A Nonsense of Border and Ontologies in the Making: Production of Difference on the Belarusian-Lithuanian Borderland

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ABSTRACT

Although the fact that borders themselves do not reflect pre-existing divisions, but rather produce them is well established in anthropology, the particular mechanics of the border work upon the production of differences is not so often examined. It is especially true if differences and differentiations are conceived at the level of *perspective upon* difference – entailing emerging and circulating classifications and conceptions of mutual (in)commensurability – instead of the *content of* difference. The state border between Belarus and Lithuania, in many of its parts inhabited by Polish population from both sides, constitutes a distinctive example of a restricted geopolitical border – the external one of the EU – that replaced clearly formal and not corresponding to any existed cultural division administrative line from the Soviet times.

The chief research question of the thesis is the effect the state border has on the various conceptions of difference, circulating along and across it. A rather arbitrary trajectory of the border is well recognised by the people that witnessed its emergence, and the border itself is still widely perceived as an absurd phenomenon; it makes no sense. Yet, through its tiresome bureaucracy, it successfully produces an estrangement between the two sides, establishing specific regimes of (un)certainty and precariousness attributed to different localities with regard to their border-related status. Upon this alienation, multiple geopolitical idioms of two scarcely compatible civilizational projects circulate in accounts for the emerged alterity, that is sometimes vested with properties of an ontological scale. That is to say, ontologies emerge out of nonsense along the Belarusian—Lithuanian state border.

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INTRO

In Summer 2016, I was doing my fieldwork in Žagarai, Lithuania, researching local Polish community. One day I was invited to join the local folk choir in their tour to Poland. After a day-long bus ride, we arrived to a small resort in mountainous South-Eastern Poland. Following a short walk, most of us went to rest, whereas some men were determined to procure more beer and snacks in order to continue the night further. After an hour, they arrived at the place of our stay, and were met with the following exchange:

> - Finally! It's nice to see that you arrived safe and with beer!

> - Pf, easy-peasy. To go down to the disco at Vieraščaki without getting the whole shit beaten out of you – *that* would be a real challenge!

Vieraščaki is a village located 7 kilometres from Žagarai, yet since 1991 separated by the Belarusian-Lithuanian state border, the one that through times grew more and more restricted visa-wise. The person who mentioned this lovely village in such a jocular way was about 40 years old, meaning that in times of his adolescence he could catch a moment to visit it without obtaining visas that were introduced in 1994. Since then, the scale of contacts declined significantly, remaining mostly confined to familial visits and tanking cars with cheap Belarusian petrol. Today's young lads from Žagarai, having Vilnius airport with cheap flights to London or Berlin in close proximity, scarcely have any experience of hazardous management of masculinities at Vieraščaki's disco.

During my whole fieldwork in Žagarai in 2016, the subject of discontinued or hindered trans-border connections appeared quite often and vividly, being expressed differently in

different generations. Engaging with the notion that the borders of the nation-states, according to the logic that underpins their existence, are supposed to reflect their 'eternal truths', it may be said that they also produce such 'truths', generating state-related ontologies (see Green 2012). This ontological dimension of the division must be particularly valid in case of the border between Lithuanian – the EU member – and Belarus, a semi-authoritarian state pertaining to the Soviet ways in many regards, both symbolical and practical. This way, the chief aim of the thesis is to examine the production of the optics operating those 'eternal truths' – to try to grasp ontologies in the making, looking at the interplay of emotional and ideological experiences of the Belarusian-Lithuanian state border. Particularly, I am interested in the operation of the representations of the state(s) – in this case, also geopolitical entities behind them – in the area of the private experiences of separation, selective immobility and reorganisation of personal geographies, produced by an unforeseen and undesired emergence of the border as a firm physical barrier. To account for all the differences that emerged would mean writing an all-encompassing description of culture. Instead, I look into the representations of the divergence with regard to its emotional and semantic background, being also concerned with political imagination regarding nation state-powers – in a sense, vehicles of the emerged division.

Hence, the prime research question of my thesis is how the operation of the state border affects concepts of sameness and distinction in terms of spatial dimension of social life, especially as it restricts human mobility. Thus formulated, it can be divided on several sub-questions, namely: how do the emotional and semantic experiences of the border structure the perception of the space affected by it; how does the very notion of difference emerge, being assigned along the border-produced spatial division and influenced by the civilizational rhetoric that justifies its existence; what sorts of alterity are produced by the border, and how do they function in various contexts.

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Research setting

The main locations in question are small towns Žagarai (Lithuania) and Rojsty (Belarus), located 17 kilometres from each other, being separated by the Belarusian-Lithuanian state border. Vieraščaki, a large village, is located approximately between them at the very border, hosting a crossing point. In each of towns as well as in adjacent villages the vast majority of population – no less than 70 %, but over 80% in most of the localities - is Polish and Catholic. Whereas in Žagarai Polish is one of the daily languages, along with Russian, Lithuanian and occasional Belarusian, in Rojsty and Vieraščaki people mostly speak either Belarusian, Russian or *trasianka* – a variety of Russian strongly influenced by Belarusian phonetics, vocabulary and syntax. Whereas the names of these three locations are given pseudonyms in order to preserve the anonymity of my interlocutors, there are several major cities located relatively closely are related to the research, such as Vilnius (the capital of Lithuania with population more than 530 thousand people; few dozen kilometres to the north), Grodno (a relatively distant centre of *voblaść*, a major administrative unit in Belarus; population 330,000, located more than 100 kilometres to the west), Lida (Belarus, population 100,000, located to the south), and Minsk (the capital of Belarus, more than 200 kilometres southward away, population over 2 million people). Several lesser Belarusian towns, such as Ščučyn, Ašmiany, Astraviec, and Iŭje (all about 15,000-25,000 people large) are also located in the region.

Methodology

The research is based on the materials of two fieldwork trips. The first took place in Žagarai in Summer 2016, when other matters were of my principal concern, namely, the role of ethnic mobilisation in the local political system and its relations to the central authorities, as well as the influence the ensued constellation of symbolic power had on the popular political imagination. However, 26 interviews from the Lithuanian side of the border were

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collected, containing questions regarding trans-border sentiments and connections, together with the diary of three months-long participant observation. Later on, in April 2018, I conducted shorter research in Rojsty, on the other side of the border. Both personal connections of my family and the network established during previous fieldwork were used in order to find people for whom the topic. Basically, in Rojsty I tried to find relatives of the people I had spoken to in Žagarai, thus attempting to follow the extant trans-border connections. 14 interviews were collected during that field trip. The group I am interested in generation-wise are mostly those who witnessed the emergence of the border themselves, that is, people of the middle and elder generation, from 40 years and older; this has also determined my choice of informants in Rojsty. The samples from both localities are also more or less equal gender-wise. The names of my informants are given pseudonyms for the sake of anonymity. Each mentioned name is followed by the information of gender and approximate age (for example, 'F, 50-60' or 'M, 40-50') of an informant.

Theoretical background and literature review

Boundaries in general are one of the most substantial categories we operate dealing with the social world in its every dimension, including geographical classifications, since making distinctions and categorisations is one of the basic cognitive mechanism human beings operate (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 170–71; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004). The very idea of the boundary in general implies separation of self from other which lends meaning to identity (Barth 2000, 17–20).

Similar understanding can be applied to the political borders, that can be seen as a point at which state's territorial competence finds its ultimate expression (Sahlins 1989, 2). Intendedly or not, the embeddedness of the idea of boundaries in our everyday cognition is used by national-states policymakers in order to impose as basic operational one the logic of banal nationalism (Billig 1995, 13–26) that presuppose national states (with all its properties

such as state borders) as the natural unit of cultural classification. Borders provide most individuals with a concrete, local, and powerful experience of the state, for this is the site where citizenship and belonging are strongly enforced (through passport checks, for instance; Lamont and Molnár 2002, 183).

Considering this, it makes sense to pay attention to how boundaries drawn by distant policymakers are being endowed with meanings and how they are contested as well as defended by different actors in border regions (Pelkmans 2006, 14). Conceiving border as a place where the two states' border agencies work together to control their subjects (Green 2012, 575), I am interested in examining of how such places and encounters of them (and the difference in realities produced by this double-state institution) are comprehended in terms of the larger geopolitical divide.

Borders are often claimed to have been built out of an eternal truth – one of the most common being the nation, which is regularly claimed to pre-exist the bounded territory that rightfully belongs to the nation (Green 2012, 576). In the case in question, however, there is a commonsensical objection to this notion. The 'eternality' of what borders represent contradicts concrete pre-border experiences of the concrete people. In other words, we can examine how political borders produce cultural differences instead of representing their pre-existence (cf. with Barth 1969, 9–10, 15).

By acting on the idea that all people ought to belong nationally to a certain territory, the nationalist logic of the border is also reinforced. Understanding of the state-border as an institution that generates ontologies (that are '[nationalist] epistemologies made real', see Green 2012, 580) based on the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1992, 25) standing behind the state is of particular import in this instance. It wouldn't be wrong to claim that in cases when the state border signifies larger geopolitical ('civilisational') divide, tropes of the state's

cultural hegemony may particularly pretend to cover ontological features of its subjects ('Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet' etc.). In the case in question, the local and national production, imposition, and internalisation of the 'sense of the border' (Green 2012, 581) can be examined, being reflected in emotional and semantic experiences that are put into larger ideological context and described with its idioms.

Speaking of the more directly related scholarship, two contextual frames may be invoked here: regional – i.e. post-socialist – and that of the Belarusian-Lithuanian border itself. Some of post-socialist borders have already received substantial attention on the part of anthropologists and other social sciences. However, of paramount import is the political and social history of every particular border in question, since many of them exhibit rather diverse dynamics. Belarusian-Lithuanian border seems to be almost unique in this regard. For instance, Turkish-Georgian border, intriguingly addressed by (Pelkmans 2006), was a highly reinforced and virtually closed external border of the USSR, and have been slackened substantially after its breakdown. Dissimilarly, the tightness of Polish-Ukrainian border, analysed in (Follis 2012) was reinvigorated by Poland's admission to the EU. Although it is now an external border of the 'Fortress Europe' – the same as Lithuanian border with Belarus – unlike the latter it was militarised and strenuously guarded since 1945. However, similar tendencies – yet different dynamic – may be found in Central Asia, where erstwhile formal borders have gradually acquired unanticipated significance (see Megoran 2005, 2006; Reeves 2007a, 2011, 2014). The substantial difference is threefold. First, many of Central Asian state borders are not very linear, having many anclaves and crossing mountainous terrain (Reeves 2007b; as I said earlier, spatial perception of the border must matter). Second, unlike Belarusian-Lithuanian border, they coexist – but not coincide – with multitude of other important social distinctions, including ethnic and religious groups, agnate clans and so on.

Most importantly, they don't have any geopolitical gravity, as they do not stand for anything larger than the national states.

Although the border between the Baltic States and Russia has different background (see Assmuth 2003) – since during the Soviet times it was not merely formal, separating very distinct ethnic groups – perhaps the only post-socialist case that is chiefly similar to the one in question in the border between Estonia and Russia separating cities Narva and Ivangorod. In the Soviet times this two cities, located on the opposite banks of Narva river, that is the current border between the EU and Russia, shared common infrastructure and were populated almost exclusively by Russians. A valuable contribution was done by A. Pfoser, the area of whose enquiry is partially isomorphic to mine (see Pfoser 2015, 2017). The dialogue with these works appear throughout the whole text. She engages both with the experiences of undesired bordering, attempts to make sense of it and narratives of the geopolitical belonging. In a sense, my thesis may be seen as an engagement with all of this dimensions of border experience, all put in dynamic conversation in order to expose the emergence of differentiation – an aspect absent in Pfoser's works. Making a claim to describe 'the construction of identity and difference' (Pfoser 2017, 30), she basically dismisses this endeavor, refusing to engage with either the construction in its dynamics or the structural properties of the difference emerged (which is, after all, the prime focus of my interest).

The scholarship examining the Belarusian-Lithuanian border itself is rather scarce. Several works appeared in Lithuanian (e.g., Daukšas 2014) or in Polish (Cegliński 2005), concerned with border population of the region in question. However, in those works rather vague concepts such as 'border zone' are vaguely used in order to signify non-centrality of the condition in question but not to examine the border as one of the state's institution. The only book I have met on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border is (Sasunkevich 2015), concerned with the evolution of the semi-legal female cross-border shuttle trade. Although providing

with many insights on the general context, and vast information about the dynamics of visa regimes, it is otherwise scarcely connected with the topic of this study; a more detailed review may be found in (Urbanowicz 2017).

Given all this, the object of my interest is exactly the discrepancy between the performative nature of the borders and their aforementioned claim to represent essential divisions. The latter seems to be especially relevant in my case, where 'the eternal truth' of the border is supposed to be larger than merely national. In other words, there must be some even deeper distinctions – to which the status of being 'ontological' is ascribed – that are supposed to legitimise why 'they' – say, 'the West' – are classified to be so much different from 'us'.

In recent years, the concept of ontology is most often mentioned in anthropology in the context of the so-called 'ontological turn', which suggests a special reflexivity in accounting for 'radical alterity'. The main point is, to be short, that the concept of 'culture' belongs to the particular, Eurocentric ontology, and this way may be irrelevant in ethnographic account; the very nature of difference may exceed the assumed divisions, such as 'nature/culture', 'truth/lie' and so on (Heywood 2017). Interestingly, these 'other ontologies' are often seen as a sort of stable entities, pre-existing the researcher's enquiry (and generally, somewhat independent from the observer) and bereft of historical and social dynamics. Moreover, they are almost always instantiated on people, who are more susceptible to be seen as 'radically different' from a Western-trained researcher's ontology – Amerindian (Viveiros de Castro 1998) or Melanesian natives (Strathern 1980), Cuban oracle diviners (Holbraad 2012) etc.

In my case, I would like to extend Green's formulation, and examine ***ontologies as political projects***. In other words, to see how ostensibly incommensurable ('civilisational') divisions – that that are supposed to represent substantial differences in values (either 'eternal'

or 'ideal') and practices and thus legitimise the existence of the border – are constructed upon personal experiences of separation and discontinuity. In other words, to see how imposition of the state border turns similarity and commonness into difference that is supposed to reflect ontological – yet not so much radical – alterity.

I suggest, for analytical purposes, that the constituent elements of these 'geopolitical ontologies in the making' are emotions and imagination, tightly intertwined with each other.

Speaking of emotions, particularly revealing is Alonso's theorising of how imagined community becomes 'second nature, a structure of feeling embodied in material practices and lived experience' (Alonso 1994, 382). Analysing public discourses from all across the world, she selects multiple tropes, used to this end. 'Spatialisation and territorialisation' conceptualise people as sharing 'national space', produce 'national nature' and emotional attachment to it, define the territory of the state as home (p. 382-284; 386). Substantialisation presents the nation as a collective subject, as a superorganism with unique biological-cultural essence; tropes of kinship and 'shared substance' impose nationhood as moral ontology (p. 384-387). Finally, 'temporalisation' is the construction of common 'national time' and 'destiny', largely based on 'prefiguring and fulfilment' (p. 389).

Such a set of discursive tools constitutes what Malkki refers to as 'national order of things' (Malkki 1992, 25), which, I suggest, is an ultimate framework for popular political imagination, a way of typification (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1966) that shapes the vernacular perception of idioms and tropes that legitimise the national and geopolitical division in question. The 'national order of things' establishes spatial segmentation of cultures, with clearly drawn boundaries and homogenous cultural content within it. It usually passes as 'the only natural' order of things, operating under the implicit premise the world must be composed of sovereign, spatially discontinued units (Malkki 1992, 26–27; cf. Wimmer and

Glick Schiller 2002), In the national order of things the rootedness of people is not only normal, it is perceived as moral and spiritual need (Malkki 1992, 29). In my case, it may be thought the other way round: rooted into locality, people become subject of 'nationalisation'; i.e., of imposition of moral belonging, that was never there before and that nevertheless passes as the only natural one. The concept of 'natural order of things', I suggest, is needed precisely because it passes as doxa (in the sense of which kind of classification – the ontological one – is of importance) thus affecting the possible scope and directions of political imagination.

As much as in Alonso's and Malkki's texts, circulation of emotions and visceral tropes of the statehood and nationhood back and forth between individuals and structures of power is scrutinised in (Ahmed 2004). The question 'what do emotions do' (p. 4), put by the author, is what I would like to examine regarding geopolitical imagination. Interestingly, Ahmed also speaks in terms of 'imagination', referring to 'how emotional properties are imagined on national scale' (p. 2); and, I would add, as a part of the political project of construction of a specificontology. Attention to cultural politics (or management, I would add) of emotions allows addressing the question of 'how people become invested in particular structures such that their demise is felt as a kind of living death' (p. 12). To rephrase, not only the personal is political, but also the (geo)political is personal.

The imaginal nature of the political, explored in (Bottici 2014) somewhat continues this line. Since people's capacity to imagine in general is essential for politics (p. 172), their informational environment – particularly, in terms of suggested ideological idioms and developed logic of their evaluation and use – affects political imagination, defining the very vocabulary for addressing geopolitical change – conceived either as 'revealed eternal truth' or aims for collective development – the imposition of which is constantly negotiated between people and institutionalised political actors.

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To sum up, the research question of this paper may be also put in conversation with the outlined literature review. If Pfoser (2015) claims that she is interested in 'not *if* there is a border, but *how* there is a border', then I am interested in more particular interconnections between immediate emotional and semantic experiences of the border on the one hand and their conceptualisations with the language of geopolitics. Moreover, the next step is to examine *what difference does the border make* in the very literal sense, that is to say, what sorts of differentiation are engendered by this constellation of bureaucratic arrangements and their

Although the questions are formulated in the way that suggests predominant engagement with the symbolic dimension of the border, it is important to emphasise that I am concerned here with both representational and material – conceived as both territorial and institutional – aspects of the state-border, since it is precisely its very material operation and very tangible existence as a cartographic line projected over the terrain in question that establishes the spatial and infrastructural conditions for the symbolic production of difference (cf. with suggestions from Green 2017; Halemba 2017; Reeves 2011)

CHAPTER 1. MOBILITY AND SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY PRIOR TO THE BORDER

Historical context

During most of its history, no political border existed in the so-called Vilnius region (Polish *Wileńszczyzna*, Lithuanian *Vilnija*, *Vilniaus kraštas*, Belarusian *Vilenščyna*). In the middle ages, this territory was a cultural and political core of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and was mostly inhabited by Lithuanian-speaking population. However, Slavic (Belarusian and later Polish) culture dominated in cities and major towns since at least 16th c. Later, it was an integral part of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (16-18th c.), Russian Empire (19th c.) and Poland (1921-1939). Since approximately the 18th century, the rural population started assuming Slavic languages (predominantly Belarusian to the South of Vilnius and Polish to the North) as languages of everyday communication, and, from the beginning of 20th c., Polish ethnic identity (based mostly on the combination of Slavic language and Catholic belief as prime determining factors).

After the Second World War, the region was divided between Lithuanian and Belarusian Soviet republics, and its largest city, Vilnius, became Lithuanian capital. However, during the Soviet times, this border was merely a formal line and no restrictions on mobility or practices of border control were implemented[1]. Both people's short-term and long-term mobility included Vilnius (as a regional centre) and adjacent villages and towns with no regard to their formal state belonging, especially as the vast majority population shared both ethnicity and religion, being Polish Catholics.

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[1] However, this administrative border organised delimitation of the governance, that resulted in slightly different cultural policies, different 'official languages' etc.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the border emerged as a real institution that represented delimitation of two different political spaces. Gradually, with divergent political changes in both states, this state border turned out to be a boundary between the European Union and Schengen area on the one side, and semi-authoritarian, semi-Soviet and pro-Russian Belarusian state. During that time, the process of the 'maturation of the border' (Baud and van Schendel 1997, 224) took place, i.e., gradual development of the restrictive border regime. Basically, the history of bordering is divided into three parts: the introduction of mutual visa regimes in 1994 (prior to which the border remained formal in many regards), its further restrictions implemented in 2003 and its turn into the mature border of European Union that operates rules of Schengen acquis (see Sasunkevich 2015). In other words, after 25 years of its existence, suddenly emerged border turned to be the one that separates not only two national states, but two geopolitical projects as well.

Nowadays, crossing the border is relatively complicated from both sides, since it is the border of European Union, a one of truly geopolitical scale. For Belarusian citizens, Schengen visa (either one-time or multi) cost 60 euro. Due to the low income of the rural population, such expense often requires devising certain ways of compensation (e.g. smuggling). However, Schengen visa also gives access to European touristic destinations etc.; in other words, other forms (related to the project of European modernisation, so to say) forms of transnational mobility. For Lithuanian citizens, Belarusian visas cost the same, and one can be refused to receive a visa without explanation from Belarusian authorities. Furthermore, between 2011 and 2016 restriction of the frequency of crossing the border using private vehicles was active.

Social geography before the border

For many of my informants, an important part of the discursive construction of the current transformations and meanings of the border is built through reference to the spatial

organisation of mobility that predated the emergence of the border. The two most important features of this organisation are the role of Vilnius as the regional centre and minor economical differences, caused by different administrative policies implemented in two different Soviet republics. The factor of different economic policies since then rose to be paramount for many people from both sides of the border, operating profitably on it via semi-legal petty trade of smuggling.

First of all, during the Soviet times, Vilnius, located no farther than 80 kilometres from all the localities involved, maintained a significant symbolic status of regional centre from previous epochs. One of my informants, Stanisław (M, 60-65), who studied medicine in Grodno in 1970ies, described this experience thus:

> So I came back to my grandfather, to his village near Rojsty, being incredibly proud, like, 'Listen, I've got accepted to a medical school!', and he asked 'Where? In Vilnius?' – 'Well, no, in Grodno', I replied, and he got disappointed. Because Vilnius was a real capital for his generation, and Grodno was a bit of a foreign land.

As much as most of the people I talked to, my another interlocutor, a local priest (M 40-50), expressed pretty much the same notions, although combining all dimensions of infrastructural and symbolic centrality that could possibly be of importance:

> Back then people weren't conscious of that border, they just travelled back and forth as they always did <…> And those who left, they never thought about it as about real migration, because it was just a few dozens of kilometres. It was way simpler to go to Vilnius than anywhere else. For jobs, for shopping, or even to

visit Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn[2]. And now, look at youth, if they move somewhere, it's naturally to Minsk, or Grodno.

Exactly as it is put, Vilnius was also a centre of accumulation of resources and infrastructure, providing abundant opportunities for employment and shopping. Majority of the cases of extended families now separated by the state border that I encountered emerged as a result of resettlement either directly to Vilnius, or closer to it for the sake of convenience. Many people, living in Soviet Belarus, commuted daily to work to Vilnius. Many of them also received an apartment in Vilnius from enterprises where they were employed, thus relocating to the city. Particularly important was the substantial role of Russian and to a lesser extent Polish language in the Soviet Vilnius, which meant that no linguistic barrier would hinder mobility. Even the organisation of transport infrastructure facilitated choice of Vilnius for various sorts of upward mobility, as it was put by my informant whose siblings left there for studies in late 1980ies, before the introduction of visa regime, they had a direct bus connection to their village in Belarus, which allowed them to visit parents' house each weekend. After that, they only visited parents eight times during 20 years.

Besides familial connections, jobs, or studying opportunities, the administrative border was also crossed on a daily basis for shopping purposes, since slightly different administration regimes led to differences in supply. An example of a mundane operation upon differences, caused by belonging to different administrative domains may be given from my own familial history. My mother grew up in a village located eight kilometres far from the administrative border from Lithuania (yet, in general, not in the locality in question). Given that the range of articles in state-owned stores was regulated by state standards (GOST), established in each Soviet republic separately, she always had difficulties with

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[2] The prominent Catholic painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary located in one of Vilnius' chapels and vastly venerated by the faithful in the whole historical region.

buying shoes, as her foot size apparently was too much above average, if compared with a 'standard Belarusian female'. However, it was no problem at all with buying footwear of proper size in the adjacent Lithuanian town fifteen kilometres far, since the range of sizes was regulated by another, Lithuanian state-standard. In this case, one may assume that they both were based on average measurements of physical anthropologists of each Soviet republic respectively, which provided planning institutions of the Soviet Republics with the rational knowledge about variation in foot size of an average citizen and thus about the demand that had to be satisfied.

In the whole Belarus, it was widely maintained in the Soviet times that the range of various articles in shops, their quality, and general living standards are slightly better in Lithuania; this followed general conception of the Baltic states as some sort of the 'Soviet Europe' if compared with other republics. This notion was clearly expressed literally by every Belarusian interlocutor I talked to. Nevertheless, those who grew up in Lithuania also saw the difference as an opportunity to compensate local shortages, as it was told by Wiesław (M, 60-70) from Žagarai:

> I remember how we used to go to Belarus with my father, because local Belarusian beer, *Lidskaje*, was much better than ours. And in general, you could find there something there that was in short supply here, so we always tried to buy something. And people from Belarus went here for the same reason.

Another difference was in policies implemented towards the Polish language and culture. Whereas in Soviet Lithuania (more exactly, in its Polish-populated south-eastern parts) central authorities provided Polish community with the whole cultural infrastructure, such as schools, higher education, newspapers, radio etc., in Soviet Belarus official stance was to treat local Catholic population as 'polonised Belarusians' (Токць 2007). Hence, no

single school in Polish language existed there since 1948. Many of locals remained passive subjects of cultural change, especially given the fact that during the so-called 'repatriation actions' in 1944-1946 and 1955-1959, local Polish intelligentsia, as well as many other relatively educated people – that is to say, more inclined to be concerned with matters of preservation of national identity – had fled to Poland[3]. Nevertheless, on some occasions, this difference in cultural policies mattered. For instance, one of my interlocutor's Andrzej (M, 40-50) parents resettled from Rojsty to Žagarai precisely in order to ensure education in Polish language for their children. Another informant, Mikołaj (M, 45-55), now living in Žagarai, attended high school in early 1980ies and had to walk 7 kilometres from Vieraščaki, where he lived with his family, to Žagarai and back every day in order to attend Polish school.

This way, during the Soviet times, the administrative border between Belarus and Lithuanian was absolutely neglected in terms of mobility, even if enabling a certain amount of social practices based upon minor differences in policies. As it was aptly summed up by one of my Lithuanian informants, 'We used to laugh back then, passing a border stone, like, "ha-ha, we are entering Belarus now". But then it suddenly stopped being funny'.

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[3] These actions were part of larger population exchanges after the war, intended to homogenise the ethnic composition of newly drawn political entities, as the border between Poland and the Soviet Union was moved more than 400 kilometres east. Yet, a substantial part of Polish population remained in South-Eastern Lithuania and North-Western Belarus – the area that was known as Polish *Kresy Wschodnie* (Eastern Limits) before the war.

CHAPTER 2. A NONSENSE OF BORDER

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the border between the two independent states started to grow more and more restrictive in terms of its permeability. The details of this process were outlined in the introduction. Important is the fact that for the first time in history, a firm barrier emerged in the region, signifying the new importance of previously negligible and arbitrary drawn administrative boundary. What is explored in this chapter is something alike the 'ordinary affect elicited by the border and boundedness' (Reeves 2011, 906), but also in its semantic dimensions, that is, the construction of (non)sense and meaning(lessness) of the border. However, before proceeding with this subject, certain important moments have to be outlined, namely the economic condition of the boundedness that structures the production of rationality for mobility as well as generational dynamics.

Economic rationality behind mobility and disconnection

An important dimension that affects real experiences of disconnection is the economic and legal environment in which people construct their own rationalities for trans-border mobility. Although this line of reasoning is clearly distinguished from moral arguments, rational concerns naturally establish the setting – structural condition for ideational constructions – for the extant moralities of trans-border mobility.

The first important factor affecting mobility is visa fees. Naturally, it has changed through time together with adjustments of visa regimes. Nowadays, for a Belarusian citizen an application for a Schengen visa – either one-time or multi – costs 60 euro and can be done in special outsourced centres, located in major cities. Depending on person's well-being, even this amount of money may constitute a significant obstacle, particularly for such group as people on low-paid state-provided jobs, retirees, single women with children and so on. Quite often I heard complains about visa fees from people of this groups. Such an obstacle does not

prevent people from going abroad 'in case of need', but it introduces different pragmatic rationality, affecting the attribution of the very category of 'need' to the different kinds of activity. Fees, together with not always clear procedure of application, often prevent people from crossing the border, and it was even more so before Lithuania joined Schengen acquis. As it was revealed by Maria (F, 45-55) from Lida, a cousin of the aforementioned Andrzej from Žagarai she had not visited relatives in Lithuania for 16 years before Schengen visas were introduced, due to particular irksomeness of the application procedure for the Lithuanian national visa. Although living standards in Lithuania are generally slightly higher than in Belarus (which applies also to the locality in question) and Belarusian visas cost pretty much the same, similar cases occur on that side of the border as well. Remarkably, many of my Lithuanian interlocutors reported rather exorbitant Belarusian visa fees (from 120 euro for a one-time visa to 300 euro for one-year one) that simply do not match the reality[4]; quite likely, a rhetorical move to emphasise inconvenience of the border procedures.

It should be mentioned though, that there is a way for Belarusian citizens to circumvent the existing condition. Possession of the so-called Polish Charter (*Karta Polaka*) – a document issued by Polish embassy, certifying one's 'belonging to the Polish nation' – allows applying for a Polish national visa without a fee. Given the recent novelisation of the Polish law, according to which person in possession of the Polish Charter could, if immigrating to Poland, obtain citizenship within a year, its value has naturally increased during the recent years. However, exploration of the whole multitude of social practices related to the Polish Charter would take separate research. For my current purposes, it would be enough to state that many people in the Belarusian part of the region posses the Polish Charter, and fee-free obtained Polish visas are used to travel mostly to Lithuania. In

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[4] See http://latvia.mfa.gov.by/en/consular_issues/visas/fees/ ; although the link goes to the web-page of Belarusian embassy in Latvia, the fees are the same for each member of the EU.

Lithuania, the Polish Charter is way less popular – and usually obtained for symbolic purposes of signifying ethnic identity, – since there is very minor pragmatic advantage in getting it.

High visa fees were often referred to in terms of necessity to compensate them via shopping abroad. It must be mentioned first of all that there are also certain groups of people more directly involved in trans-border mobility on an economic basis: those who profit from either semi-legal petty trade or smuggling[5]. Neither of them are of my concern in this paper. The first category is analysed extensively in (Sasunkevich 2015): these are usually women above 50 years old who commute back and forth via buses on a daily basis, sometimes even twice a day, carrying various items that could be profitably bought on the one side and sold on the other, such as coffee, alcohol, clothes etc. The amounts of transferred goods usually slightly exceed what is legally permitted, so that possible failure to sneak an additional pack of cigarettes or a pair of trousers would not cause any serious consequences. Those items are often pre-ordered and further redistributed through private networks; familial connections on both sides of the border in this regard constitute an advantage. As it was maintained by many of my informants, daily earnings of these ladies may reach about 20 euro per day, which constitutes a substantial addition to most often meagre state pensions. Regardless of the fact that every time I took a bus from Rojsty to Žagarai and back I was one of the few people there who didn't belong to this group (and often a single male in a bus except the driver), it was widely seen that due to the recent economic events this occupation becomes less and less profitable and popular.

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[5] Due to the specific nature of this enterprise, a research on smuggling would require very different fieldwork; hence the subject is not analysed within this thesis, even regardless the fact that it does indeed constitute very specific and vivid domain of social life. In short, it is mainly male occupation; most often, various amounts of ridiculously cheap low-quality Belarusian cigarettes are smuggled in private vehicles through the border, after which they are either sold in Lithuania or brought further to the West. E.g., see (Crawford 2016)

However, concerns about compensation visa's expenses are well known for almost everyone. For quite a long time, shopping in Lithuania presented an effective way to improve one's consumptive capacities: a larger variety of various goods – from foodstuff to clothes, electronics or tyres – was present in various Vilnius shopping malls for better prices, due to inadequate Belarusian taxes. For those from Lithuanian side of the border the main subject of interest was and remains Belarusian petrol, since it costs twice less much than in Lithuania; hence, about 40 euros may be saved on each tanking.

However, since the introduction of euro in 2014 in Lithuania, consumer prices there grew up significantly, thus rendering the profit from shopping abroad meagre, if extant[6]. Concurrently, the decline in earnings was mentioned quite often, especially by people on state-provided jobs. Remarkable is the fact that this decrease was mentioned as a historically unique moment, despite the fact that there is no statistically visible abrupt crisis in Belarusian economy; moreover, there were much more deteriorating crises in the last 10 years, and yet they were not mentioned in any discussions related to the dynamics of trans-border mobility's contingency upon economic factors. On the other hand, the growth of consumer prices made shopping in Belarus reasonable for Lithuanians in some cases (e.g., speaking of drugs).

The important moment is that the trans-border mobility – particularly, the frequency of border-crossing – is highly contingent upon the pragmatic rationality, even if a moral dimension of mobility is emphasised. E.g., an opportunity for engagement in trans-border petty trade makes obtaining visa economically rational, which leads to re-establishing connections with relatives that were neglected for about 10 years. Namely, that is precisely what happened in case of Maria, cousin of Andrzej, who was eager to discuss the detrimental effect the border had on familial connections and kin solidarity. However, she herself started

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[6] It is still very rational to shop in Poland though, journey to which are sometimes undertaken through Lithuania in case of substantial purchases

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contacting her Lithuanian relatives again after 16 years only due to the concurrent establishment of the clearer application procedure and occasional suggestion from a friend to join some trading activity. As she puts it herself:

> Every tenth person would make a visa to visit relatives, and every second would do it for pragmatic reasons. Personal economy makes much more sense interest than visiting relatives. I myself wouldn't go there often, if not the commerce <…> 1991-2006 years, before I made a visa, they are crossed out from my life, in this regard. I didn't know anything about their [relatives] lives at all.

Even in less illustrative cases, the organisation of discourse about trans-border mobility betrayed certain hierarchical organisation of motivations, in which connections of kinship (or, in scarce cases, friendship) were subordinated to pragmatic needs; phrases like 'If I am going there for any need, I naturally try to visit my uncle as well' are meant. Regardless of whether the connection between economic rationalities and morality of kinship is presented expressly or just can be discerned, it is always of substantial gravity, even if the even the emotional and moral aspect the border is presented to be paramount.

Generational dynamics

Although the prime concern of this study is the generation that witnessed the emergence of the border, a few words must be said about generational dynamics I was able to grasp. In this case, the word 'generations' may be conceived twofold: with regard to the chronological chain of changes in general, and with regard to the multiple familial histories of gradual estrangement.

In the latter sense, the third generation of extended families – if the first are siblings who once found themselves on the different sides of the border – usually maintains only occasional connections with their second and third cousins. The emotional gravity of these

connections is expressly insignificant, even though this insignificance is expressed through various idioms: the lack of either material means for mobility or the pragmatic rationality for frequenting the other country are involved. This way or another, the gradual dissolution of connections is described, even if with bitterness, as inevitable due to the circumstances. On the other hand, all the examples of widely maintained trans-border connections involved people over 50 that tried to perpetuate their links with first cousins and siblings, particularly emphasising moral dimension of these connections.

Basically, speaking of youth, even occasional visits to one's relatives in the other country rarely result in establishing any new social connections beyond the existing familial network. All the rare cases of pertaining trans-border friendship amongst the youth were established through the networks provided by the extra-local institutional activity. One of the most perceptible examples are patriotic summer camps for Polish youth 'from the East', organised by various Polish organisations – often of a right part of a political spectrum, – sometimes in collaboration with their like-minded international partners. For instance, an acquaintance of mine, Ziemowit (M, 16-17), a high-school lad from Žagarai, has good friend in Belarus – 40 kilometres distance is in question – whom he met at some joint Polish-Hungarian 'patriotic camp', organised by a conglomerate of Polish organisations together with the Jobbik party; they met on the Balaton lake. Another example of newly emerged trans-border connection I encountered was a romantic relationship between two previously unrelated people, established upon Jehovah Witnesses' networks. Basically, it may be said that younger generations largely see the border as an unquestionable fact of reality, even if abundantly complain about tiresome procedures of its crossing. An example can be made in connection with the aforementioned economic rationality. In Žagarai, I have met more than several dozens of people, mostly below 30 years old, who, having Belarusian visas and distant relatives in Belarus, visit the country quite often, but almost exclusively for the cheap

petrol at the nearest station in Vieraščaki. The topic of tiresomeness of border, somewhat surprisingly, never occurred during discussions about this particular sort of trans-border profit.

The elder generation, on the other hand, quite often enjoys way more frequent visits of close relatives in case they are separated by the border; caring is the obvious motivation in such cases. On the other hand, social encapsulation of elder people in the countryside, caused by shrinking social networks, leads to certain lack of attention to global changes, especially on the part of those who met the breakdown of the Soviet Union already being relatively old. Genowefa (F, 85-90), a mother of Mikołaj and Teresa and a grandmother of Ziemowit, lives in Vieraščaki and is visited by her children no less often than once per week. However, during the 2 hours long conversation, she barely mentioned the state border that is located 1 kilometre away from her home, being scarcely concerned with this obstacle to mobility in her age. The only major (geo)political, ideological or infrastructural change of the last 20 years that she condescended to notice was 'the permission of religion', i.e. the abolishment of Soviet repressive policies towards religious institutions.

Emotions and semantics of the border

This way, the border, as an institution that establishes its own bureaucratic environments – in this case, the one that first of all restricts human mobility tremendously – and signifies contiguity of two different administrative regimes, has set up its own regime of mobility, which had different effect upon different generations. Speaking of emotional experiences of people who witnessed the emergence of this border, the main and recurrent idioms were those of absurdity and externality. This extralocal meaning and extralocal intentionality of the border was often pronounced by many of my informants, speaking of both details and the whole picture, as Stanisław explains:

No one ever asked us, whether we wanted it or not, they [authorities in general] just separated us. It was stupid and pointless. <…> they just made it more convenient for themselves, as usual, giving no damn about us'

The very local character of this predicament was also emphasised quite often, again, somehow indicating relations of power between the centre and the periphery:

Well, people in Minsk or in Kaunas, they don't give a damn. But here, when it's five kilometres to my relatives, and I cannot go to them easily – it's just horrible. [Maria]

This state of being unable to affect external will that structures people's living condition so significantly produces certain attitudes towards the meaning of border in general. It is widely treated as an institution of particular absurdity, regarding both bureaucratic procedures and the reasons that are supposed to lay at its foundation. Interestingly, that even after 27 years of living in two different states, the subject of the preposterousness of the border may be a topic for an occasional small-talk; I myself had multiple opportunities to overhear them from people older than 40, especially in Belarus. In other words, the state border is considered as a highly unnatural institution by those who experienced its emergence; *it makes no sense*:

They severed living body. No one would want it, regardless of whether you are Polish or Lithuanian. People were quite the same[7]. [Władysław (M, 60-70)]

Quite often, many specific ways of description were involved in order to show this unnatural essence of the border. E.g., I was often informed about the abundance of cases,

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[7] Cf. with (Pfoser 2015), where the emergence of the state border is overtly reported in terms of 'forced and violent intrusion of the state into everyday spaces' (p. 1685).

when 'a house is in Belarus, and a shed is already Lithuania'[8], or about 'a lake separated by the border' – that is to say, the border separates what must not be separated in . A vast part of this preponderant notion of this irritating absurdity is expressed through reference to what makes the border visible – particularly tiresome bureaucracy of border-crossing. Lines at the border, sometimes ridiculously long due to the scarcity of the border-crossing points[9], provide an ample topic for complaints and sarcastic remarks; in this case, made by Władysław from Rojsty (M, 60-65), originally a dweller of a hamlet in the vicinities of Vieraščaki:

> You see, I literally can hear my cousin's dog barking [across the border], but still have to spend no less than two hours reaching her house through the border-crossing point, and it's up to seven hours if there are long lines

Almost everyone has a ridiculous story to tell about how the contingent condition of the border interrupted personal plans. Sometimes they are more of a nuisance, as it is in case of one of the local priests in Belarus, who missed the inauguration of Vilnius bishop due to particularly long lines. However, there are cases of urgency, in which the inexorable logic of the operation of border provides a source of humiliation and intimate inconvenience, as it was very clearly expressed by Dima (M, 40-50) from Žagarai:

> Especially when there was a limitation on entries driving your own car [once per 8 days], I missed few funerals, because I had my limits expired back then. When my father died, my aunts spend the whole night begging Belarusian border guards to let them in.

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[8] Note the phrasing, 'a shed *is* Lithuania', not '*in* Lithuania'. A contingent belonging turns into an essential property.
[9] Besides major crossing point in Vieraščaki, there are several minor crossing point, that serve only those living in adjacent villages; in fact, very few people are allowed to use them.

These abundant experiences of precariousness and indignity affect emotional modality of relations between members of extended families across the border; here the aforementioned Mikołaj, a father of Ziemowit and a son of Genowefa puts it aptly:

It has separated families. If there are any holidays, you would go to gather together with your family, but after 8 hours at the border, you don't want anything, you are just pissed off.

As the result, alienation and estrangement are produced trough growing unfamiliarity[10], which is often seen as detrimental if compared with the normal condition; Dima from Žagarai continues:

And you know, I don't even know children of my cousins anymore. We started to invite each other less frequently on many occasions, such as wedding or funerals. Those who live here can be easily invited, and with those from Lithuania, it would be so cumbersome. We are growing stranger to each other.

As it seems, the tiresomeness of border procedures produces the effect that is supposed to justify their existence – the land beyond the border is made more and more foreign (in the sense 'unfamiliar'). Its lack of sense notwithstanding, it's crossing is highly contingent time-wise, which produces certain modality of uncertainty and precariousness, thus providing people with the experience of unequal relations of power between them and state-officials (border guards), on whose decisions the former are enormously dependent. This way, constructing various regimes of (dis)comfort, (un)certainty, and even danger, all related to procedures people often unable to affect, border as bureaucratic institution classifies space and places according to its 'national' belonging, thus alienating previously familiar places.

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[10] Similar effect is reported in (Megoran 2006, 634): humiliating procedures of body search at the border turn people away from investing in plans related to the other side of the border.

A particularly vivid example of how the state produces different regimes of certainty by its apparatuses was provided by the aforementioned Stanisław, a former doctor in Rojsty's local hospital. For some time, he had been working in hospitals both in Žagarai and Rojsty, finding the job in the former through the fact that he once studied together in Grodno Medical University with the current Žagarai hospital's dean of medicine. During the shortage of employees, he remained in Rojsty hospital as well, due to sincere ask of local administration. Regardless of the fact that is was absolutely legal law-wise, he was apprehensive about the fact that 'those from KGB keep track of everything, especially border-crossing'. Later, he was accused of professional misconduct, as he maintains, being framed by local KGB officials precisely due to his attempt to belong to both sides. Regardless of the details, the presented causation 'mobility – punishment' is of importance. After all, he was tried and sentenced to a year in prison, which, evidently, influenced attitudes expressed in his conclusion of this story:

> So is my story, and I deeply regret the fact that I remained here. But who could know back then. I made a dramatic mistake when I preserved this job here. I should have just dropped it [the job in Rojsty] and visit Belarus once-twice in a year.

This is precisely a bureaucratic production of estrangement, and this is a production of regimes of belonging – both emotional and bureaucratic – that imply a strict choice between the two and a very scarce possibility to combine these two belongings. Compare it with Daria's (F, 45-55) statement:

> My relatives from Vilnius would like to come back here [Lida], because life is very expensive there. But if they will sell their property and come here, you know, nowadays they are no one here.

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This way, to sum up, the existing border between Belarus and Lithuania is widely seen by the people of the generation that witnessed its emergence and maturation as the border that makes no sense and complicates. The only source of idioms to account for its existence that locals have at hand is the geopolitics, and it is often expressly claimed to have nothing in common with any kind of order of things that would concern local interests, as it was formulated by Dima:

So, the border is a pure politics, there is nothing human in it. Two different political blocs, you know – Socialist Bloc on the one side and Capitalist Bloc on the other, as they call it [R, LT]

CHAPTER 3. ONTOLOGIES IN THE MAKING

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how people locate, perceive and evaluate the difference that emerged during 27 years of the existence of the state border; in other words, what properties are attributed to what kind of difference using what kind of rhetoric. The interest in 'how people see what is on the other side' does not entail detailed examination of the content of each 'other side' as it is perceived – especially given that the perception varies – but the scrutiny of the very perspective: what structural properties of human condition are determined by virtue of being 'the other side'.

Since the most important and primary feature through which the emerged difference is discerned is the belonging to one or the other nation-state, the majority of conversations about this divergence were put in terms of discussions about the states, comparing differences in policies and ideological projects they are aspired by; similarly to the similar case, the discursive landscape of the border is shaped by polarized imaginations of political space (Pfoser 2017, 28).

Although personal experiences of relations with different sorts of state institutions, ideological stances and preferences varied across my interlocutors, – that is to say, some people in Belarus liked their state and some not, and it is the same with Lithuanian citizens – the general idiomatic array for deliberations on the subject, as well as the logic they were organised along, was pretty much the same. There are two substantially (if not radically) different political projects at hand, that could be compared and evaluated with regard to their advantages and shortcomings. In case of Lithuania, Europeanisation as a project is sometimes ever reported to permeate social field and be wedded to personal lives (see Vonderau 2007). That is to say, in case of Lithuania, the main political aspiration of the whole nation as a collective moral subject (as it is purportedly intended by politicians and used in political

discourses) is 'to become European', referring to a vague set of values, such as human rights, individual freedom, associated with them high living standards and so on. Aspirations of Belarusian state ideology, on the other hand, however opaquely they may be sometimes voiced, are more context-dependent and susceptible to technocratic trajectories, but may be generally described as a project aimed against neo-liberal transformations and abundantly using idioms paternalistic relations between the state and its subjects, as well as preservation of Soviet legacy in general.

However, it is not my aim to discuss the content of the 'European' and 'neo-Soviet' projects here in details, since their local contours and gravities are subject to separate research (Pfoser 2015, 2017 is an example of such). My aim is instead to see how the idioms of these projects' discourses are utilised in the construction of differences ad hoc.

Two different ways

The relations between 'a person' and 'the state' here and both 'here' and 'immediately abroad' as well as their effect upon human condition were thus for my informants the organising motif for contemplations about the difference between them and those who they considered countrymen 28 years ago.

Since the understanding of previously shared political system is quite clear, these projects are often conceived as a divergence, manifestation of either weirdness (labelled so as the result of estrangement from the previous chapter) or 'normality' ('normality' as an aspiration and subject of desire; cf. Fehervary 2002; Greenberg 2011), depending on informant's ideological stance.

Quite a vivid case is the story of Danuta (F, 45-50), a mother of the aforementioned Ziemowit and a wife of Mikołaj. She once participated in some official delegation of the

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local municipality, visiting celebrations of Belarusian independence day. She was very much impressed by the event, both positively and negatively:

'We were on that official event, and the first toast was 'let's drink for our Baćka!'[11] and you know, no one even winked, all stood up and drank! That was really creepy. And they served big shots of vodka, and we two, as women, we didn't want to drink so much, so we sipped just a little bit, and the host was outraged, like, 'what, don't you respect our president!?'. That was really creepy'. It went more relaxed later, but initially, I was shocked. But later, the whole day was precisely according to the schedule, minute to minute. That was super, after a fashion, but these toasts for the president – that was weird.

Another example of similar comparison, provided by Kolia (M, 40-45), a dweller of Rojsty and good friend of Dima from Žagarai – one of the few of pertaining trans-border connections of friendship and not kinship that I met in the field – emphasises the modality of relations between the state and its subjects even more clearly (cf. Thelen, Vetters, and von Benda-Beckmann 2017), introducing such subjects as care and patronage:

Our elder brothers and sisters, those who moved, they stuck in Vilnius back then, receiving apartments for free and so on. And us, who came back from the army when the USSR collapsed, we wouldn't survive there, we would have to figure out how things works. Like, in Žagarai, they built no single block since early 90ies, only those who had money built their own private houses. Meanwhile, here in Rojsty, you can see, they build and build, there are a lot of new blocks. So we wouldn't survive there.

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[11] *Baćka* (Belarusian or Russian provincial for 'father' or, in a sense, 'patriarch') – a nickname of Aleksandr Lukašenka, Belarusian authoritarian president. Interestingly, quite rarely used by Belarusians themselves, especially nowadays.

To speak more broadly, what is in question are changes of landscapes for agency and state gridding (cf. Jansen 2014), post-socialist transformations or their lack. Important moment is that these changes are often put in terms of geopolitical projects, images of aspiration and desire, that are comprehended within the geopolitical terms. The European project – by virtue of being a deviation from the erstwhile Soviet condition – is mentioned mostly in such context. The aforementioned Władysław from Rojsty puts it in a rather fatalistic way:

> One guy from Žagarai told me that Europe didn't give them much. It just showed them promise and then gave nothing. That's what they say, and that's true. Speaking of Lukashenka, although I myself dislike him, it's very good that we have order, no crimes. And they have only promises.

Another interlocutor, Daria, while describing the experience of her nephew from Lithuania, who earns money in the UK and Germany, conveyed his words in the following way: 'Yes, we are Europe not. But with our salaries I just cannot provide for my family'. It is a clear frustration out of discrepancy between the image of aspiration and reality; more precisely, a picture of frustration, presented to me as an example of changes that happened 'on the other side'. However, I met very similar dissatisfaction with the 'domestic condition'.

This particular woman, Daria, being highly Eurosceptic and optimistic towards the conditions in Belarus, provided me with abundance of illustrations of the disastrous nature of that changes – i.e. of 'becoming Europe'. Whereas some of them, like that presented above, are evidently based on the very real experiences of vexation and disheartenment, some other

may be seen as more inconsistent [12], following the line of disappointment in the Europeanisation as a project of substantial betterment of human condition:

> And when I came to Vilnius [after 15 years of absence], expecting huge changes, as they are the EU now, I saw that it's just more and more ruins in the city. Whereas our city has been refreshed and renewed, they only fall in a decay.

Some other examples of negative changes given by Daria were even more colourful. For instance, she limned the story about the 'economic police' operating on Vilnius streets in the middle 2000s, that checked large bags and suitcases looking for Belarusian goods (allegedly brought illegally) as well as inspected smokers should they have been smoking smuggles Belarusian cigarettes and so on. For the record, none of Vilnius locals I know was able to confirm this story. However, regardless of what was the source of this narrative, important is the notion of particularly precarious and uncertain condition of a person being abroad, exposed to 'the other order of things'.

This changes in the environment are often seen as ridiculous and unnatural. To emphasise: although the examples provided contain references to 'the condition of the other side', it is not necessarily so. I have met people living both in Belarus and in Lithuania who treated precisely the conditions 'at home' as idiotic, dissatisfying and ridiculous, whereas valuing the opposite experiences[13]. However, the next example – provided by Daria again – particularly emphasises the production of alienation and divergence:

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[12] That is to say, explicitly contradicting my own experience of growing up at the very same border. Naturally, this does not render the examples in question less valuable.

[13] However, no one was too much fascinated by Lithuanian condition, since there are plenty of countries more suitable for representation of the prosperous West. No person living in Belarus was exclusively optimistic about it as well.

So I come to Vilnius, and there is no single Soviet [i.e. Cyrillic[14]] letter anymore. Everything is in Lithuanian exclusively, so you wouldn't figure out where the bus goes, how it goes. Why do they need such a stupidity, can you tell me? <…> Some of them don't even understand Russian anymore! [Daria]

Some of my informants from Lithuania have structurally similar experiences. Moreover, if Daria went to visit relatives, with whom she still stays on the same page regarding political opinions, then Wiesław, living in Žagarai, reported even more dramatic divergence:

I have relatives in Belarus, but we weren't in touch for 20 years. And recently I went there, and my cousin, she was looking on me somewhat suspiciously, since I am from NATO-member county and so on. It's such a stupidity, of course, to believe that there may be any hostility. But it seems that they believe.

Ethical formation and false ontologies

Very important is the assessment of changes with regard to their correspondence to the 'real nature' of people undergoing this changes. In many conversations, belonging to the certain environment marked by particular 'civilisational project' was seen as affecting more essential properties of human existence. As it seems, it is the ethical dimension of civilizational projects what inspires such conception of their effect. For instance, Europeanisation can be treated as a a conscious endeavour on the scale of policy-making; in a sense, a project of ethical formation (you have to become 'European' in order to live like Europeans). Using the words 'ethical formation', I draw on contribution of J. Zigon, who

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[14] Note the attribution and hence the connection between cultural traits and civilizational aspirations. During the Soviet times, every inscription in public spaces in Vilnius was given both in Russian and in Lithuanian.

refers to personal ethics 'a conscious acting on oneself either in isolation or with others so as to make oneself into a more morally appropriate and acceptable social person not only in the eyes of others but also for oneself' (Zigon 2008, 165). If seen within larger framework of relations of power, the notion of political project of ethical formation may be comprehended as a programme, a suggestion of policy-makers, an appeal to the collective moral subject in order to inspire volitional cultivation of desired individual properties, where the desire is driven by idioms of civilizational values. In other words, a collective attempt to overcome what P. Sztompka called 'civilisational incompetence' of Central and Eastern Europe (Sztompka 1993). 'Europe', this way, is both political and moral category (Klumbytė 2011, 851–52).

Although it was rarely stated expressly, it was often given to understand during the interviews that belonging to a different geopolitical project – or even merely to a territory involved in the different political project – may render people different, and in certain cases substantially different. Particularly crucial is that the dynamic abounds in the descriptions of this difference, which is clearly put in terms of emergence, change and deviation. One of my informants, Władysław (Rojsty), lamented the moral choice of his relatives living near Žagarai – a young family who don't want to have the second child:

> To live for our own pleasure' they say! That's clear bullshit, of course, but
> that's how they would like to live now, they are now Europeans!

As it is clearly seen, the project of 'becoming Europeans' is quite often described as a failed or at least disappointing project if estimated with regard to its promises and real outcomes[15]. Interestingly enough, its detrimental effect upon human condition was often expressed through idioms of kinship, cohesion and solidarity, portraying a coherent chain of

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[15] To emphasise, this study is focused on people who witnessed the emergence of the border, i.e. mostly older than 40. The picture may (and will) be different for the youth.

alienating and individualising changes that affect the very ontology of the human being, as it was put by Dima from Žagarai:

> 'Well, I can travel to Europe, to work there. To earn some money. My brother works in Norway, for instance. That's nice, he can earn really big money. But his children grow without father – is this good? That what Europe has brought to us. Families are falling apart, you know. First the border, then this.'

The very similar accounts of border as a factor of substantial change in relations between familial morality and pragmatic reasoning – in a sense, account of a perceived neo-liberal rationalisation of the 'European' terrain – is provided in (Pfoser 2017, 39). As a side remark, it may be commented with regard to the ideals presented in (Alonso 1994; Malkki 1992; see introduction), concerning imposition of certain tropes of kinship and rootedness as a part of internalisation of nation-state ideologies. In a sense, a change in symbolic locatedness and imposition of common moral ontology of the collective subject – the nation – goes together with the abrupt cut of previously established ties phrased in terms of kinship as well.

Although negative references to the outcomes of the 'project of Europe' were relatively more frequent, the same arguments can be applied to the other side of the geopolitical encounter. Important is their structural similarity: notions of the failed aspirations of one of the two projects, the collision of which constitutes the border, circulate back and forth along it. The difference lies in the fact that the 'European project' is often seen as a departure from the previous condition, whereas the essence of its Belarusian alternative lies in the preservation of what was deemed good from the Soviet legacy. This way, it is personal attitudes to change, transition and agentive betterment what often determines ideological stances that result either in nostalgia and resentment or in frustration with the stagnation. In

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other words, dissatisfaction with Belarus was often put precisely in terms of the lack of so much needed change, as in case of the aforementioned Stanisław:

But think yourself, what normal person would want to remain in Belarus? Every young person with some brain would think about emigration. I mean, why am even telling you this, you know it all, as you have left yourself. This Soviet nightmare remains here as it was, so it's only rational to leave.

And conversely, if Belarus is evaluated high in ideological terms[16], it is precisely due to the absence of changes that occurred on the other side, as it was put by Kolia from Rojsty:

'My niece from London writes me on Viber, tells what's going on in London, that all the people are super friendly and smile, unlike us. She is a true patriot though, she went to Minsk, visited Khatyn[17], Museum of Great Patriotic War. She was so amazed that the memory about the war is kept in so high regard in Belarus. The only problem that people here are grim'

A very important moment is that these changes are sometimes seen as somehow contradicting to the true nature of the people in question, an abnormal deviation, contorting the essence of otherwise commensurable and comprehensible human beings; a false ontology[18]. It is particularly so if they are marked by the Huntington-like rhetoric of

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[16] Given the history of Belarusian state-building, it could be seen differently, either through the lens of the official state ideology – a very specific Soviet-oriented variety of patronising authoritarianism, heavily influenced by Russian culture – or through the idioms of liberally inclined ethnic nationalism; the latter, however, is not really widespread in province (particularly in Polish-populated province!), despite its growing popularity in the capital.

[17] A memorial that was erected to commemorate more than 150 dwellers of the village Khatyn that were burnt alive by Nazi punitive troops in 1943. Generally, the Soviet variety of memorialisation – with much more emphasis on glorification of the winners than of commemoration of the victims – of the Second World War constitutes a very important part of the official ideology of the Belarusian state.

[18] That is to say, an ontology that is evaluated as false, not meaning that it is abstractly false in general.

civilizational clash and informed by the discourse of recent geopolitical events, as it was expressed by Dima (Žagarai):

> [recalling his times in the Soviet Army, spent in Ukraine] Well, they now have deviated, their authorities have a creepy course, at some moment they went in a very wrong way. But I always adored Ukraine, and I hope they will sort thing out.

Although the recent events in the Easter Ukraine naturally constitute very different subject, they are mentioned here for a reason. After the occupation of Crimea and the beginning of Russia-inflamed war in Eastern Ukraine, the whole discursive field of geopolitics – especially as it is portrayed in Russian television, which is widely observed by my informants from both sides of the border. As it was aptly formulated in (Yurchak 2014), the main recurrent idiom for accounting for these events in Russian media was the 'idiom of betrayal'; that, naturally, prompts the perpetuation of the notions of false ontology. Similarly, N. Klumbytė, describing discursive fields of Lithuanian politics, indicates that many of those who supported nationalist pro-European case tended to see the Soviet period 'as a historical parenthesis, that is, as a deviation from the normal, as lost years' (Klumbytė 2011, 844). What is emphasised is that behind this mist of false ontology, 'they' in reality are often on 'our' side, regardless of how this 'other side' is conceived; an nice example was given by Kolia from Rojsty:

> 'My brother-in-law lives in Vilnius, and you know, lots of his Lithuanian friends, who visit Days of Russian Culture in Vilnius together, they are solidary with him, they all carry Russian flags, sing, rejoice. There are so many people there every time. Lithuanians, especially if drunk, would shout 'Go Russia!'

Speaking of the origins of these negative attitudes towards European projects may be explained through the notion of nested peripheralisation, suggested in (Pfoser 2017). On the one hand, it's an edge of Lithuania (contingently happened to be very close to its capital), and on the other, these are Lithuanian Poles – a group that could hardly be called a beneficiary of the post-socialist transformations, namely of the establishment of largely nationalism-driven 'ethnic democracy' (Dambrauskas 2017). Preponderance of Russian and Belarusian media in the locality provides a convenient access to the counter-European idioms for discursive construction of dissatisfaction and resentment.

A particularly inspired – and, interestingly, also presented after a reference to the Ukraine – example was given by Daria; a passionate contestation of Europe as a site of authentic modernity (cf. Chakrabarty 2008):

> [after describing Ukraine and how beautiful is Belarus in comparison] And I told my children: don't think that it's better somewhere in Cyprus, on elsewhere in Europe. Maybe some places are made to be representative, but otherwise, I am sure that it must be the same poverty and devastation.

Again, to emphasise: although critical attitudes towards European project are more frequent, Belarusian project may be treated as a misleading, false ontology as well. In such case, it is more often phrased not in terms of unnatural deviations, but in terms of some sort of remaining spell, a mystification that obscures recognition of the truth, as it was formulated by Teresa (F, 55-60) – sister of Mikołaj and a mother of Ziemowit from Žagarai, who met me visiting her elder mother Genowefa in Vieraščaki:

> 'It is just laughable, how Belarusian believe what their president says, about the order. I mean, I am being here [in Belarus] often, and what I see is the disarray'

Alterities of various sorts and emergent incommensurability

Such a condition creates a difference in 'ways'; a difference out of necessity. The moment the 'ways' as a means of adaptation are internalised, they become a property of ontological kind, of more substantial features of a person (group of people, defined through civic belonging; the latter develops into civilizational belonging) than mere learned habit to behave in this or that way due to functional necessity.

An interesting example can be given from my conversation with Stanisław, with whom we also discussed possibilities of his help for searching some more informants in Rojsty:

> People here in Belarus are afraid of everything. It is rooted in all those changes of power, when it was first Russia, then Poland, then Lithuania for a while, then the Soviets came. Since then, I assume, our parents always taught us: *"God forbid you will ever meddle with politics! Never say anything against authorities!".* ['My topic is not political though', I replied] Well, you see, it is really so, but how to prove this to them?'

What is exemplified in here is a sort of a state-effect of a production of docile bodies; the point is, again, that it is seen – at least by some of my interlocutors – as a historically contingent subject of either cultivation or liberation from, and yet simultaneously as an ontological property of a person.

Another time I heard similar contemplations from Teresa, as I met her when she just dropped by at her mother's in Vieraščaki going from Žagarai to tank her car in Belarus. Earlier that day, I was stopped in Vieraščaki by Belarusian border-guard, since the village is located in the so-called border zone; however, nothing but possession of a valid ID is required to enter it. Nevertheless, quite an obnoxious border-guard – wearing no uniform and

just having shown his ID for a moment – interrogated me on the street for about a half of an hour, questioning why am I here and what am I doing and by all means suggesting my crucial dependence on his good will. Despite an error of revealing my real background and intentions – I guess it could have ended way earlier if I had tried to pass for a grandson visiting his granny – I was finally released. Few hours later, I was sitting at Genowefa's house, discussing this accident with Teresa:

> 'It's usual Belarusian stupidity. They [authorities] want to make people be afraid of their own shadow, to instil fear, so people would be scared of the power <…> It's a deliberate position, to make everything super official and full of formalities so that people would be obedient <…> Here [in Belarus] is still no real freedom, since those [Soviet] times, still no, so people are apprehensive about everything'

In this case, docile bodies are (re)produced as a result of preservation of the old 'ways'; yet the divergence alienates someone from 'the other side' from a possibility of empathic comprehension. Another example, however, suggests the possibility of the change of certain ontological features of a person – those of a visceral kind, the mother tongue – attributed to the conscious operation of political actors guided by the aim of ethical formation of subjects suitable to the civilizational project. For those unaffected such change only intensifies alienation, as it was expressed by Daria:

> [Speaking of her niece] Her children are speaking Lithuanian between each other. Can you imagine, they go to Lithuanian school, and they are forbidden to speak Russian between each other. Everything is exclusively in Lithuanian. Although they are from Russian-speaking family, they [authorities] made Lithuanian their mother tongue.

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It is particularly important to pay attention how different varieties of alterity are contextually localised differently using various distinctions, provided by discourses of either ethnic or civic belonging. As an example, several quotes from my conversation with the aforementioned Kolia (Rojsty) may be given. Firstly, he emphasises sameness between people in Rojsty and Žagarai. Regardless of what it is based upon – ethnic division is mentioned, and commonality of languages and history is likely meant – of particular importance are supposed common views; a commensurability is looked for:

[Speaking of anti-Russian trends in Lithuanian politics] That they wanted to build a high fence to separate themselves from an aggressor, since Belarus is mostly on Russia's side. That's just politics, people mostly laugh about it though. Like, I talked to a lot with people from Žagarai, and they mostly ridicule their authorities, of course. They understand us very well. But Lithuanians, those, true Lithuanians, they believe it

Further on, in slightly different context, the dichotomy acquires more local dimension, and the sort of difference similar to what was previously attributed to the long lasting ethnic division is now translated upon the recent distinction, established by the state-border. Nevertheless, it is treated as contingent and thus not substantial:

'They are told that there is no freedom in Belarus; of course, they in Žagarai understand what it's about, they know that it's a poppycock… However, people in Žagarai, sometimes look condescendingly at as. Like, we have good salaries, we live better., we have better ways of living. It may be somewhat so, but not really. Previously, we had lesser range of goods, but now you can find every article you want in Minsk. So they shouldn't really brag so much.'

Continuing his comparison, Kolia – involved in certain musical activities on both sides – describes the condition of Žagara's newly furbished musical school; interestingly he mentions not only 'new quality equipment', but also 'way better standards of training', concluding with the remark that 'well, perhaps they are different people, after a fashion'.

This notion of 'different people' may be examined with regard to the nature of this difference. For instance, discussing the idiotic attitudes of the majority of Lithuanian politicians, Mikołaj – son of Genowefa and brother of Teresa – commented as follows: 'You see, the whole entirety of their conception of the world is absolutely differen*t*', implying indeed an incommensurable difference; a difference in kind. In certain contexts, the similar phrasing was applied to the distinctions established by the state border; that is to say, to the difference the coming into existence of which was witnessed by the people in question:

'I don't have many friends in Belarus, but we have business connections with them. *They are different people now, and they think differently now*. There are always problems with them, in terms of business, with their bureaucracy. And in general, they have very different approach to human relations'. [Wiesław, Žagarai]

This notion of 'different thinking' does signify much more substantial difference than that merely contingent on the environment. Nevertheless, it is precisely mundane practices established by the state's bureaucratic apparatuses that induce the emergence of this perception of the incommensurable difference. Similarly to Wiesław, Nina (F, 35-40) – living in Lida and being second cousin of Andrzej from Žagarai – had an experience of business connection with 'the other side', vicarious as it may be. Describing the situation, she knew that I had received her contacts from Andrzej, and hence referred to me as if I was Lithuanian, even being aware of my expressly non-Lithuanian name and surname; it is important in the

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sense that it was not ethnic but civic distinction – as she assumed myself being a Lithuanian citizen – what mattered for her in the context of that classification:

'My husband works for a Lithuanian firm, and you know, it's not always easy for him. Sorry, don't take it personally, but I mean that your brains are organised differently and weirdly. <…> I mean, if you establish an enterprise in Belarus, you must understand that things are not done here in Lithuanian way, but only in Belarusian way'

The most remarkable here is the fact that what was referred to by 'things' were particularly tiresome bureaucratic procedures related to the activity of the firm. In fact, Nina defended these procedures – treated by Lithuanian owners as a stupidity – as a part of the specific internalised order related to the national belonging. It seems rather significant that the most expressly the topic of difference – in a sense, of an emerged difference in kind rather than in degree in particularities – was pronounced exactly by people like Wiesław and Nina, who had business relations with foreign peers. Operational logic, developed in the course of adaptation to structural environments – established by distant policy-makers – that condition modality of action, their entailed amount of agency etc. has created a possibility for the difference organised by the arbitrary and senseless state-border to be rendered as ontological alterity, as a result of failed attempts of mutual comprehension. This is a difference in kind, even if stemming from habits, not in degree or adaptive particularities.

Apparently, different differentiations are invoked in different contexts; identification is situational, and so is the perception of counter-agent in case of every reference. Quite possibly that discussing Norwegians, Wiesław would agreed that they have even more 'differently organised thinking' than his acquaintances from 30 years ago leaving in Rojsty. Nevertheless, in certain occasions the notion of precisely this, ontological alterity was

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allocated along the contours of moral community of the nation, embodied in the state border. The conclusion, if put very simply, is that abundant notions of absurd and senseless border notwithstanding, the notion of structurally distinct human ontologies – or, more precisely, a perception of difference as difference of an ontological gravity – sometimes ensue from these senseless divisions.

CONCLUSION

The state border between Belarus and Lithuania, despite being one of the many state borders that came into existence after the breakdown of the Soviet Union under very similar historical circumstances, possesses certain features that make it rather distinctive in the region. Initially drawn as an administrative line between Belarusian and Lithuanian Soviet Republics after the Second World War, the state border did not restrict mobility of the locals – predominantly Catholics of Polish ethnicity from both sides of the border – in any way, and did not correspond to any antecedent cultural division, going through the middle of the historical Vilnius Region.

This way, the very presence of the border and its bureaucracy produces a strong and not easily surmountable barrier that has emerged in the area. Often constituting unclear visa regimes and exasperating procedures, border crossing is often perceived by locals as extremely tiresome. Whereas people of younger generations consider it as a given fact of reality, for those who witnessed its emergence having previously established social networks and patterns of mobility, the border is characterised as an absurd phenomenon, arbitrarily drawn in someone else's interests. This way, regardless of multiple (and not exclusively negative) practical implications and 27 years of its existence, the border still makes no sense. The lack of a clear understanding of (not to mention agreement with) the process by which abstract delimitations are invested with very practical differences (see Lamont and Molnár 2002) naturally perpetuates this perception.

Although drawn rather randomly, the border, signifying the novel belonging to the two independent states, began to produce difference. The main mechanism of this process is, I argue, alienation and the production of estrangement. Multiple bureaucratic arrangements, related to the procedure of crossing the border, structure various spaces and activities,

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marking them with different regimes of (un)certainty and dependency. The space of one's 'own' nation-state is constructed as 'more secure', where one is less dependent on factors one cannot control. This basically binds people to the territory externally rendered as their 'own' in terms of the nation-state, surreptitiously reshaping previously established senses of places along the contours of nation-state. Interestingly, there exists a dialectic cooperation. In fact, visas (and in general, one half of the whole border bureaucracy) that are introduced by one state, simultaneously induce attachment to the other state on the part of its subjects, merely through the way the barrier affects regimes of certainty and precariousness.

This production of estrangement furtively eradicates threads of emotional connections that existed across the border between friends and relatives. If 'the world hangs on a thin thread of conversation' (Orsi 2007, 169), then the border in question gradually severs them by divorcing them from other social contexts, thus rendering the moral task of maintaining trans-border connections more and more intentional, deliberate, and tiresome, as well as less incorporated into routine social fabric. Hence, two different worlds are produced. Accordingly, a certain dynamic of the naturalised division may be discerned, and it is exactly what is otherwise acknowledged as ridiculous, unnatural, and benefiting extralocal actors, that is being naturalised. In a sense, the notion of ontology, abundantly used in the second half of this thesis, is a way to address the dynamic of this naturalisation.

A particularly important moment is that the border in question, nonsensical as it may be, simultaneously represents particularly symbolically charged division – it is the border that separates two different civilizational projects: Europeanisation on the one hand and preservation of the Soviet legacy on the other. At least one of this projects – Europeanisation, as it circulates in Lithuanian public discourses – is visibly laden with idioms of ethical formation: to become European means to stop being post-Soviet, assuming certain set of values, moral properties and civilizational aspirations, such as human rights, individual

liberties and attended material living standards and economic moralities. The other one, even if often pronounced with much lesser resolution, mostly due to the lack of any consistently formulated 'Belarusian ideology', is nevertheless palpably based on the rejection of the (neo)-liberal transformation suggested to the post-socialist countries in 1990ies and forthright adherence to the Soviet ways[19].

This way, the geopolitical reasoning that frames contemplations about the emerged divide provides a discursive toolkit to account for post-socialist transformation and different trajectories assumed by the two states in question. Importantly, it is exactly this ethical dimension implied in civilizational projects that imbues the divide with ontological features. The most vividly it is expressed through the circulating notions of what may be called as false ontologies: 'they are not what they sincerely try to be'.

This 'difference in ways', as examined in the third chapter, produces notions of incommensurability, expressed in terms of 'different thinking' or even 'different organisation of the brain'. Interestingly, words such as 'mentality' or 'mindset' almost never occurred in my explorations, although they clearly correspond to these formulations. It may be said that the very existence of the border imposes a certain discursive frame of reference with regard to the centre it represents; it structures discursive order that governs the terms in which spatial and political dimensions of life are contemplated. The very operative logic of the state border – what Green refers to as 'epistemology made real' – suggests the formulation of the divide in terms of ontological incommensurability. It entails neither any sort of communicative problems nor coherent 'image of the world' with any static slots of ontologically different 'others', but rather illustrates the relational dynamics of how this logic that suggests incommensurability is appropriated and internalised.

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[19] There is a famous quote of Lukašenka, 'I will not lead my state towards the civilised world', said during another tension between him and Western politicians.

Naturally, such Huntington-like rhetoric should not be taken as a source of analytical categories, but it may be analysed as it informs categories of practices. Moreover, rhetoric itself must not be taken as a representation of a static and rigid picture, but through the relations of actors with various sources of ideologically and ethically laden idioms. Nevertheless, I suggest that these are precisely the notions of ontological difference that are attributed in accordance to the division established by the state border. Interestingly, that this difference is overtly conceptualised as gradually acquiring such gravity: 'we are different people *now*'. That is to say, at least some of my informants have a certain grasp of the causation I argue for, of a process which entails the production of substantial alterity upon arbitrary and initially meaningless divisions; of ontologies emergent out of nonsense.

As S. Green puts it, in order to account for change, it is necessary to establish what has changed and what has remained the same (Green 2016). If seen through the dynamics of trans-border relations and emergent notions of difference, it may be said that in the case in question, almost everything has changed, and almost everything has remained the same. Civilisational projects that entail ethical formation establish trajectories, a movement along which seems the only natural as long as it is conceived in terms suggested by the project itself. This way, while the whole social environment changes, the set of relations encompassing those involved in the project remains the same. That is why 'they are different people now' but not 'we are different people now', even if change is acknowledged on 'our' part: the change is only natural. However, speaking in terms of theory of relativity, for those unaffected things stay the same, whereas 'the other side' deviates. The border as an institution produces a split that sets two different frames of reference (within which one may have different attitudes and stances, differently attributing deviations, improvement and stagnation), that govern the conception of changes. It is within this produced conception that the notions of ontological incommensurability emerge.

This motional metaphor of concurrent abundance and lack of changes also argues for the use of the word 'ontology' as analytical concept, instead of 'culture' or 'internalisation'. What is discussed is not the emergence of 'cultural difference' – i.e., defined by actors in terms of adherence to various items belonging to the domain of 'culture – or mere 'naturalisation of belonging' – that is to say, a process of internalisation of certain rhetorical tropes and emotional patterns. Instead, I argue that the emergence of the particular *perspective on difference* that operate categories of the scale that we may call ontological. In other words, what is scrutinised is historical dynamics of emergent differentiation and its relation with the border as a concrete bureaucratic institution and its situation in space. And it is the word 'ontology' which allows to account for essential features and scale of the ultimate expressions of this border-produced difference.

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Taking into account the dynamics of production of ontological alterities out of initially nonsensical divide, I would also like to make several suggestions, addressing certain points and claims made in the related scholarship.

Particularly Interesting is the case presented by Pfoser 2017, where the author, discussing the circulation of civilizational (she calls them 'metageorgaphical', but I believe this formulation obscures their ethical content) idioms across Estonian-Russian border between cities of Narva and Ivangorod says that 'in making sense of their position at the margins and within a hierarchically structured system of spatial divisions, they [borderlanders] participated in making it stick' (p. 39). As it seems, this phrasing conceals the reality of relations of power between both the state and its subjects on the one hand and the centre and the periphery on the other. First, there is the border as blind and inexorable barrier, and it exists regardless of the semantic attitude assumed by those affected by its operation (cf.

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Tatum 2000). Knowledgeable and creative as they may be, private actors are not always in possession of even discursive resources and have to operate poachers' tactics (as in de Certeau 1988) in terms of meaning-making as well. In this regard, the answer may be suggested to Ahmed's question about 'how people become invested in particular structures such that their demise is felt as a kind of living death' (Ahmed 2004, 12). At least in some cases, like the one in question, it may be said that the state(s)' construction of regimes of certainty and precariousness leaves no other choice – one has to be affiliated with something for the sake production of certain stability in one's life. This way, ontologies may emerge out of nonsense if there are structural conditions for them to emerge, but also a short supply of something that would be seen as meaningful enough for such task. I do not mean that it is necessarily so, but in different cases, existing structures of power may establish different regimes of opportunities for agency and meaning-making; some settings in the world are more Sartrean than the others, to put it metaphorically. What is observed in the case of Belarusian-Lithuanian border may be perceived, on the other hand, as an example of the formation of dispositional precondition for the construction of the state as 'the locus of intense emotional investment, as a site of enactment or performance, as the source of legitimation, and as an object of hope' (Reeves 2011, 918)

Another issue I would like to raise is the range of possibilities my data provides for engagement with the so-called ontological turn. The ontological turn itself is concerned with somewhat more sophisticated dimensions of anthropological practice, and its alternative name – the reflexive turn – clearly indicates a toing and froing of the focus between analysis and writing. The fact that the same word 'ontology' is used in both cases should not suggest immediate relations with this theoretical strand; this work itself barely possesses the kind of reflexive sensitivity that the ontological turn calls for. Yet some of its founding ideas seem to be of high relevance for this study, namely that there are substantially different sorts of

differences in the world. One of the things I hoped to express with my thesis is that these classifications of alterities are subject to change, production and reproduction, and they are contingent upon the interplay of powers in the social setting. An image of particular, desired sort of human ontology may be (and often is) a political project, entailing ideologically inspired ethical formation of a desired human being, defined in civilizational terms, such as 'true European'. Multiple cases of intrusion into local ways of life, committed by European colonisers and claimed to be 'bringing civilisation to underdeveloped tribes' come to mind immediately. However, the 'ontological alterity' may be seen not only as a category of analysis and an inspiration for the very new kind of reflexivity. What I advocate for from my ethnographical data and suggested conceptualisations is that they can be also seen as a vicarious category of practices, observable in various settings across the globe – including those that are not supposed to entail any 'ontological difference' with the researcher socialised in European tradition. Hence, they may be analysed in their dynamics of politically structured daily working essentialisations — as ontologies in the making.

Finally, the ontological turn argues against reducing 'cultural critique to sceptical distance' (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, 289) and invites to challenge assumptions pretending to be absolute, including the idea that 'everything exists in a permanent state of "becoming" or "emergence"' (287). This very suggestion, however, if 'exposed strategically to ethnographically generated challenges and paradoxes that can systematically undermine it' (287), may be questioned with regard to the data provided. Basically, the examined dynamic of optics entailing ontological difference suggests that to be 'flowing' and 'constantly becoming' does not necessarily mean not to be solid and essential at the same time. As it appears, people may be conscious of the flux, contingent, and dynamic nature of the differentiations they have to adhere to, and yet conceive them as having ontological properties.

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