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Oksana Ermolaeva

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1 The Environment in (B)order-Making and Border Crossing in Russian Karelia from the Eighteenth to Early Twentieth Century

Oksana ERMOLAEVA[1]

Abstract: For some time before the COVID-19 pandemic, borders seemed to lose importance, although it was still clear that the world remained highly bordered. In Europe, the reestablishment of strict border controls in response to the pandemic resulted in increased pressures on the environment, the resurgence of global neo-imperialism, and stricter governance of energy resources. The object of this chapter is to explore the historic entanglement between the environment and international border-making by examining the strategies used to bring order to these frontier zones—a process I call "(b)order-making." The chapter is based on research on Karelia, a North-Western borderland between the European Union and Russia. Of current geopolitical significance to Finland, Sweden, and Russia, Karelia has constituted a complex space where geopolitical considerations have prevailed over environmental concerns.

At the Crossroad of a Challenging Physical Geography and Geopolitical Context

As the longest national frontier in the world, the Russian border extends through a great variety of environmental and climatic zones, from the Arctic tundra to forests and steppes. It separates Russia from twelve countries, traversing some 20,000 kilometers across eight time zones (Werth 2021, 623-44) with altitudes ranging from below sea level to heights of over 5,000 meters. In this physical context, Karelia has long been a watershed between the East and European West, as it has also constituted one of the oldest religious and cultural divides on the Eurasian continent. Karelia's first international demarcation originates in the 1323 Noteborg Treaty between the Catholic kingdom of Sweden and the Orthodox principality of Novgorod. Until 1809, Karelia remained a contested region in the many Russo-Swedish wars, and its external border with Finland is currently the longest Russian border with the EU: 798 kilometers.

Based on the most salient elements of its landscape, Karelia is often called a "land of lakes, forests, and marshes" (Entsiklopedicheskyi slovar Brockhausa I Efrona 1899, 24).

[1] Oksana Ermolaeva, Complutense University of Madrid, Spain, ksana27@yahoo.com.
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Indeed, on most of its territory, the Karelian Republic offers an undulating plain showing pronounced marks of glacier activity, and the land's wavy surface reveals traces of ancient mountains. More than 49 percent of the area is still wooded (the main tree species being pines and fir), and 23 percent of its surface is covered with water: over 60,000 lakes, 27,000 rivers, and approximately 6,500 swamps. Karelia's climate is temperate continental with some maritime features. Temperatures and precipitations respectively average –8.3°C and 48mm in January and 13.3°C and –80mm in July (Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation). Throughout its history, Karelia has been the site of extensive population movements—some voluntary and temporary, others coerced and permanent—with legal and illegal trade becoming a permanent feature of cross-border contacts. Moreover, cultural anthropologists and historians have considered that the region has played an important role in the process of Finnish identity-building (Paasi 1996, 6-23).

In past centuries, multiple obstacles arose in the successive attempts at delimiting a clear and stable international border for Karelia. In examining different dimensions of border-making in the region, this study first focuses on the environment to account for the demanding physical and climatic features of the region, which had an effect on mapping the early modern border and controlling it during later periods. Second, the chapter defines environmental entanglements in the Russian imperial attempts to control transborder trafficking from the eighteenth to early twentieth century and explains the active involvement of local community networks in using the borderline to fit their needs. Third, this research analyzes the changes and continuities in border control strategies and illegal cross-border encounters in the region caused by the shift from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Empire, focusing in particular on the role of nature.

Comparing the role of the environment in (b)order-making projects and border-crossing patterns in the Karelian territory in imperial and Soviet Russia adds to the scholarship in "environmentally oriented" Russian/Soviet border studies. In the last two decades, international scholars have inclined toward a more nuanced treatment of imperial legacies in the Soviet context, focusing on "persistent factors," which include imperial ideas and myths, as well as population management techniques, which the Bolsheviks inherited from the Russian Empire upon their accession to power in 1917 (Lieven 2000; Hirsch 2005; Lohr 2012; Rieber 2015). The Russian Empire also left behind lengthy porous frontiers, relative economic backwardness, and cultural alienation in peripheral areas, the latter finding themselves having more in common with the states neighboring them than with the imperial center (Rieber 2015). Thus, this chapter builds on this history to contextualize some of these findings and approaches within the specific environmental and cultural contours of the Karelian borderland.

Beyond the scope of previous studies devoted to the North-Western Russian imperial/early Soviet borders, the chapter also seeks to expand research on the diplomatic intricacies of border demarcations (Rupasov and Chistikov 2007), border operations, and cross-border trafficking of peoples and goods (Katajala 2012; Selin 2016), as well as on the changing conceptualizations of the early modern border between Russia and Sweden (Kokkonen 2011, 66-71; Tolstikov 2015, 31-55; Katajala 2017, 177-190) and cross-cultural transborder influences during imperial/Soviet times (Vihavainen et al. 1999; Ilukha 2012; Vitukhnovskaya 2006, 2021). Scholarly pursuits have provided useful insights into the northwestern borders within the framework of the Barents region's colonization (Olsson 2016), the circumpolar interstate encounters and rivalry over borders and indigenous transborder communities (Zaikov and Nilesen 2012), and the rival imperial/national/political projects targeting the populations in the northwestern borderlands (Vituhnovskaya 2006, 2021). However, existing works on the economy of border control in Karelia have generally overlooked long-term impacts of the natural landscape in (b)order-making and border control (Bazegsky 1998; Agamirzoev 2012; Chernyakova and Chernyakov 2016). Thus, the current study differs from the existing scholarship because it introduces the environmental dimension and incorporates it as a main factor of analysis.

Exploring Historical Transborder Practices Through the Archives

This study draws on a wide array of published and unpublished sources—primarily from the National Archives of Karelia—including a variety of pre-revolutionary collections from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. Materials from the Olonets viceroyalty board (1784-1796), Olonets gubernia administration (1801-1922), the city of Padansk Chancellory (1776-1779), and the Archangelsk customs administration illustrate changing economic border regimes and the role of the environment in illegal cross-border transactions. To explore border controls and transborder practices during the early Soviet period (1920s), this research makes extensive use of the following:

- correspondence between the GPU AKSSR (Glavnoe politicheskoe upravlenie Avtonomnoi Karelskoi Sovetskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki [State Political Administration of the Autonomous Karelian Soviet Socialist Republic]) and Karelian customs institutions;
- reports on the "situation with the contraband," composed both by the GPU and customs administrators; and
- contraband legal cases filed during the 1920s against the local borderland peasantry, stored in the archives of the Karelian District Customs Inspection Department.

Out of this large volume of documents, records of legal actions against the local population in particular have never before been analyzed. Additionally, this study relies on materials from the manuscripts collection of the Scientific Historical Archive (at the St-Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences) and the Russian State Archives of Economics.

An Early Modern Border: A Civilizational Divide in a Contact Space

In Karelia—and in the Russian Northwest in general—natural borders emerging out of the local landscape played an important role in the early formation of contested external and internal administrative frontiers. Located along the dividing line between the Atlantic and Arctic oceans, borders in that region were largely influenced by the split of a vast watershed into several water basins that laid the ground for some of Karelia's administrative units (*Granitsy i kontaktnye zony* 2008). Regarding the international frontiers in the region, the first official border between Russia and Sweden was demarcated as a result of the Orekhovetskii (Noteborg) peace treaty in 1323. This treaty divided ethnic Karelians between, on one side the Western Karelians, who today constitute a regional and cultural subgroup of ethnic Finns, and on the other side the Eastern Karelians, who nowadays comprise the population of the Karelia and Tver regions (Utkin 2003). For centuries, inaccuracies in border demarcation served as a pretext for both Russian and Swedish territorial claims, border violations, and interstate violence, which subsisted even after peace treaties were signed.

In 1595, a new treaty established the boundaries of villages on both the Swedish and Russian sides according to fishing water lines. Following the later Treaty of Stolbovo (1617), the Russo-Swedish border was set in reference to taxation (based on which villages paid taxes to Korela/Kexholm, which belonged to Sweden, and which villages paid taxes to the Olonets region, which belonged to Russia). However, adjustments were made after this treaty. Indeed, only then did a long "border line"—a border in the modern sense—arose. Several hundred kilometers of border were thus cut through the forests in the early 1620s. The new border spread from the Gulf of Finland to the shore of Lake Ladoga, at the latitude of modern day North Karelia. This border was physically maintained by "borderland peasants" on both sides (Kokkonen 2011, 68). Maintenance consisted in the removal of tree growth from the clearing and was placed under the supervision of Swedish and Russian border commissars throughout the 1600s. In these border zones, the local peasantry had to control cross-border traffic, and local municipalities were allowed to settle border conflicts independently (Kokkonen 2011, 67). A number of successive treaties would ensue to further settle the border. For example, under the Treaty of Uusikaupunki (Swed. *Nystad*), concluded in 1721, the border was drawn straighter and more linear in shape, as it was made to simply cut through villages, individual farms, parishes, and local entities, without consideration for local or regional conditions (Kokkonen 2011, 69). Later on, additional treaties (in 1809 and 1917) reinstituted the border as it had existed under the 1617 treaty.

In spite of these various treaties, for centuries, the Russo-Swedish border, including its Karelian strip, remained barely marked in the landscape. Border markers and border posts were used to show the official boundary as it had been ratified not only through the treaties, but also via certain religious rites. No matter the kind of marking, the border always allowed the free passage of people and goods in both directions (Kokkonen 2011, 67; Katajala 2017, 188). For example, according to the 1595 agreement, the eastern border was marked only at its most significant points, generally within reach of major thoroughfares, so as to make it quite clear to passersby where the border ran in the district and what usufructuary rights existed there. Most of the markers consisted of natural features that stood out in the landscape, such as rock faces, large boulders, bodies of water (rivers, lakes, springs, or pools), watershed areas, and sometimes even peatlands. All these were highly suitable as border markers, as they could not be interfered with by human action (i.e., moved or destroyed) (Kokkonen 2011, 67).

In 1617, records account for possibly two major border markers separating the Swedish from the Russian territory. The first one was the Varashev's Stone (*Variskivi*), which rose from the waters of Ladoga Lake near the village of Manssila. However, when the border was redrawn in 1721, that marker lost significance (Sudakov 2003). The second marker, which stood on an old trade route along the beach of Ladoga Lake in the village of Virtelä, would be seriously damaged later in the eighteenth century. It was not before the nineteenth century that new border markers (*pogranichnye stolby)* were installed, set at regular intervals in attempts to make the border distinctly visible in the boreal cover. Despite periodic attempts to mark the administrative border in the course of the nineteenth century, by the beginning of the twentieth century most sections of the border had become invisible again to local residents, with trees and bushes growing over them. Archival sources from the late 1920s recount massive unauthorized transborder passages by peasants across the "fence" (*izgorod*) that had been installed near some parts of the Soviet-Finnish border in Karelia earlier in the nineteenth century (NARK. F. P-378. Op. 4. D. 25/568. P. 220).

Scholars working on the early modern history of this Northern border have described it as a "sieve-like frontier." Indeed, starting in the thirteenth century, the Karelians were actively involved in trading with the West, through the water routes of Ladoga Lake, as well as from the Eastern shore of the Gulf of Bothnia. By the seventeenth century, petty trade (*raznosnaya torgovlya*) with Finland provided a major source of income for the majority of borderland populations in Russian Karelia (Katajala 2007). However, populations on each side of the border faced different material conditions—with people on the Finnish side faring much better economically—which resulted in a rather one-way (from Russia to Finland) transborder flow of peddlers. In Swedish Finland, these transient characters sold a typical assortment of box trade. Residents of the Kem District (Northern Karelia), for example, imported tobacco, meat, and hemp and exported fox, beaver and ermine furs, silver, tea, and coffee (Chernyakova and Chernyakov 2016). The enormous volume of cross-border trade had tremendous importance in local life, so much so that the head of the Olonets viceroyalty, Gavrila Derzhavin, became concerned with estimating its scale as early as 1860 (Derzhavin 1860).

Seasonality and Imperial Control from the Late 1700s to the Early Twentieth Century

The first border guards and customs posts along the Russo-Swedish border in Karelia were established in the eighteenth century, first on the Swedish side (in 1723) and then on the Russian side, reflecting the spirit of eighteenth century mercantilist economic policies. The first experiment with the systematic presence of a military guard occurred with the closing of Sweden's eastern border by the Swedish government in 1770–1772, which led to the installation of a regular guard post, as part of the so-called "Plague Chain," during the plague pandemics in Russia. It was subsequently removed in 1772, when information reached Sweden from St. Petersburg that the plague was no longer considered a threat in Russia (Kokkonen 2011, 70). In 1782, Catherine the Great addressed an order to the governors-general in borderland regions "On the establishment of a chain of customs border posts and guards" to eliminate the clandestine smuggling of goods (Semyonov 1859, 63). After that date, the administration of Russian Karelia—Arkhangelsk and Olonets Governor-General Timofei Tutolmin—launched a project to create customs posts along the entire Russo-Swedish border strip in Karelia. This line extended for 500 verst (about 550 km) from the Swedish Lapland border to the village of Porosozero, located at the intersection of the Viborg and St. Petersburg provinces. Controlling the border in the context of a difficult terrain became a challenge for imperial authorities, because it required controlling passages not only on land but also on multiple water paths.

The area adjacent to the border on the Russian side included 40 lakes, while on the Finnish side this number reached 47, with uncountable rivers cutting across the border. These lakes and rivers, heavily packed with large stones, offered dangerous but navigable ways for the local peasantry to get to and across the border (NARK. F. 2. Op. 61. D. 1/12). Semen Annenkov, an active member of the statistical committee of the Karelian Olonets province in 1886, wrote that

> The landscape of this border space is generally mountainous, covered with forests and dotted with wetlands, lakes, and swamps, endowing this country with a harsh, gloomy character. It is impossible to describe all transborder routes, as in winter their directions through frozen marshes and lakes depend entirely on the decisions of the travelers, who become unaccountable (Annenkov 1886).

Based on observations made in both summer and mid-winter during two consecutive border inspection expeditions (NARK. F. 2. Op. 61. D. 1/12), summary reports identified that the main challenge in controlling the border was the blocking of local land trails and water routes leading to Sweden. Solutions were proposed (NARK. F. 2. Op. 61. D 1/12. P. 16). For example, after his 1782 summer expedition, Pyotr Yablonsky, an Assistant Customs Director from St. Petersburg (Unter-Zollner), recommended the installation of an elaborate chain of 26 customs outposts (*tamozhennye zastavy*), which would be located at a discrete distance from the border. However, his proposal did not include the provision of convenient tracks leading to these border posts (NARK. F. 2. Op. 61. D 1/12. P. 40a). Later, in 1785, when deciding on the location of the customs chain between the "Swedish Kingdom and Russian Karelian Guberniya," the Olonets viceroyalty board inclined towards a much more expedient "mid-winter" project, which had been proposed by the Olonets zemstvo Court Assessor Major Ivan Skornyakov after his own expedition. His project envisioned the installation of controls at the border itself. As a result of various reports, the customs chain that was implemented in 1785-1786 consisted of one customs station, two customs outposts (*tamozhennye zastavy*), and eleven border outposts (*strazhi*) (NARK. F. 2. Op. 61. D 1/12. P. 39). Customs outposts were border stations that operated permanently. They were complemented by smaller but more numerous border outposts (*strazhi, or storozhevye zastavy*) with staff usually ranging from two to four. When equipped with horses, these outposts were sometimes called *verkhovye strazhi*. However, in Karelia, it was more common to use boats, although some stations located in marshy areas operated only in winter when the water was frozen and boats were thus not in use (NARK. F. 2. Op. 61. D 1/12. L. 29-39).

The principle of expediency, *kazennyi interes,* became a major factor not only in the customs planning and installation, but also in providing customs chain outfitted with staff and vessels. The only way for customs officer to control waterways was to inspect them by boats, which the peasantry also used widely for illegal border crossings. In response to recommendations about avoiding "unnecessary expenses," the Viceroyalty Board refused to block several popular waterways that led directly to the border and were actively used by local people for unauthorized crossings (NARK, F. 2. Op. 61, D. 1/12. P. 38). While boats used at the outposts were generally few and old, in Northern Karelia, rowers were recruited among the local peasantry, providing them with an income, which alleviated the necessity for the residents of these settlements to engage in illegal cross-bordering for business.

Long before the customs chain was installed, people resisted border crossing regulations in the area. As early as the 1770s, an extremely remote and under-staffed isolated customs station was located 200 *verst* from the border, near the village of Yushkozero of Panozero pogost (church yard), in the Olonets viceroyalty of Northern Karelia. Unable to force peasants to abide by the new regulations and to pay crossing fees, the customs guards robbed and beat the people they caught (NARK. F. 652. Op. 3. D. 5). A Customs Head Manager responded to multiple complaints from peasants about administrative abuses by noting that

> "With the spaces along local borders being uncovered by the outposts of this customs, in summer time they travel through the lakes, marshes, and rivers, and their route is even easier in winter: they manage to pass through large masses of snow and almost unpassable forests, so in every location of this border strip, the peasants have ample places to hide from us" (NARK. F. 652. Op. 3. D. 2/23. L. 28).

Frequent "border regime" issues broke out into open strife. For example, people who reported to authorities that their neighbors were engaged in contraband had their houses looted or burned (Kapusta 2000, 46). In winter 1776, to address the problem of customs ineffectiveness, a corporal who was dispatched with three soldiers to inspect peasant traders travelling from Novgorod to Archangelsk reported that peasants "turned into the forest through their secret paths three *verst* before the Yushkozero, and our repetitive efforts to catch them from the forestry ambushes failed" (NARK. F. 652. Op. 3. D. 5).

After the customs chain installation, the local peasantry continued to cross the border *en masse*. In the summer, these peasants travelled through hidden forest pathways and marshes, or they skillfully maneuvered their small wooden boats through river stones. During the winter, when lakes and rivers froze, it was impossible to control the countless convenient transborder routes people used by carts or simple skies (*snegostupi*) (Arkhiv SpbIIRAN. Coll. 15. D. 285. L. 103). Therefore, seasonality remained a crucial factor in cross-border encounters. Sometimes, "watery" or "icy" landscapes not only provided varying transborder aquatic routes but also divided the populations across neighboring provinces. For example, the famous Egyptinkorpi swamp (stretching from the Kuopio Province in Finland deep into Russian Karelia) could not be navigated during the summer months, temporarily shutting down a popular transborder connection (Annenkov 1886). Some areas adjacent to the border became fully unpassable off-season, temporarily erasing transborder paths and in effect "shutting" down the border (NARK. F. P - 689. Op. 1. D. 8/81. P. 123).

Paradoxically, some villages located further away from the border, such as Svinaya Gora, were important sites for customs or border guard outposts in one unrealized border project, based on mid-summer border inspection (NARK. F. 2. Op. 61. D 1/12. P. 40). Until the end of the 1920s, these outposts remained major "contraband settlements" (NARK. F. P-382. Op. 1. D. 21/466). Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, the provincial administration would attempt to strengthen the sections of the Russian-Swedish border that were unprotected, but local budget constraints unavoidably hampered these efforts (NARK, F. 396, Op. 1. D. 29. Pp. 32-58). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a high-ranking prosecutor in the Olonets Governorate administration became greatly concerned with the inability to control heavy contraband traffic and proposed to position a strategic chain of border outposts, so "the smugglers would only have few daylight hours to cross the border through overgrown trails and marshlands." However, his plan was never approved by the governorate for implementation, most probably because it was too costly (Arkhiv SPbIIRAN. Collection 115. D. 285. P. 208).

The 1809 Friedrichsham Peace Treaty, concluding the Finnish War (1808-1809) between the Kingdom of Sweden and the Russian Empire, added ceded eastern Swedish provinces to the latter. To the Grand Duchy of Finland were also added the Russian eighteenth century conquests of parts of Karelia and Savonia (also known as Old Finland) in 1812, as Viborg County. This situation lasted until 1917 and transformed the previous external border in Karelia into an administrative dividing line. Most customs institutions were dismantled at that time (PSZ RI. Vol. XXX. № 22838. P. 1808). By the middle of the nineteenth century, only the Archangelsk administration's customs offices still functioned in Northern (Belomorsk) Karelia (Agamirzoev 2003, 8), and their functions were actually strengthened in order to better detect and detain revolutionaries, propagandists, and unreliable elements of all kinds after the Polish uprising of 1830, which had significantly raised imperial concerns over border security in general (NARK. F. 589. Op. 1. D. 1/1; 1/ 2).

Still, contradictory imperial regulations on transborder trade with the Grand Duchy of Finland (1809-1917) remained in place, as customs and border outposts were ineffective in handling an unimpeded flow of peddlers from Eastern Karelia to Finland who refused to obey the legal regulations of trade *(korobeiniki)* (NARK. F. 277. Op. 1. D. 30/23. P. 2-4). Legislations included a January 1824 order strictly limiting border crossings to established border and customs outposts, as did an order from June, 12, 1830, on trading at Finnish fairs. The latter order also banned trade without permits. In reality, however, in Karelia, Finns welcomed peddlers, sometimes even hiding them from the police in spite of the threat of court sentences and heavy fines (Bazegsky 1998). Moreover, illegal inflows of Finnish goods increased significantly in winter, when rugged Karelian boreal forests and marshes froze (Agamirzoev 2019). In 1898, Konstantin Djakonov, a manager at the Soroka customs outpost (*zastava*), in his letters to the head of Archangelsk customs, complained that "the local police officers do nothing, considering that this is a secondary issue and none of their concern. And again, what can one constable (*yruadnik*) do in Karelia if all of Karelia uses Finnish contraband?" (NARK. f. 277. Op. 1. D. 30/23. P. 2-4).

"Mastering Nature" in Soviet Border-Making: Political Divides, Imperial Legacies, and Northern Encounters

The shift from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union had a tremendous effect on how state borders were conceptualized and secured. Concerns over security in protecting the socialist project from capitalist encirclement led to a number of radical changes in the management of border controls. Before the revolution of 1917, the Division of the Separate Border Guards Corps (*Otdelnyi korpus pogranichnoi strazhi*) of the Russian Empire had come under the control of the Department of Customs Duties and Fees, headed by the Ministry of Finance officials. This change of jurisdiction made border-making the responsibility of an economic agency. However, at the very beginning of the establishment of Soviet authority, Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Chairman of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (Cheka), proclaimed that "the border is a political divide, and a political body must protect it." Therefore, starting in 1920, the protection of the Soviet border came under the governance of a Special Division of the Cheka, which was renamed in September 1922 as the State Political Administration (GPU). At the same time, the Border Guards of the USSR (*Pogranichnye voiska SSSR*) were placed under the aegis of the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs).

When Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917, its 1245.6 kilometer-long border with Russian Karelia was confirmed as a boundary between two sovereign states (NARK. F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 6/ 27. P. 74). However, as with all other Soviet borders, the turmoil of the civil war meant that the demarcation line was porous, almost unguarded, and open to frequent violations. In the Finnish historiography, the conflict over the territories of Eastern Karelia has been defined as plagued with multiple "wars for kindred peoples" (*heimosodat*), which were fought between 1918 and 1922. Inspired by Finnish nationalistic ideology, Finnish right-wing radicals and nationalist activists sought to unite the Finno-Ugric peoples in Finland, Russia, and Estonia by expanding Finland's borders to the east. As a consequence of these military operations, a large part of the borderland population of Northern Karelia fled to Finland in attempts to save their lives amidst the chaos and atrocities generated by the war. According to some estimates, out of the 12,479 Karelian refugees *(karbezhentsy)* who left Russian Karelia in 1921-1922, 11,239 went to Finland (Repukhova 2015, 3243-3253), which amounted to six percent of the Russian Karelian population in the 1920s. A total of 6,000 to 8,000 Karelians returned home, and approximately 5,000 remained in Finland (Takala 2016, 137-138). The establishment of the national Soviet republic (Karelian Labor Commune) in 1920 (later renamed as the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic) as a neighbor of "bourgeois" Finland opened a new page in the history of the embattled northern frontier.

Like in all their early initiatives that sought to control and transform the natural environment, the Soviets lacked human and financial resources when operating in the Karelian region. In their descriptions of the geographical obstacles facing border control, the Soviet GPU and customs administrators stressed the extreme length of the border (1,320 km), prevailing harsh climatic conditions, and rugged terrain combining water, marshes, and boreal forests (NARK. F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27. P. 78). They noted that by 1927, the border remained invisible, concealed under the cover of heavy forest growth (NARK. F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27. P. 74). The need for regular on-site inspections was a challenge for border control mid- and high-ranking Soviet officials, who had to innovate as a result. In the 1920s, the majority of customs and border guard outposts were located in remote border villages. The border controllers complained that they lacked the necessary transportation infrastructure. Moreover, winter inspections could only occur by horseback on frozen rivers and lakes through a system of tract-country and water communication ways (NARK. F. P-544. Op. 2. D. 4/68. P. 83). In 1922, in spite of its length, the Karelian part of the Soviet-Finnish border featured only nine customs outposts, each with a staff of two to four officials, and a general customs office in Petrozavodsk (ibid). The deployment logic of customs institutions along the Finnish land border almost duplicated that of the imperial project, leaving long strips of the border completely unguarded and ample space for unauthorized border crossings. Thus, the switch to a new political administration overseeing the border initially did not change much in practice. The shift was merely bureaucratic.

Soviet administrators tended to generally miscalculate the impact of the harsh climate and problematic terrain in large-scale border policy. For example, the repatriation of Karelian refugees after the 1923 amnesty disregarded local conditions in favor of Soviet security concerns. Instead of implementing the initial plans of organizing the transfer of refugees through the Beloostrov border crossing and customs (on the Karelian Isthmus), Northern Karelian border crossing sites were used, since those were closer to the refugees' former homelands. However, these border posts could not process large influx of repatriates and collapsed. In 1924, at a temporarily customs outpost (tampost) in Olanga, groups of 30-40 refugees had to wait their turn for days in freezing cold without any medical assistance. These repatriations put a heavy physical and psychological strain not only on the refugees but also on the customs officers and border guards (NARK. F. P-380. Op. 1. D. 1/1. P. 10-17).

Throughout the 1920s, Soviet administrators continued to report that is was completely impossible to control illegal border crossings and mass smuggling. Moreover, these numerous hidden transborder paths through boreal forests and across waterways were only known to local people and changed with the seasons (NARK. F. P-378, Op. 4, D. 6. P. 29. P. 65). In 1927, according to GPU KASSR reports, all inhabitants of borderland villages, including teenagers, were in one way or another engaged in smuggling. Contraband circulated along the unprotected parts of the border, usually in winter, transported by cart or sleigh (NARK. F. P- 378. Op. 4. D. 1/1. P. 10-17). A large share of these goods was then traded at smuggling bases and barter stations (*hutora*) on the Finnish side.

In front of environmental and logistical impediments, the only measures able to counteract smugglers remained limited to "periodic raids by border patrols, planning ambushes along the most likely illegal border crossing routes, irregular searches in villages suspected of housing contraband or identified in intelligence provided by informers" (NARK. F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27. P.79). When smugglers failed, it was most often only after they had crossed the border coming in from Finland, as there was a greater chance of being intercepted by the GPU along well-worn tracts leading from the border to the villages (NARK. F. P-382. Op. 1. D. 24/539. P. 22). However, the yearly volume of confiscated contraband remained relatively insignificant along the Karelian border, especially in comparison with that in the marine districts of Murmansk and the Karelian Isthmus (NARK. F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27. P. 79). This disparity can be explained by the level of poverty on both sides of the lengthy and remote Karelian Soviet-Finnish border. Also, Soviet control over transborder trade in Murmansk and at the Karelian Isthmus was difficult because smugglers were much better equipped and mobile than law enforcers there.

It is in this historical context that after 1917, a new professionalized cross-border network arose. Replacing the traditional informal smuggling peddlers (*korobeiniki*) a new category of "border people" emerged in the Russian Northwest. These were self-exilés and expatriates, some of them trained ideologically and militarily. In parallel, the peasants living at the edges of the Karelian borderland continued to engage in regular massive border crossings for trade purposes, most of the time successfully evading Soviet border outposts and customs institutions. They took advantage of the inhospitable and challenging environment using unique survival traditions inherited from their ancestors. In the face of the harsh climatic conditions and isolation, which were aggravated by delays in regular food and commodities deliveries, persistent housing shortages, and unsuitable living and working conditions, border guards and custom officials often lost morale or fell ill (NARK. F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27. P. 55). As a result, throughout the 1920s, while the appeals from the central government for "combatting contraband" became more pressing, local Karelian customs officials and border guards were unwilling to address the problem seriously and preferred to send fake or blank reports that denied the existence of contraband trafficking at their respective locations.

At the end of the 1920s, the New Economic Policy (NEP) that had been implemented in 1921 was replaced by a Stalinist command economy. The effects on the border were the emergence of stricter security measures, an increased number of border guards, and the dismantlement of most existing customs institutions. In the following decade, massive repression operations were aimed at "cleansing" border zones as part of a broad militaristic mobilization strategy in preparation for future wars (Takala 2016; Repukhova 2017), and only few counterintelligence agents remained.

From the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union: Continuity in Border Control Failure

Russian territorial borders remained vague or nonexistent until the late nineteenth century (Werth 2021, 623-44). Imperial authorities struggled in controlling the border, in particular because of the environment. Their bureaucratic ineptitude and underfinancing were met with local indigenous practices and knowledge about the regional landscape and its seasonal transformations. But even when they did take the environment into account, as the Yablonsky's project did, Russian imperial bureaucrats opted for the most expedient border controls. They disregarded border inspection reports, discounting the local environment and natural landscape as a factor in illegal cross-border trade, which remained a necessity for the local population to subsist. An important shift from Russian imperial to Soviet attempts to regulate and discipline the border fit into a wider ideological context of ruptures and continuities within broad Russian/Soviet state-building projects. What made the Russian Communist experiment unique and radically different from traditional market capitalism was that political economy had a pivotal role in the aspirations to simultaneously reshape the environment and human beings (Weiner 2000; Josephson et al. 2013). Communist infusion in revolutionary practices led to an approach to the environment that combined technocratic statism and militaristic modernization, which led to ecocide during the time of "High Stalinism" (Bruno 2017).

"Classical" Soviet border protection during that time was meant to fully isolate populations to "seal" them off from the outside world. Although this model was eventually enforced through brutal repressive measures from the mid-1930s on, before then the country's newly established North-Western borders remained non-functional for a combination of financial and environmental constraints. Local Soviet republican administrators (the heads of the GPU KASSR and customs officials) admitted they could not overcome the challenging northern landscape and climate and prevent illegal transborder trade with the meager resources they had. As this chapter demonstrates, despite new, "politicized" border protection policies, Soviet border controllers continued to rely on past imperial arrangements, thus creating "continuity in failure," reinforced by severe budget constraints, bureaucratic ineptitude, and local communities that successfully exploited difficult physical terrains. As a result, until the 1930s, the geographical and climatic characteristics of the border strip remained a major factor influencing the operational modalities of the border and the specifics of cross-border economic interactions. These characteristics contributed to the implementation of a unique border regime in which state power was dispersed and border control regulations were replaced with survival practices by all who participated in (b)order-making, whether controllers or local population.

If we consider the level of control at the frontier as a barometer of Bolshevik power in the borderlands during the 1920s, the latter was extremely weak, reflecting acute regime insecurity. After that time, this state of affairs became unacceptable under the context of Stalinist securitization. Hence, starting in the second half of the 1930s, the Soviet regime, apart from engaging in mass scale deportations from the Soviet Karelian borderland areas, paid greater attention to stiffening border controls. It did so by increasing the number of border guards, organizing mobile military patrols and supplying them with highly trained German shepherd dogs, and instituting a highly restricted border zone, which was illuminated at night by powerful searchlights. Additionally, the number of Soviet border guards went from 70,822 in December 1932 to 86,559 in August 1937 (Pogranichnye voiska 1973).

Still, well into the twentieth century, the environment continued to be a factor in the ways in which borders were contested, fought for, and administered in the USSR. For example, Karelian environmental conditions heavily impacted the "Winter War" between the Soviet Union and Finland, which lasted from November 1939 to March 1940. In this fight, too, the border area continued to be a major challenge, as Soviet tanks simply could not operate in the harsh terrain pocked with basalt outcroppings and extensive marshlands that turned into "a frozen hell" during the winter months. As a result, the Red Army paid a heavy death toll, with its principal battles fought in extremely severe long-lasting frosts, in many cases at forty degree below zero centigrade (Kilin 2012, 23). It was only in February 1940 that Soviet forces managed to penetrate the Finns' defensive Mannerheim Line across the Karelian Isthmus. Changes in the border during the Winter War, as well as during the Second World War (called the "Continuation War" in Russia), entailed cartographic modifications and large-scale population movements in 1940, 1941, and 1944. Modifications in territorial lines prompted the installation of new control devices—such as electric fences—to detect smuggling, refugees, or defectors. From 1945 onwards, most sections of the border were completely closed to all forms of traffic, including cross-border tourism and transport. During the Cold War, successful illegal border crossings from the Soviet Union to Finland still occurred, as people continued to use the environment to their benefit, proving that the idea of a totally "sealed" border remained a chimera even at that time (Laine 2014; Scott 2023).

Today, European border areas are still at the forefront of an "East vs. West" divide, reflecting much anxiety in interstate relations on the continent. In 2015-2016, asylum seekers travelling to Northern Norway and Finland through the Russian Federation caused the Finnish government to fear for its border security (Piipponen and Virkkinen 2017, 518-533), resulting in the temporary closing of two border crossing points for anyone not Finnish, Russian, or Belarusian. At the height of the European "migration crisis," over 5,000 asylum seekers entered Norway and 1,700 entered Finland through the three Northernmost border crossing points from Russia (Piipponen and Virkkinen

2017, 530). As recently as the winter of 2023, the wave of migrants from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa coming into Finland was considered by officials there to be the result of deliberate policies by Russia. In the context of deteriorating interstate relations between Russia and Finland and the latter's accession to NATO, the border was completely closed on the Finnish side. In both these cases, the peak number of people crossing over the border occurred in winter, with a majority of migrants choosing to cross the border on bicycles. These waves of migrants impacted international geopolitics and interstate relations, proving again an ephemeral, inefficient, and unpredictable border control in this northern region at the margins of Europe. Past border regimes can help in a critical understanding of not only transnational diplomatic systems but also environmental entanglements on the edges of modern Europe.

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