

**AN ESSAY ABOUT THE BORDER. *Summary*****Nadia Nartova**

This text is part of a series of essays by Russian sociologists who took part in a two-week “fieldwork school” on both sides of the border between Russia and the breakaway republic of Abkhazia in the fall of 2005. They spent the first week in a village on the Russian side of the border, and the second in the Abkhazian resort town of Gagra. The school focused on transborder networks and the border as a social space, as well as social conditions specific to Abkhazia, such as civil society in a weak state and the tourism industry in an unrecognized republic. The authors reflect on their own experiences as outside observers in this region.

This essay reflects on changing conceptions of borders and boundaries as a result of globalization and the end of the Cold War. Once seen as solid and impenetrable, borders are now often viewed as special kinds of social and cultural spaces that enable experiences of freedom and diversity. However, this romanticized view is often articulated by North American and West European intellectuals who experience borders as open transit zones. Instead of contrasting open and closed borders, the author suggests the concept of “border regimes”—trade, tourist, military—that affect all borders at different times and in different ways, gaining different degrees of legitimacy and varying according to the direction in which the border is crossed. The border is a three-dimensional space rather than a mere line. Rules, even informal ones, appear not to apply in the space that constitutes the Russian-Abkhazian border. For example, members of the author’s group seem to be picked out at random for passport checks by border guards. The border is perhaps best understood as a hologram where individuals are caught in ever-changing situations.