

# Response

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## Trauma at the Borders

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The concerns of this special issue, which address responses to trauma, are timely, globally significant, and show the relevance of cultural research in the field. The issue reflects current trends in the cultural study of trauma, replacing the event-based model popularized by scholars such as Cathy Caruth (1991) with the insight of more contemporary approaches such as Michelle Balaev's (2014) pluralistic model, which recognizes the multiplicity of theories used in the study of trauma. In their introduction, the editors of this issue emphasize the latter model's ability to address trauma's political and social aspects.

Although it may appear limited that this issue only focuses on the nation-states of Estonia, Finland, and the Soviet Union in the interwar years, the three case studies testify that all three localities are firmly embedded in global politics that have generated wide-ranging cultural and collective traumas in a variety of ways. In Liisi Laineste's analysis, dark humor is offered as a means to understand the traumas of Soviet invasion and deportation; the use of such humor is found embedded in the colonial history of Estonia. In Saija Kaskinen's text, the trauma of betrayal is addressed in radical Finnish-American journalism and its connection with decisions to migrate and construct an allegedly more egalitarian space in Soviet Karelia in the 1920s and

1930s. In Tarja Tanttu and Tuulikki Kurki's analysis of migrant exclusion and insidious trauma in contemporary Finland, the negative experiences of migrants stem from the host population's racist and xenophobic views.

By revealing transnational connections, the analyses contextualize trauma in discourses of nationhood and the need to challenge established positions. Consequently, the three texts show the power of bordering in the generation of traumatizing experiences, revealing effective and cognitive responses to them, and underline the need to generate alternative stories and counterdiscourses to come to terms with monological national narratives and establish a sense of belonging. What is shown through the analyses of trauma is how the private and public spheres cross borders and connect (see Schimanski & Nyman, 2021).

The ideas of bordering and border-scape, belonging, nation, and affect appear as themes that provide innovative perspectives for further research. The articles emphasize how the act of setting up different borders (e.g., geopolitical, ideological, ethnic, and national) and maintaining them through varied forms of discourse (e.g., media, journalism, and the everyday) play a key role in all narrative, distinguishing Estonians from Russians, radical Finnish-Americans from their conservative confrères, and excluding migrants in Finland from the body of the host population. While all of the encounters explored are enacted in the borderscape, i.e., the contact zone where different people and views meet, its functions appear to be traumatizing rather than offering belonging and becoming, as theorists such as Chiara Brambilla (2015) have suggested.

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While some traces of new identities are outlined in the studies, and perhaps most overtly in Laineste's exploration of humor as a means to negotiate sensitive topics such as traumatic national pasts, Tanttu and Kurki suggest that in the case of insidious, often directly experienced, trauma, many migrants appear unable to leave their liminal position and access a space of hybridity. However, it could also be suggested that many migrant narratives are counterdiscursive and performative since the centered national identity can be appropriated and performed otherwise, as in the case of Arvi Perttu's work investigated here by the authors. Of course, such performances add to the migrants' visibility, which is sometimes a risk and may lead to further exclusion.

In addition to bordering, the idea of belonging emerges as a key issue in the articles and deepens their insight. In her study, Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) distinguishes between how the sense of belonging is negotiated on the everyday level, involving one's relationship with different social groups, identity categories, emotional attachments, values, and what she calls "the politics of belonging" (2006, 199) associated with citizenship. From this perspective, the articles show that trauma operates on both levels, invariably complicating one's relationship with others and the nation. As an example of the first level, which involves different groups and emotional attachments, Laineste's analysis of contradictory responses to the humor of the Mood Spoiler group reveals that for some audience members, a comic representation of the trauma of forced deportation is in breach of an expected Estonian identity. In contrast, others understand the target of such humor to be Russian perceptions of the past.

The issues of emotional investment and identity are present in the polarizations that Kaskinen locates in the discourse of the radical press of the 1920s and 1930s, where the US state is openly blamed for betraying the immigrant workers, contributing to their sense of exclusion. In the narratives that Tanttu and Kurki examine, the processes of othering and exclusion are felt at the level of individuals who see themselves as second-class citizens. They lack what Yuval-Davis (2006, 208) defines as the "spatial rights," to enter and live in a political community, which is explicit in some narratives as the migrant's decision to leave Finland for a better life elsewhere.

The sense of anger and disappointment demonstrated in all of the articles underlines the importance of paying attention to its effect on further work on migration, borders, and encounters as a new direction for such research. While topics such as fear and hatred have been researched, especially in xenophobia and anti-migration discourse, feelings like hesitation, confusion, depression, and worthlessness deserve further attention. Here the cultural turn in border studies may be a fruitful point of departure, and materials such as autobiographies, fiction, essays, documentaries, and ethnographic interviews could provide valuable perspectives in future analyses. Through in-depth readings of discourse, metaphor, silence, and gaps, it will be possible to investigate and understand the trauma experiences of migrants and hosts in new ways. The plural trauma approach developed in this special issue will undoubtedly be helpful in future studies.

**Works Cited**

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