to “escape the east” and the rejection of the values associated with it which made her superior to her neighbours.

While younger people like Elena usually focused on *socioeconomic* differences between Narva and Ivangorod and saw Europeanness as a positive departure from the Soviet past, the formation of *cultural* differences between Russians living in Russia and Estonia was evoked across generational divides, drawing upon long-established symbolic boundaries in the region. Particularly older participants rooted Estonia's European character in experiences of the Soviet period. People who had moved to Narva from other Soviet Republics referred to an adaptation process through which they had become more

“Estonian” or “European”, speaking differently, becoming quieter and more ordered and generally more cultured.<sup>33</sup> The narrative of “becoming European” adopted elements of the elite discourse – the assumption of Estonia's cultural and economic superiority vis-à-vis Russia and Russian-speakers – while at the same time appropriating it to serve different purposes. Framing themselves as “European” was a way of constructing belonging to a superior economic and geocultural space and marking a difference vis-à-vis Russia. Through this narrative Russian-speakers who were usually seen as non-European inserted themselves into the symbolic geographies of Europe and countered constructions of “otherness” within Estonia.

Narratives of “becoming European” functioned not only as a self-description in Narva but were also used in Ivangorod attributing a higher status to the other side and by implication accepting an inferior, non-European status for oneself. Assumptions about the other's superiority in this case were a means of expressing higher individual aspirations and on the collective level were linked to claims-making. Ivan, a young engineer, recalled that he was shocked when he went to Narva for the first time, almost 20 years after the erection of the passport controls: “You cross the river and there is a different town, a different country”. In contrast to the stagnating town of Ivangorod, “there is a cinema, chain of shops... or rather the quantity of shops... there is some choice”<sup>34</sup>. Vera, who worked in the town administration, made a similar observation stressing the sensual, legal, cultural and economic characteristics that made Narva distinct from Ivangorod:

When I cross over to Narva and enter a building or something else, well I go and say that it even smells (differently) (...) this is already a part of what makes Narva different, and there are different rules, although Russians inhabit large sections of the city, anyhow, you feel that this is already Europe. The way everything is organised, I don't know why but when you go and take a taxi you have to use the seatbelt (...) and in regard to the shops there have been already such supermarkets opened and you go there and they are European, unlike ours.<sup>35</sup>

For some inhabitants of Ivangorod the access to a locally experienced Europe (through the access to leisure activities and shopping) added to their place experience and made life in Ivangorod more interesting. By acknowledging their neighbour's Europeaness

their own peripheral situation became less of a burden and almost achieved an elevated status because they were close to (European) Narva and everything it offered. Others, however, used the local differences to complain about the situation in Ivangorod and to reinforce the argument about Ivangorod's need for development. Ivan said that he was so frustrated with the lack of development that he had taken steps to prepare his relocation to Narva – he attended an Estonian language course and registered himself in Narva – to increase his personal opportunities, which he saw easier to realise in “Europe”.

Perhaps the most radical assertion of Estonia's superiority came, however, in a petition initiated by the City Council Deputy Iurii Gordeev in 2010 that demanded Ivangorod's annexation to Estonia and was signed by over five per cent of Ivangorod's population. It followed an earlier petition from 1998 and was at least partly a response to the downsizing of the local budget due to administrative restructuring. In 2007, Ivangorod had lost its regional autonomy and as a consequence lost 50 million roubles. This administrative change reinforced the local decline and dramatically affected possibilities for public investments. Responding to this situation, the petition launched in 2010 declared that “the arbitrary rule of our bureaucrats as well as the absolute indifference of the regional powers regarding our problems forced out to take this step”.<sup>36</sup> As it was stated by the initiator himself in multiple interviews, rather than questioning the territorial integrity of the Russian state from within, the petition should be interpreted as a deliberate provocation to raise awareness of the local situation. One of its signatories explained its purpose in the following way:

I would be for giving Ivangorod to Narva, so that we could at least have what they have there. If you come from Narva to Ivangorod you can feel the difference, right? You feel it. (...) Of course, Russia would never give up Ivangorod – this is all too clear. (...) Okay, so don't give it up. But then at least put things straight in Ivangorod... You shouldn't treat a town like this!<sup>37</sup>

By contrasting Ivangorod to Narva and demanding a shift of the border eastwards to include oneself into a more privileged space, claims for state care are underlined. At the same time, speakers mobilise images of a socioeconomic border between Narva and Ivangorod.

## **Reversing the East-West Hierarchy**

Several of the interview excerpts demonstrate the circulation of the rhetoric of Central and Eastern Europe's inferiority and otherness in the borderland as a result of Europe's shifting borders and the economic decline and symbolic marginalisation. The rhetoric of inferiority, asserting the lack of markers of modernity such as successful market economies and democracies following the Western European model, is commonly used within the region.<sup>38</sup> In the border narratives discussed above claims about one's inferiority function not only in terms of a self-critique but as a rhetorical device to articulate demands and asserting political actorhood.<sup>39</sup> Reinstating the East-West border and positioning oneself outside of Europe in this case serves as a weapon of the weak to draw attention to one's deservingness. Easternness can however be used in yet another way: as a means to express positive belonging and to mark one's membership in a community by reversing the valences of the East-West hierarchy and associating "Easternness" with positive things.<sup>40</sup> Focusing on expressions of provinciality and otherness in Lithuania, Neringa Klumbyte emphasises how Easternness becomes a "local asset" and marker of "a positive national ideology"<sup>41</sup> based on a reevaluation of otherwise marginalised identities, tastes and desires<sup>42</sup>. This alternative, positive conception of Easternness has a long history in Russia, and Prozorov<sup>43</sup> shows in an analysis of political discourses in Russia how it is currently linked to the reassertion of Russia as a sovereign state: the felt exclusion from Europe has led to the replacing of European-centered national identity constructions with anti-European ones.

In the Russian-Estonian borderland we can observe similar dynamics; as a response to Narva's Europeanisation and feelings of exclusion resulting from it, people living in Ivangorod reversed the valences associated with the East-West border. While acknowledging Narva's more advanced socioeconomic and technological development, it was evaluated as negative change that destroyed social relations. Aleksandr, a shop owner who had grown up in Narva and had taken up work in a factory in Ivangorod after completing his studies in 1988, was among those who criticised the emerging differences

between the border towns. Aleksandr remembered his Soviet childhood in the borderland with nostalgia:

The Soviet memories are much more sincere than now. When you go to Narva... I don't experience Narva as European, Europeanized. I just walk through the backyards and notice how everything has changed, how even the walls are unfriendly... Russian people, who live in Narva tell us, the Ivangorod people, that... "Excuse me, we are Estonians". I say: "You are Russian. How can you [say you're Estonian] because of such a nonsense...?" How is this possible? Why is there such a division... That they are in Narva, they are in Estonia, in Europe. They think "we are one step higher than you, and you are ... who are you at all?" That means there is such a division in consciousness which has happened here.<sup>44</sup>

Aleksandr's statement conveys a sense of a difference and estrangement that he contrasted with the shared past of his childhood. He nostalgically remembered the times of unity and mobilised a shared ethnic identity across borders, and criticised how both materially and mentally Narva had turned away from Ivangorod and its inhabitants now thought of themselves as superior than their eastern neighbours. Aleksandr himself rejected the use of the category of Europeanness for Narva because of the hierarchy between the sides that it implied. However, complaining about Narva's (Western) arrogance and re-evaluating his relation to Narva, he himself participated in bordering processes: he said that due to his negative encounters, he had stopped visiting Narva "I wouldn't even take Narva as a gift". Particularly the commercialisation of the relations to Narva were criticised, as Narva's inhabitants were said to have turned from friends and neighbours into arrogant costumers who just come to buy cigarettes and leave.

Refusing to visit Narva and/ or refusing the character traits associated with it, residents of Ivangorod reproduced the border through practices of self-exclusion. Negotiating their own locatedness outside of "Europe" or the "European Union", some of my respondents positively valued Russian collectivism vs Western individualism, disorder vs strictness, solidarity vs competition – for example when contrasting the cold consumerism of the other side to the good neighbourly relations in Ivangorod. When I asked Iuliia, whether she would like to move in with her husband in Narva, she said:

I was born in Narva, it is my home [*moia rodina*]. But now, I don't want [to go there] anymore. I tell you why. I have an Estonian mobile phone connection and a phone with a Russian mobile phone connection. And then there is still the Ivangorod phone connection: when you have little money you call through the window. Plus I can still go to my neighbours and say "Listen, I am very hungry, I don't have anything at home, please feed me!" well this is possible here, but not anymore in Narva, there is "Europe". It hardly ever happens. But this is such a good thing!<sup>45</sup>

Local networks of support and exchange in Ivangorod characterised by neighbourliness and mutual help are contrasted to a "Europeanized" Narva where people presumably have more distanced relationships. Interestingly, the practices of support emerge out of a situation of need – experiencing financial shortage or lack of certain goods – but in this case have positive connotations as they are linked to constructions of community and solidarity which get lost with the European modernity. A response to uneven post-socialist change, the reversal of the East-West hierarchy in the case of Ivangorod is a way of dealing with disappointments and attendant feelings of inferiority. Rather than aiming to "catch up" and become more similar, characteristics associated with the "East" are embraced and are used to mobilise a positive sense of local and national belonging. Although the valences of the East-West hierarchy are reversed, the refusal of Western superiority is similar to the previous narratives in that, first, it does not question the essentialist character traits associated with both geopolitical poles and, secondly, shares the similar sets of characteristics assigned to East and West, e.g. development vs backwardness, rationality vs emotionality. This reflects, as Lewis and Wigen note in their discussion on symbolic borders between East and West, "a remarkable congruence in the contours of their respective cultural stereotypes."<sup>46</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The examples I have used provide some insights into how people living on Europe's new margins make sense of Europe's shifting geographies and negotiate their locatedness within them, drawing on diverse objects, practices and values (like for example,

abandoned buildings, consumption practices and ideas about living together). The interviews clearly show a sense of difference, which has emerged in the once integrated and ethnically relatively homogeneous border space. Most of the borderlanders had initially perceived the border with its material manifestations and increasing regulations as something, which was imposed from above; however, in making sense of their position at the margins and within a hierarchically structured system of spatial divisions, they participated in making it stick.

Within the multiple configurations of the East-West dyad, competing imaginations of modernity and civilizational progress served as the lenses through which advantages of being “western” or “eastern” were discussed. The narrative of becoming peripheral focused on the experience of socioeconomic decline within the new geographies and used assumptions about one's backwardness and lost Soviet modernity for claims making. The other two narratives identified in the article, the narrative of becoming European and a narrative contesting the East-West hierarchy, emphasised the local production of differences. Adopting the East-West hierarchy, Russian-speakers living in Estonian Narva constructed themselves as more European than their Russian neighbours, thus marking (and reclaiming) belonging to a superior space. People living in Ivangorod shared similar assumptions about Narva's Europeanness to express their own backwardness and need for development. The counter-narrative to this Europeanisation and the exclusion it produced for Ivangorod was to reverse the East-West hierarchy and to associate one's side with positive connotations. The East in this case was not a negative ascription and a place to escape but was embraced as a better alternative to Europe's individualism and rationality.

Rather than questioning the East-West divide and mobilising cross-border spatialities, all three narratives reaffirm and reproduce spatial differences – although the valences and people's own position within this hierarchy diverge. Even the narrative of “becoming peripheral” which at least potentially could be appear as a shared narrative between the sides was bound to an imagination of being divided from each other, positioned at the “edge” of respective national geographies. This does not mean that the borderland was purified of alternative spatialities, familiar landscapes of cross-border friendships, work and leisure. However, what one could observe here is a reconfiguration

of these relations: as people tried to make sense of the geopolitical changes, they adopted the East-West distinction, invested it with local meanings and appropriated it for claim-making.

The narratives make clear that the East-West hierarchy is not only defined in geopolitical discourses at the European level but also recurs at smaller spatial scales as rank differences are reproduced and negotiated within the periphery. As powerful classifications about places and people are made at the European level in the aftermath of the financial and economic crises, peripheries do not necessarily form sites in which spatial hierarchies and border narratives are resisted but are themselves involved in classificatory struggles over Europeanness, its location and content, drawing upon metageographical categories and cultural assumptions embedded in them as cultural resources to articulate claims and frame one's experience of Europe's shifting geographies. Rather than marking a clear line between Europe's inside and outside, the EU external frontier is better conceptualised as a field of multiple and competing border narratives, in which "Europe" functions as an unstable referent in relation to which one's own position is marked out. As Klumbyte writes, the process of Europeanisation is a "contested and fragmentary cultural process that exists through its various local rearticulations"<sup>47</sup>, something that becomes particularly apparent at its margins. The case of Narva and Ivangorod is distinct in that the borderland is ethnically relatively homogeneous, and Russian-speakers living in Narva use the East-West dichotomy not only in relation to their cross-border neighbours but also to negotiate their status as an ethnic minority and internal "other" within Estonia. Claiming "Europeanness" in this context means not only to differentiate themselves from Russia but also to claim belonging within Estonia and the EU. Furthermore, the self-exclusion from Europeanness in Russian Ivangorod can be seen as part of the reassertion of Russian national identity as distinct from and opposed to Europe.

On a general level, the article demonstrates both the relevance and openness of "Europe" as a classificatory label at Europe's margins: it shows the difficulty of escaping these East-West oppositions in a context where economic asymmetries, the politics of nation-building and EU border enforcement have immediate reverberations in everyday lives and create a need to reevaluate places and identities. Classificatory schemes help to

make sense of experiences and imaginations of difference and exclusion and allow people to express hopes, aspirations and disappointments, acquiring localised meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Green, "Borders and the Relocation of Europe," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, no.1 (2013), 345.

<sup>2</sup> Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, *Rethinking Europe. Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization*. (London, NY: Routledge, 2005), 36.

<sup>3</sup> Merje Kuus, *Geopolitics Reframed: Security and Identity in Europe's Eastern Enlargement*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Merje Kuus, "Europe's eastern expansion and the reinscription of otherness in East-Central Europe," *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>4</sup> Maria Mälksoo, "The Memory Politics of Becoming European: East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe," *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2009); Elissa Helms, "East and West Kiss: Gender, Orientalism, and Balkanism in Muslim-Majority Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Slavic Review* 67, no.1 (2008); Kuus, *Geopolitics Reframed*; Kuus, "Europe's eastern expansion"; Sabina Mihelj, "To be or not to be a part of Europe: appropriations of the symbolic borders of Europe in Slovenia," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 20, no. 2 (2005); Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995).

<sup>5</sup> On fractal recursivity cf. Judith T Irvine and Susan Gal, "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation," in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2000), 38. Andrew Abbott, *Chaos of Disciplines* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001). Michal Buchowski, "The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother," *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no.3 (2006). Jeremy Brooke Straughn, "Wo "der Osten" liegt. Umriss und Ambivalenzen eines verschwundenen und verschwindenden Landes." In: *Der Osten. Neue sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf einen komplexen Gegenstand jenseits von Verurteilung und Verklärung*, ed. Sandra Matthäus and Daniel Kubiak (Springer VS: Wiesbaden 2016), 195-223.

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<sup>6</sup> Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin, eds., *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic-Russian Relations and European Integration* (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Mälksoo, "Memory Politics of Becoming European"; Kuus, *Geopolitics Reframed*; Marko Lehti and David J. Smith, eds., *Post-Cold War Identity Politics: Northern and Baltic Experiences* (London, Portland: Frank Cass, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Sergei Prozorov, "In And Out of Europe. Identity Politics in Russian-European Relations" in *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic-Russian Relations and European Integration*, eds. Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin, 133-159 (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2009); on Russian symbolic politics cf. Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the other: The East in European identity formation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 161-182; Mark Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia," *Slavic Review* 50, no.1 (1991); Adeeb Khalid, Nathaniel Knight and Maria Todorova, "Ex Tempore: Orientalism and Russia," *Kritika* 1, no. 4 (2000).

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Green, "What's in a tidemark?," *Anthropology News* 52, no. 2 (2011): 15; Sarah Green, "Lines, Traces and Tidemarks: Reflections on Forms of Borderliness," *EastBordNet Working Paper* 2009. Henk van Houtum, Olivier Kramsch and Wolfgang Zierhofer, eds., *B/Ordering Space* (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Van Houtum, Henk and Ton van Naerssen, "Bordering, Ordering and Othering." *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 93, no.2 (2002): 125-136.

<sup>11</sup> Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr, eds., *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Etienne Balibar, *Politics and the other Scene* (London: Verso, 2002), 75-85.

<sup>12</sup> Corey Johnson and Reece Jones, "Rethinking 'the Border' in Border Studies," *Political Geography* 30, no.2 (2011): 61.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Perkins and Chris Rumford, "The Politics of (Un) fixity and the Vernacularisation of Borders," *Global Society* 27, no. 3 (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Perkins and Rumford "Politics of (Un)fixity," 269.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. for example Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Neumann, *Uses of the other*; Kuus, *Geopolitics Reframed*.

<sup>16</sup> Ulrike H. Meinhof, ed., *Living (with) Borders: Identity Discourses on East-West Borders in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Ulrike H. Meinhof and Dariusz Galasiński, "Reconfiguring East-West identities: Cross-Generational discourses in German and Polish border communities," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28, no.1 (2002).

<sup>17</sup> Chris Rumford, "Seeing like a border," *Political Geography* 30, no.2 (2011): 68. On claims-making practices that enact national differences, cf. Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms".

<sup>19</sup> Straughn, "Wo "der Osten" liegt".

<sup>20</sup> Anton Weiss-Wendt, "Komu prinadlezhit Narva? K voprosu o territorial'no-administrativnoi prinadlezhnosti goroda v 1858-1917 gg," in *Baltiiskii arkhiv v trëkh tomakh. Russkaia kul'tura v Pribaltike*, ed. I. Belobrov'tseva (Tallinn: Avenarus, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*. Second ed., (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2001), 110.

<sup>22</sup> Elena Nikiforova, "The Disruption of Social and Geographic Space in Narva," in *Beyond Post-Soviet Transition: Micro Perspectives on Challenge and Survival in Russia and Estonia*, eds. Risto Alapuro, Ilkka Liikanen and Markku Lonkila, (Saarijärvi: Kikimora Publications, 2004), 148-64.

<sup>23</sup> Estonia initially made territorial claims based on the pre-WWII border but dropped them with the preparation for its integration into the European Union.

<sup>24</sup> On some commemorative activities cf. David J. Smith and Stuart Burch, "Enacting Identities in the EU-Russia Borderland: An Ethnography of Place and Public Monuments," *East European Politics and Societies* 26, no.2 (2012); Olga Brednikova, "Windows' Project ad Marginem or a 'Divided History' of Divided Cities? A Case Study of the Russian-Estonian Borderland," in *Representations on the Margins of Europe. Politics and Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States*, eds. Darieva Tsypylma and Wolfgang Kaschuba, (Frankfurt/Main, New York: Campus Verlag, 2007), 43-64.

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- <sup>25</sup> Interviews took between 30 minutes and 3.5 hours and were all conducted in Russian language.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with Iuliia, b. 1956, 13 December 2011. All quotations from the interviews were translated from Russian to English by the author.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Andrei, b. 1939, 29 November 2011.
- <sup>28</sup> Caroline Humphrey, "'Remote' areas and minoritized spatial orders at the Russia–Mongolia border," *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 46 (2015), accessed 18.02.2016, doi: 10.4000/emscat.2542.
- <sup>29</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account," *Theory and Society* 23, no.1 (1994).
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with Mariia, b. 1943, 19 November 2011.
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with Elena, b. 1989, 29 October 2011.
- <sup>32</sup> Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German borderland* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1999), 168; for Estonia cf. Sigrid Rausing, *History, Memory, and Identity in Post-Soviet Estonia: The End of a Collective Farm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 70-89.
- <sup>33</sup> Alena Pfoser "Between Russia and Estonia. Narratives of Place in a New Borderland," *Nationalities Papers* 42, no.2 (2014).
- <sup>34</sup> Interview with Ivan, b.1983, 11 December 2011.
- <sup>35</sup> Interview with Vera, b.1983, 26 November 2011.
- <sup>36</sup> Anastasia Kirilenko. "Ivangorod prositsia v Estoniu?" *Radio Svoboda*, 12.04.2010. URL: <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/2009712.html> (accessed 18.02.2016)
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with Evgeniia, b.1964, 01 Dec 2011.
- <sup>38</sup> Piotr Sztompka, "Civilizational Incompetence: The Trap of Post-Communist Societies" *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 22, no. 2 (1993).
- <sup>39</sup> Rumford, "Seeing like a border," 68.
- <sup>40</sup> Lewis and Wigen, *Myth of Continents*, 75.

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<sup>41</sup> Neringa Klumbytė, “Europe and Its Fragments: Europeanization, Nationalism, and the Geopolitics of Provinciality in Lithuania,” *Slavic Review* 70, no. 4 (2011): 870-871.

<sup>42</sup> Klumbyte, “Europe and Its Fragments,” 853.

<sup>43</sup> Prozorov, “In And Out of Europe.”

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Aleksandr, b.1965, 12 December 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Iuliia, b. 1956, 13 December 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis and Wigen, *Myth of Continents*, 75.

<sup>47</sup> Klumbytė, “Europe and Its Fragments,” 872,