

**BORDERLAND RUSSIANS - IDENTITY, NARRATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.** Geir Hønneland. 2010. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, St. Martin's Press LLC. 174 p, hardcover. (Palgrave Studies in International Relations), ISBN: 978-0-230-25267-7. US\$ 85.00.

The Barents Region has been since the collapse of the Soviet Union an arena for increased cooperation between Norway and Russia in particular, as well as the Nordic countries in general, together with the European Union, and Russia, for example in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR). The enhancement of stability in the region through cooperation is manifested in the 2008 visa agreement between Norway and Russia, which eased travel between the two countries, as well as the 2010 settlement of the Norwegian-Russian maritime border dispute in the Barents Sea after more than 40 years. Within the framework of BEAR, cooperation takes place within environmental, cultural and various other spheres, creating the image of mutual trust and will for cooperation.

Hønneland takes an interesting approach to depict and analyse, beyond the political level, the fundamental narratives in the northwestern Russian Kola Peninsula. Based on excerpts of interviews undertaken with ordinary citizens from the area, either endemic or immigrants from the south, Hønneland provides the reader with a comprehensive overview on perceptions, stereotypes and narratives prevalent in the Kola population about northerness versus southernness and along the east-west line, with Scandinavia in the west and Russia in the east.

Throughout the book it becomes clear that the stereotypical perceptions of north versus south are more clear cut than those of east versus west. While all interviewees applied certain attributes to the north and the south respectively, the east-west divide is perceived in several different ways, because of the different experiences of the interviewees with Scandinavians and, as interpreted by Hønneland, because of the relics of cold war narratives.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first two give an overview of its theoretical background, the concept of boundaries, borders, frontiers and borderlands, some historical accounts of Russia and living conditions, demographic characteristics and political ecology in the Kola Peninsula. Furthermore, cooperation in the region is described, interestingly dealing with a very critical approach concerning the paradigmatic challenge underlying regional cooperation: is Russia the 'learner' which is being acted upon to 'heal' it? Because of this seemingly overarching perception of western intervention on the Kola Peninsula, investments and efforts from the Scandinavian countries as well as Europe are perceived with suspicion, even as means to weaken Russian supremacy and to manifest western interests in the region.

The book explores three topical areas, how to be a northerner – distinguishing north from south; how to be a Russian – distinguishing east from west; and living in the northern environment, and the narratives relating to them, based on interviews and referring to earlier work of the author himself or other scholars. Excerpts from three different core interviews underlie each topical area which are presented, summarised and analysed, while supported by additional interview excerpts. A very positive feature of the book is the contextualisation of the

interviews within a theoretical framework. This means that all interviews are in the last section of each chapter viewed through a theoretical lens and fundamental character and narrative traits are fleshed out based on the author's own research or research done elsewhere.

'How to be a northerner' explores the underlying stereotypes of the northerners' perception versus southerners. The chapter identifies the stereotypes and their applicability very well and supports them with empirical evidence. It becomes clear that the interviewees do not base their perception on arguments, and that there is no consistency within their way of argumentation. The 'othering' of the south is a very prominent feature of this chapter.

'How to be a Russian' does not clearly present the 'othering' process as the east-west divide is not as clear as the north-south divide. What becomes clear is that all interviewees perceive the Nordic countries and societies not necessarily as bad, but definitely not as being applicable to Russia. Interestingly, the east-west discussions also refer to supposed physical features of the non-Russian northerners, for example large heads, inbreeding and the associated lack of 'fresh blood'.

'Living in the northern environment' primarily refers to the nuclear safety of the Kola Peninsula with less reference to other features of the northern environment. The interviewees regard the situation very differently, ranging from 'our experts know what they are doing,' via 'let's not talk about it' to 'our children have to move elsewhere.' It cannot therefore be concluded that the environmental situation in the Kola Peninsula as presented by western countries is perceived accordingly by the ordinary Russian population in the region. This is an important factor that could be further explored in discussions on the legitimacy of western investments in clean-up projects on the Kola Peninsula.

The last chapter 'Narrative, identity and international relations' discusses the influence of narratives on policy making and identity, summing up the findings of the book, and setting them into a context of international relations.

Although the main interviewees are all presented in the book, it is sometimes hard to follow who is whom and by referring to other interviews and interviewees, it gets sometimes a little challenging to not lose track. Furthermore, presenting a summary of each core interview after the interview itself seems unnecessary and causes redundancies in the content of the book, because the author summarises and quotes the interviews which are even printed on the same page. By doing so, the question arises concerning who the audience of the book is supposed to be, as by reading the summaries, it seems that the author tries to avoid any misinterpretation of the interviews, while he has very well managed to describe his approach in the introductory chapter to the book.

Due to the very personal style of the book, the writing in first person singular when referring to the author's research, experiences, and the strong focus on interviews, this work can be claimed as a scientific non-science book. This reviewer has not read a book like this before and it took some time to get used to the style, which seems to be a very personal account of the author and rather the call for more research in the field than the end result of a research project. This is because the quantity of the interviewees does not allow for a generalisation of the findings of the book, especially in regards to the east-west perception, as all interviewees have different approaches. Yet,

even in terms of the north-south divide which all interviewees in Chapter 3 perceive as living a 'good life in the North' with clear stereotypical perceptions of the south and southerners, cannot be regarded as a general trend in the Kola Peninsula, because of the small number of people interviewed.

Therefore, this work only presents a small fraction of an overall research topic that is very well worth investigating and which would contribute to a better understanding between the parties involved in the Barents cooperation. The author several times refers to this, not only on a national or regional level, but also on a social and personal level.

All in all, this book is very worth reading, because it gives a good insight into the way of thinking of the Kola Peninsula's ordinary population and, moreover, in a very easily understandable way. By interviewing individuals of different professions and backgrounds, the information provided is diverse and is food for thought. It would be of great interest to investigate the Nordic side of the borderlands in a similar manner to see how far both sides use similar narratives and possibly even similar stereotypes. (Nikolas Sellheim, Northern Institute for Environmental and Minority Law, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland.)