

Title: “Places of Belonging, Places of Becoming: Narratives and Practices of Russian speakers in post-Soviet Estonia and Kazakhstan.”

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In times of increased transnational mobility and socio-cultural diversity, how do linguistic minorities define own surroundings and practice belonging? How do they identify with places of their residence and respond to possible political and socio-cultural exclusions? What are the broader implications of these processes upon spaces and society they live in? This dissertation sets to answer these questions by focusing on the everyday lives of Russian speaker in the borderlands of post-Soviet Estonia and Kazakhstan. Being one day a privileged national group in the whole Soviet Union, the Russophone populations experienced a form of figurative displacement as the political borders demarcating their homelands moved over them. This 'migration of borders' implied the obliteration of the established orders, redefinition of the community memberships, transforming Russian speakers from the rightful residents in the commonly non-Russian regions into new minorities whose loyalties, attachments and belonging are being continuously questioned.

Engaging critically with the peculiar case of the politically, yet not physically, displaced Russian-speaking minorities in the borderland city of Narva in Estonia and Petropavlovsk in Kazakhstan, this dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex manifestations of belonging and not belonging across post-Soviet space and beyond. The research adopts a cross-disciplinary approach at the intersection of sociology, political science and sociolinguistics. It reconstructs belonging through the spatial prism, as a relational spatial process situated within specific historical, socio-political and economic settings.

Based on an extensive ethnographic immersion into urban memories, narratives about space, as well as impressions of embodied performances within material environments the dissertation uncovers the complex dialectical relationship between 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' as well as the different meanings they generate among the Russian-speaking populations. This relationship, as I argue, is manifested through a continuous spiral play of boundary construction, appropriation and transgression between different versions of Estonianness/Kazakhness, Europeanness/Cosmopolitanness and Russianness.

The dissertation is forthcoming as a book titled *Belonging in Post-Soviet Borderlands: Spatial Narratives of Russian speakers in Estonia and Kazakhstan* and will be published by Lexington Books (Lanham, Boulder, New York & London).