

Border Performances

Politics, art and tourism where Norway meets Russia

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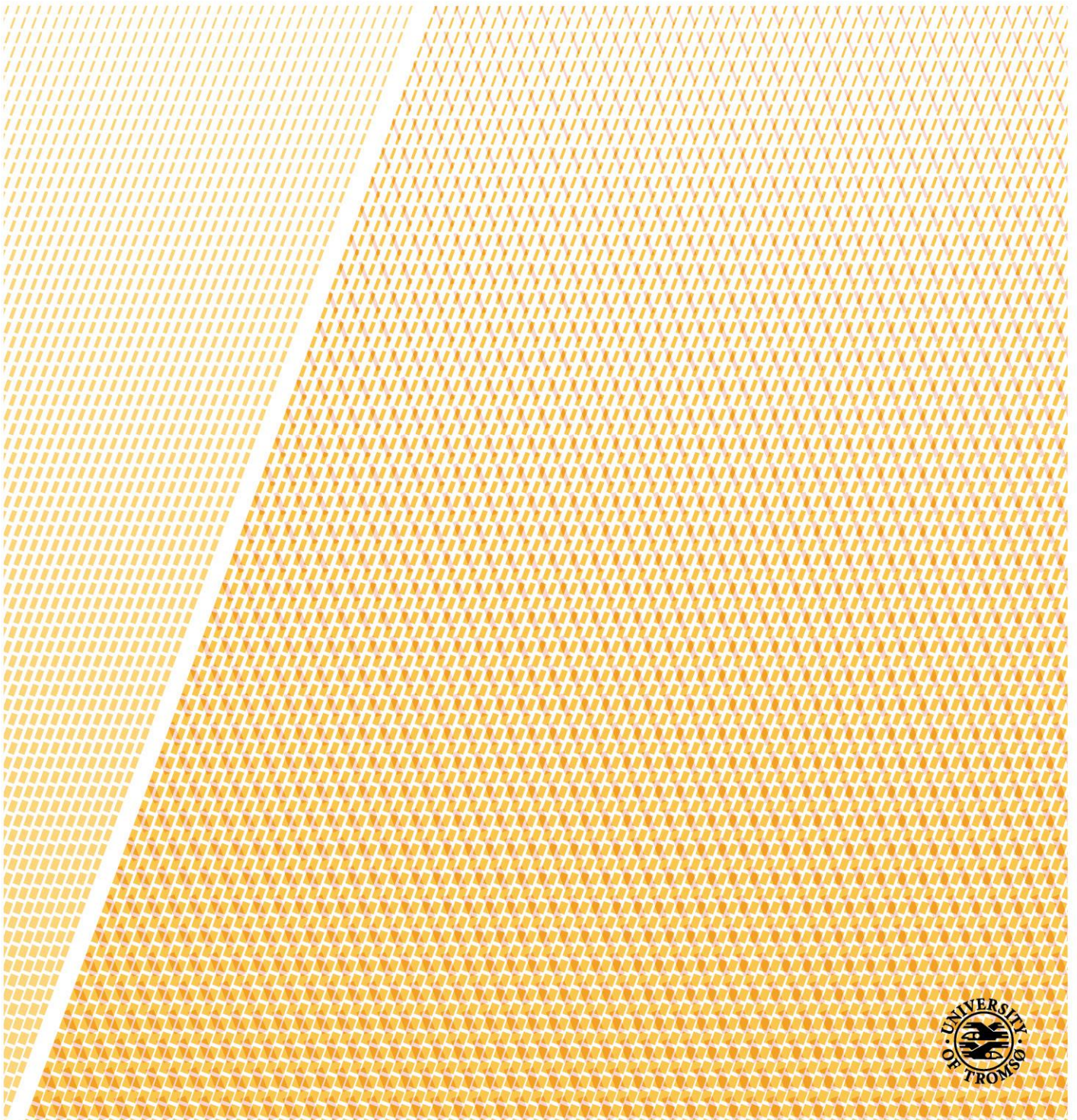


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Abstract

This thesis deals with political, artistic and touristic performances on Norway's border with Russia. Based on ethnographic research in and around the town of Kirkenes, the thesis demonstrates how the state border and the borderland are staged through these performances. On a more general level, it aims to identify, explore and increase our knowledge about the role of performances in the construction of state borders and borderlands. Adhering to Richard Schechner's (2013) perspective on performances as being meaning-making practices, the border and the borderland are investigated as material phenomena as well as communicative social constructions. Similar to other border regions, the Norwegian-Russian borderland is marked by an intensive production of performances by local, national and international actors for local, national and international audiences. Throughout this thesis, these manifold border performances are analyzed within and across three fields: politics, art and tourism. It is argued that the border tends to be construed either as a bridge, marked by openness, connectedness, unity, and continuity, or as a barrier, marked by division, disunity, and discontinuity. Correspondingly, the borderland is also invested with meaning, morphed into a place of great significance – both as a unique transnational space, and as the dramatic interface between East and West.



Figure 1. *Map of the Norwegian-Russian borderland.*

(*Arsenikk¹*)

¹ Available via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Norway_and_Russia_border_map.svg under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license. Full terms at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>

Chapter 1: Introduction

It was towards the end of my field research in Kirkenes, a small Norwegian town close to the Russian border. It was midwinter, midnight and freezing cold. Nevertheless, and along with hundreds of other people, I stood in the main street, witnessing the opening of an art installation. Created by the renowned Norwegian artist Morten Traavik and curated by the local curator group the Girls on the Bridge (Norwegian: *Pikene på broen*), the installation was named *Borderlines*. It consisted of numerous two-metre-high wooden Russian and Norwegian border posts. The Russian border posts were red- and green-striped, whereas the Norwegian ones were yellow with black paint at the top. The border posts had been set up in several central places in Kirkenes, such as in front of the ‘Welcome to Kirkenes’ sign, in the town square and along the main street. Here the border posts had been placed in 21 pairs; the Norwegian border posts on one side of the street, facing the Russian ones on the other side (See Figure 2). The border posts used in the installation had marked the real border until 2010, when the authorities on both sides decided to replace them by plastic border posts that were both lighter and easier to maintain. Traavik, who at the time was artist-in-residence in the Norwegian Armed Forces, had been granted permission to reuse the old border posts in an artistic way.

The opening ceremony took place during the first night of Barents Spektakel, the largest annual festival in Kirkenes. The atmosphere was festive. The small town had put on all the pomp and circumstance it could muster. An orchestra, specially hired for the event, played marches while parading along the border posts. Several distinguished guests were present at the opening. Among them were Queen Sonja of Norway and the Norwegian foreign minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, who, in his opening speech, introduced and interpreted Traavik’s installation for the audience (Støre, 2011):

From where we are standing, we can see a row of border posts that were set up to mark the border between Norway and Russia. Right now – in the centre of Kirkenes – they symbolise the significance of the border as a meeting place between two nations – two peoples – with a shared culture, shared history (in a

longer perspective), shared tradition. Only a short while ago the border posts played quite a different role, marking a sharp division between peoples, an immense gap, a barrier.

Having finished his speech, the minister, amidst general rejoice, declared “the border” open by cutting a red ribbon that hung across the street. The spectators were then invited to cross the border. After the opening, *Borderlines* decorated the main street for several days, attracting locals as well as tourists. The border posts were subsequently removed, but the images of the installations can still be seen in a number of contexts, from official publications about Russian-Norwegian cross-border cooperation to local touristic advertisements for Kirkenes.

The event described above may be seen as a *performance*, intended to invest the border and borderland with new meanings. It may at first glance appear unique and peculiar, but it is not. In fact, the event is quite typical for the town, its elements recurring. Since the 1990s, numerous performances in which the Norwegian-Russian border is staged have been arranged in the Norwegian-Russian borderland. Some of these have been overtly political, some have been artistic, yet others have been touristic. Many, like that described above, combine the political, the artistic and the touristic. Akin to the opening of *Borderlines*, the performances also tend to involve both local and (inter)national actors and relate to local, national and international contexts, often simultaneously. The manifold border performances taking place in Kirkenes and the borderland will be the main object of study in this anthropological dissertation. The aim will be to explain how the Norwegian-Russian border and borderland is invested with meaning through these performances, and, on a more general level, to identify and explore the role of performances in the social construction of state borders and borderlands. The data presented is primarily based on extensive ethnographic research in Kirkenes and the Norwegian-Russian borderland.

The thesis forms part of an interdisciplinary research project named *The Construction and Negotiation of Borders: Discourses related to the border between Norway and*

Russia. The project has been conducted by Finnmark University College and the Barents Institute. The overarching research questions for the project have been “how people in different arenas cross and negotiate the Russian-Norwegian border in performing their lives, professionally or privately, and how different discourses concerning the border and borderland are created and inscribed in these processes”.



Figure 2. *The art installation Borderlines in the main street of Kirkenes.*
(Photo by author)

Performance

The idea of performance as a lens through which one can observe and understand social and cultural phenomena has deep roots in anthropology as well as in the humanities. In anthropology, the performative perspective has been particularly closely associated with scholars such as Erving Goffman and Victor Turner. Goffman (1959; 1963; 1974) has demonstrated how everyday life has a strong performative dimension, while Turner (1967; 1982; 1988) has explored performance as a key concept through which to interpret a wide range of cultural practices spanning from ritual to play, from theatre to political manifestations. The theatre scholar Richard Schechner has also been highly

influential in the development of modern performance theory. Schechner's long-term cooperation with Turner was pivotal in the development of performance studies as a research field.

As a vantage point, performative approaches tend to rely on the notion of human life being inherently theatrical. Drama is thus not seen as something that is restricted to the stage, but rather as an aspect of a wide range of situations and activities. Performance studies ultimately “asserts that all aspects of everyday life, even the seemingly spontaneous or mundane, reveal a ‘performative’ component—a component that makes them *like a performance*” (Komitee, n.d., p. 4). What then *is* performance? Here the term will, following Schechner (2013, p. 2), be defined as “any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted, or displayed”. This broad definition includes so-called “is performances”, or performances that are perceived and categorized as such by those who perform or experience them, as well as so-called “as performances”, or “any behavior, event, action, or thing that can be studied ‘as’ performance” (Schechner, 2013, p. 41). Performance in this broad sense of the term may, as Schechner (2013, p. 2) writes, “occur in many different instances and kinds”, and must be “construed in a ‘broad spectrum’ or ‘continuum’ of human actions”. Performance in this sense may also transcend human activity in a strict sense and include various forms of materiality – from paintings to places – that in encounter with people invoke particular responses and meanings. Interaction is crucial here. As Schechner (2013, p. 30) notes, “performance exists only as actions, interactions and relationships”. Performances presuppose not only performers, but also an audience. Performances, “is” as well as “as”, are always performed *by* someone *for* someone.

Performances *are* things but they also *do* things. Goffman (1959, p. 15), acknowledging its transformative power, actually defined performance as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants”. Schechner (2013, p. 46) mentions, among the functions of performances, their pedagogical dimension; their ability to “teach or persuade” and “to mark or change

identity”. Performances are powerful meaning-carrying and meaning-making vehicles. They shape our notions of the world and, in turn, the world itself.

Performance is interesting in relation to the study of a wide range of phenomena and human activities. In the following section, the focus will however be restricted to the ways in which performances work *upon* and *on* borders. Performance will be seen as an important dimension of the social (re)production of borders and borderlands, as well as a lens through which this social (re)production can be observed.

Border performances

The terms *border* and *borderland* will here mainly refer to the spaces where different states meet. The term *border* will denote the borderline itself as well as to the zone extending to some extent across this borderline (Donnan & Wilson, 1994, p. 8). The *borderland* in turn will denote the broader region surrounding the borderline “within which the dynamics of change and daily life practices” are “affected by the very presence of the border” (Newman, 2006, p. 150).

In recent decades, borders and borderlands have comprised the object for numerous studies both within and beyond the discipline of anthropology. Within the field of border studies there has, as Scott (2011, p. 124) observes, been a shift of focus from “the evolution and transformation of the territorial confines of the state to the more general social production of borders”. The constructivist and processual turn has changed the notion of borders from something that is static and given, to something that is *in the making*. Consequently, borders have come to be “seen as ‘process’ as much as ‘product’” (Wilson & Donnan, 2012, p. 13), and as “social structures that are constantly and communicatively reproduced” (Albert, Diez, & Stetter 2008, p. 21).

In the communicative reproduction of borders, performances – as meaning-making and meaning-breaking devices – may play an important role. Borders and borderlands also appear to be spaces where performances proliferate. As Wilson and Donnan (2012, pp. 19-20) observe:

If all the world is a stage, then borders are its scenery, its *mise en scène*, its ordering of space and action, wherein actors and observers must work at making borders intelligible and manageable, and must do so in order for the drama to proceed.

Even prior to the establishment of modern nation-states, territorial borders were often signified through performances of various kinds. In the epoch of the modern state they have, however, become key “arenas of symbolic and performative display” (Donnan and Wilson, 2010b, p. 78). Their performative dimension typically manifests itself in the form of material aesthetics and symbolic landmarks, as well as in highly symbolic events taking place therein. Both of these manifestations may be observed ethnographically in border landscapes worldwide.

Various actors are involved in the production of border performances. Among these actors, the state itself (or its agents) is imperative, for “ever since the creation of modern nation-states, borders and their regions have been extremely important symbolic territories of state image and control” (Donnan & Wilson, 1999, p. 13). The state is, however, not the only actor active in the performative “making” of borders and borderlands. Other actors at the international, regional and local level may also engage themselves in the field of performances, alongside the state and its representatives. Some of these actors may be concerned with politics, in the strict sense of the term, others may, as is the case in the Norwegian-Russian borderland, represent other fields of activity, such as art and tourism. As different actors are involved simultaneously in the production of border performances, the meanings and messages that are communicated may also be manifold, and they may be addressed to multiple audiences.

As Donnan and Wilson (2010b, p. 73) observe, while state borders “have been periodically described as a stage on which adjoining states play out their political agendas, the performative dimensions of border zones have been relatively undeveloped in border studies”. This is even the case for anthropological studies that are otherwise

appropriate for the observation of locally occurring phenomena such as border performances. The relative lack of academic attention paid to the role of performances on borders and in borderlands serves as an important inspiration for writing this thesis.

The place

The geographical locus for this study is the Norwegian-Russian borderland, located in the far north of Europe by the Barents Sea. The study will be restricted to the municipality of Sør-Varanger, on the Norwegian side of the border. Two reasons justify this decision. First, the Russian side of the border is (given its high level of securitization) poorly accessible to researchers. Second, the Norwegian borderland, as will become clear later, represents a particularly rich field when it comes to the production of border performances.

Sør-Varanger is the only Norwegian municipality bordering Russia. The area has been Norwegian territory since 1826, when the Norwegian-Russian border first was delineated. Prior to the delineation of the border, the area had the status of *common land* (Norwegian: *fellesdistrikt*) and was jointly administered and taxed by Norway and Russia. The administrative centre of Sør-Varanger is Kirkenes, with a population of about 8,000. Sør-Varanger can be regarded as a typical borderland in the sense that daily life here whether socially, culturally or economically is significantly “affected by the very presence of the border” (Newman, 2006, p. 150). Sør-Varanger is also the only municipality in Norway to contain a small Russian minority (see, e.g., Rogova, 2008; Iversen, 2010).

The Norwegian-Russian border runs through the barren subarctic landscape, just a few kilometers from Kirkenes. In spite of increased cross-border traffic and certain signs of cross-border integration, including the introduction of a transnational border traffic zone, the border ranks among the most closed and highly securitized in Europe. This partly relates to its international significance as a Schengen Area border, and as a border between Russia and a member state of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

A long history of forcing meaning onto the Norwegian-Russian border and borderland can be identified. Ever since the border was drawn, the area has represented an arena for intensive border performances of various kinds. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Norway strived to secure the border through an active “cultural border fortification” (Niemi, 2007, p. 160). The raising of Lutheran churches built in traditional Norwegian style came to play an important performative role as markers of national sovereignty in the borderland. Subsequently, industrialization played a similar nationalising role, strengthening as well as demonstrating Norwegian control in the area.

During the Cold War, the Norwegian-Russian border became a division of global importance between the capitalist and the communist world, as well as between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. From the 1950s until the end of the 1980s, the Norwegian-Russian borderland, like other areas along the Iron Curtain, became a stage for political confrontation and (sometimes) rapprochement between East and West. During these years, the border itself was almost hermetically closed.

From the early 1990s, the Norwegian Government exerted considerable effort into improving its relationship with Russia. Here, Kirkenes came to play an important symbolic role. In 1993, the town became the site for the establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, a new transnational region spanning the borders between Russia and the Nordic states. Later, Kirkenes attained the status as the region’s unofficial capital. From 1993 until the present day, the town has been the main arena for a large number of Norwegian-Russian political events, including meetings, declarations, celebrations and commemorations. Both national and local actors have been active in orchestrating and performing these events and bolstering the town’s new status as the “Barents Capital”. These constant political performances have turned Kirkenes, formerly a peripheral mining town, into what Viken and Nyseth (2009) have termed “a town for ministers”, a political stage of international significance.

Besides having become an arena for political performances, the borderland has also turned into a site for the production of touristic and artistic border performances. In the

1980s, the planning committee of a local economic development project named *Project Borderland* (Norwegian: *Prosjekt Grenseland*) first launched the idea of producing and selling touristic and artistic “border experiences” (Norwegian: *grenseopplevelser*) (Grenseland, 1985; Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987). The aim was to replace the moribund mining economy with a sustainable “border experience economy”. During the 1990s and 2000s, many of the key ideas of Project Borderland were picked up and applied by local touristic and artistic actors. Local entrepreneurs began to develop the Norwegian-Russian border as a tourist attraction. Tours to the border were organized and various tourism facilities, from gazing platforms to souvenir shops, were developed in the border zone. Other entrepreneurs began to exploit the border artistically. In the 1990s, two local professional cultural organizations – the aforementioned Girls on the Bridge and the Samovar Theatre (Norwegian: *Samovarteateret*) – were established. Both organizations made border art their hallmark. The Samovar Theatre has developed its particular style of *border dramatics*, or theatre performances on and about the border. The Girls on the Bridge have over the years curated a large number of border-themed works of art.

The numerous border performances taking place in and around Kirkenes constantly invest the Norwegian-Russian border and borderland with meaning. Throughout this thesis, this performative meaning-making will be explored and analysed as it occurs within as well as across the three fields of politics, art and tourism.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the theoretical framework, including a general introduction to the relevant topics and concepts of performance, borders and border performance. Chapter 3 contains a more specific historical and geographical introduction to the Norwegian-Russian border and borderland. Chapter 4 is devoted to methods used during fieldwork. In Chapters 5-7, the empirical data of the study will be presented and discussed. Each of these three chapters will focus on one particular local field of performances: politics (Chapter 5), art (Chapter

6) and tourism (Chapter 7). Finally, Chapter 8 will present a general discussion of the case, including references to and findings from all three fields.

Notes on language

The language of the thesis is English. However, my mother tongue is Norwegian. The field research was primarily conducted using the Norwegian language. Many of the written sources, particularly those concerning local matters, are also in Norwegian. This necessitated a considerable amount of translation of texts and speech. Every text cited in the thesis was either originally in English or translated into English from Norwegian (and in a few cases Russian and other languages) by the author. The reader should be aware that this may mean that certain meanings and words are on occasion lost in translation, either due to my limited skills as a translator or to the gulf of incommensurability that always exists between languages.

Chapter 2: Border Performances: A Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, a theoretical framework for a performative perspective on the study of borders will be presented. First, the concept of performance and the utility of using performance as a perspective in social sciences will be discussed. Secondly, the concepts of *border* and *borderland* will be addressed. Borders will be regarded as both material phenomena and social constructions. The social (re)construction of state borders takes place through various forms of social spatialization that tend to hypostasize them into special, often mythified places. Performances will be seen as an important dimension of this social (re)construction as well as a lens through which it can be observed. Borders will here be approached anthropologically – from below – “as arenas of symbolic and performative display” (Donnan & Wilson, 2010b, p. 78) where various actors “make special effort to fix meanings in the landscape or to contest and change those that are already there” (Donnan & Wilson, 2010b, p. 76). These actors are not, as is sometimes argued, restricted to the national level and they do not only represent the state. Local actors operating within different fields such as politics, art and tourism are also active in the complex multivocal meaning-making of border performances.

The performative turn

The performative turn was a paradigmatic shift that took place in the humanities and social sciences from the 1950s, affecting and influencing such diverse disciplines as anthropology, history and linguistics. The turn also resulted in the establishment of the interdisciplinary research field of performance studies. The performative turn involved a change of focus, from the study of static structures to the study of human agency and action. The turn developed, as Conquergood (1983, p. 83) notes, “as a counterproject to logical positivism” and was marked by the introduction of new keywords such as *process*, *poetics*, *play* and *power*, as opposed to keywords from the previous paradigm such as *science*, *structure*, *system*, *distance*, *objectivity*, *neutral observer* and *falsifiability* (Conquergood, 1983, pp. 82-83). *Drama* was yet another key term of the performative turn. “*All the world’s a stage*” is a famous phrase from a monologue by Shakespeare (trans. 1995: 2.7.138). Such comparisons, metaphorically or literally,

between stage and world, play and life, inform much performative theory. “All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify”, wrote Erving Goffman (1959, p. 72), one of the most important anthropological theoreticians of the performative turn. Goffman developed, in works such as *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Behavior in Public Places* (1963) and *Frame Analysis* (1974), a dramaturgical approach to people’s acts in daily life and introduced theatrical terms such as *role playing*, *setting*, *front stage* and *back stage* as his analytical vocabulary. Victor Turner, another anthropologist essential to the development of performative theory, offered a dramaturgical approach less marked by methodological individualism and more focused on collective events, so-called *social dramas*. For Turner, the study of social drama became the key to understanding culture. Turner initially restricted himself to the study of tribal rituals in Zambia (Turner, 1967). Later, however, in works such as *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982) and *The Anthropology of Performance* (1988), he expanded his scope to include a wide range of dramatic expressions from all over the world. Turner in the end came to regard performance as “the basic stuff of social life” and introduced the term *homo performans*, stressing the performative as the very aspect distinguishing the human race from other species (Turner, 1988, pp. 80-81).

The field of performance studies emerged initially through the close collaboration between Turner and Richard Schechner, a theatre scholar and artistic director of The Performance Group, an experimental theatre troupe. Evolving in between theatre and anthropology, performance studies were from the very beginning strikingly interdisciplinary and remain so to this day. As Schechner (2013, p. 2) points out, “performance studies draws on and synthesizes approaches from a wide variety of disciplines including performing arts, social sciences, feminist studies, gender studies, history, psychoanalysis, queer theory, semiotics, ethology, cybernetics, area studies, media and popular culture theory, and cultural studies”. The only real common denominator for all scholars of the field – regardless of disciplinary background – has been the idea of using performance as a lens to study the world.

What performances are

“The term ‘performance’ has”, as Carlson (2007, p. 70) writes, “become extremely popular in recent years in a wide range of activities in the arts, in literature, and in the social sciences”. There exists today “a complex body of writing about performance, attempting to analyze and understand just what sort of human activity it is” (Carlson, 2007, p. 70). Bala, striving to clarify the complexity of the concept of performance, suggests that it “can be distinguished in terms of two paradigms: performance understood as process, and performance understood as goal or accomplishment” (Bala, 2013, p. 15). As she observes, “the former usage is most predominant in the humanities, referring to artistic, linguistic, cultural and gender performance” while the “latter usage is most common when referring to economic, technical and sexual fields” (Bala, 2013, p. 15). Here the focus will be on the former usage. Conventionally, performance in this sense has been understood as a framed event of the performing arts, where a performer or a group of performers presents works of art to an audience on a stage within a clearly designated and enclosed space during a limited period of time. With the performative turn, the notion of performance as a process has, however, expanded well beyond this conventional understanding of the term. Milton Singer, an early performance theorist, referred to cultural performances as “the elementary constituents of a culture” (Singer, 1972, p. 71). He noted, however, that these performances included not only “what we in the West usually call by that name – for example plays, concerts and lectures” but “also prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals and all those things we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the cultural and artistic” (Singer, 1972, p. 71). Performance was thus both artistic and cultural, both sacred and secular, both Western and non-Western. Goffman, in his dramaturgical approach, used the term *performance* to describe an even wider range of situations of social interaction in everyday life. He defined performance simply as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence any of the other participants” (Goffman 1959, p. 15). Singer and Goffman’s approaches expanded the concept of performance and, at the same time, defied traditional or conventional separations between different phenomena and different ways of studying them. This is typical for later performances studies that, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2007, p. 47)

observes, tend to start “from the premise that its objects of study [performances] are not to be divided up and parceled out”. As Catherine Bell (1997, p. 75) notes, “performance theory is apt to see a wide variety of activities – theatre, sports, play, public spectacles – as similarly structured around cross-cultural qualities of performance” and aims at overcoming “misleading boundaries too often drawn between rituals, festivals, healings, dance, music, drama, and so on”.

Schechner, inspired by both Goffman and Singer, claims that performances occur in many different contexts: “in everyday life – cooking, socializing, ‘just living’, in the arts, in sports and other popular entertainments, in business, in technology, in sex, in ritual – sacred and secular, and in play” (Schechner, 2013, p. 31). “This list”, he adds, does not, however, “exhaust the possibilities” for what performances can be, it only indicates “the large territory covered by performance” (Schechner 2013, p. 31). Schechner claims that

performance must be construed as a “broad spectrum” or “continuum” of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet. (Schechner, 2013, p. 2)

Performance in this sense is not even limited to human activities. It may also include material artefacts like paintings and statues and surroundings or spaces like museums and parks, as long as they are not regarded as “objects” or “things” but “as practices, events, and behaviours” that interact with an audience (Schechner, 2013, p. 2). This thesis will provide several examples of such performative materiality.

The “broad spectrum approach” outlined above will inform the way the concept of performance is applied throughout this thesis. This means that performance will be used “as an organizing concept for examining phenomena that may or may not be a performance in the conventional sense of the word”, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (as cited

in Franklin, 2001, p. 218) puts it. It will include both so-called “is” performances and “as” performances. “Something ‘is’ a performance when historical and social context, convention, usage, and tradition say it is”, writes Schechner (2013, p. 38). In a European twentieth century context, then, “plays, concerts and lectures”, referred to by Singer (1972, p. 71) as “what we in the West usually call performances”, are to be regarded as “is” performances. An “as” performance, on the other hand, is “any behavior, event, action, or thing” that “can be studied ‘as’ performance” (Schechner, 2013, p. 41). An “as” performance may include everything that can be *analysed* as a performance – irrespective of how it is actually perceived by those who perform it or by those for whom it is performed. As Schechner (2013, p. 38) points out, “there are limits to what ‘is’ performance. But just about anything can be studied ‘as’ performance”.

The distinction between “is” and “as” performances relates to the distinction Schechner (2013, pp. 42-43) makes between “make-believe” and “make-belief performances”: In so-called “make-believe performances”, typically conventional “is” performances such as theatre plays or concerts, there is “a clearly marked boundary between the world of the performance and everyday reality” (Schechner, 2013, p. 43):

On stage, various conventions – the stage itself as a distinct domain, opening and closing a curtain or dimming the lights, the curtain call, etc. – mark the boundaries between pretending and “being real”. People watching a movie or a play knows that the social and personal worlds enacted are not those of the actors but those of the characters.

In the case of “make-believe performances”, the spectators are fully aware that what they are witnessing is not *real*. There is a distinction between the stage and the “real” world. “Make-belief performances”, on the other hand, “intentionally blur or sabotage” the boundary between the world of the performance and the everyday reality” (Schechner, 2013, p. 43), “creating the very social realities they enact” (Schechner, 2013, p. 42). Such performances are not conventionally regarded as performances.

Nevertheless, they tend to be performative in *style*, scripted and staged. Schechner refers to public political appearances as an example of make-belief performances:

Public figures are often making belief – enacting the effects they want the receivers of their performances to accept ‘for real’. When an American president addresses a joint session of Congress or makes a grave announcement of national importance, his appearance is carefully staged so that he can publicly perform his authority. Speaking to Congress, the president has behind him the vice-president and the speaker of the house, while a large American flag provides an appropriately patriotic foreground. At other times, the national leader may wish to appear as a friend or a good neighbor talking informally with ‘fellow citizens’.

(Schechner 2013, p. 43)

“The goal of all this is to ‘make belief’”, writes Schechner: “first, to build the public’s confidence in the president, and second, to sustain the president’s belief in himself. His performances convince himself even as he strives to convince others” (Schechner 2013, p. 43).

The distinction between “is” and “as” performances also relates closely to the anthropological analytical distinction between the etic and the emic where the former concept refers to the “outside” perspective of the observer and the latter to the “inside” perspective of the subjects, the “native point of view”:

The emic approach investigates how local people think. How do they perceive and organize the world? What are their rules for behavior? What has meaning for them? How do they imagine and explain things? . . . The etic (scientist-oriented) approach shifts the focus from local observations, categories, explanations, and interpretations to those of the anthropologist. (Kottak, 2007, p. 29)

An emic approach to performances will be restricted to “is” performances, that is, performances classified as such by the locals. An etic approach to performances may,

however, go beyond local classifications and include “as” performances as well. Here, the etic approach will be pursued. As Kottak (2007, p. 29) notes, “the etic approach realizes that members of a culture often are too involved in what they are doing to interpret their cultures impartially. Operating etically, the ethnographer emphasizes what he or she (the observer) notices and considers important”. The etic approach gives more freedom to the researcher who avoids getting trapped by the narrow categories of the locals. Also, “using ‘as’ performance as a tool, one can”, as Schechner (2013, p. 48) observes, “look into things otherwise closed off to inquiry”. By going beyond the conventional view of what performance is and is not, one may see old phenomena from new and interesting perspectives. An unfortunate consequence of the choice of an etic approach may, however, be a reduction of mutual understanding between researcher and informant.

Even though performance has been defined above in an inclusive way – referring both to “is” and “as”, “make-belief” and “make-believe” performances – it does not include *any* form of action. “Both ‘doing’ and ‘showing doing’ are actions”, writes Schechner (2013, p. 28), but only “showing doing” is performing. While doing can be described as “the activity of all that exists, from quarks to sentient beings to super galactic strings”, “‘showing doing’ is performing: pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing” (Schechner 2013, p. 28). In “showing doing” there is an aspect of intentionality, and this distinguishes it from just “doing”. As Peacock (1990, p. 208) puts it, “a performance is not necessarily more meaningful than other events in one’s life, but it is more *deliberately* so; a performance is, among other things, a deliberate effort to represent, to say something about something”. There is also an element of consciousness involved in “showing doing” as opposed to other actions. As Carlson (2007, p. 72) notes, “we may do actions unthinkingly, but when we think about them, this introduces a consciousness that gives them the quality of performance”. In this way, performance “points to a certain distance between ‘self’ and behavior, analogous to that between an actor and the role the actor plays on stage” (Carlson, 2007, p. 72). Finally, there is an element of preparation involved in all performances. Bial (2007, p. 59) describes performances as “any activity that involves the presentation of rehearsed or pre-established sequences of

words and actions”. Schechner writes that “performances – of art, rituals, or ordinary life – are made of ‘twice-behaved behaviors’, ‘restored behaviors’, performed actions that people train for and rehearse” (Schechner, 2013, p. 28). Performances are thus not *any* action, but “any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed”, and thus taken out of the ordinary (Schechner, 2013, p. 2).

What performances do

As deliberate and intentional acts, performances shape our notions of the world and, in turn, the world itself. People use performances for many purposes. Schechner identifies seven functions of performances: “to entertain, to create beauty, to mark or change identity, to make or foster community, to heal, to teach or persuade, and to deal with the sacred and the demonic” (Schechner, 2013, p. 46). A performance usually has more than one function: “For example, a street demonstration or propaganda play may be mostly about teaching, persuading, and convincing – but such a show also has to entertain and may foster community” (Schechner 2013, p. 46). Schechner uses the term *efficacy* to describe the transformative dimension of performances, “when the performance’s purpose is to effect change” (Schechner, 2013, p. 80). This dimension is, he writes, always present in performances to some degree along with that of entertainment – “when the performance’s purpose is mostly to give pleasure, to show off, to be beautiful, or to pass the time” (Schechner 2013, p. 80). Efficacy and entertainment, or aesthetics, are, as Schechner (2013, p. 80) states, “not opposites, but ‘dancing partners’ each depending on and in continuous active relationship to the other”.

It has been the efficacy dimension rather than the entertainment dimension of performances that has preoccupied most performance theorists. The performative turn has in fact been mostly about exploring performances for what they *do*, for their role in the social construction of reality. A pivotal work in this respect was John Langshaw Austin’s *How to do Things with Words* (Austin, 1962). Here Austin argued, against positivist philosophical claims, that language can be used *performatively*, not only to state or assert something, but also to do something, or, as he summarized it: “to say something *is* to do something, or *in* saying something we do something, and even *by*

saying something we do something” (Austin, 1962, p. 94). Austin introduced the concept *performative utterances* to describe sentences that not only describe reality but actively constitute or change it as well. Examples of such utterances could be “I christen you”, “War is declared” or the biblical utterance “Let there be light!” Naming can also be seen as a performative utterance. As Tuan (1991, p. 688) writes, “naming is power – the creative power to call something into being, to render the invisible visible, to impart a certain character to things”. Throughout this thesis, several examples of the performative use of *naming* will be discussed.

Austin focused on the efficacy of verbal acts. Performances that are not strictly verbal or not verbal at all may, however, also be highly transformative, perhaps even more so. One example is the US presidential inauguration ceremony where the president elect places his hands on the Bible while reading the presidential oath – and in doing so *becomes* the president. Another example is the handshake ritual, common all over the world, which tends to establish mutual trust and respect between people.

Performances have, as Bell (1997) illustrates, two features or qualities that make them particularly powerful as transformative vehicles. First, there is “the dynamics of framing”. “Intrinsic to performance,” she writes, “is the communication of a type of frame that says, ‘This is different, deliberate, and significant – pay attention!’” (Bell, 1997, p. 160). As Bell notes, “such frames not only distinguish performance as such, they also create a complete and condensed, if somewhat artificial world – like sacral symbols, a type of microcosmic portrayal of the macrocosm”. They provide the audience with a rare “mock totality” that functions as “an interpretive appropriation of some greater if elusive totality” (Bell, 1997, p. 160). As such, they are meaningful “modeling events” with “the ability to shape people’s experience and cognitive ordering of the world” (Bell, 1997, p. 161). Thus, as Beeman (2002, p. 95) notes, performance can be regarded as “the means – perhaps the principal means – through which people come to understand their world, reinforce their view of it, and transform it on both the small scale and the large scale”.

Secondly, performances are powerful in the sense that they tend to “communicate on multiple sensory levels, usually involving highly visual imagery, dramatic sounds, and sometimes even tactile, olfactory and gustatory stimulation” (Bell, 1997, p. 160). As Bell observes, “the power of performance lies in great part in the effect of the heightened multisensory experience it affords: one is not being told or shown something as much as one is led to experience something” (Bell, 1997, p. 160):

By marching with a crowd, crying over a tragic drama, or applauding an unconvincing politician, even the less enthusiastic participants of the audience are cognitively and emotionally pulled into a complex sensory experience that can also communicate a variety of messages.

“Participation in rituals,” writes Kertzer (1988, p. 10), “involves psychological stimuli, the arousal of emotions; ritual works through the senses to structure our sense of reality and our understanding of the world around us”. The same is true for performances in a wider sense.

Performances *do* things and have an effect upon the world. Due to their multisensory appeal and the dynamics of framing, performances can serve as potent instruments for the exercising of power. For what purpose this power is used may, however, vary. As Schechner (1995, p. 1) notes, “performance is amoral, as useful to tyrants as to those who practice guerilla theatre”. Performance can, as Beeman (2002, p. 95) writes,

be employed for conservative and for revolutionary uses. As a conservative force, it reinforces the truth of the world and enacts and verifies social order . . . As a transformational force, performance behavior has the power to restructure social order through the persuasive power of rhetoric and through the power of redefinition of both audience and context.

Performances can subvert and sustain, they can serve as instruments of resistance and liberation, as well as of oppression and domination. Performances may also work in ways that go completely beyond the dominance-liberation dichotomy. Accordingly, the

actual effect of performances – the way they work upon the world – cannot be taken for granted, but should be explored in each single case.

As powerful transformative vehicles, performances are interesting in relation to the study of a wide range of phenomena. In the following, the focus will, however, be restricted to the way performances work upon – constitute and characterize – borders and borderlands.

Borders and borderlands

In the most general sense, borders are “lines”, constituting the “sharp point at which categories, spaces and territories interface” (Newman, 2011, p. 7). Understood as such, borders may denote a vast array of divides on many levels. These divides need not be territorial. In fact, as Newman and Paasi (1998, p. 188) point out:

The ideas of borders, boundaries, borderlands, border-crossings and transgressions of borders that the representatives of various disciplines use, are increasingly employed in a metaphoric sense so that they do not [anymore] inevitably refer to the material spaces with which geographers typically deal.

As Donnan and Wilson (1999, p. 35) write, “the current fascination with borders . . . extends far beyond anthropology into literary theory, cultural studies, media studies and beyond” and “the borders concerned exist at many different levels, and may be cultural, social, territorial, political, sexual, racial or psychological”. Here the term *border* will, however, mainly refer to geographical borders between *states*.

State borders emerged with the development of the universal system of territorial sovereign states following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Gradually, these linear and clearly demarcated political divides replaced the *frontiers*, the older more fuzzy and zonal type of territorial border (Prescott, 1987, p. 1). The terms and the content of terms denoting the outer limits of states vary from language to language. Some languages, like

English, have several border-related concepts (Lundén, 2004, pp. 13-17). Here two terms, *border* and *borderland*, will be used.

Border, the first of these terms, will be applied as it is defined by Donnan and Wilson (1994, p. 8), namely as “those zones which always extend, to some degree, across borderlines” as well as “the borderlines themselves, i.e., the narrow but long area which delimits the sovereignty of the states which meet each other there”. According to this definition, borders are seen *both* as an abstract line of division, *and* as the real, immediate material zone surrounding this line. This definition of the term *border* corresponds to that of the most common Norwegian term for border, *grense*.

The term *borderland* (Norwegian: *grenseland*) is sometimes used as a synonym for *border*. Oscar Martinez, in his seminal *Border People*, employs, for example, the two terms “interchangeably to refer to the place or region” where two states meet (Martinez, 1994, p. 5). Here, a distinction will, however, be made. The term *border* will be reserved for the actual line of division and the immediate surrounding of this line of division. The term *borderland* will here refer to the broader socio-spatial context of the border. The borderland is, as Baud and van Schendel (1997, p. 216) note, “usually understood as the region in one nation that is significantly affected by an international border”. Newman (2006, p. 150) defines it as “the region or area in relative proximity to the border within which the dynamics of change and daily life practices” are “affected by the very presence of the border”. Borderlands, in this sense, are not institutionalized or clearly demarcated geographical spaces. There is no “set limit for the existence or extent of any particular borderland” (Newman, 2011, p. 38). The borderland may be wide or narrow depending on the type of border and its influence. It may cover just a narrow strip of land adjacent to the border or “stretch to embrace entire countries” (Baud & van Schendel, 1997, p. 222). The borderland need not be a homogeneous region as the border may affect various parts of the borderland in various ways (Baud & van Schendel, 1997, pp. 221-222). Finally, borderlands need not be a constant category. They may emerge, grow, shrink and disappear over time, as borders and their impact upon the surrounding areas change.

Border studies

For most of the twentieth century state borders were, in social sciences, “relatively ignored, taken-for-granted or seen as peripheral, not just in the literal geographical sense but in political and social terms” (Anderson, O’Dowd, & Wilson, 2002, p. 3). Borders were mainly regarded as the “physical and static outcomes of the political decision-making process”, something “to be described rather than analysed” (Newman, 2006, p. 145). Border studies, largely the domain of specialized political geographers, was restricted to “descriptive analyses of boundaries, their location and the political and historical processes leading to their demarcation” (Newman, 2006, p. 145). Anthropological works on state borders were rare until the 1990s. In the few cases where borderlands were the locus for ethnographic field research, the border itself appeared “chiefly as a backdrop to some other line of inquiry” (Donnan & Wilson, 1999, p. 26). Since the 1990s, there has, however, been a “remarkable upsurge of activity and interest in state borders, border regions and border crossing processes” (Anderson et al., 2002, p. 1). Scholars from social sciences and the humanities have found “a mutual interest in what happens at, across and because of the borders to nations and states” (Wilson & Donnan, 2012, p. 1). Within the discipline of anthropology, there has been an “explosion of ethnographic work in borderlands” (Donnan & Wilson, 2010a, p. 8). The increased academic interest in borders was sparked by the geopolitical changes following the end of the Cold War. With the demise of the Soviet bloc and the rise of the European Union, borders were redrawn and redefined, their meaning and function transformed and questioned. In Europe, both nationalism, cross-border regionalism and internationalism put borders at the forefront. The development convinced researchers that borders were indeed no longer *fait accomplis*, frozen lines in space, if they had ever been so, but a “live issue”, an interesting focus and locus for studies.

As “borders have become attractive [for researchers] they have also been problematized”, writes Paasi (2011, p. 13). The new scholarly notions of borders have, as Sendhardt (2013, p. 25) sums up, “shifted the focus onto process-like and socially constructed qualities of borders” and replaced the “ontological question of what a border is” with that of “how borders are socially constructed, thus shifting the focus from the

border to the process of bordering”. As Scott (2011, p. 124) observes, the “attention has moved away from the evolution and transformation of the territorial confines of the state to the more general social production of borders”. Scott, himself representative of this constructivist and processual turn, describes borders as “processes that cannot be finalized” (Scott, 2012, p. 84) and notes that they “are constantly made through ideology, symbols, cultural mediations, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and everyday forms of border transcending and border confirming” (Scott, 2012, pp. 86-87). While borders may exist in space, they attain meaning only through these processes of social border construction and its efficacies.

It is against the new perspective of borders as “social constructs that are constantly and communicatively reproduced” (Albert et al., 2008, p. 21) that performances, as powerful meaning-making practices, become interesting, both as a dimension of the general social (re)production of borders and as a lens through which the social (re)production of borders can be observed. As Paasi (1999, p. 670) observes, the general border production is by no means restricted to the borderland itself but takes place in a much wider context. However, as *special places*, “the most polysemic and symbolized pieces of territory we can think of” (Thomassen, 1996, p. 45), and as “spaces of meaning-making and meaning-breaking” (Donnan & Wilson, 1999, p. 64), borders are zones where performances tend to *proliferate* and may most readily be observed ethnographically.

Borders as special places

Rob Shields (1991, p. 31) uses the term *social spatialisation* to “designate the ongoing social construction of the spatial at the level of the social imaginary (collective mythologies, presuppositions) as well as interventions in the landscape (for example, the build environment)”. Social spatialisation is a “formation of both discursive and non-discursive elements, practices, and processes” (Shields, 1991, p. 7). Through social spatialisation places are endowed with meaning and given a certain, more or less fixed, value. They “become associated with particular values, historical events, and feelings” (Shields, 1991, p. 29). Shields uses the term *place image* when describing “the various

discrete meanings associated with real places or regions regardless of their character in reality”. These images, he writes, “being partial and often either exaggerated or understated, may be accurate or inaccurate. They result from stereotyping, which oversimplifies groups of places within a region, or from prejudices towards places or their inhabitants” (Shields, 1991, p. 60). Place images form “a relatively stable group of ideas in currency, reinforced by their communication value as conventions circulating in a discursive economy” (Shields, 1991, pp. 60-61). A set of place images constitutes what Shields (1991, p. 61) refer to as a *place myth*. The attributes of certain places are related to other places, in a relational constellation of places. Shields calls it “modern geomancy”:

As the Greeks looked at the stars and saw constellations which outlined mythical figures on the inside surface of a dome (as opposed to near and far galaxies and stars), so people today might look at a map and see similar, non-empirical, gestalt constellations of good and bad places. *Real spaces are hypostatized into the symbolic realm of imaginary space relations.* The world is cognitively territorialized so that on the datum of physical geographic knowledge, the world is recoded as a set of spaces and places which are infinitely shaded with connotative characteristics and emotive associations. (Shields, 1991, p. 264)

The result of this is, he writes, “an emotive ordering or a *coded geography*”, “half topography – half metaphor” (Shields, 1991, p. 265). Shields’ coded geography is similar to Said’s concept of “imagined geography” (Said, 1979), describing how particular spaces are invoked with meaning, often in contrast to each other (e.g. Orient-Occident) through certain images, texts or discourses. Shields’ own study shows how marginal and peripheral places, from the Canadian North to the English seaside, become imbued with meanings that carry a strong cultural significance for people living in the centre. Typically, they come to represent the very inversion of the self-image of the centre. The Canadian North, projected into a “zone of Otherness in the spatial system of Canadian culture”, becomes “the complete antithesis of the urban civilization of the southern metropolises” (Shields, 1991, p. 4). The British seaside resort of Brighton, “associated with pleasure, with the liminal, and with the carnivalesque” (Shields, 1991,

p. 73), becomes a place where the normal norms of British culture may be transgressed. Shields does not write directly about borders or borderlands, but they too may be considered special places, objects for an intensive mythification that tends to hypostasize them into something out of the ordinary and turn them into significant “places apart” in the overall imaginary geography. Territorial borders have certain qualities that have made them objects for mythification since times immemorial.

First, borders are unique locations in the way that they offer a maximum of distinction in a minimum of space. They are the only locations where geographical entities begin, end and meet. They are also the only locations where you can cross from one place to another and where you can be in two places at the same time. Thus, borders tend, as Ryden (1993, p. 1) puts it, to “carry a certain mystery and fascination. They imply a transition between realms of experience, state of being; they draw an affable line between life as lived in one place and life as lived in another”. Moreover, borders are special in the sense that they may be regarded as interstitial, liminal zones. In anthropology, the term *liminal* was initially coined by van Gennep to categorize the ambiguous transitional phase of life cycle rites, marking the transition from one status, or stage of life, to another (van Gennep, 1960). The use of the term *liminal* in anthropology was later, largely thanks to the theorizing of Turner, expanded to include a much wider range of states, practices, situations and communities that may be categorized as “betwixt and between” established categories (e.g., Turner, 1967; 1974). As Thomassen (2009, p. 16) observes, in-between places may also be regarded as liminal. In fact, van Gennep himself had indicated that liminal states could indeed have spatial equivalents, borders being prevalent among these (van Gennep, 1960, pp. 15-25). Like other places defined by their betweenness, such as rivers, craters, caves, bridges, tunnels, beaches and crossroads, *borders* have often been invested with special significance, related to magic and to the supernatural. They have been regarded as “places of potency and danger” as well as “places of inspiration and enchantment” (Davidson, 1993, p. 9). These ways of thinking about borders still exist today. There are, for example, “many instances in contemporary literature and in visual culture where the border is represented as a zone of danger in which norms get undone, temptations

rear their head, transgressions take place and solid, reliable identity gets undone” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 112). A well-known work on the recent mythification of the Mexican-US border through film and fiction is tellingly named *The Magic Curtain* (Torrans, 2002).

With the rise of the modern state, beginning with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and culminating in the twentieth century, borders have attained new significance. As Anderson and O’Dowd observe, the territoriality of the modern state “necessarily produces and focuses attention on borders” (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999, p. 598). Borders have become “both structures and symbols of a state’s security and sovereignty” (Donnan & Wilson, 1999, p. 15). They have come to “act as markers of identity, are instruments of state policy, and delimit state sovereignty. As such, borders figure large in national discourse and are often core elements in people’s narratives of national and ethnic identity” (Donnan & Haller, 2000, p. 13).

As Anderson (1996, p. 3) notes, “emotions aroused by state frontiers [i.e. borders] became more widely shared and obsessive with the sacralization of homelands by nineteenth century nationalism”. Borders “became associated with powerful images, symbols and (sometimes invented) traditions” (Anderson, 1996, p. 3). They came to be perceived as the physical manifestations of the symbolic borders between the “imagined communities” of nations (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). In nationalist ideology and beliefs borders often attained immense importance as a barrier, “the final line of resistance between a mythical ‘us’ and an equally mythical ‘them’”, and “the line at which demonized threats from the outside are held at bay” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 112). They became on the one hand a promise of safety and security, but on the other hand a reminder of mutual hostility and the threat from outside. Borderlands were in the process hypostasized into “national landscapes”, “landscape icons recognized and respected by practically every member of the national group” (Häyrynen, 1997, p. 103). A well-known example of this, described by Paasi (1996), was the role of Karelia in the Finnish nation-building process. The border, in certain circumstances, “acquired a mythic significance in building nations and political identities, becoming the *mythomoteur*

[compound of the French words for myth and engine] of a whole society” (Anderson, 1996, p. 4).

Place myths are not set in stone. According to Shields (1991, p. 61), place images “change slowly over time”. Some images “simply lose their connotative power, becoming ‘dead metaphors’, while others are invented, disseminated, and become accepted in common parlance” (Shields, 1991, p. 61). So the place myths of borders may also change, as the inversion of the meaning of borders following the end of the Cold War clearly demonstrates. The nationalist sacralization of borders is still an ongoing process in several European borderlands (see, e.g., Driessen, 1992; Pelkmans, 2006). Today, however, other parallel processes of mythification may also be observed. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Iron Curtain resulted in an inversion of the image of borders in many parts of Europe. Many borders came to be “re-narrated as sites of European solidarity”, “sites of reconciliation and communication” (Zhurzhenko, 2011, p. 68). This inversion was encouraged by EU politics and EU rhetoric about the removal of borders as barriers and about borderlands as pivots for transnational integration. The White Paper on European Border Regions published by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) in 2006 sums up the core idea very well:

The formation of borders as well as their surmounting in the European Union and in the course of the fall of the “Iron Gate” is directly linked to the European history. We have learnt from our experience that borders shouldn’t be lines dividing people but places where people come together. (Gabbe & von Malchus, 2006, p. 5)

Borderlands were reconceptualized as the “glue” of the new unified Europe and as potential “living laboratories, creators of new forms of peaceful coexistence and harmonious living” (Gasparini, 1996, p. 98). They were re-evaluated and assigned great importance and high esteem: “A transnational region was the thing to be, not only as a

more modern organizational form than the old national entities, but also in the idea of borderlands as an energizing force of creative hybridity” (Löfgren, 2008, p. 196).

Place myths of different types may coexist. One border may also carry different, sometimes contradictory meanings. As Shields writes, “opposed groups may carry antithetical place-myths” (Shields, 1991, p. 61). He refers, for example, to how French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians carry very different images of the Canadian Far North. While the English-speaking Canadians have “constructed an image of the Sub-Arctic as an unterritorialised, undifferentiated, ‘unconquerable’ zone of purity” the Québécois regard it as “‘Nouveau Québec’ – which is presented as an engineering zone rich in resources and hydroelectric potential” (Shields, 1961, p. 61). Borders, too, may be places that different groups regard with different eyes and mythify in different, sometimes in quite opposing, ways.

Borders as performative spaces

Sidaway (1997, p. 166) has referred to borders as “concentrated sites of mythical-magical performance”. As *special places* – marked by an intense mythification – borders attained such a status early. Certainly, as Copland (2012, p. 508) observes, “the performative dimension of borders preceded the formation of national states”. Van Gennep notes, for example, in a chapter from *Rites of Passage*, how premodern borders were sites for the installation of highly visible objects, “a stake, portal, or upright rock (milestone or landmark) – whose installation at that particular spot [was] accompanied by rites of consecration” (van Gennep, 1960, p. 15). With the rise of the modern state in the twentieth century, the performative dimension of borders became, however, more palpable and profound than before. As Löfgren (1999, p. 11) observes, “national exits and entries became more elaborated, borders were supposed to be very visible, their passages monumental”. Today, the performative dimension of modern borders manifests itself in the concrete border landscape in the form of material aesthetics as well as in events taking place there.

Van Houtum (2011, p. 50) remarks that “when people talk about territorial boundaries, often first attention is given to their physical appearances. That which is most visible is given the most attention”. As Thomassen (1996, p. 45) observes, “the physical outlook of a border zone is highly symbolically laden and in itself relevant”. This material aesthetics of borders is “one crucial element of their performative display, part of what brings borders into being in the first place and an integral attribute that . . . functions to establish and maintain borders” (Donnan & Wilson, 2010b, p. 73). The performative materiality of borders, consists first of overtly symbolic landmarks: flags, religious symbols, and commemorative sites like monuments, memorials, statues, sculptures, and plaques. Quite often, these landmarks mark enmity and/or difference between two sides of a border, like on the Georgian-Turkish border where a huge Georgian cross, raised in the years after independence, defiantly faces a Turkish mosque on the other side (Fors, 2006, p. 35). At other times they may symbolize accommodation and friendship. An example is the 18-meter-high *Peace Monument* (Norwegian: *Fredsmonumentet*) in Morokulien, right on the Swedish-Norwegian border. The monument was raised in 1914 to mark 100 years of peace between the two countries (The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society, n.d.). Secondly, there are the features of the border landscape that to some extent serve practical functions, but in addition to this may play a performative role. Border walls may be such a feature. Brown (2010, p. 39), writing about the role of walls in the modern world, observes that walls have “spectacularized power”, and that they have always “generated performative and symbolic effects in excess of their obdurately material ones”. Other forms of fortification, e.g. watchtowers, fences and fortresses, may serve the same purpose and so may information and welcome signs, which both inform and invest the border with meaning.

Also common are performances *as events*, in which people – not objects – play the leading roles. The most famous of all border performances worldwide is perhaps the *Lowering of the Flags*, also known as the *Wagah Attari Border Ceremony*, at Wagah on the Indian-Pakistani border. The ceremony is performed every evening before sunset by border guards from both countries:

Supposedly a simple flag-lowering exercise on the road through their joint border, the 45-minute parade manages to be by turns ferocious, ludicrous and touching. In elaborate turbans topped with huge fans, complicated uniforms and shiny black boots the soldiers from the two nations high-kick towards each other. They snort. They stamp. Their eyes are crazed and their moustaches are waxed until they resemble a cross between circus ringmasters and John Cleese in Monty Python's ministry of silly walks. (Khaleeli, 2010)

The ceremony has over the years become an institutionalized happening, attracting crowds of spectators every evening: "A general atmosphere of festival prevails, as singing, dancing, eating and hawking always enliven the proceedings" (Copland, 2012, p. 519). The performance may be interpreted as a "passionate border contest played out in heady symbolism as a way of dramatizing international power struggles" (Donnan & Wilson, 2010b, p. 75), the border guards expressing "with hard-stamping precision the snarling animosity that characterizes Indian-Pakistani official relations" (Copland, 2012, p. 519). Often, public performative events in borderlands exploit the already existing symbolic material aesthetics of the border. The above-mentioned cross on the Georgian border with Turkey has, for example, more than once served as an arena for Christian nationalist political rallies calling for Georgian unity (Fors, 2006, p. 35), while the Swedish-Norwegian Peace Monument has been the site for several Swedish-Norwegian peace rallies (The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society, n.d.).

Border performances characterize and constitute to some extent all state borders. As Donnan and Wilson (2010, p. 73) observe,

even where no formally recognized borders exist, the dramatic accoutrements of state power typically associated with borders may be deployed to bring them into being and give them a theatricalized physical presence in situations where they have no other reality.

One example is the so-called Free State of Christiania in Copenhagen, where, over the main entrance, "a large sign reads 'Christiania' . . . , while on the other side it reads 'You

are now entering the EU' [the sign is written in English – not Danish] (Hall 2014, p. 209). The sign indicates, as Hall (2014, p. 209) observes, “that Christianites perceive Christiania as both a physical area and an ideological one, which distinguishes itself politically and socially from the rest of Denmark”. The density and intensity of border performances varies, however, from border to border. Along uncontested, stable borders, such as that between Sweden and Norway, performances, although existent, tend to be less common. Along borders that are contested, the meaning-making may, however, be more intense, even excessive, like along the Irish border during the Northern Ireland conflict, the so-called Troubles:

When the Troubles were most intense, the borderlands were full of the graffiti and markers of political resistance and sectarian affiliation. Apart from colours, flags and banners, there were murals and political slogans daubed on the walls of houses, shops and bridges . . . The Republic of Ireland's tricolor hung defiantly over crossroads and village, as did the Union Jack, symbolizing violently contested political affiliations and the ethnic fragmentation of the border space. (Donnan & Wilson, 2010b, p. 83)

In cases such as this, as Donnan and Wilson (2010b, p. 81) put it, “the interdeterminacy and ambiguities about the border's future facilitate” the “profusion of border symbols and encourage different parties to compete with each other for symbolic visibility and dominance”.

Just as borders may be mythified in different ways, the performances taking place along them may convey more than one meaning. Border performances may express conflict, like on the Indian-Pakistani border, or they may express peace and accommodation, like on the Norwegian-Swedish border. They may express inclusion and exclusion, enmity and good neighbourhood. Furthermore, they may be performed for different, indeed “multiple audiences that are at once local, regional and international and who may decode and (mis)understand them in a sometimes inchoate and chaotic profusion of ways” (Donnan & Wilson, 2010b, p. 88).

Approaches to border performances

Donnan and Wilson (2010, p. 73) observe that “while borders have been periodically described as a stage on which adjoining states play out their political agendas, the performative dimensions of border zones have been relatively undeveloped in border studies”. An exception is a small number of works that tend to fall within the field of so-called Critical Border Studies (CBS), notably Salter (2011), Wonders (2006) and De Genova (2002; 2012). Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2012, p. 727) refer to CBS as a “distinctive approach within the interdisciplinary border studies literature”. According to the two authors, “one of the pressing tasks confronting the CBS scholar . . . is to develop tools for identifying and interrogating what and where borders are and how they function in different settings, with what consequences, and for whose benefit” (Parker & Vaughan-Williams 2012, 729). “In this context”, they note, “CBS urges two twinned moves: a shift from the *concept of the border* to the *notion of bordering practice*; and the adoption of the lens of *performance* through which bordering practices are produced and reproduced” (Parker & Vaughan-Williams 2012, p. 729). Among the scholars of CBS, border performances have mainly been conceptualized and discussed as articulations of state sovereignty.

In his approach to border performances, Salter (2011) builds on Butler’s theories of gender performance, in which she argues that “gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 1988, p. 527). According to Salter (2011, p. 66), “sovereignty, like gender, has no essence, and must continually be articulated and rearticulated in terms of ‘stylized repetition of acts’ of sovereignty”. “The state,” he writes, “performs itself as sovereign – and this is particularly visible at borders when the self-evidence of the state’s control over populations, territory, political economy, belonging, and culture is so clearly in question”.

De Genova uses terms like *exemplary theater* (2002, p. 436) and *Border Spectacle* (2012, p. 493) to describe how the state demonstrates its sovereignty through practices of enforcement on the border. “The Border Spectacle,” notes De Genova, “may be

extravagantly illustrated in the classic examples that cluster around the patrolling and policing of geographical borders, the physical frontiers of nation-state territoriality” (De Genova, 2012, p. 494). This spectacle, he writes, “relentlessly augments and embellishes the mundane and diminutive human mobility of migrants with the mystique of an obnoxious and unpardonable transgression of the presumably sacrosanct boundary of the state’s space” (De Genova, 2012, p. 493).

Wonders (2006, p. 65) describes border performativity as an “analytical tool for exploring borders and border constructions”. According to her, “border performativity takes as its theoretical starting point the idea that borders are not only geographically constituted, but . . . socially constructed via the performance of various state actors in an elaborate dance with ordinary people who seek freedom of movement and identification” (Wonders, 2006, p. 64). Wonders regards border performances mainly as border control strategies that manifest themselves in two ways: first, in “the social construction of ‘the illegal’ and its carefully crafted linkage to already disadvantaged populations”, and secondly, in “the securitization of the border which has been accomplished by the development of a large, costly, and growing border control industry” (Wonders, 2006, p. 83).

Salter, De Genova and Wonders share the key idea of this thesis of performances as characteristic and constitutive for borders. Their approach to border performance is, however, somewhat narrow and reductive. Border performances tend to be reduced to top-down suppressive and exclusionary practices of control instigated by a state striving to mark its sovereignty. Certainly, the presence of the state is prominent on the border, and many performances taking place there can clearly be seen as articulations of the state and its agents. However, as Rumford (2011, p. 67) notes, “bordering is not always the business of the state”. Other actors, “citizens, entrepreneurs, and NGOs are [also] active in constructing, shifting, or even erasing borders”.

The important role played by non-state actors in borderlands has been demonstrated in several anthropological studies from borderlands. Sahlins’ work *The Making of France*

and Spain in the Pyrenees is often referred in this respect. The study “connects the ‘macroscopic’ political and diplomatic history of France and Spain . . . , and the ‘molecular’ history – the historical ethnography of Catalan village communities, rural nobles, and peasants in the borderland” (Sahlins 1989: xv). Sahlins shows how the local actors by no means are passive “victims” of macro changes instigated by the national centres but, on the contrary, active co-creators in the making of the Franco-Spanish border. In the article *Mugarik ez! Subverting the Border in the Basque Country*, Leizaola (2000) provides another good example of local involvement in border making when describing how local Basque separatists challenge the French and Spanish national authorities in the borderland, and indeed on the border itself. Leizaola shows how the separatists, through various ingenious performances, defy and deny (the legitimacy of) the border. Evocative slogans such as “there is no border!” and “no to the border!” are used. The protest also manifests itself in destructive actions against the border symbols of the state like boundary stones, and other landmarks. Leizaola describes, for instance, how a state-sponsored statue made by a well-known Spanish sculptor placed on the very border, is demonstratively pulled down, modified (the engraved names France and Spain painted out and replaced by the name of the two Basque provinces of Gipuzkoa and Lapurdi) and finally utterly destroyed (Leizaola, 2000, p. 40). As Donnan and Haller (2000, p. 16) conclude in the introduction to the article, “the border has here become a contested space, performatively reaffirmed or denied by a range of competing ritual events and symbolic markers”. They also observe that while “borders generally are prime sites of symbolic elaboration within the state and national imaginary”, “such state symbols sit side by side with the symbols used by local people to articulate their membership in local, regional, national and other communities” (Donnan & Haller, 2000, p. 15).

For people living in borderlands, performances may even become a source of empowerment. Studies from several borders in Europa and Africa (e.g., Flynn, 1997; Feyissa & Hoehne 2010; Konstantinov, 1994; Nugent & Asiwaju 1996a; Thuen, 1998; 1999) have documented how borders may provide a livelihood, either for specialized groups of traders and smugglers, or for entire border communities. These studies on

borders as opportunities generally explore how border citizens in various ways engage in cross-border trade, and export and import of goods. The value of borders for people living along them is thus defined in terms of what they represent as corridors, barriers and conduits between different economic spheres, constituted by the states they separate. The border as a performative space may, however, also provide borderlanders with unique opportunities. Just like the border residents may capitalize on their location next to the border as an economic barrier and conduit, they may capitalize on the border's symbolic value, its unique status as site of "mythical-magical performance" (Sidaway, 1997, p. 166). Just like smuggling and trading may be regarded as fruitful niches, so too may border performances be a niche, a field that can be used for economic as well as symbolic gains. Throughout this thesis, several examples of a successful local exploitation of the Norwegian-Russian border as a performative arena will be presented.

In the following, a more open approach to border performance than that typical for the CBS school will be pursued. Here, border performances will not merely be seen as the mechanisms of a suppressive state. Instead, these performances will be regarded as something potentially *polysemic*, conveying many possible meanings and messages as well as something potentially *multivocal*, articulated not only by agents of the state, but also by local actors. Furthermore, the exploration of these performances will take place, not through non-empirical theorizing, but through ethnographic study from *below*, bottom-up, not top-down. As Donnan and Wilson (2010a, p. 8) note, "the anthropology of borders is distinctive because of its focus on those local people and communities who live, work and cross borders". This distinctiveness should, with regards to the study of border performances, be seen as an advantage, in the sense that it makes possible the detailed study of the actual events and processes taking place on the ground.

The events and processes under scrutiny in this study occur within and across three different *fields* in the Norwegian-Russian borderland. These fields are politics, art and tourism. A more thorough background for the local significance of the three fields will be presented in later chapters. The term *field* is here used heuristically, but inspired by Grønhaug's concept *social field* that denotes a *sphere of activity*, "a relatively bounded

interconnection system stretched out in socio-space” (Grønhaug 1978, p. 118). Adhering to Grønhaug, fields are seen as constituted by *doings*, and as something that may be observed in “empirical events in which task and issue-oriented relations become activated” (Grønhaug 1978, p. 118). Furthermore, fields will here mainly be regarded as analytical units. In actual life, the boundaries between the three fields are not absolute, as different spheres of activities may be more or less intertwined. The focus on three separate fields instead of one makes it possible to explore border performances from several positions, and thereby to achieve a fuller understanding of the actual meaning-making taking place in relation to the border and the borderland. The focus on the fields of politics, art and tourism is mainly due to their prevalence in the overall production of border performances in the Norwegian-Russian borderland. The three fields tend, however, also to be relevant and typical contexts for the production of performances along other borders, as explained below.

Political border performances

Politics may, as Heywood (2013, p. 2), notes, “be treated as an ‘essentially contested’ concept, in the sense that the term has a number of acceptable or legitimate meanings”. Heywood (2013, p. 2) suggests “to distinguish between two broad approaches to defining politics”. In the first approach, “politics is viewed as a process or mechanism, in which case ‘political’ behaviour is behaviour that exhibits distinctive characteristics or qualities, and so can take place in any, and perhaps all, social contexts” (Heywood 2013, p. 3). Politics in this broad sense may be formal as well as informal, and may be “at work in all social activities and in every corner of human existence” (Heywood 2013, p. 9). In the second approach, “politics is associated with an arena or location, in which case behaviour becomes ‘political’ because of where it takes place” (Heywood 2013, p. 3). Politics, in this sense, will be confined “to a particular sphere (the government, the state or the ‘public’ realm)” (Heywood 2013, p. 9) and restricted to the actors operating within this sphere, for example agents of the state, politicians, political parties, et cetera. The approach in this thesis to politics as a *field*, mainly relate to this second understanding of politics.

Political border performances can be seen as manifestations of a particular aspect of politics, namely *symbolic politics*. The concept was developed by Murray Edelman in *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* based on a division of politics into two dimensions: an instrumental dimension that represents the real effect of political actions, and an expressive dimension of symbolic politics that represents the presentation of the action for the public (Edelman 1967). It concerns the *presentation* of politics, rather than the production of politics: “As a policy of signs (terms and slogans, badges, banners and pictures, gestures, ritual acts, and political staging), symbolic politics evolves in a semantic field” (Sárosi-Márdirosz, 2014. p. 166). Symbolic politics differs from “substantial politics”, which, “by contrast, consists of a revisable succession of political decisions (e.g., legislation, contracts, taxes, etc.)” (Sárosi-Márdirosz, 2014. p. 166). The relation between symbolic politics and practical politics is complex. Symbolic politics may be more or less congruent with real political acts and intentions. At other times symbolic politics is used *deliberately* to hide the unwanted consequences of a failed real policy. Political symbols are often used by political actors instrumentally in order to create a make-believe political reality (Edelman, 1967; Elder & Cobb, 1983). As David Kertzer (1988) demonstrates, symbolic politics is by no means inferior to substantial politics, for “political reality is in good parts created through symbolic means” (p. 5): “through political rituals, we are given a way to understand what is going on in the world, for we live in a world that must be drastically simplified if it is to be understood” (p. 2). Kertzer (1988, p. 6) notes that people tend to “make sense of the political processes [mainly] through the diverse symbolic forms they assume”. The very *visibility* of the political symbols makes this dimension of politics more accessible to people than the processes of practical politics, which mostly tend to take place behind closed doors.

Kertzer, in *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (1988), traces symbolic politics from Aztec cannibal rites up to modern presidential inauguration ceremonies and demonstrates how it has been an important and integral part of international, national and local politics regardless of time and place. In some cases, the symbolic aspect of politics may become very prevalent. The term *theatre state*, originally coined by Geertz in his writings about politics in the nineteenth century Balinese state of Negara (Geertz, 1980), refers to a

state where power almost exclusively is exercised through spectacle and performance. A modern example of a theatre state, according to Kwon and Chung (2012), is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Symbolic politics is not restricted to borders. However, as has been outlined above, symbolic politics in the form of performances is particularly salient along borders. Several of the examples of border performances above, from the Lowering of the Flags ceremony to the subversive activities of Basque separatists, may be regarded as political performances. These performances may include various communicative genres, for example speeches, marches, rallies, wreath-laying ceremonies, public celebrations and commemorations, and the raising and display of symbolic landmarks, monuments and memorials. Political border performances may convey a vast array of meanings. They may be confrontative, as in the case of the Lowering of the Flags ceremony, or accommodating, as in the case of the raising of the Peace Monument on the Norwegian-Swedish border. Many actors may be involved in symbolic politics of the border. Prominent among these is the state, for which the border represents the limit for, as well as the symbol of, authority. The state, however, as we have seen, is not the sole actor involved in the political meaning-making taking place in borderlands. Regional and local authorities, political interest groups and ethnic organizations often actively pursue their own symbolic politics along borders, sometimes in cooperation with, or sometimes in opposition to, the state.

Artistic border performances

Art, like *politics*, is a wide-ranging and contested concept. Conventionally, art can be defined as “a diverse range of human activities in creating visual, auditory or performing artifacts (artworks), expressing the author's imaginative or technical skill, intended to be appreciated for their beauty or emotional power” (“Art”, n.d.). This would include visual arts, such as “painting, sculpture, printmaking, photography, and other visual media”, as well as performing arts such as music, theatre, film and dance (“Art”, n.d.). Here the particular type of art of interest is *border art*, that is, art that thematizes the

border and/or borderland, often with the border and/or borderland as the sites for production and/or display.

Traavik's *Borderlines*, the art installation referred to in the introduction, is an example of a piece of border art actively engaging in the social construction of the border and borderland. The installation marked for some time the very border landscape in which it was placed. The use of art to *mark* borders is common. The border scholar Josef Langer (1996) describes how evocative *land art* was applied in central Europe in the aftermath of the Cold War in attempts to redefine the meaning of the former Iron Curtain. Banksy's famous works of graffiti art on the West Bank Barrier between Israel and the Palestine West Bank are aimed at modifying people's representations of this wall, questioning its role and meaning (Banksy, 2005; Jones, 2005). Border art can also manifest itself as events, for example in the form of concerts or theatre performances. Prokolla (2008) writes, for example, about how a so-called "smuggling opera", organized as a cross-border theatre project, was set up on the Swedish-Finnish border. She describes the performance as "'theatrical place-making', in which the members of the community had to negotiate what cultural meanings are to be celebrated and associated with their region, and how the particular settings are to be viewed by the outside world" (Prokolla, 2008, p. 664).

There also exists today a specific genre of *border performance art*. This genre first emerged in the US-Mexican borderland based on the ideas and activities of the San Diego-based art group BAW/TAF (*Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo*). The BAW/TAF had its origin in the 1980s and was, as Amilhat-Szary (2012, p. 218) writes, "rooted in the history of the Chicano movement and its demand for civil rights for the Hispanic community of the US". Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), which comprises essays and poems exploring border identity along the US-Mexican border, was highly influential for the new border artistic movement. The BAW/TAF "self-consciously conceived itself as a producer of 'border art'" and "explicitly addressed border politics" (Prieto 1999). Mixing art and political activism, the BAW/TAF turned the US-Mexican border into a resistance scene, a site

for protest – *against* the border itself. The BAW/TAF declared its interest in “addressing the social tensions that the border create[d], while asking us to imagine a world in which this international boundary ha[d] been erased” (Grynsztejn, 1993, p. 25). Performance became the preferred art form for the BAW/TAF. The border itself was repeatedly used as a site for their performances. One of the most influential members of the BAW/TAF was Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who has not only worked as a performance artist but also as an author, publishing works with titles such as *The New World Border* (1996) and *Dangerous Border Crossers* (2000). Gómez-Peña has, as we will see, had a significant influence on the development of border art in the Norwegian-Russian borderland.

Amilhat-Szary (2012, pp. 221-222) observes that the two most recurrent themes in the border art scene have been “the barbed wire” and the “body and its suffering”, themes related to the suppressive dimension of borders. In 1991, Carmela Castrejón hung, for instance, a “long row of blood-stained garments” on a new section of the border fence (Prieto 1999). The blood represented the dead of the Gulf War that same year, but also those who had died trying to cross the Mexican-US border, “victims of another type of slow war, silent and without any truce” (Eraña, 1993, p. 96). A third recurrent theme of the border art scene, not mentioned by Amilhat-Szary, is the celebration of border transcendence of all kinds. Copland mentions, for instance, that Gómez-Peña “consistently over many years [has] turned ‘his’ border and borderland (US – California) into a performance space”, inventing “an art of border performance that transgresses and translocates borders of every kind” (Copland, 2012, pp. 512-513). The positive image of borderlands, as open spaces or third spaces, tends to mark border art, as much as the negative depictions of closed borders.

Touristic border performances

Tourism is a powerfully communicative field specialized in the “artfulness of staged theatricality” (Bruner, 2005, p. 208). Several key scholars have pointed at the performative dimension of tourism. In his seminal work *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell – inspired by Goffman – approached the phenomenon of sightseeing as a “modern ritual” and tourist sites as a “staged performance” (MacCannell, 1989). Kirshenblatt-

Gimblett has used a performance-oriented approach to explore how people and objects – being collected and exhibited – perform touristically (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Schechner too notes how the tourism industry, in order to “satisfy an enormous and still rapidly growing market of intercultural, international, intracultural, and intranational tourists”, find, redesign and invents all kinds of performances (Schechner, 2013, p. 290).

Border tourism is a form of niche tourism taking place on international borders. The phenomenon has only in recent years been explored scholarly (see, e.g., Timothy 2001; Wachowiak 2006). One may distinguish between three types of border tourism depending on how tourism relates to the border. The first of these types encompasses the second type and the second type the third. First, there are the cases where the border serves as nothing more than a locale, a setting for tourism. The border just happens to be there. It has no real effect on tourism, nor is it of particular interest for the tourists. An example is Niagara Falls on the US-Canadian border, an attraction in which the falls, not the border, function as the tourist draw. Secondly, there are the cases where the border not only serves as a locale but also as a generator for tourism. By far the most common example of this type is *cross-border consumer tourism*, tourism encouraged by economic and legal dissimilarities across borders. Third, there is the tourism that focuses on the border itself – as a destination *and* an attraction. This third type of border tourism will be the one of main interest here.

Timothy, an authority on border tourism, writes that “as tourism develops in a destination, a distinct cultural landscape is created – a tourist landscape”, created by and for tourists (Timothy, 2001, p. 92). These tourist landscapes can be regarded as “the manner in which the visible structure of a place expresses the emotional attachments held by both its residents and visitors, as well as the means by which it is imagined, produced, contested and enforced” (Timothy, 2001, p. 92, quoting Ringer, 1998, p. 6). When a tourist landscape is established in borderlands, tourism “can, and does in many instances, help to create and alter the border landscape” (Timothy, 2001, p. 92). Timothy focuses mostly on the physical impacts of border tourism development and significantly less on the impact this development may have on the level of representation. Löytynoja

(2007), writing on touristic place-making and the staging of the Finnish-Russian border, observes, however, that tourism also “leaves marks on the socio-cultural landscape of the borderland” (p. 36), on how borders are imagined and perceived by those visiting them. Prokkola (2010, pp. 232-233), writing about the transformation of the Swedish-Finnish border landscape, also points out that tourism may add new layers of meaning to border landscapes.

In Europe, border tourism has, like border art, during the last few decades in general promoted the *opening* of borders. Prokkola even describes tourism as a “pioneering industry in the process of cross-border regionalization, transforming national borderlands into tourism landscapes and physical loci of co-operation” (Prokkola, 2007, p. 135). Tourism, she argues, has provided for “a spatial reorganisation of political landscapes, and the creation of new spatial and social images to replace the national ones” (Prokkola, 2010, p. 224). This tendency can be most clearly observed along the former East-West divide where a significant development of transboundary touristic spaces and routes for recreation and tourism has taken place. One example is the European Green Belt, typically presented as “both a commemorative landscape and a living monument for the overcoming of the Iron Curtain and the Cold War” and “a symbol for the overcoming of the division of Europe” (Geidezis & Kreutz, 2012, p. 20). Borderland destinations now typically brand themselves with names and slogans stressing their “borderless” character, rather than by referring to the borders dividing them (Prokkola, 2010). The tourist industry, however, does not always play the role of “bridge builder”. It may also exploit and cultivate closed borders. During the Cold War, the Iron Curtain was in fact a great tourist attraction (Kockel, 2010). Many places along the western side of the East-West divide were lookout points and viewing towers specially built for curious Western tourists. Such tourism, referred to by Gelbman (2010, p. 87) as “one-sided border tourism”, as opposed to border crossing tourism, still occurs adjacent to a number of relatively closed and fortified borders, including, as we will see, the border between Norway and Russia.

Intersecting fields

The distinction above between political, artistic and touristic performances is by no means absolute. On the contrary, the political, the artistic and the touristic fields are often closely related and interconnected, existing side by side, relating to each other in a dynamic way. The well-known border performances of the Berlin Wall illustrate this well. The wall, or its immediate proximity, became the stage for a wide range of performances during and after the Cold War. Some of these were of an international political character, like the famous speeches of John F. Kennedy at the Rudolph Wilde Platz (later symbolically renamed John F. Kennedy Platz) in 1963 and Ronald Reagan in 1987. Kennedy in his speech emphasized the image of the Berlin Wall as a gigantic divide between the free world and the communist world and stressed US-German solidarity by claiming that “ich bin ein Berliner” (Kennedy, 1963). In 1987, Ronald Reagan, repeating Kennedy’s claims, urged Mikhail Gorbachev to “tear down the wall” (Reagan, 1987). Other performances were artistic. The Western side of the border became a canvas for graffiti artist performances: “‘Overcoming the Wall by painting the Wall’ was the crucial ambition of much of the art on the Wall” (Baker, 2005, p. 34). Later, local East German dissidents “painted a broad white line at eye level along” a long section of the wall, wiping out the art works along the way (Baker, 2005, p. 34). They protested against the wall becoming a *touristic* attraction – a part of local place promotion – and insisted that it should be seen again for what it really was, a veritable barrier for people. After 1989, the wall, or the remnants of it, became the arena for performances celebrating German and/or European reunification and the downfall of the border – and indeed borders in general. In 1990, Pink Floyd performed *The Wall* at Potsdamer Platz in the former “no man’s land” (Baker, 2005, p. 38). Today, the remnants of the wall are still a huge tourist attraction, but now mostly as a historical monument.

In the case of the Berlin Wall there were international, national and local actors, politicians, artists and tour entrepreneurs, involved in the border performances. These various actors were interacting and relating to each other, supporting and negating each other. The border and the borderland, in the process, was inscribed and reinscribed over

and over again with a multitude of meanings. Similar interconnections between politics, art and tourism, and between the international, the national and the local, can be observed in the Norwegian-Russian borderland as well.

Chapter 3: The Border and the Borderland

Anderson and O'Dowd (1999, p. 594) note that “every state border, every border region, is unique” and that “their meanings and significance can vary dramatically over space and time”. Wilson and Donnan (1998, p. 12) state that borders are “complex and multidimensional cultural phenomena, variously articulated and interpreted across space and time”. This, they claim,

suggests that a priori assumptions about the nature of the ‘border’ are likely to founder when confronted with empirical data; far from being a self-evident, analytical given which can be applied regardless of context, the ‘border’ must be interrogated for its subtle and sometimes not so subtle shifts in meaning and form according to setting. (Wilson and Donnan 1998, p. 12)

This calls for a special attention to *context*. In this chapter, the geographic, historical and socio-economic context of the Norwegian-Russian border and borderland will be presented.

The border

The border between Norway and Russia (Norwegian: *Den norsk-russiske grense*, Russian: *Rossisko-norvezhskaya granitsa*) was defined by treaty in 1826 and has since then remained essentially unchanged. The border has a history of geopolitical significance. During the Cold War, the border was one of only two borders between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Soviet Union. Today, it is a NATO–Russia border as well as an external Schengen border. The border is 196 kilometres long; it constitutes 8 % of the total length of Norway’s state borders and 1 % of the total length of Russia’s borders. It is Norway’s shortest border and the second shortest of Russia’s 14 borders.² The border is, next after that between Norway and

² Not counting Russia’s 70 kilometres long border with the Georgian break-away region of South Ossetia which Russia recognizes as an independent state. The border between Russia and North Korea (18 kilometres) is the shortest of the international borders of Russia.

Finland, the world's northernmost international border. It stretches from the shores of the Barents Sea in the north to the Norwegian–Russian–Finnish Three-Country Cairn in the south. Approximately two-thirds of the border follows rivers – the Jakobselv River (Norwegian: *Jakobselva*, Russian: *Vorjema*) and the Pasvik River (Norwegian: *Pasvikelva*, Russian: *Paz*). The rest of the border runs partly through mountainous tundra and partly through flat forest. The border is highly visible on the subarctic landscape. On land, it is marked by a wide border vista, by border cairns, and by 357 pairs of border posts similar to those applied in Traavik's *Borderlines*. In the river, where the border follows the thalweg, yellow buoys and black buoys mark the borderline (Johanson, 1999, p. 23).

There is only one legal border crossing point along the border; this is at Storskog in Norway and Borisoglebsky in Russia, on the E105 highway. Here, the number of people crossing the border has increased steadily since the end of the Cold War; from 15 940 in 1991 to 265 177 in 2017 (Statsbygg, 2002; Nilsen, 2018). In 2012, in order to encourage cross-border integration, Norway and Russia jointly established a local border traffic zone encompassing the two border municipalities of Sør-Varanger and Pechenga. Residents living within the zone are eligible for local border traffic permits (Norwegian: *Grenseboerbevis*, Russian: *Razreshenie na mestnoe prigranichnoe peredvizhenie*) which allows them to cross the border without regular visas and stay on the other side (within the border zone) for up to 15 days. For all other travellers, a visa is required for crossing the border.

Despite the increased cross-border traffic, the border still displays many of the typical features of a fortified and closed border. There are many signs of security and control along the border: watchtowers, barbed wire fences, and border guards on patrol. On the Norwegian side there are no restricted areas and people are free to walk up to the borderline. The entire Russian side of the border remains, however, heavily militarized and has the status of a *Border Security Zone*. (Russian: *Pogranichnaya zona*). Access to and movement within the zone requires permission from the Federal Security Service (FSB). The rules and regulations for entering the zone are intricate and strict, not only

for foreigners but also for Russian citizens (Kolosov, 2012, p. 188). Along the border on both sides, there are still special regulations for economic activities: fishing, farming, hunting, and mining. There are also regulations for personal conduct and movement; it is, for example, prohibited to photograph along and across the border with tripods longer than 200 millimetres; to “intentionally make contact with, or act in an insulting manner towards persons on the other side of the border”; and “to throw items across the borderline” (Politiet, 2018).



Figure 3. *The Norwegian-Russian border seen from Skafferhullet, Elvenes, Norway.*
(Photo by Bengt Larsson³)

³ Available via <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Skafferhullet-IMAG1034.jpg> under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license. Full terms at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>

The Norwegian and Russian border commissioners, based in Kirkenes and Nikel, respectively, are assigned the task of ensuring that all border regulations are complied with. The Norwegian police and the Border Service of Russia carry out visa, passport, and immigration control. The practical surveillance of the border is operated on both sides by military units.

The borderland

The Norwegian–Russian border is located in the so-called *North Calotte Region* (Norwegian: *Nordkalotten*), a vast but sparsely populated area where the extreme peripheries of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia meet. Northern Norway (Norwegian: *Nord-Norge*) constitutes the westernmost and northernmost part of this area. The region consists of a long and rugged coastline with numerous fjords and high mountains. The county of Finnmark is the northernmost and easternmost part of Northern Norway, bordering the Barents Sea to the north, Finland to the south, and Russia to the east. The county covers an area roughly the size of Denmark, but only 75 000 people live there; mostly in towns and fishing villages along the coast (Statistics Norway, 2017). Located furthest to the east in Finnmark is the area of Varanger, which is geographically divided into Nord-Varanger (Northern Varanger) and Sør-Varanger (Southern Varanger) by the Varanger Fjord (Norwegian: *Varangerfjorden*), an inlet from the Barents Sea. The area comprises six municipalities: Berlevåg, Båtsfjord, Vardø, Vadsø, Nesseby and Sør-Varanger.

Depending on the degree of impact of a border on daily life, Baud and van Schendel (1997, pp. 221–222) distinguish between three borderland zones. First, there is the *outer borderland*, “which only under specific circumstances feels the effects of the border” (Baud & van Schendel, 1997, p. 222). Secondly, there is the *intermediate borderland*, “the region that always feels the influence of the border but in intensities varying from moderate to weak” (Baud & van Schendel, 1997, p. 222). Finally, there is the *border heartland*, the zone “abutting on the border and dominated by its existence” (Baud & van Schendel, 1997, p. 221). In a Norwegian–Russian context, Northern Norway may well be considered an outer borderland, Finnmark the intermediate borderland, while

Varanger may be considered the border heartland. As Niemi observes, “no area in Northern Norway has had more intimate connections with Russia” (Niemi, 2014b, p. 78). Historically, this was mostly true for the northern part of Varanger (particularly the towns of Vardø and Vadsø), but today the proximity of Russia is most manifest in the municipality of Sør-Varanger and in its centre, Kirkenes. As Viken, Granås, & Nyseth (2008, p. 35) note:

The development of border-related practices, summed up in the expression ‘from a town on the border to a border town’, is significant for most people living in Kirkenes; the Russian element is perceptible in many arenas and many ways in the townspeople’s everyday life.

Sør-Varanger municipality (Sami: *Máttá-Várjjat*, Finnish: *Etelä-Varanki*,) covers an area of 3968 square kilometres. The Varanger Fjord forms the natural northern border of the municipality. To the north of this fjord is the town of Vadsø. To the west, Sør-Varanger shares a border with the municipality of Nesseby. To the south and west, it borders the municipality of Inari in Finnish Lapland and, to the east, it borders the district of Pechenga in the Murmansk region of Russia. The landscape of Sør-Varanger spans from barren mountainous tundra along the coast to dense, low-lying pine forest in the southern Pasvik Valley. Several rivers cut through the landscape from south to north. The easternmost of these, the Pasvik River and the Jakobselv River, follow the border with Russia. Located well beyond the Arctic Circle, the area has a subarctic climate, with cold winters and temperate summers.

Kirkenes⁴ (Sami: *Girkonjárga*, Finnish: *Kirkkoniemi*) is the administrative and commercial centre of Sør-Varanger. The town is located on a small peninsula in between

⁴ The oldest name for Kirkenes is probably the Sami name *Akkolaggnjarga*, meaning “Greenland shark headland”, due to the periodic abundance of sharks in the fjord. This name also occurs in the Norwegian translation as *Håkiering-Næss* (Paulsen, 1987, p. 11). Later, the place was often referred to as *Piselvnes* (“the piss brook headland”) after the *Piselv* (later called *Skitbekken* (“the shit brook”)), a small brook which previously ran through the peninsula. In 1862, after the erection of a church, the place was renamed Kirkenes (literally “the church headland”) (Paulsen, 1987, p. 13).

Langfjorden and Bøkfjorden, two arms of the Varanger Fjord, approximately six kilometres (as the crow flies) from the Russian–Norwegian border. In 2017, 3566 people lived in the small town centre, but if one includes the three “suburbs” of Bjørnevatn, Hesseng, and Sandnes, the total population comes close to 8000 – roughly 80 % of the total population of Sør-Varanger (Statistics Norway, 2017).

The next chapters will reveal how Kirkenes is being branded as an exceptional place – as “the New York of the North” and “the gateway to the East”. The real Kirkenes is, however, not so extraordinary. The town has all the typical features of a North Norwegian coastal town: a harbour, an airport, a church, a town hall, a museum, a hospital, a secondary school, a police station, a fire station, a cinema, a theatre, a local newspaper, various sports clubs and associations, a couple of shopping malls, a couple of hotels, and a few cafés and restaurants. A Russian newspaper report – unusual in the way it focuses on this very ordinariness of Kirkenes – bears the illustrious title *A Settlement of the Norwegian Type* (Kochetkova, 2010). In the report, the author, Natalia Kochetkova, compares Kirkenes to David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks*, not because of the atmosphere, but due to the predominant architecture, which is very typical for this part of Norway; “low houses spread out all over, none of them higher than two floors, the largest built for four families, each with its own entrance” (Kochetkova, 2010). She further describes the pure white snow covering the streets and the typical Protestant culture of the local inhabitants who “do not pull down the curtains of their windows in the evenings but, on the contrary, put lights or candles on the window sills so that it is easier to see the cosy living rooms with their respectable owners” (Kochetkova, 2010). Contrary to most other reporters writing about Kirkenes, Kochetkova finds the town to be rather dull.

In Norway, civic heraldic arms often serve as “conveyors of information” about places (Olsen, 2008, p. 300). The coat of arms of Sør-Varanger (designed 1982), which takes the form of a *per bend rayonny Or and Gules* – a three tongued flame partition (see Figure 4), is not an exception. First, the very colours of the arms repeat those of the

national arms of Norway, emphasising the national significance of the border municipality (Johannessen & Cappelen, 1987, p. 214).

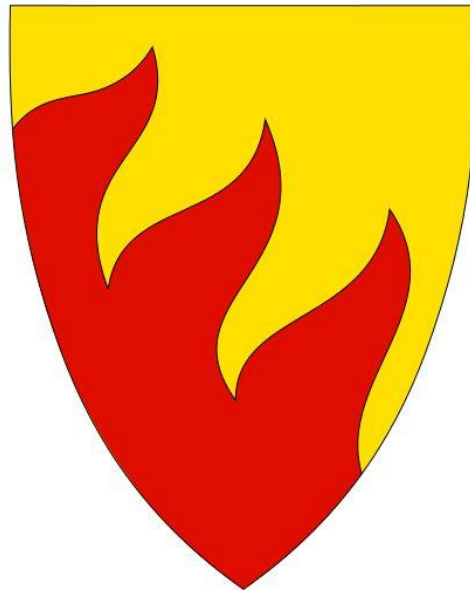


Figure 4. *The municipal coat of arms of Sør-Varanger.*

The three flames have various meanings. First, they symbolize the meeting of three states – Norway, Russia, and Finland. Secondly, they symbolize the municipality’s three main rivers, the Pasvik, the Jakobselv, and the Neiden River. The three rivers, running northwards before discharging into the Varanger Fjord, form an important part of the natural and cultural landscape of the municipality. Third, the flames symbolize the municipality’s “three population elements”: Norwegians, Sami, and Finns (Johannessen & Cappelen, 1987, p. 214). The fact that the flames are nourished by the same source indicates a unity between the three groups: “the three nationalities are jointly using the resources together and have become one community” (Johannessen & Cappelen 1987, p. 214). The Sami are the indigenous population of Sør-Varanger and were, until the late nineteenth century, the largest ethnic group in the municipality (Lunde 1979, p. 132). The Finns, sometimes referred to as Kvens, are mainly descendants of settlers

arriving from Finland to Varanger in the nineteenth century.⁵ Norwegians began to immigrate in large numbers to Sør-Varanger somewhat later, in the early twentieth century. In 1910, Norwegians constituted about half of the population of Sør-Varanger. In 1930, that number had grown to almost 75 % (Lunde, 1979, p. 132). Nowadays, the vast majority of the inhabitants of Sør-Varanger regard themselves as Norwegians, although quite a few people bear Finnish or Sami family names and claim (or could claim) to be of Sami and/or Finnish descent. Locally, there are different Norwegian, Sami, and Finnish toponyms and road signs in use, sometimes alongside each other. A fourth ethnic group, not represented in the coat of arms, is the Russians, who today constitute approximately 4 % of the population of Sør-Varanger and a somewhat higher percentage of the population of Kirkenes (Statistics Norway, 2017). Most of the Russians in Sør-Varanger have immigrated since the end of the Cold War. Many of these are women who have married Norwegian men.

Fourth, the three flames refer to the three most historically important industries in the municipality: agriculture, fisheries, and mining (Johannessen & Cappelen, 1987, p. 214). Today, agriculture employs few people and is, due to the harsh climate, of minor economic significance. Fisheries are considerably less important in Sør-Varanger than in other parts of coastal Northern Norway. For most of the twentieth century, iron ore mining was the dominant industry in Sør-Varanger. The company A/S Sydvaranger began its operations in the area in 1906. A railway was constructed from the mine in Bjørnevattn to the harbour of Kirkenes from where the iron ore was processed and shipped to the world market. For decades, the entire municipality was engaged in the exploitation, refinement, and shipping of iron ore. Kirkenes became a company town. At some point, as many as 1500 men were on the payroll of A/S Sydvaranger (Viken et al., 2008, p. 28). The decline of mining began in the late 1970s. Investments failed, there was a breakdown in the international iron ore market, and there was a growing political

⁵ Two terms, *Finns* (Norwegian: *Finner*) and *Kvens* (Norwegian: *Kvener*), are used as ethnonyms for the descendants of Finnish-speaking people who immigrated to Northern Norway from the sixteenth century up to World War II. In Varanger, a region with one of the largest Finnish immigrant populations, the term *Finns* tends to predominate (Storaas, 2007).

scepticism in Norway towards state subsidies of struggling industries, even in the borderland (Larsen, 1988, pp. 65–66). A/S Sydvaranger sustained greater and greater losses. In 1986, the Norwegian parliament decided to gradually phase out mining in Sør-Varanger altogether (Sør-Varanger Invest, 2010, p. 28). In 1996, A/S Sydvaranger closed down its operations.⁶ In order to compensate for the closure of the mine, the Norwegian authorities instigated a local economic development process, the so-called *Omstillingen* (“the restructuring”) (Teistevoll, 2006). From 1986 and well into the 1990s, several hundred million kroner were transferred to the municipality with the aim of establishing new workplaces within the public sector and developing new sectors, such as IT, culture, and tourism. The restructuring process and the partial opening of the border with Russia (see below) ensured a relatively smooth transformation from an industrial to a postindustrial economy. A new, more diversified economy developed. Currently, about 50 % of the municipality’s workforce is employed in the public sector. An administrative department of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service was established in the old mining village of Bjørnevatn, providing more than 100 jobs. Many people also work in the hospital, the schools, the police force, and the border guard. Services are important too. During the last few decades, Kirkenes has become a regional trade centre with shopping malls attracting customers from both the Norwegian and Russian sides of the border. Kirkenes also serves as a regional transport hub. The town is the starting point for the Norwegian Coastal Express (Norwegian: *Hurtigruten*) and two roads in the European E-road network, E6 (going westwards along the Norwegian coast) and E105 (going eastwards into Russia). The airport has daily flights to Oslo and Tromsø. Since the 1990s, the harbour facilities and ship repair services of KIMEK, formerly the mechanical support of the mining company, have been a thriving enterprise (Sør-Varanger Invest, 2010). The company currently employs about 200 people. Tourism is also growing in importance, employing approximately 200 people (Sør-Varanger kommune, 2015, p. 14).

⁶ The mine was briefly reopened in 2009 by Sydvaranger Gruve A/S, before being closed once again in 2015.

This study mainly concerns events and processes taking place on the Norwegian side of the border. The Russian side of the border is, however, interesting as a part of the larger context surrounding these events and processes. Located east of the border, on the Kola Peninsula, is the Murmansk region (Russian: *Murmanskaya oblast*), one of the 85 federal subjects of Russia. The region covers 144 902 square kilometres and has a population of 753 557, mainly ethnic Russians. Almost half of the population lives in the regional capital Murmansk (Russian Federal State Statistics Service, 2018). Mining, fisheries, and energy are important economic sectors in the Murmansk region. The ice-free port of Murmansk is a logistics hub of international importance. The military sector is also significant. Murmansk hosts the headquarters of the Russian Northern Fleet.

In relation to the border, the Murmansk region can be regarded as the Russian “outer borderland”, equivalent to Northern Norway on the Norwegian side. The “border heartland” on the Russian side is the district of Pechenga (Russian: *Pechengsky rayon*, Norwegian: *Petsjenga* or *Peisen*). Pechenga covers 8700 square kilometres and has a population of 37 146 (Russian Federal State Statistics Service, 2018). There are three towns located within the district: Pechenga town, Nickel, and Zapolyarny. Pechenga developed just like Sør-Varanger due to its dependence on mining. Deposits of nickel were discovered in the area in 1921 and mining operations began in 1935. In contrast to Sør-Varanger, which has entered the post-industrial era, Pechenga remains highly dependent on mining. The industrial company Norilsk Nickel is the largest employer in the district and operates two nickel refineries. The Russian side of the border is, as mentioned above, highly militarized and the military is of great importance locally. Pechenga hosts various military units, including the 200th Motorized Infantry Brigade and the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade.

From common land to iron curtain

For centuries, huge parts of the North Calotte were regarded as a *common land* (Norwegian: *fellesdistrikt*), where Norway and Russia enjoyed equal rights to tax the local population, predominantly Sami pastoralists (Eriksen, 1993, p. 39-40; Hansen & Olsen, 2004, p. 174). To the extent that tax borders and territorial borders existed, they

were fuzzy and shifting (Niemi, 2014a). From the seventeenth century, the region defined as common land began to shrink. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the only remaining area under joint sovereignty was an area roughly corresponding to today's municipalities of Sør-Varanger and Pechenga. After prolonged negotiations, Russia and Norway (in union with Sweden) agreed to divide this area into two parts – Russia gained Pechenga and Norway gained Sør-Varanger. The Saint Petersburg Convention of 1826 (convention of limits between Sweden and Russia) defined the current borderline (Foreign Office, 1825–1826, pp. 1034–1040). Religious affiliation was the guiding principle when the new border was drawn, and the location of churches and cemeteries in the area played an important role in the delineation process (Wikan, 2003; Nielsen & Zaikov, 2012). Borisoglebsky, a tiny portion of land on the western, “Norwegian side” of the Pasvik River was, for example, assigned to Russia simply because there was an old Orthodox church located there.

The religious divide continued to play a role after the delineation of the border. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, sovereignty in the borderland was to a large extent marked by the erection of Norwegian Lutheran and Russian Orthodox churches. The borderland churches, or “cultural fortresses” (Norwegian: *kulturelle grensefestninger*) as they were called, served a highly performative role as Norway and Russia strived to nationalize their newly acquired territories (Granlien, 2016; Niemi, 2007). An example of this was the establishment of the Lutheran chapel in Grense Jakobselv, a small hamlet situated on the border by the Barents Sea in 1869. Here, after repeated confrontations between Norwegian and Russian fishermen, local authorities expressed “a desire for stronger policing, or a military guard, during the fishing season” (Moan & Myklebust, 1998, p. 12). Instead of sending the navy, Norwegian authorities decided, however, to erect a Lutheran chapel as a “spiritual watchtower” (Friis, 1874, p. 101). The chapel was built on a bald hill overlooking the sea and painted white in order to make it visible from a distance (Moan & Myklebust, 1998, p. 12). Like other churches in the borderland, the chapel in Grense Jakobselv came to be the site of highly orchestrated events in which prominent representatives of state and church took part. In 1874, King Oscar II visited the place. Following his greeting by the local population

with flags and cheering, the king attended a sermon in the chapel. After the sermon, the king offered a symbolic gift of commemoration to the chapel: a marble plaque reading “King Oscar II heard the word of God here, 4 July 1873” to be placed in the wall above where the king had been seated. At the king’s behest, the chapel was named King Oscar II Chapel and the name was etched in stone above the entrance door, for everyone to see (Friis, 1874, p. 102).

In the early nineteenth century, the population of the borderland was insignificant, consisting only of a small number of indigenous Sami. From the 1870s, the population of Sør-Varanger began, however, to increase, following large-scale settling programs instigated by the state (Røst, 1981; Wikan, 1981). The introduction of mining in 1906 led to a massive immigration of Norwegian engineers and miners, as well as their families. Between 1900 and 1910, the number of Norwegians in Sør-Varanger increased from 396 to 1928 and the total percentage of Norwegians grew from 21 % to 58 % (Lunde, 1979, p. 132). During a few years, Kirkenes was, as Viken et al. (2008, p. 27) put it, transformed “from a small multicultural community into a Norwegian town”. During the same period, the Sami were reduced to a small minority in the area. Due to this demographic effect, Norwegian authorities soon came to regard mining as a “border fortress of greater importance than anything else, even military installations” (Niemi, 2007, p. 160). On the other side of the border, the development was similar. Here, Russian settlers were encouraged to immigrate while non-Russians – Norwegian, Finns, and Sami – were encouraged to leave (Yurchenko, 2002).

Despite the official policy of nationalization, well into the twentieth century the borderland could best be described as a *transition zone* – a frontier where adventurers and settlers arrived and mixed with each other and the indigenous population. The border itself remained relatively open and was frequently crossed by the people living along it. As Wikan (1981, p. 17) notes, “one could buy a cow in Russia, and the Russian Finns could buy hay in Norway. One could get working help and a spouse from the other side of the border”. Until the Russian Revolution, the *Pomor Trade*, a barter trade between Russian sailors and coastal settlements of Northern Norway, connected the

Norwegian and Russian sides of the border economically and culturally (Kraft, 1968; Niemi, 1992). The trade even gave birth to the development of a short-lived Russian–Norwegian pidgin language, *Russenorsk* (Broch & Jahr, 1984).

After the Russian Revolution, Pechenga came under Finnish rule, but was re-annexed by the Soviet Union in 1944. During the Second World War, the entire borderland turned into a battlefield where the Red Army successfully defended Murmansk against massive German assaults from occupied Norway. On 25 October 1944, towards the end of the war, the Red Army marched across the border and captured Kirkenes from the retreating Germans. In 1945, the Soviet forces pulled back across the border, leaving Norwegian authorities in full control of the area. The local Norwegian population at the time welcomed the Soviets as liberators. In 1953, partly as a local initiative, a monument celebrating the liberation was raised in the centre of Kirkenes. The monument, a two-metre-high statue of a Red Army soldier, has ever since played an important role in the performative politics of the border (see Chapter 5).

With the escalation of the Cold War, life in the borderland changed radically. As Moan and Myklebust (1998, p. 16) observe, “the Cold War began while the Second World War was still fresh in people’s minds. The liberators from the East suddenly became a distant, alien people separated by the border”. People living in the borderland “had to get used to life beside a closed border, with its restrictions, watchtowers and border patrols” (Moan & Myklebust, 1998, p. 16). The border came to symbolize fundamental divisions between Capitalism and Communism, and between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The borderland became an arena for the ideological and military competition between East and West.

During the Cold War, the border was practically sealed. The Soviet–Norwegian Border Agreement of 1949 (signed the same year as Norway joined NATO and valid to this date) introduced a new and strict border regime, effectively hampering all cross-border activity (Johanson, 1999). A securitization and militarization took place on both sides of the border. In Sør-Varanger, the Norwegian Intelligence Service established a strong

presence. The police station in Kirkenes became one of the largest in the country. The entire Russian border zone was, save for the increasing number of military personnel, largely emptied of people. A “garrison mentality” came to prevail on both sides of the border (Joenniemi, 2014, p. 14). Morten Strøksnes, a Norwegian author who grew up in Kirkenes during the height of the Cold War, illustrates this well in the passage below:

What kind of place was Kirkenes at that time? The answer is that it was the coldest outpost of the Cold War, squeezed in between the Barents Sea to the north, the Iron Curtain to the east and endless pine forests to the south. Eastern Finnmark was at the time one of Europe’s least densely populated areas, almost an arctic wilderness of untouched nature. Still, it felt like you were in a claustrophobic, militarized zone, with closed border gates, watchtowers, fences, and warning signs. The border was not a fleeting continuum; no passage where goods, ideas, cultures, and people met. It was not the end of something and the beginning of something else. It represented an absolute divide between “us” and “them”. Nothing was exchanged, except for glances through the binoculars of the border guards from NATO and the Soviet Union. (Strøksnes, 2006, pp. 243–244, author’s translation)

For many people living in Sør-Varanger during these years, the border indeed came to represent a “symbolic end of the world”, as Rogova (2009, p. 33) puts it. Still, there were “cracks” in the Iron Curtain and some cross-border cooperation took place. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, local cross-border ties were established within fields such as tourism, sports, and culture. In 1973, Sør-Varanger and Pechenga signed an *Agreement for Friendship and Cooperation*. It is also noteworthy that representatives of both municipal entities took part in the joint annual commemoration of the Soviet liberation of Kirkenes as well as the celebration of the Soviet Victory Day. A rare example of economic cooperation was the joint Soviet–Norwegian construction of hydroelectric power plants on the Pasvik River during the 1960s. To this day, the plants provide both sides of the border with energy.

Border opening

During the late 1980s, the relations between Norway and the Soviet Union improved gradually. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and soon after *glasnost* and *perestroika* were introduced as catchwords for the regime's new policy. This policy involved an opening up towards the West. In his famous Murmansk speech, Gorbachev focused on international cooperation and normalization in the north and stressed the need for a demilitarization of the Arctic (Gorbachev, 1987). A partial *desecuritization* of the borderland took place throughout the late 1980s. The border was never fully opened, but the border regime was liberalized and this resulted in an increase in the number of border crossings from around 2500 annually in the early 1980s to 8259 in 1990, 15 940 in 1991, and 81 641 in 1992 (Statsbygg, 2002, p. 3). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s the cross-border traffic continued to grow before peaking at 320 000 in 2013 (Østfinnmark politidistrikt, n.d.). During the early 1990s, a certain level of migration across the border also took place. Russian women married Norwegian men and settled down on the Norwegian side, particularly in Sør-Varanger and other areas close to the border. The partial opening of the border also encouraged new forms of cross-border trade. Many of the first Russians to cross the border were in fact trader-tourists, bringing with them all kinds of handicrafts and souvenirs that they sold in the so-called *Russian markets* along the coast of Northern Norway (see Chapter 7). This "Russian trade" was at the time described as a revival of the old Pomor trade (Thuen, 1993). Later on, in the 2000s, as the living standards on the eastern side of the border improved, middle class Russians began to cross the border not to sell, but to buy products that were either cheaper and/or better on the Norwegian side. This cross-border shopping has had a significant impact on the local economy in Sør-Varanger (see below).

From the early 1990s, national, regional, and local actors strengthened existing cross-border ties and developed new ones. Cross-border cooperation intensified and became more extensive within a wide range of fields. It culminated in 1993 with the establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (hereinafter the Barents Region), a transnational region covering thirteen provinces in the northernmost parts of Norway,

Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The region-building project involved a complex web of stakeholders on local, regional, national, and international levels (Landsem, 2013). The Norwegian foreign minister Thorvald Stoltenberg actively involved himself in the project and has today gained recognition by many as the “father of the Barents Region”. For Norway, the normalization of relations with Russia became an important aim of national foreign policy during the 1990s and 2000s (see, e.g., Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006). The establishment of the Barents cooperation was seen to be important in this respect.



Figure 5. *Map of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.*
(Arctic Centre, University of Lapland)

Within the Norwegian–Russian borderland, the processes of border opening have been particularly visible in Kirkenes. Since the end of the Cold War, the old mining town has been, as Viken et al. (2008) note, “reinvented as a border town” in the sense that border-

related processes have come to mean a lot for the town's economy and identity. This "reinvention" of Kirkenes has also been observed by Strøksnes:

Kirkenes is no longer the end of the world. What used to be a closed, military industrial end station has now become a place where the national is transgressed – a transnational zone. While the town used to be unambiguous and two-dimensional, it is now complex and ambiguous. The town is expressing its identity through an entire new system of signs. (Strøksnes, 2006, p. 246, author's translation)

One very visible sign of this development is what Viken and Espíritu (2014) refer to as the "russification" of Kirkenes. In 1950, as Paulsen (2005, p. 305) notices, one almost never saw Russian people in Kirkenes, except from the odd high-ranking officer who had arrived for negotiations with the border commissioner. Today, it is difficult to avoid seeing Russians and hearing the Russian language when walking the streets of the town. First, there are the Russians who have settled down in the town since the end of the Cold War. As discussed previously, this group is quite significant today. The Russians living in Kirkenes have their own social networks, not least an active Orthodox congregation (see, e.g., Rogova, 2008; Iversen, 2010). Secondly, there are the many Russian visitors, tourists, businesspeople, sailors, and friends and relatives of the resident Russians. Some of these visitors stay in Kirkenes for longer periods of time, others for just for a day or two of cross-border shopping. Many Russians from Murmansk stop in Kirkenes on their way to other destinations in Norway or Western Europe. The Russian presence is also evident in the form of signs and other imagery in and around the town. Several shops advertise in the Russian language and, in the centre of the town, Cyrillic street signs have been set up (see Chapter 7).

The cross-border interaction has a strong economic impact locally. "The Russians saved us twice – in 1944 and 1991" is a common saying in Kirkenes. The opening of the border coincided with the closing of the mine and, thus, to some extent, the new Russian trade came to replace the mine as a source of income for the town. Russians constitute a significant number of the customers in several Kirkenes shops. One of the largest

shopping malls in the centre of the town, *Spareland*, caters specifically to the Russians. Tvedt and Sørensen (2013, p. 51) estimate that the Russian visitors spent 129 million kroner in Sør-Varanger in 2013, which amounts to 15 % of the total turnover of the retail trade in the municipality. In addition to this comes the many services provided to Russian companies in Kirkenes; for instance, to the Russian trawler fleet which has used Kirkenes as a port of call since the late 1980s. In 2005, the Sør-Varanger municipality (2005, p. 7) concluded that “the Russian trawler fleet was the basis for practically all maritime services in Kirkenes” and estimated that “Russian activities in Kirkenes, including port calls, landing of fish, and ship repair represent[ed] a total turnover estimated at approximately 400 million kroner” (Sør-Varanger kommune 2005, p. 7). A report published in 2011 estimated that the total impact of Russian visits and services provided to Russian companies for just a number of companies in Kirkenes accounted for 254 million kroner (28 % of total turnover) (Foss & Henningsen, 2011, p. 18). For the selected number of companies within the retail trade, the Russian impact represented 16 %; for industry, 30 %; for port-related businesses, 47 %; for the tourism sector, 74 %; and for hotels and restaurants, 9 % (Foss & Henningsen, 2011, p. 18). A report from 2018 concluded that the Russian trade in total generates 710 million kroner, 45 % of the total direct turnover in Sør-Varanger (Kirkenes Næringshage, 2018, p. 10). Although other places in Finnmark have gained economically from cross-border trade, there is no place where the impact has been close to that of Kirkenes.

Political cross-border links to Russia have also grown stronger in Kirkenes than in any other place in Norway. On 11 January 1993, the foreign ministers of Norway, Russia, Finland and Sweden met in Kirkenes to recognize the Barents Region by signing the *Kirkenes Declaration* (Declaration 1993). The choice of Kirkenes as the “birth town” for the new region was not accidental. First, the town was located close to two borders and by the Barents Sea (which gave the region its name in the first place). Secondly, Kirkenes was already at that time, more than any other place, marked by the development of cross-border cooperation. The same year as the Kirkenes Declaration was signed, Russia opened a consulate general in Kirkenes and the Norwegian Government established a permanent office, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, in the

town. The main mission of the Secretariat is to promote and fund Norwegian–Russian cooperation projects in the Norwegian and Russian parts of the Barents Region (see Chapter 5). With the Kirkenes Declaration, and the establishment of the secretariat and the Russian Consulate General, the town attained its current informal status as “the Barents Capital”, a major political destination and arena for bilateral Norwegian–Russian meetings. Along with the national authorities, the municipal authorities of Sør-Varanger have also been pursuing an active cross-border cooperation policy. During the last two decades, the municipality has strengthened its cooperation with Pechenga. In 2008, the two municipalities, urged and supported by national authorities, signed an agreement whereby Kirkenes and Nikel were declared as *twin cities* (see Chapter 5). Although this agreement is mostly symbolic, it did signalize common aspirations for further cross-border integration.

The border as bridge or barrier?

The historian Hallvard Tjelmeland, pointing to some of the processes of border opening described above, argues that the Norwegian–Russian border has been radically transformed, becoming “a bridge more than a barrier” (Tjelmeland, 2012, p. 181). There are, however, important factors that clearly challenge such a description of the situation.

First, unlike most other borders along the former Iron Curtain, the Russian–Norwegian border never fully opened after the end of the Cold War. To this date, the entire Russian side of the border still has, as mentioned above, the status of Border Security Zone and both sides of the border are still subject to strict regulations regarding movement, conduct, and activities. Except for the single official border crossing point, the entire length of the border is closed. At the Storskog–Borisoglebsky border checkpoint, the border *may* be crossed, but only during certain hours of the day (7 a.m. to 9 p.m., Norwegian time) and only with valid documents (visa or local border traffic permit) which have to be applied for well in advance.

The actual border crossing can be a tedious process, taking anything from 30 minutes to two hours, depending on the traffic. Each traveller, even those holding local border

traffic permits, is required to fill in immigration forms, present passports, etc. All vehicles are thoroughly monitored. In 2007, Viken described the border crossing as “almost as strenuous as it was during the Cold War” with “needs for invitations and visa, barbed fences, gates, control points and surveillance” (Viken, 2007). Since then, little seems to have changed. The border’s status as a Schengen border ensures thorough control of all travellers and the border’s status as a NATO–Russia border ensures that the border zone remains highly militarized. The control is not even restricted to the actual border crossing point. On the Russian side – well past the border itself – there are additional checkpoints. In 2012, a local journalist encountered no less than eight border controls during a short trip from Kirkenes to Nikel and back (Nilsen, 2012b). It is no secret that many locals consider the border control to be unnecessarily scrupulous.

Secondly, the proclamation of transnational entities such as the Barents Region and, most recently, the cross-border twin cities (see Chapter 5), may be described as more symbolic than substantial. The Barents region clearly belongs to the group of European cross-border regions that, as Löfgren (2008, p. 195) puts it, “remain more political dreamscapes than examples of strong transnational integration”. It is a region which exists on paper, but hardly on the ground or in people’s minds. The Barents region has to this date only a rudimentary set of institutions: the intergovernmental Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the interregional Barents Regional Council, as well as a small international secretariat with the task of providing these councils with technical support. The region has, as Strøksnes observes, “no common election, budgets, administration or representation” (Strøksnes, 2009, p. 58). Actual cooperation within the region has been limited to so-called “people-to-people cooperation” within “soft” fields, such as culture and education (Hønneland, 2005; Hønneland & Jensen 2008).

Some observers, like Rogova (2009), argues that transnational identities are emerging in the borderland:

that there are nowadays a considerable number of people in the borderland whose “own” territory is not limited any more by the state border, but includes

both Russian and Norwegian territories as part of a unified personal space which is neither Russia, nor Norway to the full extent. (Rogova, 2009, p. 31)

Rogova further argues that the Barents region, despite its shortcomings, “has offered people a new space, a new local identity, and a new image of ‘the other’” (Rogova, 2009, p. 40). She claims, for example, that Russians visiting Kirkenes nowadays do not feel as if they are “going abroad” when they cross the border. Her observations may certainly be valid for some groups of frequent border-crossers, but there are clearly good reasons to be cautious about proclaiming the evolvment of a true transnational identity in the borderland. Strøksnes, contrary to Rogova, claims that “few people connect emotionally to Barents, even in Norway and Russia” (Strøksnes, 2009). Viken et al. (2008) demonstrate that a Barents identity may be manifest, but only among a small minority of people in Kirkenes. For most people, they argue, the border still represents a veritable barrier. The authors also find that there are large groups of people for whom the other side of the border remains utterly irrelevant. Hønneland, in *Borderland Russians* – a study of identity on the Russian side of the border –, finds that his “interviewees do identify (or wish to identify) with the Nordic countries to some extent”, but that “the general picture is one of othering”: “My interviewees’ general impression of Scandinavia is that it is everything Russia is not”, he writes (Hønneland, 2010, pp. 102–103). As Hønneland (2010, p. 102) suggests, this othering may in fact have *increased* in recent years, as Norwegians and Russians have established a certain contact and thus become aware of the many differences between the two sides of the border. The socio-economic differences between the two sides remain significant to this date. The general living standard, the GNP per capita, and the life expectancy on the Norwegian side is much higher than on the Russian side of the border. The cultural differences between the two sides are also considerable. The border first constitutes a religious divide between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy and, secondly, a linguistic divide that severely hampers cross-border communication. Today, very few Norwegians know the Russian language and few Russians speak any language other than their own.

Martinez has developed a typology for cross-border integration, distinguishing between alienated, co-existent, interdependent, and integrated borderlands, differentiated by the level of cross-border interaction (Martinez, 1994, p. 5–10). *Alienated borderlands* are the least integrated. Here, “the border is functionally closed, and cross-border interaction is totally or almost totally absent. Residents of each country interact as strangers” (Martinez, 1994, p. 7). In *co-existent borderlands*, the border remains slightly open, allowing for the development of limited bilateral interaction. Borderlanders in this case “develop closer relationships” (Martinez, 1994, p. 7). *Interdependent borderlands* are marked by “increased cross-order interaction” and “friendly and cooperative relationships” between the borderlanders. Finally, *integrated borderlands* are marked by an “unrestricted movement of people and goods across the boundary” and a merging of the economies of the two sides. The borderlanders in this case “perceive themselves as members of one social system” (Martinez, 1994, p. 7). As for the Norwegian–Russian borderland, the term “alienated” would have served well during the Cold War. Today, with the significant interaction taking place across the border, this term would, however, be misleading. To name the current Norwegian–Russian borderland as “integrated” would be equally misleading. The border has not ceased to restrict the flow of people and goods, and the two sides of the border are turning into a single socio-economic space. The borderland can probably most truthfully be described as something in between a co-existent and interdependent borderland where the processes of border opening are balanced by processes of border closure. Whether the border, as Tjelmeland (2012, p. 181) claims, is “a bridge more than a barrier” or more a barrier than bridge is hard to assess. While the metaphor *barrier* and the metaphor *bridge* may describe aspects of the borders, neither term is valid as a description of its total reality.

What characterizes the border historically and today is probably most of all a tension between opening and closing, division and unity, similarities and differences, the familiar and the unfamiliar, friendship and enmity. The Norwegian-Russian borderland has throughout history been affected by this tension. Chapter 5-7 will demonstrate how the border and borderland is invested with meaning politically, artistically, and touristically, through a wide range of performances. These performances relate both to

the global and local significance of the border, and to the past and present. Typically, they tend to emphasize and exaggerate particular aspects of the border and the borderland; either its closed nature (its barrier-like qualities) or its open nature (its bridge-like qualities). They also tend to evoke one or the other historical epoch – the common land, World War II, the Cold War, or the post-Cold War era – depending on what images of the border and borderland they put to the forefront. Thus, both the past and current realities of the border and borderland serve as a reservoir for ever new meaning-making.

Chapter 4: Fieldwork and Methods

Entering the field

My way into the topic of borders and performance began in 2004 when I conducted the field research for my master's degree in Ajaria, a tiny autonomous republic situated on Georgia's border with Turkey. In Ajaria, I studied the interrelation between the territorial borders of the republic and the several national and religious divides that crisscrossed these borders (Fors 2006). The research in the Georgian–Turkish borderland opened my eyes both to the field of border studies and to how borders could be *staged*. In Ajaria, I witnessed how the territorial borders were repeatedly marked and signified through powerful political and religious performances.

Having finished my master's degree, I accepted a position as a research fellow at Finnmark University College (now UiT The Arctic University of Norway) on an interdisciplinary project named *The Construction and Negotiation of Borders: Discourses Related to the Border between Norway and Russia*. The project, funded by the Norwegian Research Council, was the first ever border research project in Norway. The aim of the project was to study contemporary border-related social, economic and cultural processes, discourses and practices in the Russian–Norwegian borderland. The overarching research questions as formulated in the project's research proposal were:

How do people in different arenas cross and negotiate the Russian–Norwegian border in performing their lives, professionally or privately, and how are different discourses concerning the border and borderland created and inscribed in these processes?

My own role in the project was from the beginning relatively vaguely defined. According to the project plan, my task would be to study “borders, border discourses and everyday life in northern regions”. A way to concretize this was to limit my project to the study of transnational identity-building processes in the Russian–Norwegian borderland, with a particular focus on the municipalities of Sør-Varanger and Pechenga.

The larger context would then be the ongoing Barents cooperation as well as the local cross-border cooperation culminating in the proclamation of Kirkenes and Nikel as “twin cities” and the establishment of the local border traffic zone. This initial plan was, however, abandoned after my first two visits to Kirkenes.

The occasion for my first visit was the *European Conference of the Association of Borderland Studies*, which took place in Kirkenes in September 2008. The aim of the conference, which was entitled *Cultural Production and Negotiation of Borders*, was to examine “the ways cultural practices use discursive and semiotic strategies in order to imagine and negotiate the border in its social and historical context” (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2010, p 43). The topic of the conference thus pointed towards my later focus on border performances. More important than the actual conference was, however, my first encounters *with* these very performances, and with the people and institutions who were involved in the production and enactment of them. Various local actors; the Barents Secretariat, the municipality, the cultural organizations as well as touristic enterprises were involved in organising the conference. At the local Borderland Museum (Norwegian: *Grenselandmuseet*), the Samovar Theatre performed *border dramatics* for the participants. The curators of the Girls on the Bridge arranged a so-called *Transborder Café* at the local pub where various border-related issues were discussed by a panel of political figures, artists, and border scholars. The tour agency Pasvik Turist organized a sightseeing trip for everyone to the Norwegian–Russian border. The intensive local focus on the border, and the many ways it was displayed and presented by the political, artistic and touristic actors for the visiting scholars, piqued my curiosity.

I returned to Kirkenes for the Barents Spektakel festival of 2009. The festival performances were of even greater magnitude than those I had witnessed during the conference the previous year. The sheer size of the performances for such a small town as Kirkenes was impressive. This intensive production of border performances appeared to me as an interesting phenomenon, something peculiar but at the same time highly meaningful that was worthy of further exploration. My experiences during the

conference and the festival convinced me to change my focus from a more traditional study of border identity to a study of border performances.

The field

The ethnographic field, “the circumscribed area” that becomes “subject of social research” (Burgess, 1984, p. 1) is, as Madden (2010, p. 38) observes, not something given or ready-made, waiting for the ethnographer to explore. In fact, he states, there is not such a thing as an ethnographic field “beyond the imaginings of the ethnographer” (Madden 2010, p. 38). As Madden (2010, p. 10) notes, fields are “interrogative frames that are shaped by the ethnographer”. It is only through the gaze of the ethnographer that the field comes into being. The field should, however, resonate with real and existing categories, in order to make sense scientifically. It is the

synthesis of concrete space and investigative space that defines the ethnographic field and gives it its reason for being – it exists to describe, to interrogate, to question, to problematise, to theorise and to attempt to solve questions about the human condition. (Madden 2010, p. 39)

This notion of the ethnographic field above breaks with the idea of the field as a “neat bounded site” as it is “not solely reliant on geographical space, but rather informed by interrogative boundaries”. This also makes it possible to speak about fieldwork in a wide sense, encompassing categories such as “un-sited” and “multi-sited” fieldwork (Madden, 2010, p. 53). As Madden (2010, p. 53) observes, “interrogative boundaries are not troubled by geographic or social plurality, nor are they challenged by mobility in ethnography”.

In my case, the interrogative frame – the field – came to be *the borderland*. In recent years, the borderland has become an established spatial-analytical category for a growing body of ethnographic field research (e.g., Donnan & Haller, 2000; Donnan & Wilson, 1994; 1999; Wilson & Donnan, 1998; 2012). One should of course be careful not to essentialize the borderland, or to overemphasize the differences between

borderlands and other areas. Nevertheless, as outlined in Chapter 2, borderlands tend to be unique in certain ways, a uniqueness that mainly stems from their exceptional location at the crossroads between states and nations. In Chapter 2, the borderland was defined as “the broader zonal socio-spatial context of the border”, “the region or area in relative proximity to the border within which the dynamics of change and daily life practices” are “affected by the very presence of the border” (Newman, 2006, p. 150). As explained in Chapter 3, the concept has here been applied to the border municipalities of Sør-Varanger and Pechenga. These areas directly adjacent to the Norwegian–Russian border could even be described as a *border heartland*, a zone “abutting on the border and dominated by its existence” (Baud & van Schendel 1997, p. 221).

During my fieldwork, I visited Nikel and Zapolyarny several times. My actual research in the borderland came, however, to be restricted to the Norwegian side of the border. There were two main reasons for not including the district of Pechenga in the study. First – and most importantly – the Russian side of the border proved, due to its high degree of security and militarization (see Chapter 3), to be an extremely challenging site for conducting meaningful ethnographic fieldwork. Secondly, the Norwegian side of the border, aside from being more welcoming, was, with regard to the topic of border performances, more interesting. Here, the production of political, artistic and touristic performances was far more intensive than on the Russian side. There were, in fact, even people making a living by producing them. Thus, the final locus for the research came to be Sør-Varanger and, particularly its centre Kirkenes, where I spent most of the time in the field. In Kirkenes I rented flat in the so-called “Pink House”, a guesthouse mainly used by visiting artists and scholars. I also had an office at my disposal at the Barents Institute, a local research centre, during my fieldwork in the town.

Within this borderland, the locus for my field research, the focus came to be the production and enactment of border performances. The performances I observed were of different types. Some performances, like concerts and theatre plays, were regarded as performances locally. They were, to quote Schechner (2013, p. 43), “is” performances. Others were “as” performances, i.e. actions and activities approached and analysed as

performances *by* me, but not necessarily regarded as so conventionally (Schechner 2013, p. 38-41). The “is” performances were mostly artistic, the “as” performances were mostly political and touristic. Some of the performances could be described as *events*, for example exhibition openings, commemoration ceremonies, and press conferences.. There were also many cases of *material aesthetics* or *display* exposed to an audience, for example installations, exhibitions, or sculptures. Furthermore, the performances varied according to parameters such as durability and extension in space. Some performances lasted for minutes only, others for days or weeks. Some were performed only once, others daily, monthly, or annually. Sometimes there were clusters of performances taking place within a short period of time, particularly during the Barents Spektakel festival in February or during the annual commemoration of the Soviet liberation of Kirkenes in October. Often, the performances were interrelated to each other in time and space, sometimes to the extent that they blended into each other. The performances most often took place either in the town of Kirkenes, or on the border. Some (particularly the conventional “is” performances) were performed *indoors*, for instance within the confines of the theatre. More common, however, were *outdoor* performances, performed in public places like the main street or town square of Kirkenes, or the border crossing point at Storskog-Borisoglebsky.

The production and enactment of performances involved a considerable number of local actors: organizations, institutions and individuals. These actors, which became my informants in the field, could be divided into three separate categories: political, artistic and touristic actors, according to their main field of activity. The political actors included the Barents Secretariat as well as various representatives of the local government. The artistic actors were the Samovar Theatre and the Girls on the Bridge, the two professional cultural organizations in Kirkenes. Finally, there were the touristic actors – the tour operators and guides within three companies: Barents Safari, Pasvik Turist and Radius, as well as other people involved in tourism locally. All actors related to extra-local contexts of people, projects and ideologies, to national and international politics, to the international art scene, or to the context of global tourism. In the case of politics, powerful extra-local actors, like ministers or members of the Norwegian royal

family, involved themselves directly in the border performances, thus practically entering the local field.

The distinction between the three categories of actors was not self-evident. It was most of all my own way of making order in the field and of making sense of a huge amount of data. In practice, the boundaries between politics, art and tourism were not always strict. There was – as will become clear later on – a lot of entanglement and overlap across these fields. The actors of the various fields knew each other personally, communicated and cooperated with each other. While art production was the main field of the artists, this did not hinder them from venturing far into the political field; while the political figures mostly were concerned with politics, they did also take part in artistic performances, and so on.

Field research

The field became the locale for my fieldwork. As Eriksen (2001, p. 24) notes, “anthropology distinguishes itself from the other sciences through the great emphasis on ethnographic fieldwork as the most important source of new knowledge about society and culture”. Ethnography can be seen as a “direct, qualitative social science practice that involves ethnographers doing fieldwork with human groups, societies or cultures, experiencing the daily ebb and flow of life of a participant group” over a considerable period of time (Madden, 2010, p. 34). The length of the fieldwork may vary from a few months to years. In any case, the main aim is to develop “as intimate an understanding as possible of the phenomena investigated” (Eriksen 2001, p. 24).

The use of anthropological fieldwork as a methodological approach distinguishes my own research project from those of most other scholars who have conducted research in the Norwegian–Russian borderlands in recent years. This includes researchers of my own project whose works have mainly been based on data stemming from secondary sources or from structured interviews collected during short periods of time. My prolonged fieldwork in the borderland provided me with data of two types that these studies could only obtain to a lesser extent. First, it gave me valuable data on *practices*,

people's actual *doings*. Secondly, it gave me a unique opportunity to follow processes over a longer period of time.

The data obtained during the fieldwork mostly stems from participant observation (see below). However, in the exploration of the local and extra-local contexts in which the performances were taking place, it was necessary to collect other forms of data as well. My fieldwork involved, for example, studies of a considerable amount of secondary sources – printed texts: books, articles, letters, speeches, brochures, websites, and advertisements. Local newspapers, *Sør-Varanger Avis* and *Finnmarken*, were good sources of information on local matters, and so was *BarentsObserver*, the official news site of the Barents Secretariat. Useful were also the websites of the Girls on the Bridge and the Samovar Theatre. I also read literature about the culture and history of the borderland. Of great use were the publications of the local historical society, for example the impressive five-volume *History of Sør-Varanger* (Sør-Varanger Historielag, 1997–2005). Also interesting were the local scholar Steinar Wikan's works on the nature, culture and history of the borderland (e.g., Wikan, 1981; 2003; 2009). To the category of local authors, one may also add Morten Strøksnes, who has written extensively about contemporary Kirkenes (e.g., Strøksnes, 2003a; 2003b; 2006). In the following chapters, there are references to all these sources.

Participant observation, “whereby the ethnographer joins in with the normal activities and routines of the participant group” (Madden 2010, p. 77) usually constitutes the most important part of the data gathering during an anthropological fieldwork. Madden describes “looking at people”, “talking to people” and “being with people” as the three key “elements of the participant observation process”, the sum of which “creates participant observation in its broadest sense” (Madden 2010, p. 77). My fieldwork consisted of a combination of these activities. Throughout my entire field research, all three activities were, to some degree, pursued. In the beginning there was, however, more “looking at people” and “talking to people” than “being with people”, as the latter kind of doing demanded a more advanced intimacy with the field.

Looking at people

Looking at people in an ethnographic sense is not simply looking at people. Madden (2010, p. 96) refers to the activity of observation in the field as *the ethnographic gaze*, that is a specific way of looking at the phenomena under scrutiny in order to produce data. This ethnographic gaze is, as he writes, “more complex than just looking at people” (Madden 2010, p. 98) and it involves “much more than the act of observation in a sensory way” (Madden 2010, p. 100). The ethnographic gaze is not only about “looking” but also about the “‘mind’s eye’ of the ethnographer, the mental frame of reference through which a particular ethnographer views the world” (Madden, 2010, p. 100). “While ethnographers do indeed look at people,” writes Madden (2010, p. 98), “they do this in such a way as to *frame* the observations in relation to the interrogative boundaries, conversations and intersubjective embodiment that comes with being in an ethnographic field”. Looking at people in an anthropological sense is to use “the systematic eye” (Madden, 2010, p. 101) in order to “‘see’ things that are ethnographically relevant and important” (Madden, 2010, p. 112). To use my eyes this way, consciously and systematically, was an ambition throughout my fieldwork, something I strived to do. It should be added that my ethnographic observation – focusing on performances – also involved a certain amount of *listening*. Sound: music, speeches et cetera, was an important element of many of the performances I experienced during my field research. Thus, I also needed to use my ears actively.

The people involved in the performances observed were generally of three kinds: producers, performers and audience. The “makers” of the performances, the producers and performers were, as mentioned above, my main focus. During my fieldwork, I observed, however, all three groups as well as the interaction between them. I tried meticulously to look at what they were doing and saying, as well as the *way* they were doing and saying things. The ethnographic observation in my fieldwork went, however, beyond looking just at people and their behavior. It also involved observing what Madden (2010, p. 102) refers to as “structures” and “settings” and the interaction between these and the three groups mentioned above. In my case, the physical structures of particular interest were first those that played a performative role, for example

symbolically important buildings, memorials, or art installations. Also interesting to observe were the *stages* where performances were performed. This could be the local theatre, it could be the Russian Monument during a commemoration ceremony, or a viewing tower for tourists on the border. The build-up of stages was often carefully arranged in order to evoke a certain atmosphere or convey certain meanings to the audience. Finally, the settings, the landscapes and locations of the performances were relevant elements for observation. The locations were often deliberately chosen and symbolically important, a vital part of the place-making inherent in the performances.

In order to better document and remember my observations in the field, I sometimes used camera and tape recorder. Of great help were also the videos and pictures covering the events published by the local newspapers *Finnmarken* and *Sør-Varanger Avis*, by the Barents Secretariat's news site *BarentsObserver* as well as by the producers themselves, particularly the Samovar Theatre and the Girls on the Bridge.

Talking to people

“Talking to people is the crucial first ethnographic task,” writes Madden (2010, p. 59). In an ethnographic context, *talking* is, however, an open concept with many possible meanings. In my own fieldwork, I find it useful to distinguish between two types of talking: the less spontaneous and interactive *interviews*, and the more spontaneous and interactive *conversations*.

Interviewing is one of the most common methods for data collection and information gathering in social sciences. Interviews range from the very formal to the very informal, from the highly structured to the unstructured (Bernard, 2002, pp. 204–206). Anthropologists, if they conduct interviews at all during their fieldwork, tend to prefer the least structured and most informal type of interviews, so-called “ethnographic interviews” (Spradley, 1979). My own interviews were only partially structured and they were usually quite informal. A few questions were always prepared beforehand, and so was a general framework of themes to be covered. The interviews unfolded, however, relatively freely and new questions and topics could often arise along the way.

During my field research, I conducted 40 interviews. Half of these were interviews with *key informants*. I also interviewed several other people in Kirkenes with general or specific knowledge of the topics I was interested in. Among these were people working in the municipality, in the local business sector, as well as cultural workers and researchers. The interviews usually lasted for about an hour. They were mostly conducted during working days. The setting for the interviews varied. Generally, I let the informants choose the time and place. In some cases, I went to the working places of the informants. In other cases, the informants came to my office in the premises of the Barents Institute. A few interviews were conducted in public places, like the library or in a cafe. Interviews were conducted only after some initial oral and written information about the project had been given and with the consent of the informants. Most of the interviews were recorded. Tape recordings of the interviews were never conducted without the approval of my informants. Moreover, during recorded interviews, I always left the option open for the informants to turn off the recorder whenever they liked. Only on a few occasions did they choose to do so. Some key recordings were later transcribed, as accurately as possible. By using the recorder in addition to taking notes, I eliminated errors that otherwise might have occurred. Thus, I also safeguarded the integrity of my informants.

The use of *conversations* in data collection is typical for ethnographic field research, where the anthropologist “joins in with the normal activities and routines of the participant group” (Madden, 2010, p. 77). In my own field research, numerous informal conversations served as a rich source of information. Unlike the interviews, these conversations were rarely planned. They occurred mostly by chance, as by-products of being in the field, of “hanging around” and meeting people. Being less structured and informal than the interviews, the conversations were also more *interactive* than the interviews. Here the sharp distinction between interviewer and interviewee dissolved. Most of the time, conversations took place before, during and after various performance events, but also during other daily activities, in cafes, in the library, and so on. Sometimes interviews could also, especially towards the end, evolve into straight conversations. In general, I did not take notes during conversations, nor did I tape-record

them. The number of people I conversed with during the fieldwork exceeded by far the number of people I interviewed and involved many more people than those I regarded as my key informants.

Being with people

Being with people in an ethnographic sense is about letting oneself be temporarily integrated in a society or culture with the aim of obtaining valuable insights. “It is a deliberate form of association that is targeted at gathering information germane to the research project in question”, a sociality “saturated with instrumentality” (Madden 2010, p. 78). Some scholars have a rather strict interpretation of what it means to do participant observation. For example, according to Aase and Fossåskaret (2007, p. 31), participant observation takes place only when the “researcher himself is one of the actors he is studying”. In practice, however, few anthropologists attain this level of absolute immersion. In my own fieldwork, the degree of immersion was relatively low and I would by no means claim to have become “one” with my informants. My fieldwork could rather be described as a sort of “step-in-step-out” ethnography (Madden, 2010, p. 80). I spent only parts of my days “in the field”, looking at, talking to or being with my informants. The rest of the time I spent in my flat (which I did not share with any informants), in my office, or various other places. Furthermore, I did research in three different fields, which were only partially connected to each other. Due to this, there were limits to how much I could involve myself in each of these fields. The degree of immersion also varied considerably between the fields. I became least immersed in the touristic field. Here, my fieldwork consisted mainly of interviews, observation and participation in various border excursions. In the political field, the degree of immersion was somewhat higher. I met key informants, mainly from the municipality and the Barents Secretariat, more frequently, also informally. The field where I spent most time with my informants was the artistic field. Both the Samovar Theatre and the Girls on the Bridge willingly opened their doors for me so that I could observe their work from the inside. This made it possible for me to visit these organizations and follow their activities from day to day. I also got to know the people working in these organizations pretty well during my field research.

During my stay in Kirkenes, I did take part in several of the activities my informants were involved in. I participated, for example, with the status of researcher, in a few events organized by the political and artistic actors. I presented a paper at a seminar named *Unmaking Borders* arranged by Finnmark University College, the Barents Institute and the Girls on the Bridge. I chaired a session at the *Thorvald Stoltenberg Symposium*, an event which was jointly organized by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat and the Barents Institute. I also gave a lecture about borders in the Caucasus during the *Extra Europa Cultural Festival & Symposium* in Linz, Austria, invited by the Girls on the Bridge. I became most involved in the activities of the Samovar Theatre. In 2010, the theatre invited me to join them for a trip across the Norwegian–Russian border to Pechenga, where the director and the rest of the troupe collected material for a new production named *Radio Barents III*. Later on, I joined the theatre for another such trip across the Norwegian–Finnish border. Although I initially did not have a particular task during these trips, apart from doing my own research, I did make myself useful in some ways, for instance by helping along with translation from Russian to Norwegian and the other way around. From late 2011 to early 2012, I worked as an interpreter in the theatre during the preparation for the same performance. My task at this point was to facilitate communication between the theatre director and Russian actors who had been invited to participate in the performance.

Fieldwork at “home”

Traditionally, there has been a widespread assumption of anthropological fieldwork being as a *rite of passage* that, as Peacock (1986, p. 55) puts it, “through ordeals and insights, moves the initiate to a new level of maturity”. The idea of the fieldwork as a *rite of passage* hinges on two assumptions. The first is that the fieldwork should be conducted far away from home. The anthropologist should travel away, “preferably to a distant locale where the ethnographer will immerse him/herself in personal face-to-face relationships with a variety of natives over an extended period of time” (Amit-Talai, 2000, p. 2). Secondly, there is an assumption about the fieldwork as a sort of “liminal phase”, radically different from the “normal” life of the anthropologist. My

own anthropological fieldwork in Georgia, taking place far away from Norway, and in an unfamiliar social environment, was very much an example of an “ideal” fieldwork judging by the criteria above. My fieldwork in Kirkenes was, however, not. First, the fieldwork was conducted in my own country, even within my native region of Northern Norway. The place, although not my home (I grew up in Tromsø), did not represent a high degree of “abroadness”. Secondly, there were not any significant differences between myself and the people who came to be my informants. We shared language, experiences, knowledge and interests. I was not a stranger to them and they were not strangers to me. Third, the fieldwork could not be clearly distinguished from “normal” life, in the way that my first fieldwork could. As described above, the fieldwork could be described as a “step-in-step-out ethnography”. There were no ruptures. The entry into the field was not dramatic and abrupt, but gradual and smooth. I did not experience any cultural shock whatsoever. It was not even easy to define exactly *when* my fieldwork began. My fieldwork did not end abruptly either, it is more correct to say that it “faded out”. I could not say for sure myself at what point I finally left the field. I visited Kirkenes for the first time in September 2008 and then again in February 2009. From February 2010 to February 2011, I spent most of the time in the town. Some work was also carried out during the summer of 2011 and in early 2012. From 2012 to 2015, I worked as a researcher at the Barents Institute – commuting between my home town Tromsø and Kirkenes. Although I worked with various other projects during these years, I was still to some extent “in the field”. Thus, my fieldwork lacked most of the characteristics of a rite of passage. The spatial, social and temporal boundaries between the field and non-field, fieldwork and normality, home and abroad were blurred. To what extent did this have an impact on the quality of my research?

Traditionally, there has been a certain scepticism within the discipline of anthropology towards fieldwork conducted “at home”. Twenty years ago, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) even argued that within the discipline exists a “hierarchy of purity of field sites” where faraway fields tended to be considered more pure and appropriate than those closer to “home”:

After all, if the “field” is most appropriately a place that is “not home”, then some places will necessarily be more “not home” than others, and hence more appropriate, more “fieldlike”. All ethnographic research is done “in the field”, but some “fields” are more equal than others – specifically those that are understood to be distant, exotic and strange. (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 13)

Today, this tendency to judge fieldworks according to their socio-spatial distance from home seems, however, weaker. Most anthropologists would probably regard this way of thinking as anachronistic, a residue from the days of colonialism when, as Madden (2010, p. 52) puts it, anthropology found its very “*raison d’être* in the unfamiliar and the exotic”. Most anthropologists nowadays seem to agree with Madden in his claim that “anthropology ought to muster the same enthusiasm for representing and translating the familiar as it does for the representation of the exotic”. (Madden, 2010, p. 52)

There may even be reasons for questioning the very distinction between field and normality, home and abroad. Shore claims, for example, that “the traditional idea that fieldwork can be neatly divorced or ‘bracketed off’ from ‘normal’ time and space is itself a highly dubious and problematic notion” (Shore, 1999, p. 26). Madden argues that the very distinction between home and abroad, endogenous and exogenous anthropology, should be regarded as a false dichotomy as “any place, exotic or familiar, can be constructed as ethnographic” (Madden 2010, p. 54). To speak about fieldwork as home or abroad, or about endogenous and exogenous ethnography may be problematic, as it may indicate that these categories are mutually exclusive dichotomies. It makes, perhaps, better sense to speak about *home* and *abroad*, *endogenous* and *exogenous* as opposites in a continuum. Then a field may be more or less “exotic” or “homely”, depending on the anthropologist’s experiences of spatial, cultural distance or social distance to the field. The more homely, the less filters or barriers between the anthropologist and the field.

Van Ginkel (1994, p. 9), reflecting upon the qualities of “endogenous ethnography”, warns against overemphasising “the differences between home and abroad” in the first

place and instead carefully considers the actual advantages and disadvantages in each case. Rosaldo, too, arguing both against endowing fieldwork at home with “excessive virtue” and fieldwork at home with “excessive vice”, claims that “if distance has certain arguable advantages, so too does closeness, and both have their deficits” (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 169). In my case there were advantages as well as disadvantages related to the high degree of closeness to the field. The clearest advantage was the easy *access* to the field. Due to the way I resembled themselves, my informants early on identified and accepted me as an “insider”. There were absolutely no language barriers keeping us apart from each other. The fact that I, like them, was Norwegian, with all the common knowledge and experience this represented, of course also made it easier to “blend in”. On top of this came the fact that we shared regional identity. Regional identity is generally important in Norway, and perhaps even more so in the northernmost parts of the country. For many people in Northern Norway the distinction between *Northerners* (Norwegian: *nordlendinger*), commonly understood as people from one of the three northernmost counties of Norway, and *Southerners* (Norwegian: *søringer*), people from the southern part of the country (particularly Oslo and the surrounding region), is fundamental and constantly cultivated. Southerners are even considered as “significant others” by many locals, in a negative way (Eidheim, 1993, p. 52). They often tend to be perceived as arrogant and/or naïve, something which could make it difficult for them to gain respect and access in the north, regardless of their status as fellow Norwegians. This is certainly something anthropologists from the south may experience when conducting field research in the region. As a northerner myself, I avoided such prejudices. In this sense, too, I was considered one of them. Aside from these general factors, there were also more specific personal factors that made my entrance to the field easier. Here, most important perhaps was my very interest for *borders*, particularly the one between Norway and Russia. This was an interest I shared with most of my informants. Thus, the border became a sort of “common ground” from which relations could be built. My knowledge of Russia as well as Russian language was also highly appreciated among my informants. Finally, my informants could relate me to people they already knew, not least Arvid Viken, the leader of the project in which I was taking part. Viken, thanks to

his previous research in the area, knew several of my informants and enjoyed a certain local esteem.

Alongside the easy access to the field, there was no doubt that my intimate understanding of local language, codes and conventions made the fieldwork much less marked by misinterpretation and misunderstandings than my fieldwork in Georgia some years earlier had been. In Kirkenes, I could much more easily attune to and interpret cultural nuances, something which was particularly important when studying and interpreting performances, which often carried subtle messages.

The disadvantage most often referred to regarding fieldwork in familiar settings is the phenomenon of *home blindness*, i.e. that one at home takes too much for granted and thus fails in reaching the necessary deep understanding of whatever one is studying. It is this challenge of distancing that Leach refers to when he states that “fieldwork in a cultural context of which you already have first-hand experience seems to be more difficult than fieldwork which is approached from the naïve viewpoint of a total stranger” (Leach, 1982, p. 24). According to Eriksen, the problem of home blindness “can, at least to a great extent, be overcome through proper training” (Eriksen 2001: 30). What this training should consist of is not elaborated, but a typical strategy is to make efforts to “defamiliarize” oneself from the field in order to see it with new eyes. This can, as Marcus and Fischer (1986, pp. 137) suggest, be achieved by disrupting “common sense, doing the unexpected, placing familiar subjects in unfamiliar, or even shocking, contexts”. In Kirkenes, fearful of home blindness, I tried to follow this advice of defamiliarization. To some extent, the very perspective of performance served this aim, as it allowed me to effectively remove phenomena and processes from their conventional categories and put them together into new ones. Whether this deliberate defamiliarization was enough to free me from whatever preconceptions and prejudices I may have had is hard to judge – even in retrospect. To what extent home blindness plays a role and distorts the actual understanding of a field is always very difficult to assess.

Researcher and informants

Unique to ethnographic research is the role of the researcher, for during participant observation, the anthropologist is not only *guiding* the research but also being himself a *tool* of the research. This peculiar role as “tool” raises particular questions regarding the ethnographer’s personal influence on the production of data. Of special importance in this context is the researcher’s *status* and *relations* in the field. Aase (1997, p. 49) argues that a successful field research depends upon two factors: first the researcher’s ability to establish viable relations with his informants, and secondly, a reflexive attitude to his ascribed status and the way this status is being performed in the field. The character of the ethnographic field research thus demands a high degree of self-reflexivity. Both status and relations in the field need to be critically interrogated as to how they influence the research process and its outcomes.

Participant observation implies, as Aase (1997, p. 50) writes, that the anthropologist “enters a status that is relevant in the social system under scrutiny”. The status of researcher is not always possible, nor is it always helpful when conducting field research. Aase (1997, p. 55) describes how this very status may actually be an impediment in the process of data collection. Doing field research in a Pakistani village, he repeatedly experienced that his locally ascribed status of researcher gave him *too much* respect among his informants. People were reluctant to answer his questions as they expected him, the researcher – supposedly a person of great knowledge – to know all the answers better than themselves. Another problem, typically experienced by scholars doing fieldwork in borderlands, is the *suspicion* related to the status of researcher. As Donnan and Haller (2000, p. 9) write, “if state authorities do not want to let anyone look over their shoulders, it may not only be difficult to receive permission for research in these areas, but [it] may also be dangerous to life and limb”. A researcher – particularly one engaging in “participant observation”: talking to, looking at and being with people over time, or (seen with local eyes) “nosing about” without any clear purpose – may easily be suspected of really being something else, namely a spy. This was something I personally experienced when conducting field research on the Georgian-Turkish border. During my fieldwork in the Norwegian-Russian borderland,

I did not face any of these problems. In the case described by Aase, the largely uneducated villagers obviously lacked a basic understanding of what a researcher was. In Kirkenes, this was by no means the situation. Most of my key informants were well educated and quite capable of understanding – at least to some extent – what it meant to do anthropological research. Most of them had already had experience with other researchers, for instance the mentioned Viken. Quite a few jokes were made by my informants during my fieldwork about my possible role as a spy, particularly due to my knowledge of Russian and my interest in the border, but these were mainly *jokes*, and the slight suspicion that may have been there did not have any noticeable impact on my research. People were not reluctant to meet me or talk to me. Furthermore, neither Norwegian nor Russian authorities did, as far as I know, anything to hamper my research. Thus, for me, the status of researcher was not an impediment. There was not really a need to look for a more “suitable” status, as Aase did. On the contrary, it seemed like the status of researcher made my presence in the area, my questions and peculiar interests, understandable to my informants.

A fieldwork is interactive. While I carried the status of researcher, the people I related with in the field came to be my *informants* (Norwegian: *informanter*). Both myself and they used this term when referring to their role in my research project. Some anthropologists do prefer to use other terms, like *host* (e.g., Wax, 1980) or *partner* (e.g., Fluehr-Lobban, 2000) when writing about their informants. The idea in both cases is to establish a more equal relationship between the researcher and those who are the object of his or her research. Such terms may, however, often just work as euphemisms, obscuring an asymmetrical relationship that is still there. When I apply the terms *researcher* and *informant* instead of, let us say, *partner*, it is first because I do not see the relationship between researcher and informants as a partnership in the true sense. Secondly, I have no intention of working collaboratively with my informants to achieve common ends, nor do I have any intention to establish alliances with them. My informants should not have any creative role in my project. I should be responsible.

It has been argued that the very term *informant* could be problematic in the region where I did my research. Kramvig (2006, p. 131) has, for instance, pointed at how the term in Finnmark may be associated with the *quislings* who, during the Second World War, collaborated with the German occupants. Some people in the Norwegian–Russian borderland may also associate the term with the informers of the Cold War, local people who reported to the police about other local people who could be suspected of having pro-Soviet attitudes. My own informants, well aware of the work researchers do, did, however, not tend to invest the term with any of these meanings, neither did anyone ever express any particular concerns about stepping into this status in relation to me.

Challenges and concerns

To make oneself a “tool” for the research one is doing may have some consequences. As Madden notes, “being with people in their everyday lives, through all their trials and tribulations, gives a great deal of experience to ethnographers, but it also enmeshes them into responsibilities and obligations to their participants” (Madden, 2010, p. 77). This is particularly true in cases where ethnographers befriend their informants, something which is not uncommon during long fieldworks (see, e.g., Friedman Hansen, 1976; Hendry, 1992). To combine the obligations of friendship with the obligations of independent and objective research may, however, be challenging, as I came to experience during my own field research.

I entered, as mentioned above, the field with the status of researcher. I easily got access to the field and established good working relations with my informants, especially those within the Girls in the Bridge and the Samovar Theatre. We shared interests and had much in common. We spent much time together, also gradually outside the typical fieldwork setting, in various local social activities. We became friends. In the Samovar Theatre I also acquired another status along that of researcher, namely that of co-worker, due to my short-term engagement as an interpreter facilitating the cooperation between the theatre and Russian partners. For me, the interpretation service was, as mentioned, a way of giving something back to my informants while at the same time getting a unique insight into the theatre’s activities from within.

While my additional statuses of friend and co-worker gave me a lot of insight, they did also cause me some concern. First, I got the feeling that some of my informants began to think of me as an ally, rather than an objective researcher. There seemed to be a certain expectation that my research in some way would serve them and their interests, that I would turn into some sort of ambassador for their agendas. I should add that such expectations were only subtly expressed by some of my informants. As mentioned above, I do not embrace the idea of conducting so-called “collaborative research”. For me, independent research is an important guideline. Due to this, my informants’ expressed expectations made me feel somewhat uncomfortable. I knew that, at some point, I would have to disappoint them, and that by doing so I would also break with the typical expectations related to friendship and collegiality, namely trust and loyalty. How did I cope with this situation? Most importantly, I was forced to reflect seriously upon my relationship with my informants. I had to make up my mind and decide for myself how I could work and relate to my informants without entering into alliances with them. As the situation was not acute, I decided in the end not to do anything dramatic like quitting friendships or ending my research. I approached the problem more pragmatically. First, I tried to make my position as clear as possible to my informants so that they, hopefully, could adjust their expectations somewhat regarding my role. Secondly, I strived to act in a way that made my intentions more clear. In the theatre I became careful about not getting involved in the more creative parts of the theatre’s activities – thus limiting myself to the “outsider/insider” role of interpreter. Thus, I tried to “give something back” to my informants while at the same time avoiding becoming a “partner” in the true sense. These measures did, I believe, to some extent work. The mutual understanding between me and my informants improved. A *modus vivendi* was reached. Still, my uneasy feeling of not keeping my obligations as a friend and colleague did not completely disappear, nor did, I believe, my informants’ hope that I would – in the end – turn into an ally.

In addition to the role dilemma described above, my main ethical concern during the fieldwork was related to the principle of *informed consent*. More than once, I worried about my informants’ degree of knowledge about my project. Were they really informed

enough about what they were going to take part in when they agreed to become my informants? Should I have told them more? Could I have told them more?

The principle of informed consent stresses the researcher's obligation to inform his or her research subjects about the various aspects of the research. Such aspects could be the objective of the research, the role of the researcher, the research subject, the possible outcomes and impacts of the research and so on. The requirement of a free and informed consent from people participating in research projects is an important way of securing their interests and safeguarding their rights. As Alver and Øyen (2007, p. 11) note, "we [researchers] have a responsibility for the individuals, groups and societies studied – and in particular for those who furnish data and information for our research". The requirement seems to be particularly acute in anthropological research where the contact between researchers and research subjects tends to become both extensive and intensive. To what extent the informants' consent really *is* well informed may, however, not always be clear, neither for the researchers nor for the informants themselves. In my own case, it was surely difficult to assess whether my informants knew enough about the content, aims and possible outcomes of my project when they gave their consent to actually participate in my research. This was due to two factors. First, as Hastrup (1992, pp. 31–32) observes, anthropological fieldwork can best be described as a journey into the unknown. Research projects are often sketchily designed and may change considerably along the way when confronted with empirical data in the field. This makes it difficult – if not impossible – for the anthropologist to explain the project in a fully comprehensible way to others (Alver & Øyen, 1997, p. 112). In my own fieldwork this was, at least to some extent, the case. At the very beginning of my fieldwork, which was the time when I was required to obtain consent from my informants, I had only relatively vague ideas about what I wanted with this project and how I was going to proceed with it. My own lack of knowledge prevented me, I felt, from providing my informants with a clear picture of my project.

Secondly, there was the challenge of explaining to my informants what I actually did know in a way they could understand. Perhaps this challenge was less acute in Kirkenes

than it would have been in, for example, an illiterate society far away. Nonetheless, I found it demanding to explain my methods and intentions to my informants in a language that was comprehensible. Even though there were no linguistic barriers between us, and even though my informants in general were educated people, they were not, after all, anthropologists. It was obviously challenging to translate my etic categories and accounts to their emic world. For example, my broad approach to performances was hard to grasp for most of my informants who had more narrow understandings about what performance was or could ever be.

My main worry was that my informants, due to lack of knowledge, would fail to grasp the true purpose of the project, and consequently would have false expectations about my research, what it was about and what its impact would be. Some informants seemed, as mentioned above, to be of the opinion that my research would serve them, that it would bring positive publicity, help to promote the place, et cetera. These ideas could be related to the way they came to see me as a potential ally, but they could also result from a lack of understanding for my project in the first place. Due to my worry, I did put quite a lot of effort into explaining my project, not only at the beginning, but also later, as the study progressed, striving to make absolutely sure that my informants knew as much as possible about what they were taking part in. I also discussed the possible outcomes of the research with my informants. In the end, none of my informants did express any regret at having taken part in my research project. In general, they seemed to be satisfied with the information they had about my project.

Chapter 5: Political Performances

At the entrance to the town hall of Sør-Varanger stands a large wooden sculpture of a lion, with a crown on its head, that dances merrily with a bear.⁷ The crowned lion represents the Kingdom of Norway; the bear is a symbol for Russia. The sculpture in its entirety symbolizes the improved relations between Norway and Russia since the end of the Cold War. The sculpture is named *The Friendship Dance* (Norwegian: *Vennskapsdansen*). This name – perhaps intentionally, perhaps not – illustrates the highly performative, almost dance-like way in which these relations have been played out politically in the borderland during the last decades.



Figure 6. *The Friendship Dance*.

(Photo by author)

⁷ The sculpture, a gift from Murmansk to Sør-Varanger, was created by the Russian artists Vladimir Kornilov and Igor Mashkovsky. Originally it was displayed in the main street of Kirkenes. The sculpture was moved to the town hall after some children vandalized it (Langseth, 2005, p. 334).

Since the early 1990s, Kirkenes has become the arena for vigorous performative politics stressing friendship, good neighbourship and brotherhood between the two countries. This symbolic politics manifests itself most intensely during the meetings between high-ranking representatives of Norway and Russia that regularly take place in the town. These meetings tend to involve two important events: firstly, a joint commemoration ceremony by the Russian Monument and, secondly, a joint crossing of the Norwegian–Russian border. The meetings are also occasions for the use of naming and declarations, through which the border and borderland are invested with new meaning. A final manifestation of the symbolic politics in the borderland is the performative use of material aesthetics: symbolically laden buildings, monuments, plaques and sculptures similar to that of the Friendship Dance. All these forms of political border performances and their significance in the meaning-making of the borderland will be described and discussed in this chapter.

The main actors

The political border performances involve actors on the international as well as the local level. The international actors include the many high-ranking representatives of Norway and Russia, who more or less frequently pay visits to the borderland. Among these are the prime and foreign ministers of the two countries as well as members of the Norwegian royal family. The Norwegian side, as host and facilitator, plays the most active role in these meetings. Three Norwegian statesmen, Thorvald Stoltenberg, Jens Stoltenberg and Jonas Gahr Støre, have been particularly important in the symbolic politics of the borderland.

Thorvald Stoltenberg (1931–2018) was an important political figure in the borderland for at least three decades. He visited Kirkenes numerous times publicly as well as privately. Stoltenberg, a prominent Labour Party politician, served as ambassador, defence minister (1979–1981) and foreign minister (1987–1989 and 1990–1993) in two Norwegian Labour governments. Stoltenberg played a decisive role in the establishment of the Barents Region in 1993. Due to this, he is often referred to as the “father of the Barents Region” (Norwegian: *Barentsregionens far*). Later on, Stoltenberg continued to

engage himself in Norwegian–Russian cooperation in the north. In 2006, a bust of Thorvald Stoltenberg was unveiled in the centre of Kirkenes (see below).

Jens Stoltenberg (1959-) is the son of Thorvald Stoltenberg. He was the leader of the Labour Party from 2002 to 2014. Stoltenberg served as minister of industry and energy from 1993 to 1996, finance minister from 1996 to 1997 and prime minister from 2000 to 2001 and from 2005 to 2013. As prime minister, Stoltenberg strived to improve Norway’s relationship with Russia through dialogue and cooperation. Stoltenberg met his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, in Kirkenes in 2013. Since 2014, Stoltenberg has served as Secretary General of NATO.

Jonas Gahr Støre (1960-) is the current leader of the Norwegian Labour Party, succeeding Jens Stoltenberg in 2014. Støre served as foreign minister from 2005 to 2012 and as minister of health and care services from 2012 to 2013. Støre is generally regarded as the main architect of the Stoltenberg Government’s *High North Strategy*, which included a strong focus on improving Norwegian–Russian relations (Government 2006).⁸ During his years as foreign minister, Støre established good personal relations with Russia’s foreign minister Sergey Lavrov.

Alongside the (inter)national actors, there are also several local actors who are engaged in the symbolic politics of the border. Notable among these is the political leadership of the municipality. The mayors mentioned below are Alfon Jerijärvi (in office 1980–1982 and 1991–2003), Tone Hatle (in office 2003–2007), Linda Beate Randal (in office 2007–2011) and Cecilie Hansen (in office 2011–2015). The representatives of the municipality are deeply involved in the political performances taking place in the borderland, catering for the international actors but also – to some extent – exploiting them for their own interests. Another important local actor the Norwegian Barents Secretariat with its ten mainly locally recruited employees. The Secretariat was

⁸ The term *High North* (Norwegian: *Nordområdene*) refers here to the circumpolar Arctic and the Barents Region.

established in 1993 and is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter MFA). Its main mission is to promote and fund Norwegian–Russian cooperation projects in the Norwegian and Russian parts of the Barents Region. The Secretariat also works as a resource centre for the Barents cooperation. Formally speaking, the Secretariat is not a political body, but in practice it has played an important political role locally, especially under the leadership of Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen.

Rafaelsen, originally from Kirkenes, was politically active from an early age. From 1979 to 1987, he held a seat in the municipal council for the far-left party Red Electoral Alliance (Norwegian: *Rød Valgallianse*). Later, he joined the Labour Party. In the 1990s, Rafaelsen was for some years the organizer of the Arctic Sky Balloon Fiesta. He also worked with destination development in AS Grenseland, a remnant of Project Borderland (see Chapter 7). Rafaelsen served as head of the Barents Secretariat from 2003 to 2015. Although formally a bureaucrat, Rafaelsen has, as both the former mayor⁹ and the chief municipal executive¹⁰ of Sør-Varanger confirm in interviews, been a powerful figure in the field of border-related symbolic politics. In 2008, he was awarded the medal of the Golden Eagle, the highest reward of the Russian Academy of Science, for “his long work to promote friendly relations between the northern regions of Norway and Russia and for establishing the best possible cooperation between the peoples in daily life” (Hågensen, 2008). Rafaelsen currently (2015-) serves as mayor of Sør-Varanger.

An interesting aspect of politics in Kirkenes is the strong ties that exist between the international and the local actors. Members of the local political elite tend to refer to the national political leaders using their first names, and the same is true the other way around. Culturally speaking, this practice indicates a high degree of closeness and familiarity. The Stoltenbergs as well as Støre have visited Kirkenes numerous times and

⁹ Linda Beate Randal (mayor, Sør-Varanger municipality), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 30 April 2010.

¹⁰ Bente Larssen (chief municipal executive, Sør-Varanger municipality), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 21 May 2010.

established strong personal relationships with local strongmen, such as the mentioned Rafaelsen. This entanglement between the international and the local can often be observed in the various political border performances that take place in the town.

The borderland as a political destination

“Ministers regularly travel to Kirkenes from where they make various statements”, writes Kochetkova (2010) in her journalistic reportage from the borderland. It is a laconic, but precise, observation of the role that Kirkenes has come to play as a political destination and an arena for Norwegian–Russian meetings.

The arrival of prominent visitors to the borderland is not new. Niemi (2014a) writes, for instance, about the traditional journey of the Norwegian bailiff of Finnmark to meet the representative of the Russian tsar in Malmis (Kola), which took place between 1615 and 1813. This so-called Malmis meeting was, as Niemi notes, an institutionalized form of soft diplomacy that ensured as well as publicly exhibited a mutual understanding between Norway and Russia in the North prior to the border delimitation. The character of the meeting itself was, as Niemi illustrates, highly theatrical and festive, marked by “an often relaxed atmosphere with personal contact and mutual trust, as well as a good portion acting and entertaining ceremonial” (Niemi 1992, p. 24). Later, after the delineation, official visits to the borderland, like that of King Oscar II (see Chapter 3), often served to demonstrate national sovereignty in the area.

The post-Cold War period came to mark a new turn in the politicization of the borderland. From the early 1990s, Norway and Russia strengthened their cooperation within a wide range of fields. Mutual trust was, at least to some extent, re-established and former conflicts solved. Milestones in this development were the establishment of the Barents Region in 1993 as well as the settlement of an old marine border dispute in the Barents Sea in 2010 (*Treaty between the Kingdom of Norway and the Russian Federation* 2010). Kirkenes, the birth town and unofficial capital of the Barents Region, became the place where the new improved relations were played out performatively. The town became an important political destination – a meeting point between Norway

and Russia. Viken and Nyseth (2009, p. 62) observed that during one single week in 2009, Kirkenes was visited by no fewer than five ministers. Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen, not without some proudness, could in 2010 claim that “not a single office in Norway was visited by more ministers than the Barents Secretariat in Kirkenes”.¹¹ Since 2010, the number of visitors does not seem to have declined. Ministers arrive in Kirkenes all year round, but the number of visits tends to peak during the Barents Spektakel festival in February (see Chapter 6), as well as during the anniversaries for the establishment of the Barents Region and the Soviet liberation of Sør-Varanger in January and October, respectively.

The political visits to Kirkenes tend to have a strong performative dimension. As Viken and Nyseth (2009, p. 63) observe, “it seems to be a policy for prominent people to be seen in Kirkenes”. Therefore, when “politicians or government representatives arrive, they normally are accompanied by a team and a trail of journalists” (Viken & Nyseth, 2009, p. 62). The many journalists ensure that these visits become public events with an audience that is not only local but also national and international.

The most prominent visitors arrive for the Russian–Norwegian ministerial meetings that regularly take place in the town. These meetings tend to be highly orchestrated events, involving, like the old Malmis meetings, a number of repeated performances or rituals. Most important among these are, firstly, the joint commemoration at the Soviet Liberation Monument and, secondly, the joint crossing of the Norwegian–Russian border at Storskog-Borisoglebsky.

Commemorations

The Soviet Liberation Monument (Norwegian: *Det sovjetiske frigjøringsmonumentet*), locally referred to as the Russian Monument (Norwegian: *Russemonumentet* or *Russermonumentet*), is a two-metre-high bronze statue of a Red Army soldier standing

¹¹ Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen (head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 10 April 2010.

on a pedestal of stone three-and-a-half metres tall. The soldier was crafted by the sculptor Stinius Fredriksen. The pedestal was designed by the architect Gudolf Blakstad (Sør-Varanger Historielag, 2008, p. 53). The monument is placed in a park on a small hill just outside the centre of Kirkenes. It was raised by the Norwegian state and Sør-Varanger municipality in gratitude for the Red Army's liberation of the town in 1944 and bears the following inscription in the Norwegian and Russian languages: "To the Soviet Union's brave soldiers in memory of the liberation of Kirkenes 1944". Soviet authorities proposed to raise the monument in 1945. The initiative gained support from the local authorities in Sør-Varanger. Originally, the intention was to raise a gigantic twelve-metre-high statue in the town square. Norwegian authorities feared, however, that a memorial of such a size placed in the centre of Kirkenes could be used as a Soviet propaganda tool. Consequently, the Government decided to reduce the height of the statue and place it in a less prominent place. The monument was unveiled in 1953. As many as 2000 people attended the ceremony (Ruud, 2008, pp. 54–55).

During the Cold War, the Russian Monument became a rare – but therefore also important – site for the marking of Russian–Norwegian brotherhood during a period of high tension in the borderland. Joint Soviet–Norwegian commemorations took place at the monument on the Norwegian Liberation Day on 8 May, the Soviet Victory Day on 9 May and, most importantly, on 25 October, the date for the liberation of Kirkenes. On such occasions, the Soviet and Norwegian anthems were played, speeches were delivered and wreaths of flowers were laid on the statue's pedestal. The commemoration ceremonies, until the 1990s, were mainly attended by representatives of local authorities. The Norwegian national authorities – profoundly sceptical about the monument from the very beginning – were conspicuously absent. In fact, between 1952 and 1994, not a single Norwegian minister attended the ceremonies. This changed, however, after the end of the Cold War. In 1994, during the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation, King Harald V of Norway was present for the commemoration. Also present were the prime minister, the speaker of the parliament, the foreign minister, the defence minister, the president of the Sami parliament, the county governor, the county mayor and, representing the Church of Norway, a bishop (Ruud, 2008, p. 112). Russia was

represented by its foreign minister (Johansen, 2005, p. 420). Never before had so many high-ranking officials visited Kirkenes at the same time. Since 1994, a commemoration ceremony at the Russian Monument has been a compulsory part of every top-level visit to Kirkenes. The monument was visited in 2008 by the Russian and Norwegian foreign ministers, Sergei Lavrov and Jonas Gahr Støre, and in 2013 by the two countries' prime ministers, Dmitry Medvedev and Jens Stoltenberg. For the seventieth anniversary of the liberation in 2014, King Harald was again present, together with Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Foreign Minister Børge Brende. The Russian delegation was headed by Foreign Minister Lavrov.

The ceremonies taking place by the Russian Monument tend to be brief and formal, lasting only minutes. The description below is from the local newspaper *Sør-Varanger Avis*'s coverage of the prime minister's meeting in 2013 (Sandø, 2013b, author's translation):¹²

Just before half past three, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg arrived at the Russian Monument. Medvedev and Stoltenberg greeted County Governor Gunnar Kjønneøy, County Mayor Runar Sjøstad and Mayor Cecilie Hansen before walking up to the monument where they paid homage to the soldier that stands as a symbol of the brave soldiers of the Soviet Union, in memory of the liberation of Kirkenes in 1944. Medvedev stepped forward, adjusted the banner of the great flower wreath, stepped back, bowed, before taking place next to his Norwegian colleague. After about a minute the ceremony was over and the large cortège drove away.

Like most commemoration ceremonies, the events by the Russian Monument tend to be marked by a high degree of rule governance and formalism. They are, to quote Connerton (1989, p. 44), "deliberately stylized . . . not subject to spontaneous variation". Due to this highly ritualistic structure, they appear out of the ordinary and therefore

¹² A picture entitled *Glory* (Norwegian: *heder*) above the text shows the two prime ministers bowing in front of the monument (Sandø, 2013b).

significant, well worth the audience's attention. Sometimes, such as during the king's visit in 1994 and 2014, speeches are delivered during the ceremonies. The speeches are not long. Only a few words are said, and these words are carefully crafted and skilfully articulated. Most ceremonies are strictly non-verbal, involving only a variety of postures, gestures and movements: the salutation of the flag, the correct erect position, the respectful placing of the wreath on the monument and the bowing in front of it. The main performers of this ceremony tend to be the ministers, representatives of Norway and Russia, but the attending audience takes part in it as well. By bowing their heads at the right time, and keeping respectfully silent during the entire event, spectators too become, as Connerton (1989, p. 71) puts it, "habituated" by the performances. This "ceremonially embodied form" (Connerton, 1989, p. 43) of the commemorations makes them highly powerful and persuasive.

What meanings are conveyed during these performances? First, for Norway, the commemorations are a way of showing deference towards Russia. As Zhurzhenko (2018) points out, the symbolic capital that the Soviet memorials abroad represent can be seen as an important part of Russia's soft power. However, in recent years, many of these memorials have come to be regarded as symbols of past occupation rather than as symbols of liberation. In a few countries, they have even been removed or destroyed. Cases in which Russia's historical role as liberator is acknowledged abroad are today rare but therefore even more appreciated by Moscow. Norwegian authorities are of course aware of the great value that these memorials have for Russia.

Secondly, as demonstrated by Connerton (1989), commemorative ceremonies play an important role in the shaping of communal memory, in reconstructing or revising the past. In this sense, the commemorations can clearly be seen as a way of re-evaluating the Soviet liberation of Sør-Varanger. During the Cold War, this historical event was mainly regarded as a local curiosum with little national significance. Since the early 1990s, as Norwegian authorities began to take part in the ceremony, the significance of the event has, however, been redefined. King Harald V's speech by the memorial in 1994 was pivotal in this sense. In his speech, the king described the Soviet liberation of

Sør-Varanger as “doubtlessly one of the most important milestones in our war history” and added that the entire Norwegian nation felt a “real and deep gratitude to the brave soldiers and the Red Army” (Ruud, 2008, p. 112). The commemorations can also be seen as part of a larger re-evaluation of the historical relations between Norway and Russia. In this re-evaluation, peace, brotherhood and good neighbourship are key terms, as exemplified in the king’s speech during the seventieth anniversary liberation of Kirkenes:

For more than 1000 years, Norway and Russia have lived in peace and good neighbourship. Between our two countries there has never been war. Few neighbouring countries can display such a heritage. The only time war came, we stood united. (Harald V, 2014, author’s translation)

Third, as Hite (2012, p. 4) notes, “the politics of commemoration recognizes that commemorative processes are more than symbolic exercises to acknowledge the past”. The commemorations not only construct the past; they also constitute the *present*. The narratives about the past underpin new political narratives about border opening and successful Russian–Norwegian cooperation in the borderland. The king claims, for example, in his speech that the Norwegian–Russian border has come to serve as a “door to the other side and not as a barrier” and, furthermore, that “few places has this been so thoroughly demonstrated as in Kirkenes, the birth town and capital of the Barents-cooperation” (Harald V, 2014). The fact that the Norwegian and Russian ministers *jointly* perform the commemoration strengthens the rhetoric about cooperation and brotherhood.

Everything considered, the cultivation of the Russian Monument and the commemorations taking place there can be seen as a form of performative *memory politics* that invests the borderland with meaning and mythicizes it in new ways. As Aagedal (2009, p. 61) observes, there is the “peace myth”, “the narrative about Kirkenes as a peaceful border town” and “a borderland with contrasts and tension, but never war”. There is also the “restoration myth”, the narrative about how good neighbourship has

been the rule rather than the exception in the history of the borderland and how this good neighbourship, after the unfortunate interlude of the Cold War, is restored today. These myths in turn serve, as Aagedal (2009, p. 61) writes, to strengthen the status of Kirkenes as a centre for cross-border cooperation and as a meeting point of great symbolic importance, “a sort of Norwegian Brandenburger Tor”. Having attained this mythicized status, the place becomes of course even more attractive as the site for new commemorations.

Border crossings

The joint commemoration described above is an example of a relatively common form of political performance. The joint crossing of the border, the other event repeatedly taking place during the Norwegian–Russian top-level meetings is, however, unique. The first such border crossing took place during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Barents Region in January 2003. Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik of Norway and his Russian counterpart Mikhail Kasyanov, having both arrived for the festivities, decided to arrange a meeting on the actual border. After having held political talks in the border commissioner’s house on the Norwegian side of the border, the two ministers, amidst great media coverage, jointly crossed the border into Russia, where they opened a new Russian border checkpoint, which had been funded by Norway (NRK, 2003). The second joint border crossing took place in 2008 during the meetings between Norway and Russia’s foreign ministers Jonas Gahr Støre and Sergei Lavrov. This time, the ministers invited other dignitaries as well as the international press corps to follow them across the border into Russia. For about half an hour, the two ministers and their entourage promenaded the border zone. The third joint border crossing took place in 2013 during the twentieth anniversary of the Barents Region as part of the meetings between Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and his Russian colleague Dmitry Medvedev. Now, for the first time, a huge crowd of local people attended the ministers’ border crossing. Norwegians arrived from Kirkenes, and Russians were bussed in *en masse* from Nikel and Zapoliarny. Choirs, combining singers from both sides of the border (the choir Crescendo from Sør-Varanger and the music school of Zapoliarny) performed Norwegian and Russian romantic songs about freedom and

liberation, from *Katyusha* to *Ellinors vise*. Arriving by car from Kirkenes, Stoltenberg and Medvedev were greeted on the border by the mayors of Sør-Varanger and Pechenga, who provided each of them with an honorary border traffic permit. Equipped with these symbols of the recently established local border traffic zone, the two ministers strolled across the borderline – into Russia and back (Nilsen, 2013; Trellevik, 2013b). Just as in 2008, everyone except the local audience was invited to stroll along with them.

Jonas Gahr Støre claimed, in his speech during the Barents Spektakel in 2011, that the Norwegian–Russian border – earlier “marking a sharp division between peoples, an immense gap, a barrier” – had gained new significance as “a meeting place between two nations – two peoples – with a shared culture, shared history (and in a longer perspective), shared tradition” (Støre, 2011). King Harald, in his speech during the commemoration in 2014, described the Norwegian–Russian border as a “door to the other side” (Harald V, 2014). During the border-crossing events, a similar rhetoric is used. After the first border crossing in 2003, Prime Minister Bondevik stated that the new border station would serve the general aim of opening the border and improving the cross-border relations. The station, he claimed, would never hinder people from visiting the neighbouring country but “simplify the contact across the border” and become a “good starting point for a closer and better cooperation” (Statsbygg, 2003, p. 4). After the border crossing in 2013, Prime Minister Stoltenberg, posing for the press with his honorary border traffic permit, enthusiastically proclaimed: “I have been to Russia!” (Føleide, 2013). He went on to explain to the journalists how much the Norwegian–Russian border had changed since the end of the Cold War. Stoltenberg told them about his first ever visit to the Norwegian–Soviet border as a young boy, a visit that he made in 1972 with his father and “the father of the Barents Region” (as it was added in the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation’s report), Thorvald Stoltenberg. “At that time”, he explained, “this was a completely sealed border. The Soviet Union was on the other side and it was scary to be here. It used to be a closed border marked by distrust and Cold War”. “Now, however”, claimed the prime minister, “it is an open border marked by trust and warm cooperation”, and he added that it was “fantastic to experience this” (Føleide, 2013).

These ministers' stories about transnational cooperation and successful border opening are in themselves not always true to life. What renders their performances convincing for large audiences is really the way they involve *showing doing*. The ministers not only talk; they walk (literally). Just as in the commemoration ceremony, in which the ministers also play the lead role, they use their own bodies to communicate their message. Alongside the ministers, many other "actors" are involved in the border crossing performances. First, there are the representatives of the local authorities, mayors and border commissioners. Military personnel, border guards and customs officers play along, putting on smiling faces in front of the photographers. Many locals also willingly contribute to the general rejoicing, handing out roses, cheering, dancing and singing. Thanks to the efforts of all the actors, a truly positive – if not festive – atmosphere is evoked within the border zone. For a moment, all strict rules and regulations are set aside, as vividly described in one of the newspaper reports covering the events:

On Tuesday afternoon, armed border guards and customs officers strolled carefree around the Norwegian–Russian border without checking a single document, and for a short half an hour all laws of gravity disappeared at Storskog. Not a surprise when the leaders invite! The foreign minister delegation that visited Kirkenes today made post-Cold War history when the border gate was opened. About 50 people rushed into Russia, without any passport control. For many northerners this is the dream situation: border guards greeting cheerfully, and customs officers who are all smiles. (Arvola, 2008, author's translation)

What Schechner refers to as *make-belief performances* "intentionally blur or sabotage" the boundary "between the world of the performance and the everyday reality" (Schechner, 2013, p. 43). The aim of such performances is to convince people that what they experience in the performance is what there is. As make-belief performances, the joint border crossings at Storskog-Borisoglebsky have to a large extent been successful. Newspaper headlines such as "Where there used to be closed borders, there are now open borders and trust" (Dragnes, 2013) and "Now they can cross the border whenever

they like” (Føleide, 2013) indeed indicate that the staged political “reality” – at least by observers from outside – is being accepted as the reality. Only for people who are familiar with the normality of the border, with its strict surveillance and control, may the staged open border appear as fake, or “surreal”, as one local reporter put it (Arvola, 2008). The same reporter did not fail to observe the theatricality of the event either when observing that, while the openness of the border is being demonstrated by the political leaders, not a single real border crossing takes place. All regular travellers have to wait at a considerable distance for the festivities to end.

The Barents Capital

The meetings taking place in the borderland do not only consist in theatrical enactments, such as commemorations and border crossings. They are also occasions for the use of evocative language, for declarations and statements – which invest the borderland with meaning. In this context, the act of *place naming* is particularly interesting. Austin (1962) has pointed out the act of naming as a deliberate and performative act in the way in which it changes the social reality and brings something into being. Giving a place a name is one of the most powerful ways of giving it an identity, a unique individuality (Tuan 1991). One may even claim that naming is an act that turns space into place. Place naming as a rhetorical device is particularly powerful when it comes to the use of *epithets*. An epithet (derived from the Greek word *epitheton*, meaning attributed) is a phrase that characterizes a place, a thing or a person and helps to make the characteristics of this place, thing or person more prominent. Typical examples are “Richard the Lionheart” for Richard I and “the Big Apple” for New York. Epithets have been used politically as well as commercially to draw attention to places and highlight a particular aspect of them. In recent years, Kirkenes has gained two new epithets, *the Barents Capital* and *Twin City*. In both cases, the naming has come from above, been politically motivated and intended to provide the place with new significance. Below, the two epithets will be discussed.

The term *Barents* originally related to the Dutch explorer and navigator Willem Barents¹³ (1449/1450–1597), who gave his name to the Barents Sea (Norwegian: *Barentshavet*; Russian: *Barentsevo More*). The name *Barents Region* appeared only in 1992, invented and introduced by Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg (Landsem, 2013, p. 92). At the time, there were several ideas for names for the new transnational region, for example *Marushkaland* (*maruskha* is the Russian word for cloudberry – a circumpolar boreal plant typical of the region), the *North Calotte* (Norwegian: *Nordkalotten*) and the *Great Calotte* (Norwegian: *Storkalotten*) (Landsem, 2013, pp. 89–97). Only Stoltenberg’s suggestion, however, won the necessary support from all the relevant stakeholders at the national and regional levels. The reason may very well have been the fact that his name was a *novelty* and in that sense neutral and acceptable for everyone. Stoltenberg was also, allegedly, the person who introduced *the Barents Capital* (Norwegian: *Barentshovedstaden*) as a byname for Kirkenes during one of his many visits to the place in the early 1990s. Today, the byname is, alongside the closely related *Barents Town* (Norwegian: *Barentsbyen*), the most commonly used epithet for the town.

Above, it was described how the memory politics of the commemorations mythicized the borderland, turning Kirkenes into a “Norwegian Brandenburger Tor” (Aagedal, 2009, p. 61), a unique and highly meaningful place. The performative act of naming Kirkenes as the Barents Capital further mythicizes the borderland – endowing it with certain qualities that, from the point of view of the Norwegian authorities, are desirable. The term *Barents* links the identity of Kirkenes inextricably to the transnational region bearing the same name as well as all the qualities typically associated with this region, namely cross-border cooperation, Norwegian–Russian brotherhood, good neighbourship and peace. The word *capital* refers to the central status of Kirkenes within the Barents Cooperation, first as the Barents Region’s “birth town”, second as the host town for the Barents Secretariat and third as the most favoured arena for political

¹³ *Barents* is really an anglicized version of the Dutch name Barentsz, a short form of the patronymic name Barentszoon, the son of Barent or Bernard.

Barents-related meetings. The term *capital* also evokes ideas about importance and greatness. As the Barents Capital, Kirkenes is “framed and accentuated as an international town, a centre within the Barents Region, and as a place with meaning and position that goes beyond the national level of identity and politics” (Viken et al., 2008, p. 35). To be named capital of the Barents Region – a region covering 1.75 million km² and home to 6 million people – gives the small town an air of grandeur, even if the status of capital is not official and even if the Barents Region itself is more of a dreamscape than a real region. Since the epithet was introduced, it has become customary for prominent visitors to emphasize the international importance of Kirkenes and the borderland. In a speech given in Kirkenes in 2008, Foreign Minister Støre claimed, for example, that Kirkenes as the Barents Capital plays an important role in Norway’s dialogue with Russia and the Russians (Støre, 2008a). An American ambassador, who boldly claimed to have visited Kirkenes “more than the Norwegian prime minister”, asserted that, “seen from Washington”, Kirkenes was in fact “the centre of Norway” (Viken, Nyseth, & Granås, 2007, p. 60).¹⁴ Such statements, even though they fail to describe the reality, educe an image of Kirkenes as a highly significant place, and, the more important Kirkenes appears to the world, the more lucrative the place becomes as the arena for symbolic border politics, new meetings, speeches and declarations.

Some observers, like Valestrand (2005) and Kvidal and Nygaard (2009, pp. 35–38), claim that the use of the term Barents lacks a solid local support or foundation. Viken et al. note that “the narrative of Kirkenes as the Barents Town bears the characteristics of a hegemonic project” (Viken et al., 2008, p. 36), describing it as a “top-down project staged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its local agency” (Viken et al., 2008, p. 41). The authors argue that significant numbers of the local inhabitants express reservations against the Barents rhetoric. Aagedal claims that the Barents identity, for many people, may represent an unwanted “redefinition” of the town’s old identity as a

¹⁴ The content of the statement, as well as its origin, is disputed. According to Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen (2009b), the correct quotation is that “seen from Washington D. C. Kirkenes is Norway’s geopolitical centre”. Rafaelsen cites the U.S. ambassador to Norway (2002–2005); John D. Ong. Sætre (2005), however, cites the U.S. deputy secretary of energy, David Garman.

mining town. He also suggests that some people may be sceptical about the idea of an open border and cooperation with Russia in the first place (Agedal, 2009, pp. 75–76). While these observations may be correct, the name *Barents* has, nevertheless, been exploited commercially in Sør-Varanger. A remarkable number of local enterprises, institutions and events use *Barents* as a prefix. There are the Barentssekretariatet (the Barents Secretariat), Barentsforlag (publishing house), Barentsinstituttet (research institute), Barentshallen (sport hall), Barentsbadet (public swimming pool), Barents Frokosthotell (hotel), Barents Sport (sports shop), Barents Buss (bus company), Barents Safari (tour operator) and Barents Spektakel (festival), to mention only a few. There has even been a local campaign to rename Kirkenes airport Barents Airport. The local authorities have embraced the epithet as well and turned it into an important part of the official articulation of the municipality's identity. In the municipal master plan, the Barents identity is referred to as being important for the identity of the place (Sør-Varanger kommune, 2005). In 2006, the municipality officially adopted the slogan "Sør-Varanger – a border-crossing municipality" (Norwegian: *Sør-Varanger kommune – en grensesprengende kommune*). In the municipality's official promotion video, the mayor proudly welcomes people to "Sør-Varanger municipality, a border-crossing municipality in the heart of the Barents Region" (Sør-Varanger kommune, n.d.-b). The Barents Secretariat has also put much effort into bolstering the Barents identity of the town, for example by engaging in campaigns to raise a bust of Thorvald Stoltenberg as well as an enormous Barents House in the centre of the town (see below).

Viken et al. (2007; 2008) have introduced a special term, the *Barents elite*, to denote people who promote Kirkenes locally as the Barents Capital and the Barents Town. This network consists, according to them, "of people involved in the Norwegian Barents Secretariat . . . The Girls on the Bridge, representatives from Sør-Varanger municipality, and local leaders within the public sector, politics and business" (Viken et al., 2008, p. 35). Initially, the term was not very popular locally, at least not among the people to which it refers. Some clearly felt that the term indicated that they were acting in an "elitist" manner, pursuing their own narrow interests, disentangled from the rest of the local community. Later, however, the same people turned the term into something

positive. In a portrait interview from 2010, Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen, the head of the Barents Secretariat, was for example portrayed as a “proud elite soldier” (Jacobsen, 2010). According to Viken et al., the Barents elite in Kirkenes has mainly been an agency of the national authorities, “not strongly embedded in the local community or politics”, as “their activities are beyond the local level and their networks are outwardly directed” (Viken et al., 2007, p. 62). The authors may be right in their description of the elite as “outwardly directed”. The relations between the Barents Secretariat and the representatives of the MFA have, for example, been strong and cordial for years. This does not, however, disqualify the elite from pursuing local interests. On the contrary, it seems that members of the elite have supported the Barents rhetoric precisely *because* it fits the local interests. In interviews, most members of the elite tend to support the “barentsification” of the borderland, not because they necessarily support the Norwegian foreign policy but because they see this process as being good for Kirkenes. According to Rafaelsen, the naming of Kirkenes as the Barents Capital has been valuable first and foremost because it “put Kirkenes on the map” and transformed its status from that of a periphery to that of a centre. Rafaelsen refers to this process as *local empowerment* and *deprovincialization*.¹⁵ According to Mayor Linda Beate Randal, the declaration of Kirkenes as the Barents Capital has been of great value for Kirkenes, as it has provided the place with considerable attention and formidably increased its status and prestige.¹⁶ Without the local support, not least the support of the Barents elite, it is doubtful whether the naming of Kirkenes as the Barents Capital would have been so successful. Thus, rather than being regarded simply as a top-down project, the naming can be seen as a process to which both national and local actors have contributed and in which there has been something to gain for both parts. This is also true for the other naming process of recent years, the declaration of Kirkenes and its Russian neighbour Nikel as *twin cities*.

¹⁵ Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen (head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 2 June 2010.

¹⁶ Linda Beate Randal (mayor, Sør-Varanger municipality), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 30 April 2010.

Twin cities

The process towards the formal declaration of Kirkenes and Nikel as *twin cities* (Norwegian: *tvillingbyer*; Russian: *goroda-bliznetsy*) began with a letter dated 13 March 2008 that was addressed from Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre to the mayor of Sør-Varanger, Linda Beate Randal. In the letter, the foreign minister urged the mayor to begin immediate talks with the mayor of Pechenga to develop a proposal for a *twin-city cooperation* between the two municipalities that could be presented during the meeting between Støre and his Russian colleague Sergei Lavrov that would take place in Kirkenes in June the same year. In the letter, Støre made it clear that the twinning initiative had already been clarified with the Russian authorities. Mayor Randal enthusiastically supported the minister's idea. In less than three months, the mayor, in close cooperation with the municipal authorities in Pechenga and under the auspices of the national authorities of Norway and Russia, developed a twin-city agreement proposal. On 9 June 2008, the proposal was ceremonially approved during the foreign ministers' festive dinner (*Felles erklæring* 2008). Kirkenes had gained a new byname: *The Twin City*.

Several terms exist that denote cities that cooperate with each other across national borders, the most common being *sister cities*, *friendship cities*, *partner cities*, *city twins* and *twin cities*. There are various ways to define twin cities. In a broad sense, the term may refer to any pair of cities located in two different countries that have signed cooperative agreements, regardless of the distance between them. In a narrower sense – which is relevant here – the term refers only to border cities that are located adjacent to each other (Joenniemi & Sergunin 2013, p. 144). The latter application of the term has been adopted by the European Union, where city twinning has “been turned into an established form of crossing and doing away with the divisive effects of borders” (Joenniemi & Sergunin, 2009, p. 4), as well as by the City Twins Association (CTA), the main umbrella organization for twin cities in Europe.

In Europe, as Joenniemi and Sergunin (2013, p. 144) note, “most city twinning unfolds between cities facing similar social, economic and political situations and historical

links”. The twinning also tends to involve cooperation within a wide range of areas – aiming to achieve a high degree of transnational harmonization and integration. Thus, it contributes, “in varying degrees, to the formation of commonality reaching beyond the national configurations” (Joenniemi & Sergunin, 2013, p. 145). The Kirkenes–Nikel case, however, differs radically from this standard pattern. First, the two towns, although located in relative proximity to each other, do not really have much in common, as mentioned in Chapter 3. The socio-economic realities of the two towns have been, and are to this date, very different. Second, the twinning process has had very little practical impact. The twin-city agreement failed to extend the cooperation between the two towns. The declaration of Kirkenes and Nikel as twin cities did not result in any transnational harmonization and integration whatsoever. The only outcomes of the twinning process were in fact, as Haugseth (2014, p. 29) observes, just a few highly inefficient public seminars, for example the two-day seminar Twin City Cooperation – Round Table and Creative Laboratory, which was arranged in Kirkenes and Nikel in 2009. The practical failure of the twin-city project can be explained by the numerous obstacles facing any type of Norwegian–Russian cross-border cooperation, “for instance gap in living standards, personal relations, language barriers, different political structures and a complex visa regime” (Figenschou, 2011, pp. 71–72). The most important obstacle to real cooperation was, however, the fact that the twin-city agreement itself did not include anything new. The content of the twin agreement was, as Haugseth (2014, p. 29) observes, to a large extent a duplicate of the older Friendship Agreement signed between the two municipalities at the height of the Cold War, in 1973. The content of the cooperation was thus, as both Mayor Randal¹⁷ and Chief Municipal Executive Larssen later expressed it, the same as before, just with a new and catchy name.¹⁸ As the agreement did not open new forms of cooperation, it could not, even with the best intentions, spark deeper cross-border integration. The lack of practical results makes it easy to regard the twin-city project as a complete failure, as do indeed

¹⁷ Linda Beate Randal (mayor, Sør-Varanger municipality), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 30 April 2010.

¹⁸ Bente Larssen (chief municipal executive, Sør-Varanger municipality), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 21 May 2010.

Figenschou (2011) and Haugseth (2014) in their reviews of the process. However, if one switches the focus away from the practical and towards the symbolic aspects of the twinning process, it may not have been such a failure after all. Regarded as a performance, and probably only as a performance, the twinning makes sense – both from a national and local point of view.

The declaration of Kirkenes as a twin city was not to begin with a local initiative. Just like the previous epithet, Barents Capital, it came from above. Furthermore, the initiative was, as Joenniemi (2014, p. 9) writes, “clearly Norwegian in origin”, with Foreign Minister Støre as the main architect. Russia played along, but certainly on second violin. From the point of view of the initiator, the Norwegian Government, the twin-city declaration was mainly interesting as a tool of symbolic politics. First, the declaration fit very well into the general story about successful border opening and cross-border cooperation. In fact, it became a sort of evidence that these processes were actually taking place. Secondly, the term *twin cities* itself was interesting as a metaphor, as it expressed a close relationship marked by far-reaching similarity. Evoking Norwegian–Russian unity and commonality was certainly an aim for the Norwegian Government. Støre himself has repeatedly spoken about the Norwegian–Russian border not as a divide but as a “meeting place” between two nations with a shared culture, history and traditions (e.g., Støre, 2011). The epithet *twin cities* could serve as a symbol for the larger Norwegian–Russian unity that the Government strived to cultivate. Third, the twin-city declaration was *in itself* a great event, an occasion for common Norwegian–Russian celebration and, perhaps, the starting point of future anniversary celebrations. It was not a coincidence that the proposal was “ordered” for the ministerial meeting. The declaration sparked considerable positive interest and publicity for the meeting. Furthermore, it served as a perfect pretext for the above mentioned joint border crossing that the ministers conducted the day afterwards.

On the Norwegian side of the border, the support for the twin-city project was strong. The municipal authorities, headed by the mayor, as well as the entire “Barents elite” enthusiastically supported the initiative, despite its obvious lack of practical impact.

This was not due to naivety. Mayor Randal seemed, for example, to be well aware from early on of the lack of substance in the project. She did, however, realize that there was something to gain symbolically from the naming, not only for the national authorities but also for the municipality. For Sør-Varanger, the new epithet fit very well with the municipality's previous efforts to brand itself as a "border-transcending municipality", stressing as it did the advanced and progressive transnational qualities of the place. The word *city*, usually reserved for much larger places than Kirkenes, fit well with the local ambitions to present the town as a capital of great size and importance.

In the aftermath of the declaration, the local authorities used the new twin city status for all its worth, promoting it on every possible occasion. The letter from the minister to the mayor that started the process became something of a trophy in this campaign. It was put to performative use, publicly displayed on several occasions by the mayor and other representatives of the municipality during conferences and seminars. The informal style of the letter, in which the minister addressed the mayor simply as "Linda", was habitually referred to as proof of a very intimate and harmonious relation between local and national authorities. Thus, the mayor's inferior role as a mere executor for the foreign minister was in the end presented as something of which to be proud. Finally, the letter was posted on the website of the municipality along with the text of the Joint Declaration.

It is not the first time that city twinning has been used for place marketing and branding. As Joenniemi and Sergunin (2013, p. 146) write, "city-twinning has turned into one of the departures used by cities in aspiring for a distinct, visible, and favorable profile". What makes Kirkenes a special case, however, is that the branding dimension of the twinning here became so dominant. In fact, the symbolic value of the twinning seemed to have been the only value gained from it. For both national and local authorities on the Norwegian side, these symbolic gains were, however, more than enough. On the Russian side, the story was different. Local authorities in Pechenga took part in the twinning process but seemed to lack the enthusiasm of their Norwegian colleagues. In Nikel, as Haugseth (2014) observes, the concept of twins appeared pompous and out of touch

with reality, as indeed it was. In Nikel, there was little understanding of the sudden need to change status from brother towns to twin cities.¹⁹ Many locals actually regarded the term “twin” as absurd, taking into account how different the two towns actually were. A local joke soon appeared about Nikel and Kirkenes having become “the world’s most unidentical twins”. Seen through Russian eyes, the twinning process was meaningless and the new epithet useless. Nikel lacked all the incentives that Kirkenes had to embrace its new status as a twin city. Still an inward-looking mining and garrison town, Nikel had no need to reinvent and promote itself as “border transcending” and “transnational”.

Material aesthetics

Above, various examples of political border performances – from naming to joint commemorations and border crossings – have been discussed. A final interesting dimension of the politics of the Norwegian–Russian borderland is the performative use of material aesthetics: buildings, monuments, sculptures and plaques. The political use of material aesthetics is not a new phenomenon in the borderland. The raising of churches, for example, played a highly performative role in the borderland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Chapter 3). Today’s material aesthetics, however, invest the border and the borderland with new meanings.

Above, the role of the Russian Monument in border politics has been discussed. This war memorial, although by far the most prominent, is not the only one in the borderland. There are in fact no fewer than twenty war memorials in Sør-Varanger. Most of these were erected in the aftermath of the Second World War, but a few have actually been set up in recent years (Sør-Varanger historielag, 2008). The last monument, commemorating the moment when the people of Sør-Varanger came out to greet the approaching Red Army, was raised as late as 2008. The Borderland Museum in Kirkenes (Norwegian: *Grenselandmuseet*) also serves as a sort of war memorial. Thorvald Stoltenberg laid the foundation stone for the museum, which opened in 1997 (Sørensen,

¹⁹ What in Norwegian are named *friendship towns* (Norwegian: *vennskapsbyer*) are in Russian named *brother towns* (Russian: *goroda pobratimy*).

2005, p. 256). The permanent war exhibition inside the museum documents and celebrates the Soviet liberation of Sør-Varanger. At the centre of the museum, a rare Soviet Second World War warplane, an Ilyushin 2 Sturmovik, donated by the Russian state, is displayed (Ruud, 2008, pp. 114–115). As Aagedal notes, “the war memorials in Sør-Varanger are not ‘dead’ cultural heritage, but continuously in use during commemorations” (Aagedal, 2009, p. 60). They work as symbols as well as arenas in the ongoing memory politics of the borderland. Below, three other prominent examples of performative material aesthetics that relate less to the past and more to the present will be discussed. These are the Sri Chinmoy Peace Border plaque, the Thorvald Stoltenberg bust and the Barents House.

The Sri Chinmoy Peace Border plaque

Prominently placed on the wall of the Norwegian customs building, the Sri Chinmoy Peace Border plaque used to be one the first objects that travellers would notice when they crossed the Russian–Norwegian border. The brass plaque was decorated with Norwegian and Russian flags and carried the signatures of the mayors of Sør-Varanger and Pechenga. The inscription said:

Norway – Russia – The World’s first Sri Chinmoy Peace Border

Traditionally borders have implied separation and division: separation of peoples by language, culture and politics; division among members of the world family because of ignorance and its unfortunate companions: doubt, mistrust and fear. Today, with the dedication of the Sri Chinmoy Peace Border between these two noble nations, the concept of a border takes on a new, powerful and inspiring meaning. May the Peace Border between Russia and Norway serve as a promising, fulfilling and unifying link between these two great northern lands. On the universally beloved common ground of peace, may the men, women and children of Norway and Russia extend their hands and hearts and join together in a multitude of self-giving and oneness-distributing activities for their mutual fulfilment and satisfaction.

On this Sri Chinmoy Peace Border
May we open our hearts to our neighbours
May we share our strength with our neighbours
May we walk, march and run together
To the golden goal
Of everlasting peace

To-day's Peace Border will be the discoverer of
To-morrow's One-ness brothers
And One-ness sisters

Sri Chinmoy, or Chinmoy Kumar Ghose, was an Indian guru who lived from 1931 to 2007. Preaching peace and love, he managed to attract an international following that even included powerful world leaders. When he died, Mikhail Gorbachev allegedly wrote that his passing was “a loss for the whole world” and that “in our hearts, he will forever remain a man who dedicated his whole life to peace” (Kilgannon, 2007). Others have doubted the guru's sincerity and accused him of being a dangerous cult leader (Davis, 2009). Sri Chinmoy was highly successful in raising memories and naming places after himself. Hundreds of sites and landmarks all over the world, from the Niagara Falls to the Taj Mahal, were declared as “Sri Chinmoy Peace-Blossoms” during his lifetime (Kannapell, 1996).

In 1993, Ole Johnny Johnsen, a Sri Chinmoy devotee living in Kirkenes, suggested declaring the Norwegian–Russian border the first ever Sri Chinmoy Peace Border (Gjørund, 2012). Johnsen's proposal won immediate support from the local as well as the national authorities on the Norwegian side. This support had most probably little to do with the guru. In fact, it seems that the people involved in the installation of the plaque at the time paid very little attention to who Sri Chinmoy actually was and what he represented. What was interesting for them was the idea of declaring the border a *peace border*. The text on the plaque, grandiloquent in style, evoked ideas of Norwegian–Russian peace and good neighbourship, which the national and local authorities at the time were eager to express. The use of terms like *one-ness brothers*

and *one-ness sisters* evoked, like the metaphor *twin* fifteen years later, ideas of advanced cross-border commonality. Following an invitation from Norway, Russia agreed to support the project as well. On 21 November 1993, an official unveiling ceremony was held on the border at Storskog. Present were representatives of Norway and Russia as well as spectators arriving for the event from both sides of the border. The plaque was jointly unveiled by Alfon Jerijärvi and Andrei Ivanov, the mayors of Sør-Varanger and Pechenga. At the same time, the Norwegian–Russian border was declared a Sri Chinmoy Peace Border for all the future.

In 2013 the Norwegian Directorate of Public Construction and Property quietly removed the plaque from the customs building. The removal did not signal a change of the official Norwegian policy towards Russia. It was a response to a series of newspaper articles that were highly critical of the practice of naming Norwegian state property after Sri Chinmoy (e.g., Gjørund, 2012; Stanghelle, 2012). There was no official statement following the removal, nor did any reports about it appear in either the national or the local media.

The Thorvald Stoltenberg bust

The bust of Thorvald Stoltenberg, made by the sculptor Odin Øistad, forms the centrepiece of the Pavilion Park (Norwegian: *Pavillonparken*) in the heart of Kirkenes. The bust, facing the Barents Sea, stands on an iron ore stone placed on top of a stone arch. Around the arch, there are four points of light – one for each cardinal direction – pointing towards the sky. An inscription states “the founder of Barents Cooperation Thorvald Stoltenberg” (Sør-Varanger historielag, 2008, p. 25).

It was Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen, Head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, who first proposed to raise the Stoltenberg bust. Rafaelsen came up with the idea during the tenth anniversary of the Barents Region in 2003. By installing the bust, he wanted to honour Stoltenberg, first for his role in the establishment of the Barents Region and second for his crucial role in “putting Kirkenes on the map” and “turning it into a political

destination”.²⁰ The bust was meant to stress the connection between Thorvald Stoltenberg – the “father of the Barents Region”, the Barents Region and the “Barents Capital”, Kirkenes. Rafaelsen also suggested placing the bust in the Pavilion Park (Norwegian: *Pavillonparken*), next to the hotel where the Kirkenes Declaration had been signed in 1993. He even proposed renaming the park Thorvald Stoltenberg Park or, alternatively, the Barents Park (Norwegian: *Barentsparken*). Neither name has ever been officially approved, but both are allegedly in use locally. According to Rafaelsen, the raising of the bust was at the time “not altogether uncontested”, as it has not been common in Norway to create sculptures of people who are still alive.²¹ Regional and local authorities, however, gave their full support to the proposal, and both Sør-Varanger municipality and Finnmark County joined the Barents Secretariat in the financing of the sculpture.

The unveiling of the Stoltenberg bust on 5 August 2006, like the unveiling of the Sri Chinmoy Peace Border plaque, was made into a great public happening. More than 1000 people turned up for the event, which took place during the Kirkenes Days (Norwegian: *Kirkenesdagene*), a popular local summer festival. Thorvald Stoltenberg himself attended the ceremony, with his son Jens Stoltenberg and the rest of the Stoltenberg family. The ceremonial speeches were delivered by Mayor Tone Hatle, Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen and the Stoltenbergs. The mayor, in her speech, stressed the important role of the Barents cooperation in the development of Kirkenes. Rafaelsen described Stoltenberg’s ideas for cross-border cooperation as “perhaps one of the most important Norwegian foreign political initiatives ever” and concluded that, thanks to this initiative, a “positive and simply unique cooperation with Russia” had evolved (Nilsen, 2006). Thorvald Stoltenberg, in his speech, expressed gratitude to Rafaelsen for his great efforts: “The leader of the Barents Secretariat Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen is a person who never uses the word no. Every time I call Rune I am met with enthusiasm, something

²⁰ Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen (head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 10 April 2010.

²¹ Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen (head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 10 April 2010.

which is very important for the future of the Barents cooperation”, he exclaimed. Stoltenberg also stressed the important role that Kirkenes was playing in Norway’s cooperation with Russia (Nilsen, 2006). Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg told the audience the story about his visit to the border in 1972 with his father, the same story that he told the press after the border crossing event at Storskog seven years later. Here too he compared his impressions from that time with his impressions of today’s “open border”. The prime minister did not fail to cherish his father, proclaiming him “godfather of the Barents Region”:

Many say that Thorvald is the father of the Barents Region. I can tell you that in addition to this he is also the godfather (Norwegian: *fadder*) of the region. Even though he is no longer, since he retired from the post of foreign minister, formally responsible for the Barents cooperation, he is still in his daily life deeply engaged in the Barents cooperation. (Nilsen, 2006, author’s translation)

The unveiling ceremony itself clearly emphasized the ideals of cross-border cooperation and Norwegian–Russian friendship. The flags of both countries were flying. Two young local girls, dressed up in national costumes, greeted Thorvald Stoltenberg and the audience in Norwegian as well as Russian before jointly unveiling the bust. After the unveiling, an open seminar about “people-to-people diplomacy in the North”, attended by Thorvald and Jens Stoltenberg, was arranged in the same conference hall in which the Kirkenes Declaration had been signed (Nilsen, 2006). According to people who were there, the interest in the seminar was immense. The conference hall itself was packed, and there were still long queues of people outside hoping to enter and may be catch a glimpse of the Stoltenberg family and their entourage.

Since 2006, the park with the Stoltenberg bust has on several occasions been used as a site for political events and artistic border performances. The greatest of these events was a gigantic show named Barents Score that was commissioned by the MFA and organized for the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Barents Region in 2013. The event will be described in detail in Chapter 6.

The Barents House

Three years after the raising of the Stoltenberg bust, Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen came up with a new idea: the Barents House (Norwegian: *Barentshus*). The audacious plan was to build the world's tallest wooden building, a 70-metre-high skyscraper, in the centre of Kirkenes. The building would be like a shining lighthouse, visible from far away.²² From the top floors, one would be able to see the entire borderland, even into Russia. According to the plans, the Barents House, with its 17 floors, would provide the municipality and the library with new offices and the town with a new cultural hall. The building would also house a number of border-related institutions, including the Barents Secretariat itself. In the promotion of the Barents House, it was, however, not its practical use but rather its symbolic value that was emphasized. Rafaelsen himself repeatedly expressed that, for him, “the most crucial thing was that the house should signalize something”. The *name* should reflect Kirkenes's status as the Barents Capital. The size should reflect the importance of this status. Of course, claimed Rafaelsen, there were already buildings in Kirkenes that had been named after Barents, for instance the Barentshallen (sport hall) and Barents Frokosthotel (hotel), but there was nothing special about these buildings except for the name. Only a real landmark, such as the Barents House, could truly reflect the greatness of Barents.²³ The house, he claimed, should be of such significance that people would want to come to Kirkenes from far away to experience it. It should, he argued, be “an attraction and a landmark . . . beyond any other similar building” (Karlsbakk, 2009a). On 12 June 2009, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat published the following press release supporting the house:

As a centre for the development of the Barents cooperation and as a bridgehead in Norwegian High North policy, Kirkenes has for the last twenty years played a crucial role in Norwegian foreign policy. It is in Kirkenes that Norway meets Russia and it is here that geopolitics for centuries has formed communities and relations. The Barents Secretariat believes a symbol should be raised for this

²² For illustrations of the house, see Baltzter (2009) and Reiulf Ramstad Arkitekter (n.d.)

²³ Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen (head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 10 April 2010.

role, a landmark showing with all clarity the importance that the development of the High North has had for Norway. (Karlsbakk, 2009b, author's translation)

Two months later, Rafaelsen wrote an article for the local newspaper *Sør-Varanger Avis* in which he referred to Kirkenes as “the closest Norway gets to New York”, “the geopolitical centre of Norway seen from Washington D.C.” and “Norway’s most important city”, as well as a “centre of logistics in the cooperation with Russia” (Rafaelsen, 2009b). “The town’s political, economic and symbolic significance” was, due to all this, “simply incontestable”. The head of the Secretariat added that now was the time “to make this position more visible than by just putting up Cyrillic street signs”. Only by building the Barents House, a signature building of great size, could the importance of the place be properly expressed (Rafaelsen, 2009b). On 30 September, in an interview with *Finnmarken*, he repeated his claims that modern Kirkenes, with its “unique constellation of people”, was “the closest Norway got to New York” in addition to being “the most exciting geopolitical destination in the country” (Jacobsen, 2009). Rafaelsen himself admitted that the portrayal of Kirkenes as “Norway’s New York” and “Norway’s most important city” could appear somewhat pompous to outsiders. Still, he claimed, there were similarities between the two places. Kirkenes was, just like New York, a place marked by differentiation, sophistication and not least *drama*, all thanks to its border location. Also like New York, Kirkenes was not the national capital but nevertheless a political centre of great importance.²⁴ The parallel between Kirkenes and New York – the city of skyscrapers – certainly provided inspiration for the proposal in the first place. Initially, Rafaelsen had even been playing with the idea of erecting two identical houses with a piazza between them, just like the famous twin towers of New York – and, of course, a timely reference to Kirkenes’s status as a twin city.

During 2009, the Barents house was actively promoted locally. In October, a special community seminar about town development was arranged in Kirkenes, with the Barents House as the main topic. Here, Rafaelsen gave a presentation named *Barents*

²⁴ Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen (head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 10 April 2010.

House Kirkenes – From Idea to Reality, in which he presented the plans and visions for the house (Rafaelsen, 2009a). In December, the staff of the Secretariat made a gingerbread replica of the house and presented it to the public library for its annual gingerbread exhibition. The house proved in fact to be the tallest gingerbread house ever made in Kirkenes, and it literally dwarfed all the other houses of the exhibition. Its helicopter landing on the roof fascinated the visiting children. At the same time, there was extensive coverage of the Barents House in the national as well as the international media. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, for example, published a report with the image of the future house, shining like gold high above the centre of Kirkenes (Balzter, 2009).

While the promotion campaign was successful, the practical process of creating the building proved to be more difficult. The architectural firm Reiulf Ramstad Architects was commissioned with the task of designing the house. A Norwegian investor and real estate magnate, Arthur Buchardt, proclaimed that he was ready to build the house if the municipal authorities would support him. Consultations were held in 2010 and 2011 between various stakeholders, but a final agreement about how to proceed was never reached. In general, local politicians seemed to embrace the *idea* of the house but were more critical regarding its practical use as well as the costs of raising it, at the time estimated at 300–400 million kroner (Jacobsen, 2009). Some were also sceptical about the size and shape of the house and the idea of turning Kirkenes into a so-called “Barents Manhattan”. A few obviously regarded the entire project as a sort of megalomania. The issue divided the population in Kirkenes. In an unofficial poll in *Finnmarken*, about 40% replied that they believed the house “could be realized”, whereas 60% replied that it was a “castle in the air” (Jacobsen, 2009). Interestingly, the Norwegian MFA, the Secretariat’s beneficiary, avoided making any public statements about the Barents House project. This may indicate that national authorities regarded the project as too audacious and/or contested to become involved in or that they chose to await the course of events locally.

In October 2011, yet another article about the Barents House appeared, this time in the national daily *Aftenposten* (Rapp, 2011), but at this point the interest in the house had already slowly begun to die down. In May 2012, Rafaelsen, together with Trond Haukanes, Managing Director of Sør-Varanger Invest AS, tried to reawaken the enthusiasm for the house. In an open letter published on the website of the Barents Secretariat, they invited the municipal authorities and all the other stakeholders to join forces to realize the house. “How can we, as citizens”, they asked, “unite all positive energy in a new border-transcending building that will give Kirkenes a new visual identity?” (Haukanes & Rafaelsen, 2012). The authors expressed a hope for a renewed process that preferably “could be announced at the prime minister’s meeting during the twentieth anniversary in Kirkenes on 3–4 June 2013”. The response to the letter was, however, sparse. Thus, to this date, the house remains a plan on paper only.

Performative materiality

The Sri Chinmoy Peace Border Plaque, the Thorvald Stoltenberg Bust and the Barents House are here regarded as performative materiality, intended to convey certain ideas about the border and the borderland. Just like the sayings and doings of the visiting political leaders, these objects evoke Norwegian–Russian peace, friendship and brotherhood. They also (the bust and the house in particular) serve to strengthen the image of Kirkenes as “the Barents Capital”.

What distinguishes the cases of material aesthetics from the other forms of political performances taking place in the borderland is their solidity and durability. Political speeches and actions, although highly effective rhetorically, are, after all, more elusive. A speech may express ideas, but a plaque, bust or house gives the expressed ideas a solid form and anchors them to a particular place. The plaque was used to decorate the border-crossing point at Storskog. The Stoltenberg bust stands next to the building where the Kirkenes Declaration was signed. The Barents House, if ever realized, will be built in the centre of Kirkenes. Placed in such prominent locations, the objects are highly visible and “speak” to people all the time. Just like the churches that were raised along

the border in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they modify and dominate the border landscape.

The objects are not only powerful in themselves. The process of creating them tends to spark numerous other performances: promotion campaigns, writings, speeches, meetings and festive events. The Barents House, even though it has never materialized, has still played an important performative role thanks to all these happenings. The house should therefore not, as Rafaelsen himself concluded, be regarded as a failure, even though it was not built.²⁵ In the cases of the plaque and the bust, the unveiling ceremonies turned into huge public events during which the political leaders could celebrate themselves as well as their own narratives about the borderland. Ever since their installation, the objects have continued to be sites at which border performances of various kinds proliferate.

Findings

The Norwegian–Russian border and the borderland are invested with meaning through a wide range of political performances. Top-level meetings between Norwegian and Russian political leaders are important occasions for these performances. These meetings involve various forms of carefully orchestrated doings and sayings. The commemorations by the Russian Monument as well as the symbolic crossing of the Norwegian–Russian border can be seen as performances in which the main actors use their bodies and movements in the evocation of certain stories and images. Through their actions and the way in which they are performed – from respectfully bowing in front of a statue of a Red Army soldier to relaxed strolling across the state border – they enact symbolic politics. The performances are also marked by sayings: speeches, statements and declarations. Naming has been pointed out here as a particularly powerful rhetorical device. Finally, there is the highly performative use of material

²⁵ Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen (head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 10 April 2010.

aesthetics: the raising of plaques, sculptures and, possibly in the future, the world's tallest wooden building.

What ideas and images do the political performances convey? Notable is the rhetoric of Norwegian–Russian friendship. The commemorations and the border crossings conducted jointly by Norwegian and Russian actors express this rhetoric in a powerful way. The rhetorical language is furthermore marked by the use of metaphors such as *brothers*, *brothers-in-arms*, *one-ness brothers* and *twins*, all indicating a high degree of familiarity and similitude. The Norwegian–Russian border is an object for an active reconstruction, at least on a rhetorical level. Strong efforts are put into redefining the border from being a symbol of division to being a unifying symbol. It is declared as a Peace Border and referred to as an “open border”, “a bridge”, “a door” or “a meeting point”. The borderland is presented as a transnational space marked by cross-border cooperation and commonality. Kirkenes, in the process, is redefined from being a small provincial town to being a transnational centre of great importance. Bynames such as Barents Capital and the Twin City are effectively applied to stress this new status. The constantly evoked significance of the borderland turns it into a lucrative location for new border performances. The symbolic power invested in the place gives the political doings and sayings taking place there additional strength. Thus, Kirkenes and the border become *the* place to do and say things about the border.

The political border performances can be seen as examples of “make-belief performances” – “enacting the effects they want the receivers of their performances to accept ‘for real’” (Schechner 2013, p. 43). There is, however, often a discrepancy between the performed border and the real border. As Viken et al. (2008, p. 41) observe, “while celebrating Barents policies, the central authorities at the same time sustain a strict immigration regime, whereby an expensive and time-consuming visa procedure makes frequent border crossings relevant only for a rather small political–administrative and economic elite”. The staged open border of the border-crossing events is not the border that people know from their daily life. In fact, the staged border is, to some extent, a negation of the real border, a fact that makes it possible to describe it as “surreal”. The

performed borderland also deviates radically from the real borderland. The description of Kirkenes and Nikel as “twins” may indeed appear comic when confronted with the deep differences that actually exist between the two towns. The depiction of Kirkenes as the “Barents Capital” or a “Norwegian New York” stands in contrast to the sleepy small-town reality of the place. The lack of touch with reality is, however, not necessarily so important seen from the point of view of the actors involved in producing the performances, the national and local authorities. As the twin-city case finely illustrates, the symbolic effect tends to be given more weight than the practical effect. Gimmicks and impression management tend to be more important than real reforms.

Both (inter)national and local actors are active in the political meaning-making taking place on the border. Often they join forces. Strong personal ties link the local and national actors to each other, as in the case of Foreign Minister Støre’s relationship with Mayor Randal or the Stoltenberg family’s close relationship with Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen. National authorities strive to exploit the borderland as an arena for performing foreign politics. Local authorities take part mainly to promote local interests. In some of the performances, like the border crossings and the commemorations, national actors play the lead role. In the campaigns for the plaque, the bust and the house discussed above, it was, however, local actors, from Ole Johnny Johnsen to Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen, who were most active. This illustrates how both national and local actors are able and motivated to play along in the performative field of the border.

Chapter 6: Artistic Performances

Border performances in the Norwegian–Russian borderland are not restricted to the field of politics. There is also strong artistic involvement in the performative (re)construction of the border and borderland. In this chapter, the artistic performances of the two professional art organizations in Kirkenes, the Girls on the Bridge (Norwegian: *Pikene på broen*) and the Samovar Theatre (Norwegian: *Samovarteateret*), will be discussed. Borders have been the overarching topic for the art production of both groups. The Girls refer to their productions as “border-crossing exercises”. The Samovar Theatre refers to its productions as “border dramatics”. Below, the two organizations will be introduced, and so will the Barents Spektakel festival, the main arena for their art production. The introduction will be followed by the presentation of a number of the organizations’ artistic productions. Next, the way in which their performances invest the border and borderland with meaning will be discussed. Finally, the close relationship between the artistic and the political field in the borderland will be analysed.

The Samovar Theatre and the Girls on the Bridge

The Samovar Theatre was established in 1990 by Bente S. Andersen, who has been its art director ever since. The theatre is professional and runs its own cultural hall. It has a staff of six, but as many as many as thirty-five people – actors, dancers, musicians, composers and directors – are involved annually in the theatre’s productions. The Samovar Theatre produces two to three new performances every year, usually new dramas. Many of its productions are international collaboration projects, involving partners from Russia and other countries. The theatre performs locally and nationally as well as internationally.

The Girls on the Bridge were founded in 1996 by five women who at the time were involved in various local cultural activities.²⁶ Viken et al. (2007, p. 60) describe the Girls

²⁶ The founding members were Inger Blix Kvammen, Anne Mette Bjørgan, Solvor Vefsnmo, Svea Andersen and Bente S. Andersen, the founder of the Samovar Theatre.

as a “local artistic-cultural women’s association”. According to themselves, they are also referred to from time to time as an “artists’ group”, “a commission agency” and a “cultural development agency” as well as “an ensemble that plays internationally” (Kuzovnikova, 2010). The Girls are, however, mainly art curators and producers. They do not create art themselves but select, present and interpret art produced by others. The Girls have six full-time employees. Lyubov Kuzovnikova, originally from Russia, has been the organization’s art director and front figure since 2006. The Girls have produced a huge number of performances over the years, in Kirkenes as well as other places in Norway and abroad. They have an extensive network of national as well as international partners.

There are several similarities between the Girls and the Samovar Theatre. Both organizations are examples of successful artistic entrepreneurship. Both have achieved recognition, not only in their own community but also nationally and internationally. Bente S. Andersen has received the *Finnmark County Cultural Prize* (Norwegian: *Finnmark fylkes kulturpris*). The Girls have received the Norwegian culture prize *Eckbos Legaters Kulturpris* for “making Kirkenes one of Norway’s most important towns through their conscious promotion of contemporary art” (Pettersen, 2009). Since 2008, both organizations have been funded through the Norwegian state budget, a clear recognition of quality and professionalism. They have also received considerable direct support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). This support, quite unique in a Norwegian context, relates, as we will see, to the special connections that exists between art and politics in the Norwegian-Russian borderland.

The backgrounds of the two organizations are very similar. Both were established in the 1990s by the same network of people in the context of local upheaval: the closing of the mine and the opening of the border. The founders of the two groups shared the idea of using art to overcome the challenges that the place and region were facing. They had two visions. First, they wanted to transform Kirkenes from an inward-looking mining town into an outward-looking transnational town. This vision fit well with the political visions for Kirkenes in the 1990s. The Girls later engaged themselves in place promotion

as well, striving to strengthen the image of Kirkenes as “the Barents Capital”. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Girls have come to be closely associated with the so-called “Barents elite” (Viken et al., 2008, p. 35). The second vision of the two groups was to use art to transform the Russian–Norwegian border from a barrier into a bridge. Cross-border cooperation through art production became an aim and later a hallmark for both groups. Over the years, both the Girls and the theatre have cooperated extensively with a large number of Russian partners. This collaboration is often visible on stage, in their performances (see below). The very name *Girls on the Bridge*²⁷ expresses the ambition of cross-border bridge building, and so does the name *Samovar Theatre*, combining the Russian word *samovar* (tea maker) with the Norwegian word *teater* (theatre).²⁸ The theatre’s border-crossing ambition is also visualized in its logo (Figure 7), which contains both Latin and Cyrillic letters. In the logo, the Latin letter R has been replaced with a Cyrillic Я. This makes no sense to Russians, but for Norwegians the *faux Cyrillic* typography immediately evokes Russia. The red line in the middle symbolizes the border itself:



Figure 7. Logo of the Samovar Theatre.

The enthusiasm for the transnational and for border crossing was the starting point for the Samovar Theatre and the Girls’ focus on border related art. Today, the Samovar Theatre often refers to its productions as “border dramatics” while the Girls refer to their productions as “border-crossing exercises”. Both organizations have been inspired by the artistic performances of the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF) on the U.S.–Mexican border (see Chapter 2). Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s

²⁷ The Norwegian name, *Pikene på broen*, is also the name of a famous painting by Edvard Munch. In English, this painting is usually referred to as *The Girls on the Jetty*.

²⁸ The name also expresses what the theatre wants to be: “Samovar (Russian tea boiler) means self-boiling. It is warm, beautiful to look at, something that you can fill up, drain off and it is constantly simmering” (Samovarteateret, n.d.-a).

philosophy of artists as activists, creatively transforming and transcending borders through performances, fit well with the Samovar Theatre's and the Girls' ideas of themselves as cultural-political agents of change. The style of Gómez-Peña's performances has also appealed to both groups. Typical elements from his performances, such as the inventive mix of languages ("Spanglish" and "Ingleñol"), genres and art forms, experimental aesthetics, the use of humour and the involvement of the audience in the performances, can be found in many of the Girls' and the Samovar Theatre's performances (see below). In 2004, Gómez-Peña, invited by the Girls, visited Kirkenes. During his stay in the town, Gómez-Peña took part in a border art workshop and presented his performance *Mexotica*.

The Barents Spektakel

Kochetkova (2010) gives the following introduction to Barents Spektakel:

When I was planning to go to Kirkenes, a friend of mine said to me, "there is nothing to do there". This is true. There is nothing to do there. Except one week every year when the Barents Spektakel is arranged, for during that time the small town is transformed into a big cultural platform. (Kochetkova, 2010, author's translation)

The Barents Spektakel festival has been the main arena for the presentation of the art of the Girls and the Samovar Theatre since 2003. The Girls arrange the festival. The Samovar Theatre uses it as its main occasion for presenting new dramatics. The festival takes place every year in Kirkenes during the middle of the winter, usually in February. It is the biggest cultural event in the town and one of the largest in the entire region. During the days of the Barents Spektakel, the hotels and restaurants in Kirkenes are fully booked and the centre of the town, usually rather empty, is bustling with people: locals as well as visitors. The festival attracts journalists and artists from Norway, Russia and other countries. The event is also popular among political leaders involved in the symbolic politics of the borderland.

The Girls habitually refer to the Barents Spektakel as a “border-crossing festival”. This is also expressed in the festival’s name. The word *Barents* refers to the Barents Region, to Barents cooperation and to Kirkenes – “the Barents Capital” – where the festival takes place. The word *spektakel* is a Russian–Norwegian neologism, giving associations with the Russian word *spektakl*, meaning performance or show, as well as the Norwegian word *spetakkel*, meaning noise or uproar. This linguistic cross-over is a clear expression of the Girls’ idea of the festival as a transnational “bridge event”. The logo of the event, consisting of a smiling figure made up of the different parts of the Barents Region (Pikene på broen, n.d.-a), conveys the same idea. As a bridge-building event, the festival brings together artists from Norway and Russia as well as from other parts of the Barents Region and beyond. A concept that is unique to the festival has been to let artists from different countries perform together on stage (see below).

Every Barents Spektakel festival has a special slogan or title that loosely defines its content. Most festivals, however, revolve around the concepts of *border* and *Barents*. The festival programme tends to be varied, containing a mix of art forms, genres and artistic and political events. The Girls have described it as a “cultural-political cocktail with contemporary art, performances, literature, theatre, film, seminars and concerts as ingredients, spiced with the current issues related to the Barents Region and the High North in general” (Pikene på broen, n.d.-a). The festival usually consists of three different elements. First, there is the element of contemporary art, normally relating to borders. This element tends to be the focal point for the audience of visiting artists, art critics and cultural bureaucrats. Each festival contains a wide range of artistic works created by well-known national and international artists.

Secondly, the festival has a political element that distinguishes it from many other cultural festivals. The first ever festival was jointly opened by five prime ministers during the official celebration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Barents Region in 2003. Since then, ministers and members of the royal family have been present at every festival. During the festival, there are always political side events, so-called *Transborder Cafes*, in which public figures debate border-related issues. The

festival also coincides with the Barents Days (Norwegian: *Barentsdagene*), an annual event hosted by the MFA and the municipality that includes a conference about politics and economy in the borderland.

The third element of the festival, which mainly attracts the local population, is entertainment or show. As Viken (2014) notes, the festival has changed over the years – from a small avant-garde side event into a popular festival. From 2003 to 2007, the avant-garde profile dominated. During these years, only a few local groups, described by Viken (2014, p. 152) as “the curious, the pro-Russian and the academics”, endorsed the festival. Most people considered the festival as being far too “highbrow”. From 2008, popularization of the festival took place as the Girls began to include dance shows and rock concerts in the festival programme. Most effective in mobilizing the local audience was, however, the introduction of spectacular opening shows. The first of these shows was *Border-Crossing Exercise II* in 2008 (see below). The next year, the Girls attracted 3000 people to the opening, offering a “parade, a spectacular show and the best fireworks in Kirkenes history” performed by the French urban show theatre La Compagnie Malabar (Pikene på broen n.d.-f).

The three festival elements, art, politics and shows, are not always easy to distinguish from each other. Often, as in the border performances described below, all three elements are present. It is probably this very mix of elements that has rendered the festival commercially as well as artistically interesting and made it attractive to a very heterogeneous audience that is at once local, national and international.

The Girls on the Bridge: Border-crossing exercises

The Girls use the term “border-crossing exercises” to describe their huge *oeuvre* of border-related art productions, much as the Samovar Theatre refers to its art production as border dramatics. Below, the presentation of these productions will, for the sake of simplicity, be limited to four cases: *Border-Crossing Exercises III* (2008), *Borders – Control or Rock-n-Roll?* (2009), *Mind the Map!* (2011) and *Barents Score* (2013). The first three productions were presented during the Barents Spektakel and the last one

during the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Barents Region. All four productions rank among the Girls' most popular performances ever.

Border-Crossing Exercises III

The expression “border-crossing exercises” originally stems from a limited number of productions presented in 2007 and 2008. The Girls have described them in the following way (Pikene på broen n.d.-b):

Border-Crossing Exercises are artistic and cultural political statements, which take the form of different art and cultural project and productions. With the help of contemporary art and culture we want to articulate the necessity of better possibilities for border-crossing. Together with artists and other participants we tell new stories and hope that in this way we contribute, as equal stakeholders, to the development of the High North.

Border-Crossing Exercises I, the first of these productions, consisted of ten art installations by artists from several different countries. Each of the installations was presented as a “border-crossing exercise”, as it related to the topic of border crossing in one sense or another. *Border-Crossing Exercises II* was a concert featuring musicians from three different regions of the world: Scandinavia, the Caucasus and West Africa. Here the term *border crossing* referred to musical meetings between different nationalities, traditions and genres on the stage. *Border-Crossing Exercises III* was the final and largest of these productions, the culmination of the project. The performance took place on the evening of 2 February 2008 as the main event of that year's Barents Spektakel, which was also entitled *Border-Crossing Exercises*. Offering free tickets and a spectacular show, the Girls managed to attract as many as 1200 people to the event.

The performance took place close to the Norwegian border station at Storskog on the ice-covered border lake of *Pikevatn* (literally meaning *Girls' Lake*). Initially, the Girls had planned to let the Norwegian–Russian borderline serve as the stage for the performance. This proposal, however, was turned down by the Russian authorities. As an alternative, the Girls then decided to perform on the Norwegian side of the lake only.

From the main road leading to the border crossing point and down to the lake, the Girls cleared a pathway through the snow. Along the path, they placed frozen clothes and ice sculptures with pieces of text containing statements like “the border was created by the people” and questions such as “do you want one more border, man?” Where the path ended, the Girls set up an artificial borderline, with enlightened ice sculptures shaped like border posts. The real border, with various installations and watchtowers, formed the background. As the spectators reached the lake, the artificial borderline was transformed into a stage for a multi-art performance in which, to quote the Girls, “cultural traditions from the Norwegian and Russian sides met innovative art-hybrids developed in cooperation between artists from east and west” (Pikene på broen, n.d.-b). The audience was served a mix of artistic expressions: traditional and modern Norwegian and Russian dance, Siberian throat singing and choir songs performed by Russian and Norwegian choirs. More than one hundred professional artists and amateur performers from Norway and Russia took part in the event, which allegedly was the largest single cultural performance ever staged in the municipality. The performance culminated in a massive symbolic border crossing. First, all the performers on the stage simultaneously crossed the “border” to meet and greet each other. Then the audience was summoned to the stage as well, encouraged by the Girls over the loudspeakers to follow their example of “breaking boundaries” and “study the art of border-crossing”. Eventually, hundreds of spectators literally ran for the border, crossed it, straddled it and danced on it.

Border-Crossing Exercises III has several elements that are typical for the Girls’ border performances, and relevant in relation to the general artistic staging of the border and the borderland that will be discussed later on. First, the performance, like most of the performances of the Girls, takes place *outdoors*, and in a symbolically meaningful place – in this case virtually on the state border. Secondly, the performance involves the staging of a border which, during the show, is crossed by the actors on stage. Third, the performance involve actors from both Norway and Russia as well as a mix of different art forms and genres typically associated with these countries. Fourth, the show itself is *spectacular*, involving a huge number of people – both performers and spectators.

Finally, the audience is invited into the performance. This involvement of the audience is a recurring element in the artistic border performances. All these elements could also be observed in the performance *Borders – Control or Rock-n-Roll?* which took place during Barents Spektakel one year later.

Borders – Control or Rock-n-Roll?

In 2009, Barents Spektakel was introduced in the following way by the Girls (Pikene på broen, n.d.-i):

Welcome to Hot Arctic Kirkenes!

It is time for the festival again! It is still dark. It is still cold. So what? The sun is back, and all of us here make history every day in a fantastic borderland where everything is possible! We are happy to offer to all of you experiences for heart and mind, ear and eye! We promise art and culture of high quality, hot debates and lots of new things you have never seen or heard before. Outdoors in the cold and indoors, and both over and under the water! This year the festival slogan is: BORDERS – CONTROL OR ROCK-N-ROLL? We will literary rock it here! We live in the borderland. Now, we take the borders away and we hope that the festival will create many new friendships! Only through cooperation can we build our future!

The biggest event of the festival this year was *Borders – Control or Rock-n-Roll?* This performance was in many ways similar to *Border-Crossing Exercises III*, only this time the stage, or the staged border, was set up in the very centre of Kirkenes. In the middle of the town square, the Girls raised four stylized watchtowers, each containing a soundscape made by artists who, as the Girls put it, had “worked with Barents-sounds in their art” (Pikene på broen, n.d.-g). The name of the sound installations was *Sound around the Watch-Towers*, paraphrasing Bob Dylan’s song *All along the Watchtower*. Surrounded by the watchtowers, a temporary skating rink was built, and, around the rink, an arena for the audience was arranged. *Borders – Control or Rock-n-Roll?* featured, just like the performance in the previous year, actors from both Norway and Russia as well as from other countries of the Barents Region. This performance also

included a wide range of art forms. First, a professional Finnish ice sculptor set the stage, carving the festival slogan out of the ice with a saw. Then, accordion playing and traditional Sami joik were performed from the top of the watchtowers. In the skating rink, Russian and Norwegian figure skaters danced together against a background of ice and fire to the sound of rock-n-roll samples written and played by a Russian musician. Towards the end of the show, the huge audience, just like the previous year, joined the professional performers in a massive “border-crossing exercise” on the ice. The Girls described the performance as a manifestation of “cultural politics across and without borders” (Pikene på broen n.d.-c):

With the performance “Control or Rock-n-Roll?” we want to manifest cultural politics across and without borders:

- Rock-n-roll is a mix of popular musical genre!
- Rock-n-roll is a melting pot of different music traditions!
- Rock-n-roll (read: arts and culture) is a folk alternative to border control!

Mind the Map!

Mind the Map! was the slogan of the Barents Spektakel festival of 2011. The slogan urged, according to the organizers, people to pay attention to the importance of location. *Mind the Map!* was also the name of an exhibition project curated by the Girls during the festival. The exhibition consisted of three art installations created by three different artists. The installations were set up in various public spaces in the centre of Kirkenes. The artists, Olga Kissileva from Russia, Stefano Cagol from Italy and Morten Traavik from Norway, had been invited by the Girls to contribute site-specific and border-related works of art produced especially for the festival. This is how the Girls contextualized the project (Pikene på broen, n.d.-e):

Borders around the world, at sea and on land, are challenged every day. In April 2010 the maritime boundary in the Barents Sea was drawn between Norway and Russia. In November 2010 a visa-free agreement applied to the border areas along the Norwegian–Russian border was signed. Almost at the same time

NATO and Russia entered a strategic partnership about the ABM-system²⁹, and activities in the vicinity of the borderline between North and South Korea in the Yellow Sea led to escalating of tension on the Korean Peninsula.

The work presented by Olga Kissileva, a digital animation film named *Arctic Conquistadors*, was screened in the local shopping mall. The animation demonstrated how the Arctic was being “invaded” by modern “conquistadors”, multinational companies ruthlessly exploiting the region for its riches. In the film, the commercial logos of companies such as Esso, ABB, Intel, Shell and Statoil had been drawn onto the map of the Arctic.

The second work, more directly responding to the Girls’ intended focus on borders, was Stefano Cagol’s *Evoke Provoke (The Border)*. The work consisted of two parts. The first part was a video installation of 36 minutes screened in the same shopping mall as Kissileva’s installation. In the video, the artist exposed borders between land and water, fire and water, light and darkness, and human and nature. The second part of Cagol’s work consisted of numerous white flags, which were hoisted in several places in downtown Kirkenes: in front of the town hall, outside the police station and outside other central buildings. All the flags were inscribed with slogans like “challenge!”, “open!” or “blow up!” written in the English, Norwegian and Russian languages.

Morten Traavik’s *Borderlines* consisted, as mentioned in Chapter 1, of Norwegian and Russian border posts, placed in the main street, in the town square and at the entrance to the town, in front of the “Welcome to Kirkenes” sign. The installation was a result of a cooperation between Traavik, the Girls and the Norwegian border commissioner, Ivar Sakserud. During 2010, Norwegian and Russian authorities were in the process of replacing a number of old wooden border posts with new ones made of fibreglass. Traavik arranged a meeting with the border commissioner in which he proposed to use

²⁹ Anti-ballistic missiles (ABM) are designed to counter ballistic missiles. In 2010, the NATO Lisbon summit confirmed the intention to explore the potential for linking the missile defence systems of NATO and Russia (Mattox, 2011).

these old border posts in an artistic way. At this point, the Girls had already been “in dialogue with the Border Commissioner regarding the potential use of the decommissioned border posts” (Kuzovnikova, 2014). The meeting with Traavik allegedly totally changed the border commissioner’s opinion about artists and contemporary art. Somewhat surprisingly, he fully supported the idea of a “border art installation” and even helped to facilitate it in every way he could. His only demand was that the artificial border should not in any way create confusion regarding the location of the *real* border. The Russian border authorities were considerably more sceptical about having their old border posts reused for artistic purposes, especially on the Norwegian side of the border. This problem was solved ingeniously by acquiring twice as many Norwegian border posts as initially planned and then repainting half of them in the Russian colours (Kuzovnikova, 2014).

Traavik’s work came to play a role not only as an art installation but also as a stage for the opening ceremony of *Mind the Map!* The opening resembled both *Border-Crossing Exercise III* and *Borders – Control or Rock-n-Roll?* in the sense that it took place outdoors, in a public space, on an artificially staged border (*Borderlines*) and with a huge audience. Here, too, the event culminated in an “opening” of the border and a subsequent symbolic border crossing – in which both performers and spectators took part. The only major difference between this event and those previously described was the fact that the prominent performers here were not artists but high-ranking representatives of the state and municipality: the queen, the foreign minister, the border commissioner, and the mayor. The event could thus, like several of the Girls’ and the Samovar Theatre’s productions, be described as both political and artistic.

Barents Score

The cross-over between art and politics was even more prominent in *Barents Score*, a huge artistic show commissioned by the MFA for the lavish celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Barents Region in Kirkenes in 2013. The show was an expanded version of *Arctic Score*, the opening concert of the Barents Spekakel in 2011. This is how the Girls advertised the event (Pikene på broen, 2013):

On June 3rd, when the Prime Ministers meet in Kirkenes to discuss the future of the Barents Region, we invite you to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Barents Cooperation – with an extended performance: BARENTS SCORE.

The venue for *Barents Score* was a gigantic circus tent, raised especially for the occasion around the bust of Thorvald Stoltenberg in the Pavilion Park. The entire population of Sør-Varanger was invited to the event. Tickets were, as so often before, free, sponsored by the MFA. In the end, as many as 800 people were seated inside the tent. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg himself welcomed the audience. The prime minister declared that “Kirkenes was Norway’s Barents capital” and credited the local community for its “crucial role” in the Barents cooperation. He stressed that the entire borderland was marked by economic growth, thanks to the transnational cooperation. Then Stoltenberg once again repeated the story about his visit to the Norwegian–Soviet border with his father in 1972:

When we came to Kirkenes, we went up to the border at Storskog. I still remember putting my hand through the fence – experiencing an encounter with Communism. This was the time of the Cold War and the border at Storskog was almost completely closed. (Trellevik, 2013a, author’s translation)

Stoltenberg reiterated how much the border had changed since this time and how the relationship with Russian had improved. Finally, he greeted the audience on behalf of his father (who had to cancel his plans to attend the show), pointing at the bust next to the stage: “I send greetings from Thorvald (he used his first name only), and he is with us today, on this pedestal inside the circus tent” (Sandø, 2013a). Thereafter, the prime minister left the show, hastening to the border for another meeting with his Russian colleague Dmitry Medvedev. After the prime minister had left the circus, the real show – mixing artistic elements with sport – began. In the local newspaper, the event was later described as a “firework of a concert” in which “the audience could experience everything from Russian fist fighters performing ancient Russian martial arts, to Norwegian folk dance, Swedish timber log throwing, and a wrestling competition

between Norway, Finland and Russia” (Trellevik, 2013a). The show had a clear dramaturgy. In the first part, performers from the different countries competed aggressively with each other. In the end, however, all the participants – regardless of their art form and nationality – joined forces and performed a final show together, vividly demonstrating the ideals and accomplishments of the Barents cooperation. The response from the audience was ecstatic, the applause lasting for several minutes.

The Samovar Theatre: Border dramatics

The Samovar Theatre has produced many dramas over the years, but *border dramatics* (Norwegian: *grensedramatikk*), as the theatre itself refers to it, has become its hallmark. Several performances of recent years may be described as *border dramas*, for example *Spor i snø* (2005), *Snow* (2006), *Buses and Stories* (2007), *Voices* (2008), *Arctic Voices* (2009), *Klassisk Kulturspa* (2009), *Radio Barents III* (2012) and *Vodka, vann og glasnost* (2013). Bente S. Andersen directed most of these performances.³⁰ Border dramatics is not completely unique to the Samovar Theatre. Several elements typical of the style can be found in other theatre productions around the world, for example in the transnational performance *Dreiland* described by Wilkinson (2010). Only the Samovar Theatre, however, has applied border dramatics consistently for a long period of time.

A number of stylistic elements are typical of all the theatre’s border dramas. First, all the border dramatics performances involve performers from different countries. As Table 1 illustrates, the number of nationalities represented on stage varies from two in *Spor i snø* to eight in *Buses and Stories*. The foreign performers tend to be guests from one of the theatre’s many international partners. Two countries, Norway and Russia, are always represented in the performances. Some of the performances also feature actors from the other two Barents states, Sweden and Finland. Occasionally, the theatre brings in actors from other parts of the world as well, especially from border regions such as the Caucasus and the Baltics.

³⁰ The exceptions are *Klassisk Kulturspa*, which was directed by Thor-Inge Gullvåg, and *Radio Barents III*, which was directed by Fransizka Aarflot. *Buses and Stories* was directed by Bente S. Andersen with Ferran Audí.

Second, the performances are multilingual. The rule is that, whenever on stage, each actor speaks his or her own mother tongue. Sometimes, the number of languages exceeds the number of nationalities, as different actors from the same country may speak different languages (see Table 1). In *Buses and Stories*, no fewer than nine different languages were spoken on stage. The use of so many languages makes the border dramas distinctive and rich in rare interlingual dialogues, for instance Azeri–Sami in *Snow* or Finnish–Kurdish in *Buses and Stories*. The dominating languages in the performances are, however, Norwegian and Russian. The use of different languages on stage is deliberate, a way of illustrating the reality of borderlands, where communication across languages tends to be challenging. On its website, the Samovar Theatre quotes Gómez-Peña, who writes that “border culture is above all a culture of misunderstandings. We are crossing the border, therefore we shall be misunderstood” (Sceneweb, n.d.). Of course, the use of several languages on stage may pose some challenges for the audience, who – failing to understand the dialogues – may risk losing the plot. For this reason, the theatre has developed various special techniques. Sometimes, a screen with subtitles is applied. Usually, however, the theatre compensates for the lack of understandable verbal communication through active use of non-verbal forms of expression: dance, music, video and pantomime. A few times, for instance in *Radio Barents III*, the language confusion is deliberately cultivated as a way of creating comedy on stage.

The third element typical of the theatre’s border dramas is the mix of genres. In *Snow*, elements from the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk’s novel of the same name were combined with elements from classical Greek dramas. In *Buses and Stories*, texts from Hamsun and Catalan literature were mixed with extracts from the Old Testament. In *Voices*, the Norwegian Government’s White Paper on the High North was accompanied by biblical verses. The performances also tend to mix tragedy and comedy, realism and fantasy.

Table 1. *Countries and languages in performances of the Samovar Theatre.*

Performance	Countries	Languages
<i>Spor i snø</i> (2005)	Norway, Russia	Norwegian, Russian, English
<i>Snow</i> (2006)	Norway, Russia, Finland, Turkey, Azerbaijan	Norwegian, Russian, Finnish, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Kurdish, Sami, English
<i>Buses and Stories</i> (2007)	Norway, Russia, Finland, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Spain	Norwegian, Russian, Finnish, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Georgian, Turkish, Kurdish, English
<i>Voices</i> (2008)	Norway, Russia, Finland, Lithuania	Norwegian, Russian, Finnish, Sami, Lithuanian, English
<i>Arctic Voices</i> (2009)	Norway, Russia, Finland, Sweden	Norwegian, Russian, Finnish, Sami, English
<i>Klassisk Kulturspa</i> (2009)	Norway, Russia, Finland, Lithuania	Norwegian, Russian, Finnish, Lithuanian
<i>Radio Barents 111</i> (2012)	Norway, Russia, Sweden	Norwegian, Russian, Swedish, Sami, English
<i>Vodka, vann og glasnost</i> (2013)	Norway, Russia, Sweden	Norwegian, Russian

Finally, the theatre's border dramas are, just like the Girls' performances, characterized by a mix of different art forms. In addition to the acting, there is, as mentioned above, rich use of music, dance and video art in the performances. The Samovar Theatre strives in its performances to unite all these different elements into a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, "a scenic idiom where text, movement, music and multilingualism is merged into a whole" (Samovarteateret n.d.-f). Sometimes, when the theatre succeeds in creating this idiom, the effect on the audience may resemble the one described below in a newspaper review of *Snow*:

It crackles underneath the boots. A hymn from somewhere in the Caucasus cuts warmly through the winter evening . . . In the raw set we get a firework of a performance about love, borders and bridge building inspired by Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*. Eight actors performing in nine different languages, from Sami, Norwegian and Russian, via Finnish to Turkish and Kurdish. Not even the actors understand each other. It does not matter. The play reaches our hearts. Afterwards we all join the dance to Russian music in the snow. (Mathismoen, 2006, author's translation)

The narrative of the border dramas differs from play to play. A certain pattern can, however, be discerned. The story of *Arctic Voices* is, in its relative simplicity, illustrative. In this play, the audience is first introduced to a group of people speaking to each other in different languages. They are having a party in a place called *Barentsland*, a common land without the presence of any state authority, perhaps like the Russian–Norwegian borderland before the state borders were drawn. The party, however, ends abruptly when two official envoys arrive with measurement instruments and a globe on which countries are marked with different colours. Their mission is to divide the land. Soon, boundaries are mercilessly drawn across the stage, dividing chairs and tables into two and separating the various characters from each other. The division of the land is followed by taxation and war. In the end, however, the suppressed borderlanders rebel. They manage to erase the borders and liberate themselves. They ridicule the rulers' speeches and throw away the governmental treaties. It all ends happily with another party. *Arctic Voices* demonstrates, like the other border dramas, how people's freedom can be oppressed by political, social, ethnic or religious borders. The play also demonstrates how people in turn may liberate themselves from the borders. Sometimes, like in *Buses and Stories*, the play follows a "Romeo and Juliet"-like pattern: a couple falls in love but is hindered by physical and/or symbolic borders. In contrast to Shakespeare's famous play, the Samovar stories tend to have a happy ending. Romeo and Juliet end up with each other. The audience witnesses how borders can be an obstacle to love in various ways but also how love defeats borders in the end. Usually, the border dramas end with a celebration, and the audience is often invited to

join in. Thus, just as at the end of the Girls' "border-crossing exercises", the play enters reality or the other way around.

The Barents Spektakel in Kirkenes has been the main arena for the presentation of the Samovar Theatre's performances. The plays have, however, been performed in other places as well, both within and outside Norway. In Kirkenes, the Samovar Theatre has, just like the Girls, set up its performances in public space. *Snow* was partly performed in the Pavilion Park, where the Thorvald Stoltenberg bust is placed. Here, the acting took place in a specially arranged Greek amphitheatre of ice and snow surrounded by hundreds of ice lanterns. In *Buses and Stories*, the audience was invited to join the theatre for a tour through the town. The first act took place in the town square. Then the performance moved to a bomb shelter from the Second World War and then to a Russian trawler in the harbour, before ending up at Scene 2, the old stage of the theatre.

The artistic staging of the border

In their performances, the Girls on the Bridge and the Samovar Theatre repeatedly stage borders. Some of these borders are physical, made up of border post replicas, stylized watchtowers, white tape or paper walls. Others are symbolic, like those between artists of different nationalities or between different art forms and genres. During the performances, the Girls as well as the Samovar Theatre first demonstrate to their audiences that all these borders are oppressive structures, limiting people's freedom. Then they let their audiences experience how border crossing may serve to liberate people and how it may cause a *synergic effect*, the creation of new forms of unity that are greater than the simple sums of their parts. Hybridization is celebrated. Rock-n-roll, as a musical crossover genre, is portrayed as an alternative to border control. The border crossing is demonstrated physically, as the actors cross the various artificial borders set up on the stage, and symbolically, as different languages, traditions, art forms and genres meet and blend into each other. After the actors on stage have demonstrated border crossing in every possible way, the spectators are invited to cross borders themselves in a massive exercise. As the performances reach their climax, all the oppressive borders are transformed into something inviting: a skating rink, a playground or a dance floor.

The Girls and the Samovar Theatre share their negative attitude towards repressive borders as well as their enthusiasm for border crossing with their mentor Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who, in the *Pocha Nostra Manifesto* (2012), states that

our common denominator is our desire to challenge, cross, and erase dangerous borders between art and politics, practice and theory, artist and spectator, mentor and apprentice, body and cultural nightmares. We strive to eradicate myths of purity and dissolve borders surrounding culture, ethnicity, gender, language, power, and *métier*.

The ideas expressed by Gómez-Peña are not at all unique either. Indeed, as Phillips (2011, p. 57) observes, “much theoretical, curatorial and artistic work has been done over the last two decades to, firstly, recognize borders as repressive geopolitical formats and, secondly, to imagine worlds without borders”. Thus, the Girls and the Samovar Theatre operate within a well-established tradition of artistic border denouncement.

The art works presented by the Girls and the Samovar Theatre tend, like those of Gómez-Peña, to relate to many types of borders. According to Traavik, *Borderlines* carries, for example, references to

– among other things – border zones between States and nationalities, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, East and West Berlin, economic zones in the Barents Sea, North and South Korea, Israel and the West Bank, Shia and Sunni, Mars and Venus, business and economy class, center and periphery, sense and sensibility, too much and not enough, genius and madness, us and them, order and chaos, majority and minority, hip and unhip, Left and Right, art and politics, homo and hetero, grown-up and underage, Apollo and Dionysus, Heaven and Hell, Laurel and Hardy, past and future, to be and not to be. (Kuzovnikova, 2014)

The main reference for *Borderlines*, as well as for other works of art presented by the Girls and the Samovar Theatre, is, however, the Norwegian–Russian border. The reason for Traavik’s failure to mention this border above is probably only that its significance

for the installation is so obvious and the self-evident tends to be forgotten. The art produced by the Girls and the Samovar Theatre points to the Norwegian–Russian border in several ways. First, the art works are to a large extent *site specific*, made *in* and *for* the Norwegian–Russian borderland. Removed from this particular location, they lose a substantial part of their meaning. *Border-Crossing Exercises III* made considerable sense when it was performed on Pikevatn but would have lost much of its power had it been performed outside the borderland. The installation *Borderlines* appeared to be much more meaningful in Kirkenes than it did in Oslo and Murmansk, where it was staged after the Barents Spektakel. Secondly, the performances tend to be presented in contexts in which Norwegian–Russian relations are the main topic, either during the Barents Spektakel or during the many political Norwegian–Russian meetings that take place in Kirkenes. Third, in most of the performances, there is a wide range of elements that specifically refer to Norway and Russia: the display of Norwegian and Russian border posts, Russian and Norwegian music, Russian and Norwegian actors, Russian and Norwegian spoken language and so on. Finally, the producers themselves, the Girls and the Samovar Theatre, tend to relate the performances to the Norwegian–Russian border in their presentation of the works – in programmes, on websites and in opening speeches.

The political performances discussed in Chapter 5 largely tend to convey images of an open border and a borderland marked by successful transnational cooperation. How do the artistic performances relate to this rhetoric? Here, two tendencies can be observed. First, there are productions that challenge the political rhetoric. An example is the Samovar Theatre’s performance *Arctic Voices*. The underlying message of the performance seems to be that the border was imposed on the local population by state authorities, that it has served to oppress people ever since and that it ultimately should be erased. In the theatre’s presentation of the play, it is written that it “illustrates how political decisions and drawing of borders affect the life and destiny of the people living in the region”. It also asks rhetorically, “what would you do if someone suddenly divided your living room in half, removing you from family and friends, explaining that you

now live in different countries?” (Samovarteateret, n.d.-b). In *Snow*, the theatre again seems to object to the very existence of the border (Samovarteateret, n.d.-e):

The idea of the show lies in the fact that people living in regions on the border of two or more countries have similar dreams and experiences, and they do not pay attention to which side of the border they live on. People do not want to be separated and placed under control; they want to be free and to peacefully live their lives. The play carries the message that hope, truth and love can conquer any borders.

In *Arctic Voices* and *Snow*, the Norwegian–Russian border is not portrayed as a bridge but as an impediment and barrier to people living in the borderland. An even more radical message can be found in Amund Sjølie Sveen’s *Below-Images from a Borderland*, one of the art works of *Sound around the Watch-Towers* presented by the Girls. In his own presentation of the work, Sveen (n.d.) pointed at the apparent contrast between political rhetoric and reality in the borderland.

Watch towers are clean, they are surface. Life underneath the towers, under the radar, behind the polished rhetorics – what happens on the ground – is different. That is the case either the border is in Kirkenes or somewhere else.

He also drew a grim parallel between the Norwegian-Russian border and that between Israel and Gaza:

While I was working on this piece related to the Norwegian-Russian border, in January of 2009, there was a different border that was all over the news. Israeli troops was about to enter Gaza. The purpose of the border in Kirkenes/Finnmark, the Schengen border, is to keep the threat, “the other”, outside of Europe. The purpose of the border in Gaza/Palestine is to keep the threat, “the other”, inside a closed area. (Sveen, n.d.)

The sound material of the work contained an ominous Morse code transmitting an SMS sent from Norwegian volunteer doctor working on the Gaza Strip during the 2008 war:

Hades! We are wading in blood and amputated limbs. Lots of children. Pregnant woman. Tell everybody, pass it on, shout it. Everything. Do something. Do more! We are making history now, all of us. (Sveen, n.d.)

Border-Crossing Exercises III could also, to some extent, be regarded as a protest against the political rhetoric about the open border. In their presentation of the performance, the Girls described it as a “visualization of a wish for a simplified visa regime” and wrote that:

While Norway and Russia develop new cooperation strategies, we in Sør-Varanger face many barriers hindering everyday cooperation with our close neighbours. According to the newly introduced border regime on the Russian side, one should apply for a special permission in addition to a Russian visa to be able to enter Nikel. Visum and other border regulations make the idea of a cooperation zone sound more like a utopia for the majority of people. (Pikene på broen, n.d.-b)

For the audience watching the performance, the Girls’ staged border on the lake appeared in contrast to, and perhaps as a positive alternative to, the real closed border in the background.

Works like those described above are, however, relatively rare. Furthermore, their radical messages seem to be *downplayed* in the way in which they are presented to the public. For example, in their presentation of *Border-Crossing Exercises III*, the Girls find it necessary to stress that the performance is “*not* meant to be a political protest”, but only, as they put it, a “professional artistic performance manifesting our aspirations for an improved border regime between Russia and Norway!” (Pikene på broen n.d.-b). Sveen’s Morse coding of the alarming SMS, whether intended or not, ensures that its disturbing content never reaches the audience. In the festival programme, it is just

written that the sound works (in general) “reveal exciting realities of life in the borderland” (Pikene på broen, n.d.-g).

Generally, the artistic performances do not criticize but endorse the rhetoric of the political leaders. Often, they can even be interpreted as *illustrations* of how the border is being opened and how the Barents Region is successfully being realized. The works are habitually put into a context of optimism regarding regional development. The extract below is from the presentation of the *Barents Score* (Pikene på broen, 2013):

The North is definitely happening; maritime border agreement between Norway and Russia, opening of the Northeast passage, new transportation routes, oil and gas exploration in the Barents Sea, visa-free zone, climate changes³¹, increase in fishing activities, etc.

In the Samovar Theatre’s presentation of the play *Buses and Stories*, we read that “13 years of cooperation in the Barents Region has given us great opportunities for east–west as well as north–west trade” and that “those of us living in the northern parts of Norway, Finland, Russia and Sweden have a sort of common identity” (Samovarteateret, n.d.-c). The performance *Radio Barents III* is described as “the answer to the dream of collaboration across languages and cultures in the Barents region” and as a “warm and musical tribute to the future of the region” (Samovarteateret n.d.-d). Even the idealized common land of *Arctic Voices* is named *Barentsland*. Sometimes, as if to strengthen these messages further, political figures are invited to introduce the performances. *Borderlines* was opened by Foreign Minister Støre and *Barents Score* by Prime Minister Stoltenberg, while *Radio Barents III* was introduced by a video of Thorvald Stoltenberg addressing the audience and congratulating the fictive radio station for its efforts to realize the border-transcending ideals of the Barents Region. Both the Girls and the Samovar Theatre publicly express full support for the Barents project. The Girls

³¹ It is worth noting that climate change in this region tends to be regarded as something positive, as it will generate a more hospitable climate. The melting of the ice will also, presumably, open the Northeast Passage for transshipment between Europe and Asia, which in turn could produce a positive economic impact for the region.

have even adopted the slogan “All for Barents!” (Norwegian: *Alt for Barents!*³²) as their motto and refer (somewhat jokingly) to themselves as the *Barents Liberation Army* – just to emphasize their strong commitment to this cause.

Phillips, a critical observer of the art scene in Kirkenes, describes, curiously without mentioning the Girls on the Bridge or the Samovar Theatre directly, contemporary art as an “ideal collaborator in the making-up of the Barents Region” (Phillips, 2011, p. 68). The artist Ivan Galuzin, in a review, accuses the Girls of uncritically reproducing the political rhetoric in the borderland and idealizing the border (Galuzin, 2009). According to Galuzin, the Girls have ceased to be curators and turned into a “catering bureau” for the authorities, delivering propaganda rather than presenting (as they should, according to him) critical art. “You call – we bring”, he writes sarcastically (Galuzin, 2009). Galuzin observes how the potentially problematic concrete realities of the border – inequality, militarization, bureaucracy, closed zones and so on – tend to be conspicuously absent in the art of the Girls. There are few stories about unhappy border crossings, and there is a lack of provocative disturbing elements, such as blood or violence. In the Girls’ performances, the border is mainly an arena for fun. The atmosphere is festive, sometimes even euphoric.

Being mainly positive and “uncritical”, the art production of the Girls and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the Samovar Theatre deviates starkly from that of Gómez-Peña. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the two most recurrent themes in border art internationally have been “the barbed wire” and the “body and its suffering” (Amilhat-Szary, 2012, pp. 221–222). One typical example is Joan Wyand and Gómez-Peña’s silkscreened print entitled *Greetings from the U.S.–Mexican Border*, which depicts Gómez-Peña himself, dressed in a Mexican costume, crucified on the border (Wyand & Gómez Peña, 2012). While the border art along the U.S.–Mexican border has been rebellious and anarchistic, striving to reveal, challenge and denounce the rhetoric and the policies of the authorities on every occasion, much of the art of the Girls and the Samovar Theatre has supported

³² The motto paraphrases King Harald’s official motto, *All for Norway* (Norwegian: *Alt for Norge*).

the authorities. Having said that, there are significant differences between the U.S.–Mexican and the Norwegian–Russian borderland. First, the U.S. authorities often tend to be associated with a strict and repressive border policy. The Norwegian authorities, on the contrary, appear to be supportive of border opening. Secondly, Kirkenes is not San Diego and Nikel is not Tijuana. The socio-economic differences between the Russian and the Norwegian side of the border, even though they are large, cannot be compared with those of the U.S.–Mexican borderland. This may at least partly explain the difference between the U.S.–Mexican border art scene and that of the Norwegian–Russian borderland.

The artistic staging of the borderland

The political actors strive to evoke images of Kirkenes as a transnational centre, as “the Barents Capital” or “New York of the North”. The artistic actors too play a role here, particularly the Girls on the Bridge, who, from the very beginning, have focused on town transformation. Kuzovnikova has said about culture that this “resource is as much effective as iron ore, oil or fish” and that it creates the “identity of the town and contributes to its competitive ability” (Kuzovnikova, 2010). Over the years, place branding has become an important dimension of the Girls’ work, alongside their art production. In their endeavour to promote Kirkenes, the Girls have found inspiration in the writer and urban planner Charles Landry’s works on place development and place promotion. In the popular *Creative City* (Landry & Bianchini, 1995), Landry and his colleague Franco Bianchini give advice about how to innovate, reinvent or re-enchant cities. A more recent book by Landry is the *Art of City-Making* (Landry, 2006), in which he defines city making as a complex art – an idea that has certainly appealed to the Girls. Phil Wood, one of the key associates of Landry, founder of the *Huddersfield Creative Town Initiative* and author of *The Intercultural City: Planning for Diversity Advantage* (co-authored with Charles Landry) (Wood & Landry, 2007) has twice visited Kirkenes, first in 2003 and then again in 2014, both times giving lectures about city branding.

Place branding is basically about developing a concept, name, term or symbol that distinguishes the place from other places and makes it attractive. In *The Creative City*,

Landry and Bianchini (1995, p. 49) describe place branding as a “way of identifying a place with particular attributes”, a concept, name, term or symbol, which distinguishes the place from other places and makes it attractive. They point out Montpellier in France as an example of successful branding:

The minute you arrive in Montpellier for example, you are told what the city is and what it wants to become: it has been made into a narrative. If you arrive by car, you are greeted by a welcome in a dozen languages, including Japanese – this symbolises the city’s cosmopolitanism and international orientation. Entering the city, you notice that the streets are all named after scientists such as Albert Einstein or Alfred Nobel – this is the innovative enterprises zone of the city. The message is that Montpellier is future-oriented. As you walk around there are all kinds of ecological messages about the city and its newly built cycleways – this signals its environmental friendliness. When you finally reach the main square there is a mobile health screening unit – a statement that Montpellier wants its citizens to be healthy. So before you have had your first coffee, you have been told a story about Montpellier. (Landry & Bianchini, 1995, p. 49)

According to Landry and Bianchini, the city of Montpellier has, through the effective use of symbols and naming, succeeded in presenting itself as innovative, cosmopolitan and international. The Girls’ ambition is to engage themselves in the “art of city making” and give Kirkenes a similar recognizable and desirable identity.

The speech below, presented by Lyubov Kuzovnikova during the *International Forum on the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture* in Saint Petersburg in 2010, illustrates well how the Girls try to promote Kirkenes (Kuzovnikova, 2010):

Today Kirkenes is no longer a periphery – it is a centre in many ways. It is Kirkenes, and not Oslo, which is Norway’s geopolitical centre. It is Kirkenes that both the Russian President and the Norwegian Prime Minister mentioned in their speeches on the historical day of April 27th when they signed the agreement

about the dividing line in the Barents Sea. In all our projects we take Kirkenes as a point of departure – Kirkenes as a border town and the Barents Region as a border region. We have christened Kirkenes to Hot Arctic Kirkenes, so that it has a name to compete with Big Apple New York in the future. From Hot Arctic Kirkenes we take the world into the Barents and the Barents out in the world. Kirkenes is “the Russian town” in Norway, with its 10% Russian residents. Kirkenes is a border town, at the border to Russia and Finland. Kirkenes is called a Transborder Kirkenes with Nikel as a twin-city . . . Being originally a company-town with its 10-tonn thinking, Kirkenes has developed its multiple identity for the last 10–15 years. It has become a laboratory for new times. Kirkenes is now called the capital of the Barents Region.

In Kuzovnikova’s presentation, naming is again again used as a rhetorical device, a vehicle for convincing people of the identity of the place. Several old and new epithets are introduced. The presentation repeats much of the political rhetoric about the borderland, with key terms of this rhetoric, such as *border* and *Barents*, being mentioned no less than five times. The status of Kirkenes as a centre and as a place of great importance is repeatedly stressed. The town is referred to as “the capital of the Barents region” and “Norway’s geopolitical centre”. The latter statement is supported by the fact that the town was “mentioned” by President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg during the signing of the agreement on the delimitation of the maritime border in 2010. The twin city status is also evoked, and it is claimed that Kirkenes “is called a Transborder Kirkenes”. The name *Transborder Kirkenes* was originally introduced in a Master’s thesis by the architecture students Øystein Rø and Hans Jørgen Wetlesen (Rø & Wetlesen, 2006) and presented to the public in *Sør-Varanger Avis* in 2006 under the title *The Most Important City of Norway* (Norwegian: *Norges viktigste by*) (Karlsbakk, 2006a). Their idea was that Kirkenes could, should and would become Norway’s first transnational city and thereby Norway’s most important city by capitalising on the border location and growing with Nikel on the Russian side into a big urban space. The development of a special *Barents District*, a Norwegian–Russian innovation centre, in Kirkenes would ensure the town’s dominating position in this futurist binational conglomerate. Kirkenes would in the process be transformed from a

“mono-community” into a “multi-community”, and, with the growth of Transborder Kirkenes, the entire Barents Region would be united in a new and better way (Karlsbakk, 2006a). Rø later developed, with financial support from the Barents Secretariat, ideas for an even more ambitious transnational city, called *PeZaNiKi City*, which would include not only Kirkenes and Nikel but also Pechenga and Zapolyarny (Karlsbakk, 2006b). Neither *Transborder Kirkenes* nor *PeZaNiKi City* are names that are much in use locally, except perhaps among a limited number of people who are typically associated with the “Barents elite”. Kuzovnikova further claimed to have “christened Kirkenes to Hot Arctic Kirkenes so that it has a name to compete with Big Apple New York in the future”. Rafaelsen’s comparison of Kirkenes with New York (see Chapter 5) is thus brought up here too. During the Barents Spektakel in 2007, the Girls even presented a video installation named *Times Square Kirkenes–Nikel* in the town square of Kirkenes. The installation was presented as “an attempt to lift the status of these towns and turn them into Barents metropolises” (Pikene på broen, n.d.-h). Kuzovnikova, referring to the installation, later admitted that “of course, we have a lot to do to catch up with the NYC Times Square but we take it step by step” (Kuzovnikova, 2010). The oxymoron “hot Arctic” conveys that Kirkenes (like New York) is an exciting “melting pot” where many things are happening. There is also a reference to the town as a “laboratory of new times”, with “multiple-identity thinking” replacing the old “ten-tonne thinking”. The laboratory metaphor, indicating that Kirkenes is a creative and progressive place, was adopted from an article named *Kirkenes Laboratorium*, written by Morten Strøksnes in 2003 (Strøksnes, 2003b). The expression “ten-tonne thinking” is much used by the artistic community in Kirkenes as a way of describing the apparent “narrow-mindedness” characterizing the town during the mining era, when, as it has often been claimed, “nothing less than ten tonnes had any value whatsoever”. Finally, the Girls refer to Kirkenes as “‘the Russian town’ in Norway”. This reference, pointing at the “exotic” character of the town, is much used by the tourist industry in its promotion of Kirkenes (see Chapter 7).

The Girls strive to promote these images of Kirkenes on every possible occasion: “In all our projects we take Kirkenes as a point of departure – Kirkenes as a border town and

the Barents Region as a border region”, claims Kuzovnikova (2010). Network meetings, conferences and seminars in which the Girls participate are typical contexts for their branding. The Girls have even arranged special events with the sole purpose of promoting Kirkenes to the outside world. An early example of such an event was the open seminar *Kirkenes – A Town in Oslo*, arranged in cooperation with the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in Oslo in 2007. Thorvald Stoltenberg, Mayor Linda Beate Randal and Morten Strøksnes all participated in the event. Below is the advertisement for the seminar (Pikene på broen, n.d.-d):

Formidable plans and challenges facing Sør-Varanger. Is Norway developing a political infrastructure in the north? What would it mean for Norway to have a dynamic hybrid-town on the border to Russia? And what do people in the capital Oslo know about political, cultural and economic processes along the Kirkenes–Murmansk axis? The Transborder Cafe will help shed light on the fascinating Barents Region and arouse interest in an extraordinary melting pot – Kirkenes.

The Girls also promote Kirkenes internationally, as Kuzovnikova (2010) explains:

Every time we go abroad, we invite artists with us, and we take Kirkenes and the Norwegian–Russian–Finnish border with us. Thus, we build up a positive image of Kirkenes in Norway, Barents, the rest of Europe and in the world . . . Without setting it as a goal, we do network-marketing for Kirkenes. The artists we work with and all our guests become our ambassadors outside Kirkenes and Barents, in addition to press coverage the projects receive internationally.

Like some of the local political actors, the Girls have even developed plans for raising landmarks to signify the town’s desired status properly. Their most audacious idea has been to construct an entire artificial island named *No Man’s Island* in the bay of Kirkenes. The island will, according to the Girls, become “a meeting place for various cultures in the Barents Region out in the sea, a meeting place between land and water . . . , a symbol for the exciting melting pot Kirkenes has become, and an outstanding piece of

Nordic architecture in public space of Kirkenes” (Pikene på broen, 2012). The Girls also explain why this island should be located here:

Why Kirkenes? Kirkenes is located by the Barents Sea, close to the Norwegian border to Russia and Finland. Kirkenes is called the Barents capital, and considered to be the Barents Region in miniature with its 70 different nationalities and ethnic groups. Kirkenes has become Hot Arctic Kirkenes: both the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, the International Barents Secretariat and Barents Institute are located in Kirkenes – home to the Kirkenes Declaration signed in 1993. Kirkenes has become a geopolitical destination. We want to profile “the new Kirkenes”, with its Russian community, represented by the numerous Russian fishing boats in Kirkenes harbour and the Russian 10% of the municipality population (Kirkenes is often called “a Russian town” in Norway) — versus “the old Kirkenes” represented by the main company Sydvaranger A/S and the mining community. (Pikene på broen, 2012)

The most important field for artistic place promotion is, however, the actual performances staged by the Girls. *Border-Crossing Exercises III*, *Borders – Control or Rock-n-roll?*, *Borderlines* and *Barents Score* all serve to evoke the image of Kirkenes as the Barents Capital. The spectacular character of the performances and the huge audience also evoke ideas of Kirkenes as a great and exciting place, a “New York of the North”. The deliberate use of Russian and Norwegian actors and symbols gives an impression of Kirkenes as being highly transnational.

Furthermore, the events tend to take place outdoors in public spaces. In this way, they *mark* – at least temporarily – the place. The border posts of *Borderlines*, placed immediately in front of the “Welcome to Kirkenes” sign (see Figure 8), clearly connected the identity of the town with the Norwegian–Russian border. The headline of the installation’s information poster was “the border runs one place” (Norwegian: *ett sted går grensen*). In Norwegian, this sentence has a double meaning. First, it is a proverb meaning that “there are limits to things”. But in this very context, it also indicates that the border is something unique for Kirkenes, a feature not found other

places. In their presentation of *Borderlines*, the Girls rhetorically ask if everybody in Norway is “aware of this borderline to Russia?” (Pikene på broen 2010). One should expect that most people are. Not everyone relates, however, this border with Kirkenes. The Girls’ aim is to establish a link between the town and the border in people’s minds, and Traavik’s installation serves this purpose perfectly. Just as the street signs of Montpellier, according to Landry and Bianchini (1995, p. 49), express its cosmopolitan and international identity, the border posts express Kirkenes’s identity as a border town, a twin city and Barents capital. In the case of Montpellier, the “creative innovation” is, according to Landry and Bianchini (1995, p. 49), about “thinking through the process of getting into the city and reading it like a book”. In Kirkenes, much of the same strategy is applied.



Figure 8. *Border posts in front of the “Welcome to Kirkenes” sign.*

(Photo by author)

It is during the Barents Spektakel festival that the artistic branding of Kirkenes is most prevalent and powerful. The festival can indeed be seen as one gigantic manifestation

of the Barents Capital. Border and Barents imagery appears everywhere. Along the streets, there are Russian and Norwegian border posts. Across the streets, banners welcome visitors with texts such as “Welcome to Hot Arctic Kirkenes”, typically written in English, Norwegian and Russian. Performances take place everywhere and at almost every hour of the day. The town is bustling with people from near and far. As Viken notes, “the art, the cultural events and all the visiting celebrities related to Barents Spektakel transform the town into a political and international stage” (Viken, 2014, p. 154). One may also say that Kirkenes, during these days, is itself staged. During the Barents Spektakel, Kirkenes *becomes* its image for some short days.

Artistic–political collaboration

As we have seen, there are, with some notable exceptions, clear similarities between the ways in which political and artistic actors stage the border and the borderland. Neither the Girls nor the Samovar Theatre accept, however, being described as “ideal collaborators” (Phillips, 2011, p. 68) or a “catering bureau” (Galuzin, 2009) for the MFA. In interviews, they adamantly describe themselves as free and autonomous organizations – not instruments for particular political agendas. In fact, they tend to turn the alleged relation with the political elite upside down, pointing at how *they*, as an artistic *avant-garde*, influence politics and not the other way around. By demonstrating border crossing in their performances, they claim to set an example for the policy makers, showing them the right direction.

While the Girls and the Samovar Theatre deny accusations of collaboration, they admit having received considerable support from the MFA and the Norwegian Government over the years. The MFA first supports the two organizations financially. Thanks to this funding, it has been possible for the Girls to produce and stage spectacular performances such as *Border-Crossing Exercises III* or *Barents Score*. The funding also makes it possible for them to offer free tickets to the events, thereby attracting huge audiences. The Barents Spektakel festival of today would probably have been inconceivable without generous funding from the MFA. Secondly, the MFA tends to choose the Girls and the Samovar Theatre as contractors for their own events in the borderland. *Barents*

Score is but one of several examples. Of course, as contractors for the MFA, the artistic organizations come very close to becoming “catering bureaus”. Third, the MFA tends to coordinate its own border-related events with those of the Girls and the Samovar Theatre, aiming to achieve a synergic effect that benefits both parties. The first ever Barents Spektakel was, as mentioned above, arranged during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Barents Region. Today, the festival coincides with the Barents Days and the Kirkenes conference. Finally, official representatives of Norway – from ministers to members of the royal family – actively promote the Girls and the Samovar Theatre by publicly praising them for their art production and for their role in the building of good relations with Russia. The extract below is from Foreign Minister Støre’s speech during a seminar named *The Art of Influence* (Norwegian: *Innflytelsens kunst*), about the role of art in Norwegian foreign policy (Støre, 2008b, author’s translation):

In our own neighbourhood, in the High North, the term “transborder exercises”, or “border crossing exercises”, has found its expression in the Barents Region, exemplifying that art can always be a step ahead of other processes and open doors to an open and trustworthy cooperation, across old borders. The curator group The Girls on the Bridge is behind this, and the festival Barents Spektakel makes the cooperation visible and attracts international attention. This creates a basis for broader dialogue and an even stronger Barents identity.

The political leaders themselves also participate in the events of the Girls and the Samovar Theatre. Sometimes, they deliver speeches, like Jens Stoltenberg during *Barents Score*. At other times, they conduct opening ceremonies, like Queen Sonja during the Barents Spektakel 2011. Sometimes, they just attend the performances as VIP guests. In any case, the presence of these celebrities at their events provides the Girls and the Samovar Theatre with considerable free and (usually) positive publicity at home and abroad.

In the Norwegian context, the MFA’s support for the local art scene is unique. The ministry’s interest suggests that the art production in Kirkenes is of a special kind. What

makes it special is not so much the art itself as the *role* that it plays in the wider symbolic politics of the borderland. The MFA tends to think instrumentally. As Aagedal (2009, p. 62) notes, the Norwegian Government invests in a cultural life in Kirkenes that “focuses on cooperation and possibilities in the relation between Norway and Russia”, that “supports the political choice of Kirkenes as national and international capital for the Barents cooperation” and that “stages and symbolizes the Governments’ High North politics, focusing on cross-border cooperation”. The MFA seems to have clear ideas about the kind of art scene that it would like to see in the borderland. Tore Tanum, working in the MFA’s Section for Cultural Affairs, states in an interview that “the cultural life in Sør-Varanger should play the role of bridgehead and spearhead in relation to Pechenga and Northwest Russia”, something that demands that the “cultural actors define their role and use it as agents for change in a geo-social context” (Holand 2009, p. 89). Repeating the political rhetoric about the border and the borderland, the Girls and the Samovar Theatre in general *do* fulfil this assigned role. There are, however, exceptions, cases in which the artistic actors challenge the Government’s rhetoric and launch their own stories about the border and the borderland. In such cases, the two organizations may sometimes expect constructive criticism from their sponsors. Shortly after the performance of *Arctic Voices*, the mentioned Tanum expressed a certain dissatisfaction with the theatre’s role. He indicated that it had become a less trustworthy partner than the Girls and refused to consider any of the theatre’s project as “important for Kirkenes” (Holand, 2009, p. 92). Furthermore, the representative of the MFA suggested that the theatre had become “too experimental” and too focused on “finding its place among free theatre groups in Norway and Northern Europe instead of playing the role as a local agent for change”. He recommended that the theatre’s staff should focus more on “identifying new projects that [were] part of the creative and visible border crossing line that characterized the development in Sør-Varanger” (Holand, 2009, p. 92). Such open criticism is, however, rare. Usually, the representatives of the MFA tend to express gratitude for the work carried out by the artistic actors.

The Girls and the Samovar Theatre are interesting for the MFA due to the *role* that they play but even more due to the *way* in which they perform this role. Galuzin (2009) refers

to the art of the Girls as “aestheticization of politics” in the sense that it makes politics enchanting and attractive. Viken (2014, p. 146) describes it as “spectacularization of politics”. The artistic actors *dramatize* the political rhetoric in a more impressive way than the political actors themselves are able to do. Thanks to the huge number of actors on stage, the large number of spectators and the rich and extravagant variety of art forms, sounds and images, the artistic performances tend to be highly impressive. The way in which they make use of – and indeed *transform* – the public space is also part of their efficacy. In a powerful way, they make the entire borderland their stage – and at the same time they stage this borderland. The performances are also powerful in the way in which they convincingly and deliberately blur the conventional “boundary between the world of the performance and the everyday reality” (Schechner, 2013, p. 43). By performing in public spaces and by breaking the conventionally strict boundary between actors and audience, the artistic actors bring their performances into real life and let reality enter the performances. Thus, in these performances, as in the political performances discussed in Chapter 5, there is a strong element of “make-belief”. This distinguishes the art production of the Girls and the Samovar Theatre from that of most other art producers in Norway. It also makes their art highly effective and therefore attractive as a tool for political propaganda.

Kirkenes – Norway’s North Korea?

The artistic performances in Kirkenes are unique in the Norwegian context. They do, however, resemble certain politicized performances of more totalitarian states, for example the North Korean mass games (*Arirang*). The mass games are also huge spectacular events during which various art forms – dance, gymnastics, acrobatics and music – are mixed. Here, too, the audience takes part in the performance, typically equipped with flip-book cards that they use to make gigantic shifting mosaic pictures.

Interestingly, the Girls have cooperated more than once with the North Korean regime. In 2011, an official North Korean delegation visited the Barents Spektakel and held meetings with representatives of the Girls as well as the Norwegian Barents Secretariat. The visit was facilitated by the creator of *Borderlines*, Morten Traavik, who, after

several artistic projects in North Korea, had achieved the status of a sort of cultural emissary for the Pyongyang regime. In 2012, the North Koreans returned to Kirkenes with several performers, most notably a quintet of accordion players who soon became a hit on YouTube thanks to their odd performance of the Norwegian pop group A-ha's classic *Take On Me* (Caulfield, 2012). The accordionists' concert in Kirkenes was attended by several political notabilities, among them the United States ambassador to Norway, Barry B. White, Thorvald Stoltenberg and the Norwegian culture minister, Anniken Huitfeldt. The minister, enthusiastically describing the event as "cool", later posed smilingly with the North Korean delegation (Elvestuen, 2012; Karlsbakk, 2012). During the same festival, under the leadership of professional North Korean mass game instructors, almost 200 Norwegian border guards (mobilized for the event by the border commissioner) as well as 60 local volunteers performed as human pixels, producing shifting alluring motives from the Russian–Norwegian borderland (Nilsen, 2012b). Kuzovnikova (2014) recalls the mass performance, which was named *Me/We*:

Together with Morten Traavik we wanted to test the Norwegian collective spirit (as the basis of the social democracy) by inviting the local community to act as one, to become human pixels in Norway's first attempt to create a backdrop picture series under the instruction of two Arirang leaders from Pyongyang. Although the local community was extremely enthusiastic about the project, when it came time to sign up for outdoor rehearsals in minus 25 degree weather we got only 60 civilian volunteers. "Have no fear – the army is here!" Due to our working relationship with the Border Commissariat and the local Border Garrison we were able to make the numbers 256 using young army recruits.

The North Korean visit to Kirkenes was followed by a Norwegian revisit to Pyongyang, during which "the First Norwegian Festival in Pyongyang" was arranged, with Traavik as artistic director. The festival, supported by the Arts Council Norway, the Barents Spektakel festival and the MFA, included "a concert by some of Norway's most prominent musicians" (Williams, 2012). Two representatives of the Girls took part in the festival as well.

The reactions from the mass media and the public to the Girls' cooperation with North Korea were not altogether positive, especially after the national daily *Aftenposten* published an article about the peculiar happenings in the North named "Watch Norwegian NATO-soldiers take orders from North Korean instructors" (Melgård, 2012a). Human rights activists and the political opposition protested against the "misuse" of Norwegian soldiers for propaganda purposes (Hultgreen, 2012). Later, a special hearing about the affair was held in the *Storting*, the Norwegian Parliament. Here, a member of parliament asked the defence minister to explain "whether it was reasonable to allow uniformed soldiers from the Sør-Varanger Garrison to take part in the art project that represented North Korean propaganda". The minister, however, defended the use of the army, claiming that the event was only part of a cultural festival focusing on border regions and that it had nothing whatsoever to do with North Korean propaganda (Melgård, 2012b).

The debate that followed in the aftermath of the North Korean participation in the Barents Spektakel was very much about whether it had been morally right or wrong to cooperate with North Korea. A forgotten but interesting question in this debate was, however, how this seemingly unlikely cooperation could have evolved in the first place. How could local artists in Kirkenes find common ground with propagandists from Pyongyang? One answer to this question is simply that the two parties had much in common. As Traavik himself claimed, "Kirkenes is Norway's North Korea" (Melgård, 2012a). In Kirkenes, as in North Korea, the political and artistic fields are clearly intertwined. In Kirkenes, as in North Korea, the political authorities tend to have a clearly instrumental approach to art, seeing it as a tool for propaganda. Finally, there are, as indicated above, striking similarities between the style and content of the performances in Kirkenes and those of the performances in Pyongyang. In any other place in Norway, this cooperation would have been inconceivable or regarded as very strange and/or problematic. In Kirkenes, where, as Aagedal (2009) puts it, "local art becomes foreign policy", it is not. On the contrary, the Norwegian–Korean cooperation here appears as natural not only for the artistic actors but even for the border commissioner and the chief of the local garrison, who, according to Kuzovnikova

(2014), came close to losing his position due to his handling of the event. Both the Korean and the Norwegian actors seemed to find the cooperation fruitful and clearly learned from each other during the process.

Findings

Art is, along with politics, an important field for the production of border performances along the Norwegian–Russian border. The main actors here are two local professional art organizations, the Girls on the Bridge and the Samovar Theatre. The backgrounds of the two groups are similar. Both organizations were established by the same network of people in the aftermath of the closing of the mine and the opening of the border. Their aims and ambitions were similar. Both were inspired by the works of Gómez-Peña and the BAW/TAF. Both groups have been highly inventive and both have developed their own distinct styles, “border dramatics” (the Samovar Theatre) and “border-crossing exercises” (the Girls on the Bridge). Both have become artistic and entrepreneurial successes thanks to the way in which they were able to develop border art as a niche.

There are clear similarities between the performances of the Girls and those of the Samovar Theatre. First, the performances of both groups involve the staging of physical and symbolic borders that in turn are crossed and transgressed. Second, they typically display a mix of elements – art forms, genres, languages and actors of different nationalities – on stage. Third, they tend to involve the audience actively – thus breaking down the normal barrier between actor and spectator. Furthermore, their performances tend to be large, involving many actors and often a large audience. At least in the Girls’ performances, magnitude seems to be a hallmark. The performances of both groups are often staged outdoors, in public spaces – on the border or in the town centre. Applying all these elements, the performances tend to take the shape of a powerful *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which sometimes may resemble the art of more totalitarian societies than Norway, for example that of North Korea. The Girls have also engaged themselves in the “art of city making”, as Landry (2006) names it. Branding and place promotion have become an important activity alongside their more conventional art productions. In their branding, performative techniques, such as naming and storytelling, are put to

use. Most important, however, is the way in which their place promotion is integrated into the more conventional performances. Through all their performances, the Girls and the Samovar Theatre are able to mark and modify the borderland, at least during the Barents Spektakel, when they turn the entire town into a stage.

Like the political performances, the artistic performances invest the border and the borderland with meaning. Here they relate very much to the political rhetoric discussed in Chapter 6. There are performances in which the artistic actors criticize the Norwegian authorities' policies in the borderland and their rhetoric about border opening and regional progress. Generally, however, the Girls and the theatre tend to repeat the political rhetoric. Their performances, and the way in which they are contextualized, tend to illustrate rather than challenge the politicized story of a border that is open, or at least in the process of being opened, and a transnational region in the making. Through their many performances, the Girls and the theatre also evoke the image of Kirkenes as the Barents Capital, a transnational centre.

There are strong ties between the political and the artistic field. The actors of the two fields collaborate closely with each other. The political actors provide the artistic actors with significant support. The artistic actors in turn create art that bolsters the symbolic politics of the borderland. The art becomes political, and politics becomes, to some extent artistic. The close relation between political authorities and artistic actors is more typical for totalitarian states than for democratic societies like Norway. It can probably only be explained by the way in which the borderland has become an arena for intense performances.

Chapter 7: Touristic Performances

This chapter will explore the ways that local tourism stages the Norwegian-Russian border and borderland. An image on the front page of the municipal tourist brochure may serve as a starting point. It shows a Russian priest dressed in a long black robe with a huge silver cross around his neck and a black *kamilavka*, an Orthodox hat, on his head. The priest stands in the woods, between a Russian and a Norwegian border post. The text below says *Borderland Sør-Varanger* (Norwegian: *Grenselandet Sør-Varanger*) (Sør-Varanger Kommune, n.d.-a). The picture of the priest appears not only in this brochure, but also on websites, on locally merchandized postcards, and on a billboard in the arrival hall of the airport, in an advertisement for a “riverboat tour to the Russian border – the ultimate experience while in Kirkenes”. The priest is a real person, Father Filip. The photograph was taken in 1998 by the director of the tour operator Barents Safari, using the priest’s own camera.³³ The reason this specific picture is so extensively used and has been in circulation for such a long time is probably that it captures the product that the local tourist industry wants to sell, namely the experience of visiting an exciting border and an exotic borderland. For many Western tourists Orthodox Christianity represents something inherently “Eastern”. The Orthodox priest on the border therefore serves as a symbol of the border’s status as an East-West divide, a status frequently evoked by the tourism industry in the borderland. As we will see, it is typical in the touristic sale of the border to stress its status as a barrier, rather than its functions as bridge and contact zone. Sør-Varanger is in turn presented as an exotic borderland where the unfamiliar East, personified by the Russian Orthodox priest, can be experienced. In Kirkenes, an Eastern atmosphere is evoked through the use of Cyrillic street signs. The most popular attraction in the town is the Russian Market where tourists can buy archetypical Russian souvenirs from Russian saleswomen.

³³ Hans Hatle (Director, Barents Safari), personal communication with author, 23 August 2013.

The touristification of the border

Tourism plays a significant role in the economy of Sør-Varanger. The sector employs around 200 people (Sør-Varanger kommune, 2015, p. 14). In Kirkenes, there are three main tour operators: Barents Safari, Pasvik Turist and Radius. There are also various smaller entrepreneurs offering services to visitors. There are two larger hotels in the centre of the town, as well as several other options for accommodation. Two main groups of tourists can be identified. First, there are the Russians. This group arrives mainly for shopping, business, visiting friends and relatives, and for transfer to other destinations via Kirkenes airport. The Russians are, however, not the main target for organized tourism. More important are the approximately 150 000 visitors arriving on their way to or from the Norwegian Coastal Express (Norwegian: *Hurtigruten*) (Proneo, 2016, p. 16) for which Kirkenes is the first (or last depending on perspective) port of call. These tourists come mainly from countries in Western Europe and the United States. Germans are the largest group.

Border tourism is the main niche of the local tourism industry and all the main tour operators in Kirkenes describe border tourism as their core activity. There are, however, other forms of tourism taking place as well, particularly outdoor recreational activities like snowmobiling, husky safaris, and king crab safaris. Tourists may visit the fishing village of Bugøynes or go bird-watching in the Pasvik Valley. Sometimes activities can also be combined. A trip to the border may not *only* be a border experience, it can also be a great nature experience.

Organized tourism is something relatively new in Sør-Varanger. Prior to 1990 tourism was mainly about providing the few accidental visitors with food and a bed. Only after the demise of mining did tourism become a viable local enterprise. “We were lucky that AS Sydvaranger (the mining company) collapsed”, claims one of the leading tour operators in the region. “If this had not happened we would probably not have had any tourism in Kirkenes today”.³⁴ The decline of the mining industry encouraged new

³⁴ Kåre Tannvik (Director, Radius Kirkenes), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 22 June 2010.

entrepreneurship. It forced people to look for alternative livelihoods and think in new ways. A reinvention and diversification of the local economy took place, and tourism was among the economic sectors that began to grow (Teistevoll, 2006).

The development of local tourism has mostly been about developing the Norwegian-Russian border as a tourist attraction. Certainly, the border attracted visitors long before the development of organized tourism. As Aarnes (2005, p. 314) remarks, “the tourists who came to Sør-Varanger when the Cold War was at its coldest came here, not to see the midnight sun, but to experience the physically closed border ‘*in natura*’”. In a 1976 television documentary, Border Commissioner Finn Ramsøy admitted that it was “difficult to maintain the ban on photography on the border as it had become such an exciting tourist goal” (NRK, 1976). Ten years later, there was a short report about the border as an attraction in the magazine *Cruise Travel* (Meyers 1986: 48):

For the early risers and the curious, there is also the chance to take a bus or taxi from Kirkenes, the turnaround point of the cruise, to the Norwegian- Soviet border. There’s really not much to see - just guard towers and some grim-looking Russian troops — and the Soviets permit no photographs, but this is the only European border between a NATO country and the USSR, which may intrigue the politically aware.

In the 1980s, the air company Norving for some time offered so-called “border flights” along the Norwegian-Soviet border for adventurous tourists. The flights were, however, not always popular with the authorities on either side. On one occasion, the Norwegian border commissioner allegedly intervened, trying to stop the flights once and for all.³⁵

³⁵ Nina Teistevoll (former Tourism Coordinator in Sør-Varanger), personal communication with author, 10 May 2010.

Pivotal in the development of legitimately organized border tourism was *Project Borderland* (Norwegian: *Prosjekt Grenseland*), a local development project launched in 1984 as an answer to the call for local diversification following the demise of mining (Sør-Varanger Invest, 2010, pp. 41-42). A planning group working on the project delivered two reports, in 1985 and 1987 (Grenseland, 1985; Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987). In these reports, the border was, for the first time, presented as an economic asset, a huge undeveloped resource and a potential solution for the economic challenges the community was facing. The border was also seen as something that could give the place a new identity. The project planners proposed redefining the identity of Sør-Varanger from that of a mining district to a borderland, or in fact *The Borderland* (Norwegian: *Grenselandet*) (in capital letters). In the first report, Sør-Varanger is described as a borderland in almost every sense, “politically, ethnically, military, archeologically, geologically, botanically and zoologically” (Grenseland, 1985, 2.1). The borderland identity is presented as something unique and positive that can unite the community and create belief in the future. It is also described as something that can elevate the status of the place and give it a new and unique significance, nationally and internationally.

The ambitious aim of the project planners was to turn Sør-Varanger into “the great travel destination in Northeast Europe” by developing the border as an attraction and promoting the region internationally as an exotic borderland (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, p. 14). Several ideas were launched for the development of so-called *border experiences* (Norwegian: *grenseopplevelser*) that could be produced locally and sold to visitors (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, p. 23). These included organized trips from Kirkenes to the border, the sale of border- and Russia-related souvenirs, and, not least, the development of a huge border theme park just outside Kirkenes. The theme park, named the *Borderland Centre* (Norwegian: *Grenselandsenteret*), was planned to cover several thousand square meters and include numerous components; a conference centre, a museum, a gallery, a library, a planetarium, an activity centre, a swimming pool, and a high standard hotel (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, pp. 14-21). High above it all, on the hill of Hessengfjellet, the planners proposed to raise a gigantic replica of a border watchtower. The watchtower, described as “an important image in the border landscape”

was expected to be a “nice experience for many visitors” (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, p. 18). From the top of the tower, tourists would be able to see the entire borderland, from the Barents Sea to the Pasvik Valley. Even the real border, with the Soviet Union on the other side, would be within sight. The watchtower would in turn be visible from far away, constituting a landmark of great value for the promotion of the region. The ideas and plans for the watchtower were to some extent similar to those for the Barents House 25 years later (see Chapter 5).

The final report from the planning group of Project Borderland ends with the following words: “Borderland is an important project and will be an answer to the many challenges that Sør-Varanger faces. Project Borderland must be realized” (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, p. 54). This did not happen. In 1988, the municipality decided to abandon the project. First, there was a lack of understanding in the old mining community about how the border could actually become an asset. The radical idea of border tourism as an economic *panacea* seemed strange to many people at the time. Secondly, there were worries about the cost of the project. The necessary investments were at the time estimated at more than 200 million kroner, a huge sum for the crisis-ridden municipality. A third difficulty was the fact that the area set apart for the Borderland Centre was located in a nature reserve area, which was additionally filled with explosives from the Second World War (Sør-Varanger Invest, 2010, p. 42; Torgersrud, 2005, p. 346). Finally, the timing of the project was not ideal. The evolving rapprochement between East and West made it politically problematic to “exploit” the Iron Curtain, as a tourist attraction (Sørensen, 2005, pp. 255-56).

Project Borderland still came to have a strong impact on the development of tourism in the region. One concrete outcome of the project was the establishment of the municipal destination company *AS Grenseland* (Borderland), which came to be a “leading organ for product development, marketing, and coordination of the tourism activities in Sør-Varanger” (Sør-Varanger Invest, 2010, p. 41). The company invested a great deal of effort into turning Sør-Varanger into an attractive destination, and its work was very much based on the ideas of Project Borderland.

From 1991, there were no severe barriers hindering the development of border tourism in Sør-Varanger. As the Soviet Union ceased to exist, the border regime became slightly more relaxed, and the total ban on photography along the border was removed. As the border zone became more tourist friendly, local entrepreneurs began to put the ideas of Project Borderland into practice. For the tourists arriving with the Norwegian Coastal Express a daily tour bus marked “Russian border” was set up from Kirkenes to the border checkpoint and back. Soon, guided *border tours* by riverboat, snowmobile, dog sledge and quad bike were also on offer. A string of tourism sites began to appear along the borderline. A border souvenir shop was set up next to the border checkpoint at Storskog. Just south of Storskog, on the actual border, Barents Safari created a large tourist centre, fully equipped with souvenir shop, café, viewing platform and an exhibition containing various odd items relating to the border and Russia (see below). Further south, at the hill of Nittisekshøgda in the Pasvik Valley a former military watchtower was transformed into a tourist tower, with an excellent view of the border landscape and Russia on the other side. Over the years, the touristification of the border modified the very border landscape and brought new life and new activities to the parts of the border zone that had previously been the exclusive domain of border guards, local farmers and fishermen.

Tourist attractions emerge, according to Dean MacCannell (1989, p. 41) in interaction between tourists, sights and markers, i.e. pieces of information about sights. MacCannell refers to the process whereby attractions are established as *sight sacralization*. The term expresses the parallel that MacCannell (inspired by Goffman’s dramaturgical approach) draws between touristic and religious activities or “performances”. Sightseeing is, for instance, described as a “modern ritual”, and as “extensive ceremonial agendas involving long strings of obligatory rites” (MacCannell, 1989, p. 43). The macro-process of sight sacralization consists, according to MacCannell of five stages, or sub-processes: naming, framing and elevation, enshrinement, mechanical reproduction and social reproduction. As Jacobsen (1997) demonstrates, the sub-processes need not follow a particular order. They may occur in various sequences, they may overlap, and

they may take place more than once. All these sub-processes can be observed in the touristification of the Norwegian-Russian border.

According to MacCannell, the sub-process of *naming* “takes place when the sight is marked off from similar objects as worthy of preservation” (MacCannell, 1989, p. 44). Naming is about making an object stand out, and demonstrating a sight’s special value. Touristically, the Norwegian-Russian border is often referred to as “the border between East and West”, an epithet that stresses the border’s status as a fundamental divide, and thus unique and extraordinary among national borders (see below).

Framing and elevation is about marking off a site physically, exhibiting it to, and opening it for, the tourists. Framing is defined as “the placement of an official boundary around the object”, elevation as “the putting on display of an object – placement in a case, on a pedestal or opened up for visitation” (MacCannell, 1989, p. 44). To date, no fences have been set up around the Norwegian-Russian border, and no entrance fee is charged for tourists entering the border zone. Nevertheless, a touristic marking of the border has been taking place. Striking are for example the border post replicas that tourism entrepreneurs have placed near the borderline. The replicas, along with other markings such as Russian and Norwegian flags, serve to make the border more visible than it otherwise would have been. The border has also been “put on display” through the opening of viewing towers and the building of gazing platforms. *Gapahuken*, a restaurant close to the border checkpoint, offers its visitors “a panoramic view to Russia” (Sollia Resort, 2018).

Fine and Speer (1985, p. 82) describe the stage of *enshrinement* as “the pivotal phase of sight sacralization”, occurring “when a tourist attraction contains within its boundaries and even more valuable attraction”. The Mona Lisa within the Louvre and the Gutenberg Bible within the Gutenberg Museum are examples (MacCannell, 1989, pp. 44-45). Kaaba, the most sacred site of Islam, at the centre of its most sacred mosque, Al-Masjid al-Haram, in Mecca, its holiest city could be a religious analogy. In the case of border tourism, one may perhaps regard the border in a zonal sense as the first attraction and

the borderline as an even more valuable attraction within this – the equivalent to the Mona Lisa and Kaaba. The borderline itself is certainly the highlight of the many border tours (see below).

Mechanical reproduction is, according to MacCannell (1989, p. 45), “most responsible for setting the tourist in motion on his journey to find the true object”. It may include “the creation of prints, photographs, models or effigies of the object which are themselves valued and displayed” (MacCannell, 1989, p. 45). The touristic mechanical reproduction of the Norwegian-Russian border includes a huge number of images and artefacts. Border post replicas can be found everywhere, in front of the airport building, in hotel lounges and in the tourist complexes next to the real border. Miniature versions of Norwegian and Russian border posts are on display in the souvenir shops and in the windows of the tour agencies. Images of border posts, as well as photographs of the border itself, appear on locally merchandized postcards, plates, cups, and t-shirts (see Figure 9). One of the most popular souvenirs for sale in Kirkenes is the so-called “border troll” (Norwegian: *grensetroll*) (see Figure 10). The troll, holding a border post in each hand, comes in many shapes and sizes.

MacCannell defines *social reproduction* as the final step in the process of sight sacralization, occurring “when groups, cities, and regions begin to name themselves after famous attractions” (MacCannell, 1989, p. 45). The project planners of Project Borderland launched the slogan “Sør-Varanger – Borderland in the centre” (Norwegian: *Sør-Varanger; Grenseland i sentrum*) (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, p. 5). Today “Borderland Sør-Varanger” (Norwegian: *Grenselandet Sør-Varanger*) is the title of the municipal tourist brochure (Sør-Varanger kommune, n.d.-a). In touristic advertisements, Kirkenes tends simply to be referred to as “the border town” (Norwegian: *grensebyen*). The border has thus become a key element in the touristic branding of the place.



Figure 9. T-shirt for sale in a souvenir shop on the border

(Photo by author)

One-sided border tourism

In stark contrast to the Norwegian side of the border, the Russian side has remained practically untouched by tourism development. This is first due to the relatively closed nature of the Norwegian-Russian border. It is illegal to cross the border, except through the official border crossing point at Storskog-Borisoglebsky. Here, a visa is, however, required for all travellers, and this has to be applied for well in advance. Even with a visa, the crossing of the border may, as described in Chapter 3, be a tedious and time-consuming process. Consequently, few travellers arriving in Kirkenes cross the border.

Secondly, the entire Russian side of the border is defined as a Border Security Zone, a specially designated area where access and economic activities, such as tourism, are restricted. All tourists who wish to enter the zone needs a special permit issued by the local Federal Security Service (FSB) department, which may be very difficult to obtain.

From time to time there have been political signals indicating that parts of the Border Security Zone may be opened (Nilsen, 2011; Pettersen, 2011). The Twin City Agreement signed in 2008 (*Felles erklæring*, 2008) referred vaguely to common tourism development as a “field of priority” but no concrete plans or strategies were ever developed. For some tour operators this is frustrating. Hans Hatle, director of Barents Safari, has for years wanted to bring tourists to the Orthodox chapel of Boris Gleb, just across the border. In 2013, having seen no change in the border regime for years, he sent a petition letter concerning the matter directly to President Vladimir Putin, with a copy to the Russian consul general in Kirkenes and Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia (Trellevik & Pedersen, 2013). Even this rather “unorthodox” initiative failed, however, to soften the strict border regime.

The relatively closed border and the restricted Russian border zone makes tourism along the Norwegian-Russian border starkly different from most other cases of border tourism in Europe today where, as on the Swedish-Finnish border, tourists tend to engage in “fun border-transgressing activities”, like playing golf across the border or staying in bi-national hotels with bi-national bars (Löfgren, 2008, p. 206). While these more common cases of tourism may be described as “two-sided border tourism”, or “border crossing tourism”, the current tourism on the Norwegian-Russian border is an example of what Gelbman (2010) refers to as “one-sided border tourism”. In cases of one-sided border tourism, tourists have to “consume” borders from one side only.

One-sided border tourism typically occurs “adjacent to borders that are still closed and fortified and are yet to be opened to passage” (Gelbman, 2010, p. 87). During the Cold War, there were several one-sided border tourism sites in Europe on the western side of the Iron Curtain. Today, there are very few left. Cases of one-sided border tourism can mainly be found along a small number of hostile borders in Asia, such as those between Israel and Syria (see e.g., Gelbman, 2010), and between North and South Korea (see, e.g., Sonnberger, 2013).

The touristic staging of the border

Medvedev (1999, p. 43) writes that the border between Finland and the Soviet Union during the Cold War was “meaningful as the North Cape and ideologically charged as the Berlin Wall”. Like other borders along the former Iron Curtain, which during the Cold War was Europe’s “most iconic and disruptive feature” (Havlick, 2014, p. 126), it not only represented a national divide, but symbolized the deep cultural and political divide between what was known as the East and the West, the Communist and the Capitalist world. The border’s status as a significant divide attracted curious visitors. As Medvedev (1999, p. 43) observes:

many Finns used to visit the Finnish-Soviet frontier, especially in the olden days of a sealed border, to feel the mystique of the place, take photos of the prohibitory sign, or even to step into the restricted border zone, seeking to experience a geopolitical thrill – taking a small step towards the Other, into the realm of shadows.

Today, visitors come to look at – and gaze across – the Norwegian-Russian border for much the same reasons. In a brochure for a cycle route along the former Iron Curtain it is stated that “if you want to have first hand experience of the division of Europe, you can go to the town of Storskog, Norway’s only official border crossing to Russia” (Cramer n.d., p. 11). The border is interesting to tourists as an attraction due to its (in a European context) exceptional status as a divide, and its exceptionally closed nature. These dimensions of the border are also the dimensions that are cultivated in the touristic staging of the border. This staging involve various elements of performance: the use of naming, the exposure of particular symbols and evocative storytelling. The border tours are the main context for this staging. During my fieldwork, I participated in several such tours. The reflections below stems from my observations during these excursions to the border.

Evocative naming has, as mentioned, been a part of the sight sacralization that has taken place in the borderland since the end of the Cold War. In touristic contexts, in

advertisements and during guided tours the border is often referred to as “the border between East and West” (Norwegian: *grensen mellom øst og vest*). In a geographical sense, this turns the border into a fundamental line of division, similar to that of the Equator or the Greenwich Meridian. The border is thus bestowed a significance that goes far beyond that of an ordinary national border. The epithet also immediately call to mind ideas about the border as a marker of deep cultural and geopolitical divisions between “the Western World” and “the Eastern World”. This idea of the border as a fundamental cultural and geopolitical divide is cultivated by the tourism industry through the active exposure of religious items and Cold War artefacts, symbols of cultural and political difference.

The portrait of Father Filip appears, as mentioned above, in the advertisement for a popular riverboat trip from Kirkenes to the border. The tour, which takes place two or three times every day during the summer season, offers several encounters with religious motives. The riverboats used for the tours are actually named after Russian saints: *Boris Gleb*, after Russia’s oldest saints Boris and Gleb, and *Trifon*, after Saint Tryphon of Pechenga, a monk living on the Kola Peninsula in the 16th century. Furthermore, and obviously solely for touristic purposes since such practices do not exist in Norway, large silvery Orthodox icons depicting the Mother of God with the Divine Child have been placed in the bows of the boats. En route to the border, close to the mouth of the Pasvik River, the boats usually make a halt along the shore where another icon, curiously fixed to a large board of red painted plywood, marks the entrance to a cave. Russian Orthodox believers initially placed the icon there, traditionally regarding the cave as a holy site. It was allegedly a tour operator who nailed the icon to the wooden board so that the tourists could see it more easily from the river on their way to border. Finally, tourists taking the trip may see even more icons on the actual border, this time on display along with Orthodox crosses and other religious and non-religious artefacts in the tour operator’s small souvenir shop (see Figure 10).

The display of Orthodox symbols is not unique to this tour. In fact, the tourist routes and sites along the border display an abundance of imagery and artefacts related to Orthodox

religion. The focus on Orthodoxy is one of the most recurring in the touristic sale of the border. This reason for this is probably that this very cultural trait tends to represent something unfamiliar and exotic for most Western visitors. Orthodoxy also tends to be irrefutably associated with the East. Thus, the Orthodox images serves perfectly well as an illustration of the cultural divide that the tourist industry strives to evoke. Notably, this exploitation of religion for touristic purposes is not unique to Kirkenes. Along Finland's border with Russia, Orthodoxy has also, as Paasi (1996, p. 129) observes, become a "selected sign of 'eastern-ness' actively marketed to tourists" in order to create a "mythical, exotic atmosphere in the border areas".

Symbols of *political difference* are also actively displayed along the border. Many of the politically charged artefacts that are exposed to tourists relate to Communism and the Cold War. In the souvenir shops in Kirkenes and on the border, Soviet medals, red flags, red stars and small statues of Lenin are on display. In the Barents Safari camp on the border there is even a small exhibition of Cold War artefacts. Here one can see a genuine Red Army uniform and, inside a glass display case, a camera that, according to the informative text, was "used for spying on Western allies during the Cold War" before it was "purchased from a former KGB agent". These artefacts clearly evoke the geopolitics of the Cold War, the divide between the "Free Western World" and "Eastern Communism". They confirm and strengthen many tourists' expectations of the border as a Cold War relic. While the symbols of political divides mostly relate to the past, there are also references to today's geopolitics. The riverboat trip mentioned above has also been promoted by the use of an image of Vladimir Putin, who, shirtless and aggressively flexing his muscles, poses on the river shore next to a border cairn together with a group of border tourists. The Russian president appears (unlike Father Filip) to have been manipulated into the border landscape by means of Photoshop.



Figure 10. Icon and border troll for sale in a souvenir shop on the border.

(Photo by author)

Besides evoking the border's status as a fundamental cultural and political divide, the local tourism industry tends to exploit the closed nature of the border, turning it into an exciting "border experience" for visitors. This can be observed during the border tours where an atmosphere of suspense, mystique and geopolitical thrill is being cultivated. On the way to the border, the visitors are often told exciting Cold War stories; about dangerous incidents, trespassing spies and dramatic defections. They are exposed to warning signs, watchtowers, barbed wire fences, and soldiers on patrol. On the border, the guides spend much time telling the tourists about what *may* happen if they try to cross the borderline. The stories are partly informative, intended to avoid stupidities. Border crossings result in fines of several thousand kroner and may backfire severely on the tour operator. There is, however, also a performative component involved here. The stories serve to "dramatize" the tourists' experience on the border. It certainly has

an intriguing effect on the tourists: “A visit to the Russian border is not something for the faint-hearted!” one elderly German tourist exclaimed after having listened to the guide’s warnings against “taking one small step too far in the wrong direction”. He added that he “would not be surprised if the hidden Russian border guards were at this very moment pointing their guns at us, *hoping* we would cross the border so that they could shoot us”. The man, even if he was half joking, was clearly experiencing the situation on the border as fairly dramatic.

The guides also spend much time telling the tourists about the many hidden things in the border landscape, like surveillance cameras, radars, movement detectors and camouflaged border guards. The tourists are told that even when no one seems to be around there are in fact “eyes” and “ears” everywhere in the landscape. As one tour guide told me, “the forbidden and hidden, the things you cannot do and the things you cannot see, is what the tourists really find fascinating”. This fascination, he explained, is something that is cultivated during the tours:

The tourists, you know, get very curious. What is it that they are not allowed to see? Then we can tell people about the military camps, how the Russian and Norwegian soldiers patrol the border, how the entire border actually is walked up and down a number of times every day. We tell them that they are under surveillance all the time. They may hide under a shrub but even there they will be observed, from both sides actually. You never know. You are in that kind of area. People start feeling a particular way.

Sometimes, the guide continued, the tour guides’ evocative stories may be highly effective:

You may have noticed that close to Storskog there is a Russian watchtower. It has been unmanned for ages, but when the tourists see the tower they get so excited that they start to imagine things. Upon returning home, they actually recall having seen a soldier in the tower! That is the power of the border and good story telling.

Löytynoja (2007) writes about touristic performances on Finland's border with Russia. Here, the staging of the border involves both fake Russian border guards and fake border checkpoints, all with the purpose of creating drama for the visiting tourists:

A couple of "Russian border guards" are suddenly asking the bus to pull over, coming into the bus and asking for passports. [The] "Russian border guards" wear uniforms, speak Russian, carry guns and act like actual border guards, so tourists usually believe it is a real border check in a temporary border crossing point. (Löytynoja, 2007, p. 42)

As one of the Finnish entrepreneurs arranging the tour admits, it is all "a piece of theatre" but "it is such great drama that when you go there, it is a play in which you participate, and you imagine that it is a real thing" (Löytynoja, 2007, p. 43). The border tourism of the Norwegian-Russian border is in some ways similar to that of the Finnish-Russian border. Along the Norwegian-Russian border there are no fake Russian border guards frightening the tourists or offering them vodka, but the guides, in their dramatizations, do sometimes engage real Norwegian border guards on patrol, as the description of this tour, taking place in the middle of the night illustrates:

We stop at a place where the Russian border is as close as the other side of a town street. "Are you there?" shouts the guide into the woods on the Norwegian side. "Of course," the soldiers from the Sør-Varanger garrison shout back. But we can't see them in the dark (Northern Norway Tourist Board, n.d.-a).

The guides' involvement of border guards is first intended to excite the tourists. At the same time – in the frightening darkness and so close to Russia – the voices of Norwegian soldiers may have a certain reassuring effect.

The situation described above takes place very close to the borderline. As mentioned above, the borderline can be seen as the "attraction within the attraction" in the overall staging of the border. If the border is the Louvre, the borderline is the Mona Lisa. It is

on the borderline that the border tours reach their dramaturgical climax. Usually, the tourists spend quite some time here taking photos of each other in front of, or in-between, the Russian and Norwegian border posts.



Figure 11. *Tourists on the border.*

(Photo by author)

Besides the photo session, the main activity on the border is *gazing*. In cases of two-sided border tourism, tourists may often be seen straddling or jumping across the borderline. Along one-sided border tourism sites, they *gaze*. While the former activities tend to be characterized by merriment, laugh and play, *gazing* tends to be marked by reflection, each tourist silently scrutinising the landscape. *Gazing* was a typical activity along the former Iron Curtain during the Cold War, as in Kella, a small village on the East-West German border, described by Berdahl (1999, p. 2):

The crest of the wooded hills surrounding the isolated village lay in the West, where a lookout point (“the window to Kella”) with a parking lot large enough to accommodate several tour buses provided a site from which westerners could gaze down on and ponder the Otherness of the East.

Just as anthropological looking is more than looking, touristic looking involves a reflection upon *what* one sees. Gazing leaves time for meditative contemplation, for pondering, as Berdahl calls it, upon the distinction the border represents and upon the unfamiliar land beyond it. The tour operators clearly encourage this activity. As mentioned above, gazing platforms, fully equipped with binoculars, have been built along the border. The guides may also influence the *way* the tourists ponder upon “the Otherness of the East”. In reality, as one tour guide told me, “the difference between the two sides is minimal. The nature – and it is almost only nature – is the same on both sides”. “Therefore”, he continued, “in order for the tourists to *experience* the difference, it has to be evoked”. The undramatic scenery has to be *dramatized* by means of touristic performances; evocative storytelling and the use of evocative symbols, as described above.

Fine and Speer (1985, p. 82) note how the encounter with touristic shrines, just like the encounters with sacral objects, may transform “a group of strangers . . . into a group of celebrants”, inducing a state of *communitas*. Such a radical transformation may perhaps not take place very often on the Norwegian-Russian border. However, the encounter with the borderline seems to be an exciting, perhaps even sublime, experience for many visitors. The owner of the souvenir shop next to the border checkpoint has witnessed the behaviour of border tourists for years. Quite a few of them, he explained, approach the borderline with a certain awe – as if they have reached the aim of a pilgrimage. The man particularly recalled one couple that, upon reaching the border got out of the car with two pillows, lay down on them in front of the border fence and kissed the ground. Such “bizarre” enactments on the border may indicate that the tourism entrepreneurs have succeeded in spreading the image of the border as a great and significant divide.



Figure 12. *Tourists gazing across the border.*
(Photo by author)

The touristic staging of the borderland

In the touristic staging of the Norwegian-Russian border, the border itself is presented as a significant divide, a border between the West the East. In the touristic sale of the borderland, its location *on* this important divide is repeatedly stressed. The headline of the tourist brochure featuring Father Filip on the front page is “Borderland Sør-Varanger” (Sør-Varanger kommune, n.d.-a). In the brochure it is written that “Sør-Varanger municipality is a ‘border-country’ in more than one way”, that it “forms a geological, botanical and zoological frontier between Europe and Asia”, and that it, “as far back as the Stone Age . . . has been a melting pot of different people from the East and West” (Sør-Varanger kommune, n.d.-a). The website of the Norwegian Coastal Express, which brings tourists to Sør-Varanger every day, presents Kirkenes as “the only town in Norway where East meets West” (Hurtigruten, 2018).

It is not, however, its western elements, but rather its “easternness” that is stressed in the touristic sale of the place. Kirkenes may be described as the “Gateway to the East”, as on the website of Visit Norway (2018), but never as “the Gateway to the West”. “Did you know that in Kirkenes you are as far east as Cairo and further east than most of Finland”, it is rhetorically asked in the municipal tourist brochure (Sør-Varanger kommune, n.d.-a). On the Northern Norway Tourist Board website one can, below the headline “Kirkenes – a borderline case” (sic.), read that Kirkenes is “about as far east as Alexandria and Istanbul” (Northern Norway Tourist Board, n.d.-b). SAS, in an advertisement for flights to Kirkenes, writes that the town is located “as far east as Istanbul and Cairo” (Scandinavian Airlines System, 2018). The insistently recurrent mentioning of the names of Alexandria, Cairo and Istanbul does not so much serve to demonstrate the actual longitude of Kirkenes. More important is the way the use of these names tends to invest the place with certain qualities. As magical mantras – repeated over and over again – these names tend to evoke the *exotic orient* with all its connotations for Westerners. The easternness is also promoted through images and sounds. On Barents Safari’s hand-drawn tourist map of the Norwegian-Russian borderland, images of the cupolas and minarets of Istanbul decorate the *bordure* of the map alongside the Kremlin of Moscow. In the municipality’s official promotion video, Turkic folk music is used as a soundtrack, while exotic border- and Russia-related images roll across the screen (Sør-Varanger kommune n.d.-b).

While there are many references to Turkey and Egypt in the touristic promotion of the place, the evoked exotic easternness is, however, first and foremost, related to Russia. Iversen, writing about Russian residents in Kirkenes, notes that Kirkenes is often called “Little Murmansk” (Norwegian: *Lille Murmansk*) and that the town, for outsiders, appears to be “very Russian”, littered with recognisable symbols of Russianness (Iversen, 2010, p. 5). Iversen, however, finds this ever-present “Russianness” somewhat puzzling, as the Russians living in the town make few efforts to distinguish themselves and their culture, or to make themselves visible in the public space. Therefore, he concludes that:

it is perhaps rather Norwegian commercial interests and municipal “marketing” that exaggerates the Russian identity of Kirkenes. The proximity of the border with Russia and the apparently strong Russian impulses are used for all they are worth in the product development of the tourism companies and in the municipality’s promotion of the town in Norway and internationally. (Iversen, 2010, p. 5, author’s translation)

My observations support Iversen’s conclusion. Certainly, there *are* signs of Russianness that are not staged by the tourism industry, for example shop advertisements in the Russian language that are intended to attract Russian customers, or the Russian trawlers flying Russian flags in the harbour. Many of the Russian signs do not, however, serve any practical purpose, save that of making the town appear as exotic as possible in the eyes of Western tourists. A typical example of this, mentioned by Iversen (2010, p. 5) is the peculiar use of the Cyrillic script on street signs in the town centre of Kirkenes. Alongside the image of Father Filip and images of border post replicas, photos of the Cyrillic signs often appear in tourist brochures promoting the town.

The Cyrillic street signs were put up in 2001 as a part of a municipal policy on bilingualism in public spaces. The original idea was to make the town more easily navigable for Russians but there was also a hope that non-Russian tourists would appreciate the signs for their exoticness, and that they would symbolize the identity of Kirkenes as a true border town and Barents capital.³⁶ In Sør-Varanger, as in other parts of Northern Norway, the use of signs in minority languages like Sami and Finnish has been highly contested (Puzey 2007). There was, however, little public debate about the Cyrillic signs. Most people simply regarded the signs as touristic decoration, not as ethnopolitical manifestations. Only Arne Hammersmark, the local chief of police, at the time publicly expressed criticism of the “Russification” of the public space, suggesting that the signs could weaken national sovereignty in the volatile borderland. “We should mark that we are in Norway”, Hammersmark argued (Hagen, 2001).

³⁶ Arve Tannvik (Director, Kirkenes Næringsshage), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 21 April 2010.



Figure 13. *Street sign with Latin and Cyrillic letters.*
(Photo by author)

The Cyrillic street signs did not have the intended practical effect. First, both the Russian inhabitants of Kirkenes and Russian visitors to the town read Latin letters without any difficulty. Secondly, the centre of Kirkenes is so small that hardly anyone needs street signs to find their way around in the first place. As a “gimmick” the signs were, however, a success. The story about the signs soon spread to other parts of Norway and the world. It was picked up by *Verdens Gang*, Norway’s largest newspaper, which published a report named *Little Russia in Kirkenes* (Verdens Gang, 2001). In a report published in *Dagbladet* the same year, Kirkenes was coined *Little Murmansk* (Hagen, 2001). Both reports, stressing as they did the exotic Russian identity of Kirkenes, worked as good advertisement for the town. Today, the street signs have become an attraction in themselves, a popular photo object for visiting tourists. For Westerners (including Norwegians), the signs probably appear as alluring motifs in much the same way as the Orthodox icons and the other religious items. The Cyrillic alphabet is incomprehensible to most Westerners, and therefore quite exotic. It is also clearly associated with Russia – although the alphabet is used in countries as well. Just like images related to Orthodox

Christianity, the street signs thus serve as an illustration of, or evidence for, the true easternness and Russianness of Kirkenes.

Another exotic feature of tourism in Kirkenes is the display and selling of Russian souvenirs. In Sør-Varanger, most souvenirs that do not directly refer to the border tend to relate to Russia. Next to the ubiquitous *border troll*, the most common local souvenir is the archetypical Russian *matryoshka doll*. Other common Russian souvenirs are fur hats, Easter eggs and icons. The sale of Russian souvenirs is, as Arne Wikan, the director of Pasvik Turist, explains a deliberate choice:

The travellers have been driving all the way through Norway seeing Vikings and trolls. We have decided to go for Russian souvenirs to signal that *now* you are at the border. That is why we sell such souvenirs both here [at the Pasvik Turist shop] and at Nittisekshøgda [the viewing tower in the Pasvik Valley].³⁷

The Russian souvenirs, as Wikan observes, first serve to stress the proximity of the border, which the local tour industry sells as an attraction. Secondly, they stress the uniqueness of Kirkenes compared to the rest of Norway where Vikings, trolls and Sami exotica dominate in the shelves of the tourist shops. Third, as Thuen (1993, p. 13) notes, souvenirs serve as “cultural idioms, as some sort of metonymic symbol for the other, the exotic”. As such they are, like the Cyrillic signs, highly visible symbols of the town’s desired easternness.

The Russian souvenirs are sold in various shops in Kirkenes and along the borderline, but the most popular place to buy them is probably the Russian Market (Norwegian: *Russemarkedet* or *Russetorget*) in the town square. The Russian Market is, second only to the border, the greatest single attraction in Sør-Varanger. Tourists love to visit the market and look at the many products for sale, and the colourfully dressed Russian saleswomen selling them.

³⁷ Arne Wikan (Director, Pasvik Turist), interview by the author, Kirkenes, 24 June 2010.

The history of the Russian Market in Kirkenes goes back to the early 1990s when the fall of the Iron Curtain made it possible for Russians to cross the border into Norway. Some arrived as normal tourists, but most came as *trader-tourists*, bringing with them all sorts of (by Norwegian standards) cheap products for sale: “self-produced or mass-produced souvenirs, household utensils, tools, fishing gear, military uniform effects, pins, binoculars and cameras, clothes and footwear, samovars, small items of furniture, china etc.” (Thuen, 1993, p. 12). The goods were sold at bazaar-like markets in the towns of northern Norway.

As Thuen (1993, p. 12) notes, the Russian markets were, from the very beginning, more of an exotic touristic attraction than real markets. People did not buy the products that were sold there for their practical value, but for their value as souvenirs, symbols of “the exotic other”. They were interpreted “as things for display, not for use” (Thuen, 1993, p. 13). As Thuen (1993, p. 14) notes, this exoticness was immediately interesting for local tourism entrepreneurs who saw the possibility of promoting them to visitors from abroad: “Imagine, they said, how excited Americans and other tourists would be by the sight of representatives of the former ‘empire of the evil’ selling handicrafts on the streets of remote Arctic towns”. Before the markets could be properly exploited by the tourism industry they were, however, prohibited by the authorities. There had been reports about market-sellers offering illegal and morally doubtful products, such as alcohol and sex, and the press had begun to relate the markets to mafia invasion, moral collapse, and exploitation (Stenvoll, 2002).

In most places the prohibition of the Russian markets was accepted, but not so in Kirkenes. Here, the market had not only become an attraction, but it had come to symbolize the very unique Russianness and border identity that the local tourism industry strived to promote. Petitions were organized and politicians, as well as tourism entrepreneurs, lobbied to bring the market back to the town. At the end of the 1990s, after years of lobbying, the market sellers were, through a special arrangement, allowed to return to Kirkenes and set up the market in the very centre of the town. As the market returned, Kirkenes also obtained *de facto* a Russian market monopoly within Norway.

Consequently, the touristic value of the market increased even more. In 2008, Chief Municipal Executive Bente Larssen claimed that the market had become “the trademark of the town” (Methi, 2010, p. 35). Espíritu, writing about the market five years later, concluded that “the presence of the Russian market women in Kirkenes has become an identity of the town” and that “in the local identity-making and the discourse of the municipality itself, Russians and the Russian market women are central” (Espíritu, 2013, p. 21).

The Russian Market today employs approximately twenty sales women who regularly commute between Murmansk and Kirkenes. Although the market is now legal, the sales women working there still face various bureaucratic challenges. Crossing the border is not always an easy task, due to the strict control and the many regulations (Espíritu 2013). In 2011, for instance, the sales women were able to obtain business visas and work-permits for the Barents Spektakel festival only at the very last moment, perhaps due to the presence of Queen Sonja at the festival:

With the prospect of such a prominent visitor, it became imperative for the organisers that these women be present, all set up outside, in the cold reality of the Arctic winter. Surrounded by several outdoor art productions and winter activities, they became a visible token of the new post-Soviet reality of the border town of Kirkenes. (Mobile kultur byrå, 2013, p. 78)

As Espíritu (2013, p. 21) points out, the municipality “advertises the market on its website and provides resources for tables to be set up in the market square”. Still, the women make little money on their trade. The big money remains in Kirkenes where the town capitalizes on the tourist attraction the women make up, just by being there. Thus, the market women have themselves become a “commodity” of much greater value than the goods they sell. Like Father Filip, they more or less consciously play the role of exotic Russians in a staged exotic border town.³⁸

³⁸ The peculiar role of the Russian Market as a site of display as well as a market place has been approached artistically. In 2011, an art trio, Mobile Kultur Byrå, invited all the sales women to arrange

The commodification of countries and cultures is of course a typical feature of modern tourism all over the world. As Bruner notes, “wherever tourism establishes itself . . . , the peoples and cultures of the world, becomes commercialized, marketed and sold to an eager audience of international tourists” (Bruner. 2005, p. 191). The peculiar thing about Kirkenes, however, is that the commodified culture is *foreign* to the place: Russianness is staged *outside* Russia. Through the display of Orthodox imagery, Cyrillic letters, matryoshka dolls and the Russian Market, a “miniature Russia” dislocated from the real Russia is performed for the visiting tourists. The presentation of Russia in Kirkenes is not negative. On the contrary, Russianness is made into something exciting and alluring. Still, the tourists are served a stereotype image, similar to that of foreign countries and cultures that one may find in, for example, the national pavilions of the Walt Disney World Resort. It is the most exotic and, for Westerners, most different aspects of Russianness that are emphasized in the touristic sale of the town. The staging of Russia in Kirkenes, contributes, like the sale of the border, to emphasize the contrast between the East and the West, and thus to further stress the border’s status as a significant divide. The main difference between Disneyworld and Kirkenes is perhaps that in the case of Kirkenes, the real thing is very near. The proximity of the real Russia gives the staging here a certain authenticity. The tourists may actually believe in it.

Of course, the Russian staging of a town so close to the real Russia would, like the sale of the border as a barrier and a divide, hardly have been successful had it not been for the relatively closed border. If the border had been fully open, the tourists could simply have crossed it and experienced the real Russia on the other side. As long as the border remains difficult to cross, and the Russian border zone remains inaccessible for Western travellers, the touristified Russia of Kirkenes is, however, the only alternative. The closed border also makes it easier to perform Russianness in Kirkenes. Isolated from the real Russia, Norwegian entrepreneurs are free to select and display the signs of Russianness which they find appealing. They do not have to care about hiding or

their market within the confines of Tromsø Centre for Contemporary Art. The exhibition made it possible to reflect on the many implications of the market (see *Mobile kultur byrå*, 2013).

omitting the more boring or problematic aspects of Russianness that may have appeared if the border had been fully open.

Findings

Touristic performances play, like political and artistic performances, a significant role in the overall construction of the Norwegian-Russian border and borderland. Tourism, like professional art, emerged as a viable local field in Kirkenes after the closing of the mine and the end of the Cold War. The development of tourism was very much related to the touristification and *sight sacralization* of the Norwegian-Russian border. Ideas for developing border tourism in the region were first developed by the visionary planning committee of Project Borderland in the late 1980s. Later, the ideas were put into practice by various local entrepreneurs. The touristic actors have successfully developed border tourism as a local niche. They have succeeded in putting Kirkenes on the map, both nationally and internationally. The development of border tourism can thus be regarded as another local entrepreneurial success, with the existence of the border as the starting point. Today, the border has become the over-arching *leitmotif* in the sale of Kirkenes as a destination. Tourism is increasing. The town benefits from this economically.

In their staging of the border and borderland, the touristic actors produce a wide range of performances. The border tours are an important arena for these performances. During these tours, the local guides show the tourists the border and tell them about it. There is an active and deliberate use of evocative symbols, from Communist stars to Orthodox icons. Just like the political and artistic actors, the tourist industry also applies naming and branding as performative techniques in their staging of the border. The touristic actors, to an even larger extent than political and artistic actors, intervene in the very border landscape, physically transforming or “modifying” it with their activities.

The political and artistic actors, as we have seen, tend to stress cross-border similarities and to evoke images of an open border. In the context of tourism, the border is presented in a different way. Here, it becomes, first and foremost, a significant line of division

between the East and the West. The contrast between the two sides of the border, and especially the *unfamiliarity* of the Russian side, is emphasized. The touristic actors also tend to stress the closed nature of the border. Indeed, the tour guides, showing the tourists watchtowers and telling them dramatic stories from the Cold War, intentionally exaggerate this nature of the border, just as they overstress its divisive quality. The significance invested into the border also provides Kirkenes and the borderland, located next to this divide, with a certain importance, as the meeting point between the familiar West and the unfamiliar and exotic East.

Scott A. Lukas (2007, p. 1) defines theming as “the use of an overarching theme to create a holistic and integrated spatial organization of a consumer venue”. In the borderland there is certainly an on-going touristic theming relating to the East and Russia. This theming takes place in the form of various touristic performances: naming, the setting up of street Cyrillic street signs and a Russian market, complete with Russian souvenirs and saleswomen. Again, it is (for Westerners) the most exotic aspects of Russianness that are commodified in the theming of the town. Thus, the Russian theming also contributes to the emphasizing of the the contrast between the East and the West and to the stressing of the border’s status as a significant divide.

Chapter 8: Reflections and Conclusions

Performances have impact on the construction of the social reality. Performance is also a lens through which this construction can be observed. In this thesis, performance has been the starting point for exploring the ongoing social engagement with borders and borderlands, identified as “arenas of symbolic and performative display”, where various actors “make special effort to make fix meanings in the landscape or to contest and change those that are already there” (Donnan & Wilson, 2010b, p. 76).

The focus here has been on how the Norwegian–Russian border and its surrounding borderland, particularly the town of Kirkenes, are invested with meanings through various performances produced and performed by actors within three different fields: politics, art, and tourism. In previous chapters, the three fields have been approached separately. In this final chapter, findings from all three fields will be summed up, and implications of these findings will be discussed.

Performances and fields

Throughout this thesis, the concept of *performance* has not been restricted to performances in a conventional emic sense, i.e., what Schechner refers to as “is” performances, but has also included so-called “as” performances, defined as behaviors, events, actions, or things “that can be studied ‘as’ performance” (Schechner, 2013, p. 41). This broad approach to performance has made it possible study a wide range of manifestations and expressions deliberately intended to invest the Norwegian–Russian border and borderland with meaning.

Notable here is, first, the performative use of *material aesthetics*; the raising of buildings, monuments, statues, sculptures, and plaques, as well as the display of symbolic artefacts and décor, such as the Russian Monument, border post replicas, and Cyrillic street signs. All political, artistic, and touristic actors in the borderland deliberately use material aesthetics in order to invest the border and borderland with specific meanings. Second, the performances include many *events*: theatre

performances, concerts, artistic shows, festivals, public celebrations, commemorations, unveiling ceremonies, exhibition openings, political meetings, press conferences, market days, touristic excursions, et cetera.

The border performances involve producers, performers, and audiences. Among the key producers of performances are the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, the Girls on the Bridge and the Samovar Theatre, as well as a number of local tourist agencies. Notably, actors on both the national and local levels are involved in the production of performances, often in cooperation with each other.

The performers involved in the performances are of many kinds: actors, singers, dancers, musicians, representatives of state and municipality, border guards, tour guides, and tourist market sellers. Some of the producers of the performances, like the troupe of the Samovar Theatre, are also performers; others, like the Girls on the Bridge, are not. Some of the performers are local. Others arrive from other parts of Norway or from abroad to take part in the events. Russian performers are prominent in both the political, artistic and touristic performances. Many of the performers are professional in the sense that performing is part of their professions as actors, politicians, or tour guides. Others are amateurs, like the local choirs that entertained during the prime ministers' ceremonial crossing of the border in 2013 (see Chapter 6). Sometimes, like in the artistic mass performances, the spectators contribute as well.

The audiences of the performances may be both local and non-local. Performances within the political field tend to appeal to both a local audience, to the Norwegian public in general, and to a Russian audience, particularly the Russian authorities. The artistic performances tend to appeal to the same groups, but they also appeal to the national and international art scene, artists, and art critics. The touristic performances are produced mainly for a market of Norwegian and European tourists. The number of spectators present at the performances varies, from only a few people to several thousand for the artistic-political mass performances. The largest performances may have attracted as

many as one-third of the inhabitants of Sør-Varanger. Naturally, some of the audiences here do not experience the performances directly, but mediated through television, radio, and newspapers.

The performances tend to take place either on the Norwegian–Russian border itself or in the town of Kirkenes. On the border, the main location for the political and artistic performances tends to be the border-crossing station at Storskog. The touristic performances take place along the entire border, but especially in places with a good view of the border and into Russia. Except for the political border-crossing events (where participants walk into Russia for a few minutes), the performances are restricted to the Norwegian side of the border. Artistic and touristic attempts to create border-crossing tours and events have not succeeded. In Kirkenes, some of the performances take place indoors, for example in the theatre. Many of the performances, however, are performed outdoors in public spaces, particularly in central parts of the town, on the main street, in the town square, or beside symbolically important objects, such as the Stoltenberg bust, the Russian monument, or the Welcome to Kirkenes sign. A peculiar feature of the performances taking place in the Norwegian-Russian borderland is the way the border sometimes, like in the case of *Borderlines*, is recreated or *restaged* in Kirkenes. It is first and foremost the artistic actors that tend to stage the border this way. The touristic actors are more dependent on performing *in situ*, showing the “real thing” to their audience.

The touristic border performances take place throughout the year. The political and artistic performances, however, are more common at certain times of the year. The political events tend to be arranged during the annual commemorations of the Soviet liberation, during the anniversaries for the establishment of the Barents Region, or during Barents Spektakel, which also is the main occasion for artistic performances. During the festival, there is indeed an excess of border-related happenings and imagery, in the town and on the border. At such times, the intensity and frequency of the border performances sometimes makes the town appear like a fully fledged theme town. In January 2011, the town square was so full of flags, border post replicas, and other artistic

and touristic border paraphernalia of all kinds that the Russian Market sellers had great difficulties finding space to display their goods. In the end, however, the women solved the problem ingeniously, using the many border posts as hangers for their caps and robes.

The performances have been approached as they occur within and across three fields: politics, art, and tourism. These fields are clearly entwined. There are particularly strong connections between the actors of the political and artistic fields, who tend to befriend each other, support each other, and even join forces in the production of performances, as with *Barents Score* (see Chapter 6). The term *Barents elite*, introduced by Viken et al. (2008, pp. 35–36), refers to the strong alliances that exist between the political and artistic actors in the borderland. The fact that there are such local networks across the fields in a place like Kirkenes is not surprising. As Agedal (2009, p. 72) observes, Kirkenes, as a small town, is naturally “marked by close networks where the same actors meet and interact in different roles”. The way the three fields intersect, however, can also be explained by the very importance of the production of border performances locally. The common interests related to the production of performances naturally connect the fields to each other, irrespective of the differences between them. In this way, there are clear similarities between the intersection of fields in the Norwegian–Russian borderland and that of Berlin, as discussed in Chapter 2.

As Viken et al. (2007, p. 62) note, both “local and national actors are involved in constructions of the meaning or significance of the Russian-Norwegian boundary”. The key actors are not restricted to representatives of the state. Politically, both the Norwegian Barents Secretariat and the municipal authorities play an important role. The artistic and the touristic actors are all local. The case thus exemplifies how the social construction of borders may occur as much bottom–up as top–down.

Just as various fields intersect, so do the (inter)national and the local levels. In the borderland, there are strong connections between national and local actors, particularly in the fields of politics and art. The Norwegian authorities, especially the MFA,

collaborate closely not only with the Barents Secretariat and the municipal authorities, but also with the Girls on the Bridge and the Samovar Theatre. The relation between the (inter)national and local actors could be described as symbiotic in the sense that they are mutually dependent on each other. The MFA depends on the local actors in order to execute their symbolic politics on the border convincingly, and the local actors depend on the economic support and goodwill of the actors on the national level.

The border as a theatre of opportunity

Nugent and Asiwaju (1996b, p. 11) describe borders as “theatres of opportunity”. In the Norwegian–Russian borderland, this is certainly the case. The creative exploitation of the border provides all of the actors involved – from ministers to local tour operators – with particular opportunities. There is something to gain for everyone. For the national actors involved, the border performances serve many ends. For the Norwegian Government, the performances are, first, a way of communicating with Russia by means of symbolic politics. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the performances can be seen as elements of a “friendship dance” between the “Norwegian lion” and the “Russian bear”. The Norwegian and Russian ministers’ joint commemorations by the Russian monument, their joint crossings of the border, and their joint declarations and celebrations of new common spaces, from the Barents Region to the Twin Cities, repeatedly demonstrate friendship and mutual goodwill across the border. The performances also function as political propaganda directed inwards. They serve to demonstrate for a local and Norwegian audience the achievements of the Norwegian Government in relation to Russia and the borderland. Third, the performances serve to strengthen the power of certain political leaders. Thorvald Stoltenberg, in particular, has been the object of something that may resemble a cult of personality in the borderland. The veneration for the former foreign minister culminated in the raising of the Stoltenberg bust, which later became a sort of “shrine”, the preferred site for a range of symbolically laden political-artistic events, for example *Barents Score*. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg has contributed much to the writing of his father’s “hagiography”, for example, by choosing to deliver his Barents anniversary speech next to the bust of his father and by referring to him as “godfather of the Barents Region” (Nilsen, 2006). By

deliberately cultivating reverence for his father, the younger Stoltenberg has probably also increased his own symbolic power, within the local community, nationally and perhaps even in relation to Russia.

Locally, the border performances empower the political elites; the municipal authorities, and the Barents Secretariat. They allow the local political actors to establish strong relations with powerful actors on the national level, from ministers to members of the royal family, relations that, in turn, may be converted into political influence. For the touristic and artistic actors, the production and sale of border tourism and border art has become a lucrative business, a livelihood. For the artistic actors, the production of performances has also given them a great chance to make a name for themselves within the national and international art communities. Finally, for all local actors, the performances are seen as an opportunity to do place promotion: to brand the borderland as an attractive and extraordinary place, to turn it into a destination, politically, artistically, and touristically.

As several anthropological studies, particularly from Africa (e.g., Nugent & Asiwaju, 1996a; Flynn, 1997; Feyissa & Hoehne, 2010), demonstrate, there are entire communities that capitalize on borders. Flynn (1997, p. 320) observes, for example, how the Ibere on the Benin–Nigerian border are able to “draw their economic and political power from their position in the interstices of the borderland”. “The border residents are”, she writes, “fully aware of how they can use their interstitial power – their borderland advantage – to benefit themselves” (Flynn, 1997, p. 320). In Kirkenes too, the border has clearly become an asset for the local community. What differentiates the case of Kirkenes from that of the Ibere, however, is that here the exploitation of the border does not relate to cross-border trade or smuggling. Instead of exploiting it as a corridor for the import and export of goods between different economic spheres, the actors in Kirkenes turn the border into a commodity, an attraction, and a brand. Instead of engaging themselves in traditional border trade, they create a “border experience economy”. The case of Kirkenes is more like that of a border community on the Spanish–Portuguese border described by Amante (2010). This community initially

depended on cross-border smuggling, but owing to the elimination of tariff differences, this livelihood disappeared. As a substitute, the locals found new ways to exploit the border. A smuggler museum attracting tourists was opened, and old smuggling routes were converted into exciting pedestrian paths. “The border as a site”, writes Amante (2010, p. 106), gave “place to the border as a sight”. The locals transformed the border “into vernacular heritage, trying to capitalize on new forms of cultural consumption” (Amante, 2010, p. 106). Some of the same process has been going on in the Norwegian–Russian borderland since the closing of the mine and the partial opening of the border in the 1990s. Here too, the locals have in inventive ways capitalized on the border, and, in the process, refigured the meanings of it.

Kirkenes and Sør-Varanger, the Norwegian side of the border, has gained the most from the intensive production of border performances. Although, from time to time, the Russian side is involved, as in the twinning process or during the prime ministers’ crossing of the border, Pechenga has yet to capitalize economically on the performances. Thus, while Kirkenes has been reinvented as a centre for “border experiences” and a political, artistic, and touristic destination, Pechenga remains essentially a mining community.

The border invested with meaning

A main object of this thesis has been to examine how the actors, through various performances, invest the Norwegian–Russian border and borderland with meaning. What *place images*, to use the term of Shields (1991, pp. 60–61), are evoked through these performances? The performances do not convey a single clear message, but two major images can be discerned, namely the *border as a bridge* (Norwegian: *Grensen som bro*) and the *border as a barrier* (Norwegian: *Grensen som barriere*). The former image is mainly evoked by political and artistic actors, the latter image mainly by touristic actors.

The metaphor *bridge* evokes ideas of openness, connectedness, unity, and continuity. The many speeches delivered by political leaders in the borderland clearly express the

idea of the border as a bridge. Prime Minister Stoltenberg speaks about “an open border marked by trust and warm cooperation” (NRK, 2013), while King Harald refers to it as a “door to the other side . . . not as a barrier” (Harald V, 2014). Foreign Minister Støre (2011) describes the border, not as a line of division, but as a “meeting place” between two nations – two peoples”, which, according to him, share culture, traditions, and history. Such ideas of cross-border continuity and unity are further cultivated through the rhetorical use of kinship terms, indicating an advanced similitude and commonality between Norwegians and Russians, such as *brothers*, *one-ness brothers*, and *twins*. The image of the border as a bridge is also communicated in more dramatic ways, for example, through the Norwegian and Russian ministers’ symbolic joint crossing of the border. Their border crossing powerfully demonstrates the openness of the border and the fact that they cross it *jointly*, emphasises cross-border unity. The bridge image is conveyed in similar ways artistically, through the very name of the Girls on the Bridge and their many “border-crossing exercises”, as well as through the border dramas performed by the Samovar Theatre. A clear contrast tends to be drawn between today’s bridge border and the closed border of the Cold War, typically known as the Iron Curtain. In his speech, Støre refers to the old border as “a sharp division between peoples”, “a barrier”, and “an immense gap” (Støre, 2011).

Contrary to the metaphorical bridge, the metaphorical *barrier* evokes ideas of division, disunity, and discontinuity. The border as a barrier is the predominant image in the touristic staging of the border. Here, the Iron Curtain is not revoked but evoked. Objects symbolising the closed nature of the border, such as barbed wire fences, warning signs, and watchtowers, are put on display. Furthermore, the border is portrayed as a fundamental East–West divide, geographically, culturally, and geopolitically. Features of cross-border commonality are downplayed. Instead, contrast is emphasized. Some of the (for Westerners) most unfamiliar traits symbolising “the other side” – from the Orthodox religion to Cyrillic letters – are highlighted. The image of the border as a barrier can also be detected in the few artistic performances that question the political rhetoric about the open border, for example *Arctic Voices* or *Below-Images from a Borderland*. In these cases, the border’s barrier like nature is, however, not related to

cultural divisions. On the contrary, the closed border is seen as an unfortunate obstacle to cross-border unity.

The images of the border as a bridge and the border as a barrier contradict and exclude each other. Still, there does not seem to be any open contest between the conveyers of the two images. Representatives of the political authorities have not criticized the touristic exploitation of the East–West divide, although it clearly contradicts the messages they like to communicate, both to the Russians and to the Norwegian public. The tour operators do not argue against the political rhetoric about border-opening and cross-border cooperation, although this rhetoric to some extent “weakens” the product they try to sell. There are at least two possible explanations for this puzzling lack of open contest concerning the nature of the border. First, the touristic and political actors are not competing with each other. They clearly appeal to different audiences. The tourist industry sells the border as an *attraction* to non-local tourists, most of them foreigners. The political actors appeal in their rhetoric to Russia, as well as to a national and local audience. Second, the lack of contest may indicate concord on a higher level. Representatives of all fields seem to share a greater common aim, namely to present the Norwegian–Russian border as significant and extraordinary. Whether this significance and extraordinariness stems from the border’s status as an East–West divide or from its status as a model border for peace and cooperation may, in the end, matter less.

The borderland invested with meaning

As Viken et al. (2007, p. 62) notes, “the construction of the meaning or significance of the Russian-Norwegian boundary . . . constitutes a backcloth for place-related identity construction in Kirkenes”. The performances are instrumental in investing not only the border with meaning, but also the borderland. How is the borderland staged through the performances taking place there?

First, Sør-Varanger and Kirkenes are repeatedly and inextricably linked to the Norwegian–Russian border. This began in the 1980s with Project Borderland. The project’s planning committee suggested that the border location become the chief

dimension of local identity articulation (Grensland, 1985; Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987). For this purpose, the committee proposed to brand Sør-Varanger *the Borderland* (Norwegian: *Grenslandet*) (Grensland, 1985, 2.1). Over the years, the political, artistic, and touristic actors have adopted this idea. Today, an abundance of epithets more or less connect Kirkenes and Sør-Varanger directly with the border, for example “the border town”, “the border-transcending municipality”, “Transborder Kirkenes”, “the Barents Capital”, “the Barents Town”, “Twin City”, and “Little Russia”, just to name a few. The planning committee also recommended a thorough theming of the place – in order to make the border more prevalent. One suggestion was to raise a giant border watchtower high above the town (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, p. 18). Today, the place has been thoroughly themed. Symbols of the border, particularly replicas of Norwegian and Russian border posts, have been put to use performatively by political, artistic, and touristic actors. Although the border posts have not (yet) been included in the coat of arms of Sør-Varanger, they have become a sort of unofficial symbol of the place. The Russian theming of the town, the display of souvenirs, icons, Cyrillic street signs, and the Russian Market, also reinforce the border identity of the town.

Second, the performances tend to elevate the place, make it unique and important. The second report of Project Borderland states that “the values that Sør-Varanger represents are important for the Norwegian nation” and that Sør-Varanger “as a Borderland and meeting place” can serve as a bridge-builder between East and West (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, p. 8). To symbolize this significance, the planning committee introduced a new slogan: “Sør-Varanger – Borderland in the centre” (Norwegian: *Sør-Varanger – Grensland i sentrum*), illustrated with an image of the globe with Sør-Varanger placed in the very centre (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, p. 5). The project planners pointed at how the emphasis on the border could be a way to redefine Kirkenes from a peripheral and insignificant place to a central and important place. This way of morphing the town by using the border was later adopted by political as well as touristic and artistic actors. Politically and artistically, the town’s importance tends to be related to the significance of the border as a bridge. Kirkenes is presented as the Barents Capital, an important centre for cross-border cooperation and transnational development. The

proximity of the border is also the basis for even more ambitious epithets, such as “Norway’s geopolitical centre”, “the most important town of Norway”, “the centre of Norway”, and “Norway’s New York”. Touristically, the importance of Kirkenes tends to be related to its location by the border as a fundamental divide. Here, the town becomes prominent thanks to its unique status as “the gateway to the East” or as “the only town in Norway where East meets West”.

New Vasiuki

In Russian, there is a proverb, “Don’t tell me about New Vasiuki”, meaning “be realistic” or “stay on earth”. The proverb stems from a section of Ilf and Petrov’s classic *Twelve Chairs* where the con man Ostap Bender, pretending to be a chess grandmaster, manages to fool the inhabitants of a small town named Vasiuki into believing that their backwater, thanks to the organization of interplanetary chess tournaments, will be transformed into New Vasiuki, a great metropolis and the chess capital of the universe (Ilf & Petrov, 1928/1997, pp. 320–336). Ostap Bender’s story is highly exaggerated but, nonetheless, convincing. The locals believe him. As such, it is similar to the political, artistic, and touristic storytelling taking place in the Norwegian–Russian borderland. Just like Bender’s wild story of New Vasiuki, the stories told about Kirkenes and the border are often very unrealistic. Epithets such as the “Barents Capital” or the “New York of the North” evoke a greatness and importance far beyond the small town realities of Kirkenes. The town is certainly not a capital, and it is not a metropolis in any sense of the term. It is not really the “centre of Norway”, and it is nothing close to New York. The border too tends to be presented as more extraordinary than it really is, portrayed either as a closed “Iron Curtain”, a great divide, or as an open bridge and meeting place. In reality, the border is something in between these two extremes, partly open – partly closed. Just like Bender’s story about New Vasiuki, however, the many extraordinary tales about Kirkenes and the border are told in a remarkably persuasive way. Many people, visitors in particular, tend to be seduced by what they experience in the borderland. This can be seen in the way writers, journalists, and academics report from the place. One example is a travel report named *The Borderline Syndrome* (Norwegian:

Borderlinesyndromet), written by the well-known art critic, Tommy Olsson, after a stopover during Barents Spektakel (Olsson, 2005, author's translation):

The clouds there underneath, the nerves on the outside. It was not a good idea not to sleep the day before, but I had no choice. Did I not already know it? That Kirkenes is not so much a geographically defined place as a specific frame of mind? And that you should arrive well rested as you in any case will not be human for weeks afterwards?

The author Morten Strøksnes writes that Kirkenes feels “like a laboratory for a new time, like a place that has just been put into an orbit that will steadily increase its speed” (Strøksnes, 2006, p. 247). Iversen (2010, p. 81) states that he has “rediscovered Kirkenes”. He then describes the fantastic progress allegedly taking place in the borderland, which in future will turn Kirkenes into a “Little Russia”. He finishes his thesis by writing that Kirkenes is in the process of becoming a “shimmering star in the North” (p. 81). Foreign observers tend to be even more exalted in their descriptions of the borderland. Nodé-Langlois (2010) in *Le Figaro* argues that Kirkenes, owing to its favourable location between East and West, could be in the process of becoming “the new Singapore” (Nodé-Langlois, 2010). Bomsdorf writes in *Financial Times Deutschland* that, in future, the town could become “*der Nabel der Welt*”, the centre of the world (Bomsdorf, 2010). These excerpts indicate that indeed the performances succeed in convincing observers. The observers in turn spread the exaggerated images about the border and borderland to an even greater audience.

What makes the performances here so convincing? Löfgren and Willim (2006) observe that, in the experience economy, “a lot of energy is devoted to producing ... atmosphere, symbols, images, icons, auras, experiences and events”. “In this process”, they continue, “cultural technologies of ritualization, narration, imagineering, and aestheticization are put to work” (Löfgren and Willim 2006, p. 13). This is also true for the production of performances in the borderland. The actors – from the ministers to the tour operators – use a wide range of techniques to touch their audiences emphatically and emotionally,

to seduce, enchant, and even fool them, and they do so effectively. First, as Viken et al. (2008, p. 33) observe, Kirkenes “in some ways now performs as a border town”. The town and the borderland are efficiently themed. In this theming, naming as rhetorical device is frequently applied. Just as Ostap Bender in the *Twelve Chairs* introduces the name *New Vasiuki* in order to evoke a new identity for Vasiuki, so do the political, artistic, and touristic actors in Kirkenes ingeniously name the town in new ways, from Hot Arctic Kirkenes to the Barents Capital. Currently, a large number of such alluring epithets are in use. Many of them are, as we have seen, evocatively repeated, like mantras. In their theming of Kirkenes, the political, artistic, and touristic actors also actively display objects and artefacts. Some of the objects are larger, like the *Borderlines* installation or the Stoltenberg bust. Others are smaller, like the border trolls and matryoshka dolls displayed in the windows of the souvenir shops. As mentioned, border post replicas in all sizes are displayed everywhere. Photos and other images are also put to work. Above, the image of a globe with Kirkenes in the centre was mentioned (Sør-Varanger kommune, 1987, p. 5). Another example, discussed in Chapter 7, is the photograph of Father Filip between the border posts. Yet another iconic photo shows a group of children playing around the border post replicas of *Borderlines* on the main street of Kirkenes.³⁹ This photo was printed on the front page of a Barents Secretariat publication named *Barents Borders* (Staalesen, 2012). The photo has also been used by the MFA as an illustration for good Norwegian–Russian cooperation, for example, in a government report on “visions and strategies in the High North” (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011–2012, p. 89). The more conventional performances are also a part of this large theming of the town. Many of them are truly spectacular. The settings, like the ice-covered lake of Pikevatn for *Border-Crossing Exercises III* or the gigantic circus of *Barents Score*, are impressive. They also involve grandiose shows: fireworks, a multitude of art forms, dance, music, sport, and acting, as well as huge audiences, which, in a small town like Kirkenes, is in itself something unusual and attractive. The performances are particularly persuasive in the way they involve the audience. With the help of mass choreography, the spectators themselves enact the stories they are told, in

³⁹ The photographer is Marius Hauge.

a sort of all-encompassing political-artistic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which very much resembles that of totalitarian states.

The pitfalls of theming

In Chapter 7, theming was defined as “the use of an overarching theme to create a holistic and integrated spatial organization of a consumer venue” (Lukas, 2007, p. 1). Theming is about the fabrication and enforcement of images, the imposing of certain traits, and the manipulation of the physical landscape, with the purpose of producing certain desirable impressions of a place and its inhabitants. The theming of Kirkenes takes place through the political, artistic, and touristic border performances. Thanks to the intensity of these performances, Kirkenes, today, in many ways, resembles a *theme town* with the Norwegian–Russian border as the main theme, and with Russia and Barents as subthemes.

As Engler (1994, p. 21) notes, “town theming contains both pitfalls and opportunities”. In many cases, theming could “prove viable to a small town’s economy” (Engler, 1994, p. 14). As mentioned above, the economic gains for the Kirkenes community have been significant. The theming has also transformed the place into something apparently unique and remarkable. It has put Kirkenes “on the map”, politically, artistically, and touristically. In addition to the positive effects, however, there are also aspects of the theming that people living in the borderland may perceive as problematic. These aspects relate mostly to the way theming “precipitates standardisation and homogeneities and inhibits diversity” (Engler, 1994, p. 21).

First, there is the manipulation of the physical landscape. For Kirkenes, such landscape manipulation takes place, for example, through the raising of monuments, border post replicas, and Cyrillic street signs. The theming of the landscape may be even more prevalent in future, especially if larger building projects, such as the gigantic Barents House (see Chapter 5) or No Man’s Island (see Chapter 6), are realized. In a humoristic comment to the ongoing theming of the place, a local blogger, using Photoshop, has “painted” a mural of Saint Basil’s Cathedral on a house wall in the centre and placed a

gargantuan matryoshka doll on top of the church (Himmelstigen, n.d.). The effect is comic. For many people, however, the ongoing manipulation of the landscape may be a real cause of concern. Not everyone may like to see their town transformed into a venue or a stage. The public debate relating to the plans for the sky-high Barents House and the future “Manhattan Kirkenes” illustrates that a too-audacious theming of the town’s landscape may be contested and spark local protests.

The theming may be also be problematic in that it forces an identity on the residents. Inhabitants of theme towns are often expected to enact the town’s desired theme. In some places, they are even urged to dress in a particular way. The Bavarian-themed town of Leavenworth in the United States adopted for example “an ‘authentic’ dress code” for its citizens: “lederhosen for men and dirndls for women” (Frenkel & Walton, 2000, p. 569). In Kirkenes, no dress code has so far been imposed. Still, the intensive theming does involve certain expectations as to how the inhabitants should behave and what identity they should express. In a report from Kirkenes, the scholars Didriksen and Moldenæs (2010) celebrate the new desired identity of the place. They write that “the New Singapore is nothing new to the youth of Kirkenes”, who in turn are described as “world citizens” and “Barents cosmopolitans” living by “the gateway to the East”, in “the Barents Land” (Didriksen & Moldenæs, 2010, p. 16). As Rasmussen (2014) points out, having conducted field research among pupils attending Kirkenes’ upper secondary school, this ascribed and celebrated identity may be perceived, however, as a straightjacket by many local youngsters. Rasmussen finds that many of the local kids are fed up with being perceived by outsiders as “exotic borderlanders”. Instead of acting like “Barents cosmopolitans”, they express a desire to escape their imposed identity and be recognized as “normal Norwegians”. Rasmussen’s observation is supported by Viken et al. (2008), who find that the youngsters of Kirkenes express a certain dissatisfaction with the Barents rhetoric: “I feel that there is so much talk about Barents, Barents, Barents . . . but do we really have that much to do with Barents?”, one of their respondents commented (Viken et al., 2008, p. 37). The Russian theming of Kirkenes seems to be particularly problematic for many local inhabitants. In political rhetoric, artistic presentations, and touristic advertisements, Kirkenes is often referred to as

“Little Murmansk”, “Little Russia”, or simply as “the Russian town”. These epithets are intended to be purely positive, either emphasising the town’s transnational qualities or its status as an alluring and exotic border town. Locally, however, they are not always appreciated. According to Aagedal (2009, p. 76) “‘Little Murmansk’ is not a popular nickname locally”. He also finds that many people are “fed up with Russia” (Aagedal 2009, p. 76). Viken and Nyseth (2009) also observe a certain scepticism towards the official celebration of the Russian dimension of Kirkenes:

Some elders found it difficult to embrace the Russians that they for decades had been indoctrinated to detest. Some young people expressed alienation towards the border focus: “It is the commercial actors who put up signs in the Russian language”, one informant said, indicating that they felt it was too much. (Viken & Nyseth, 2009, p. 61)

A typical pitfall of theming is that it “neglects local identity and place-rooted experiences” (Engler, 1994, p. 21). According to Viken et al. (2007, p. 65), there are “among people in Kirkenes ... other identities that are stronger than those relating to the border and to Barents rhetoric”. This observation is supported by both Aagedal (2009) and Rasmussen (2014). One such “muted” local identity is the old mining town identity. As Viken and Nyseth (2009, p. 61) observe, the mining era “is still part of the local consciousness”. For many people, especially the older generation, the old mining industry remains a source of local pride. One may sometimes detect a certain nostalgia for the time when “everyone” in Sør-Varanger worked for “the company”. Alfon Jerijärvi, two-time mayor of Sør-Varanger, expressing this nostalgia, has described the years from 1964 to 1974 when A/S Sydvaranger employed as many as 1,500 men locally as “the safe period of growth” (Jerijärvi, 2005, p. 427, author’s translation):

The changes that took place were positive and future-oriented. We had our hospital, Sydvaranger, Sør-Varanger Garrison, the Coastal Express, and the airport. Voluntary organizations flourished. There was music, sport, revues, and so on, important things for a local community. Our strategic location with an ice-

free harbour and a closed border was a guarantee for permanent settlement . . .
here was iron ore for generations.

In much of the current rhetoric, however, the mining town is presented as the antithesis of the Barents Capital. It is associated with the mentality of “ten-tonne thinking”, with isolation and inertia. The Cold War, which coincided with the mining era, and to some extent facilitated it, tends to be regarded as a “dark age” (Agedal, 2009, p. 75).

A second identity that seems to be neglected is the national identity of the locals. Norwegian identity is conspicuously absent from the political, artistic, and touristic theming of the borderland. This is perhaps surprising, as one would expect that the national identity would be particularly important in a borderland. Instead of Norwegianness, however, the theming emphasizes an exotified Russianness and a transnational Barents identity. When people express that they are “fed up” with Russia or Barents, it may indicate that they feel that these identities are superimposed on them, whereas their Norwegian identity is being suppressed. Rasmussen (2014) finds that the pupils in Kirkenes are particularly eager to express their Norwegianness. “This still is and should be a Norwegian community”, claim some of Viken and Nyseth’s respondents, clearly as a reaction to the local celebration of the Russian and the transnational (Viken & Nyseth, 2009, p. 61).

A final major danger related to the intensive theming is that, in the end, it may transform Kirkenes into a sort of *Potemkin village*, an impressive façade lacking substance.⁴⁰ As Engler, (1994, p. 21) observes, “theme towns, highly dependent on visuals and less on substance and meanings, are driven to create replicas and faked facades”. As in so-called “theatre states”, all efforts in such places are put into the production of spectacle. This tendency can sometimes be observed in Kirkenes. For the Barents House (see Chapter 5), it was almost exclusively the value of the building as a landmark, symbol, and

⁴⁰ The term *Potemkin village* (from Russian, *potyomkinskiye derevni*) initially referred to “the fake settlements allegedly erected by the Russian Minister Grigory Potemkin to impress the Empress Catherine II during her visit to the Crimea in 1787” (Dmitriev, 2018).

attraction that was emphasized, not its usefulness. The Twin City Declaration (see Chapter 5) was also largely without any practical effect. The danger of *Potemkinization* is of course that the real problems facing the borderland may be neglected, ignored, or even concealed to maintain the façade. This danger is strengthened because the staging of the town has become politicized. The political investment in the construction of the identity of the place is in fact so strong that it resembles that of certain more totalitarian states. In Chapter 6, the parallels between Kirkenes and North Korea were discussed. There is also a certain similarity between the ongoing political-artistic construction of Kirkenes and that of Bayreuth under Nazi rule. Bayreuth, owing to its status as Richard Wagner's hometown, became in the 1930s a centre of national socialist ideology. The place was turned into an idealized model town for the Third Reich (Geschichtswerkstatt Bayreuth 1992; Spotts, 1994). During these years, Bayreuth was, like Kirkenes today, a town that "performed", and its main role was to perform. In the same way that the construction of Kirkenes today is instigated by the Norwegian Government, so the place-making of Bayreuth was instigated by Berlin. The town planning was directly administered from the capital. The leaders of the Nazi movement, including Hitler himself, often visited the town, particularly during the Bayreuth Festival, which like Barents Spektakel today, appeared as an impressive synthesis of art and politics (Spotts, 1994).

The future

This study has revealed an intensive production of border performances in the Norwegian–Russian borderland. Will this continue in future? Both micro and macro level processes may affect the future production of border performances.

On a micro level, the border performances may be regarded as a field of opportunity and a source of empowerment. The staging of the border has been an entrepreneurial success for the touristic, artistic, and political actors. At the same time, as discussed above, there are pitfalls related to the intensive staging of the border and borderland. If the theming becomes too dominant, if it modifies the landscape too much, or if it is perceived as a suppression of local identity, it may provoke a counterreaction that may be nationalist

and perhaps anti-Russian. This would especially harm the political and artistic performances that depend largely on strong local and popular support.

Locally, the production of border performances depends on a number of key figures. In all three fields, the staging of the border has been driven by a few strong, skilled, and creative leaders. Foss (2004) writes about the importance of the *person* Bente S. Andersen in the making and development of the Samovar Theatre. She uses the idiom *going against the grain* in her title in order to emphasize Andersen's role as "the classical 'hard-headed' entrepreneur that goes against the wind" (Foss, 2004, p. 100). In recent years, Lyubov Kuzovnikova has played a similarly crucial and constructive role in the *Girls on the Bridge*. Politically, Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen has been of great importance. In the field of tourism, there has been a number of highly successful local entrepreneurs, such as Arne Wikan (Pasvik Turist), Kåre Tannvik (Radius), and Hans Hatle (Barents Safari). The unique character of these leaders means that their success may not easily be repeated by their successors, if there will be any. Already, some of the key figures of the symbolic politics of the borderland have disappeared. Jonas Gahr Støre is no longer foreign minister, but leader of the Labour Party, in opposition. Jens Stoltenberg has left Norwegian politics and become secretary general of NATO. The current Norwegian Government seems less interested in pursuing an intensive symbolic politics in the borderland. Locally, the key actors are still active, although Rune Gjertin Rafaelsen has changed position, from leader of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat to mayor of Sør-Varanger. In future, however, some of these actors may also disappear, something that could have significant consequences for the production of performances.

In addition to the micro context, there is also a macro context of great importance. Here, the status of the state border itself is certainly the most important factor. By definition, the borderland is the area where the "dynamics of change and daily life practices" are "affected by the very presence of the border" (Newman, 2006, p. 150). Many studies demonstrate that reconfigurations – opening and closing – of the borders can have a large impact on the communities along them. This is particularly so for communities that not only live on a border, but also *off* the border, which turns it into a livelihood in

one way or another. The situation of the aforementioned Ibere, which used to profit from cross-border trade, changed dramatically when the Nigerian state resolved to intensify “its presence in the border area with the construction ... of a full-time customs and immigration post, intended to crack down on illicit cross-border exchanges” (Flynn, 1997, p. 311). For the Portuguese–Spanish borderlanders described by Amante (2010), the opening of the border had a similar effect. The removal of the border as a barrier put an effective end to smuggling as a local livelihood. Although the people in Kirkenes exploit the border in another way, they also depend on the border’s degree of openness. This degree of openness depends largely on the larger geopolitical situation. Russian–Norwegian relations are important here, and so are the relations between the Russia and the West, EU and NATO. Two possible developments can be imagined that may reduce the possibilities of producing border performances.

First, there is the possibility of a closing of the border. Although it is an improbable scenario, a return to the Cold War or a similar situation can certainly not be ruled out, particularly after the deterioration of Russian–Western relations in the aftermath of Russia’s annexation of the Crimea in 2014. A sealing of the border is not impossible if the relations continue to worsen. A closing of the border would mean less space for play and creativity in the border zone. Tourism may not be allowed anymore, even on the Norwegian side. Artistic performances in the border zone could also become highly problematic. Politically, a further closing of the border could reduce the incentives of the Norwegian Government to promote friendship with Russia.

Second, there is the scenario of a further opening of the border. This scenario is probably as likely or unlikely as the scenario of closing. An opening of the border would also have many effects on the way performances are produced in the borderland. An opening would clearly affect the tourism industry. As explained in Chapter 7, Hans Hatle, director of Barents Safari has been lobbying for an opening of the Russian side of the border to tourism. If the border really is opened, however, it would radically change local tourism. A border opening would, in fact, mean the end of “one-sided border tourism”, which today certainly attracts many of the tourists. Much of the drama of the

border tours, which build on the border as a barrier, would disappear. The Russian Market too would lose its current value if every Western tourist could cross the border without any difficulties and visit the “real” markets in Nikel or Zapoliarny. An opening of the border would also affect the activities of the artistic and political actors. To some extent, they also depend on the closed nature of the border. The incentive to emphasize the openness or *opening* of the border is motivated by the fact that the border still is relatively closed. The closed border makes border crossing interesting in the first place. To perform openness along an open border would in fact appear like kicking in an open door, it would be a redundant activity. If everyone could pass the border wherever and whenever they pleased, there would not be much magic left. There would not be any excitement about border opening or any excitement about the closed nature of the border. In such a context, there would not be much need for the local political or artistic actors either. A man who seemed to have understood this very well is Morten Traavik. In a programme broadcast on Norwegian national radio, Traavik told about how he and other artists and curators, after the opening of *Borderlines* in 2011, were invited to a banquet hosted by Queen Sonja in Kirkenes. At the banquet, Traavik was chosen to deliver the “speech of the artists” to the queen. Traavik chose, to the surprise of many of the guests, not to deliver the “normal festive speech” about the need for breaking borders. Instead, as he put it, he came out of the closet as a fan of borders. Traavik concluded his speech by pointing out the ironic fact that, without the border, most of those present at the banquet, including the queen and himself, would be without jobs (NRK, 2011).

It seems as if the current indeterminate state of affairs, the ambivalence between openness and closedness, is particularly suitable for the production of performances. The relatively closed nature of the border makes it attractive to produce drama about the border as a barrier and divide as well as about border opening. The border’s openness makes this drama production possible. Both an opening and closing of the border may disenchant the border as well as the borderland surrounding it. The border performances of today would disappear. The phenomenon of border performance would, however, in some way or another still be there, as it, to some extent, constitutes every border.

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