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Imagined mosque communities in Russia: Central Asian migrants in Moscow

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to shed light on mosque communities in Russia through the example of mosques frequented by Moscovites and by Central Asian migrants. I will make use of Anderson's theoretical framework of 'imagined community' in analysing the material presented in the article. The main argument is that there are no real mosque communities and rather that the sense of community formed around mosques is imagined. There are nevertheless a variety of networks, groups and institutions within and around mosques. The article is based on fieldwork conducted in 2016 and 2017.

'[…] the supra-local space of the imagined-community, both past and present, obtains in the sensation of a shared condition which, in turn, furnishes the grounds for *mutual existential intelligibility and sympathy* – that is, for shared *inter-personal meaning*.'[1]

Introduction

Islam in Russia became politically and economically important not only in the light of escalated conflicts in the Middle East and terrorism but also due to large-scale migration of Muslims from former Soviet Republics. The increasing number of these migrants has influenced state politics on Islam. Within Russia, the Islamic leadership has come from Tatars, though the North Caucasus is also populated by Muslims. Under Tatar administration, Islam is a bureaucratically well-organised religion and integrated in the Russian legal system; it is, moreover, ideologically dictated and controlled by the state and poses little security threat. There is, nevertheless, a major ongoing power struggle among the leading (Tatar) Islamic authorities.[2] In particular, there is tension between regional authorities in Muslim-majority areas (especially those outside of European Russia) and those in the major cities (especially Moscow) where most decision-making occurs.

Russia's biggest mosque was built in 2015 in Moscow after long delays (since 2005) because of mismanagement in financial and organisational matters. All the mosques in Moscow have either been reconstructed or renewed in the post-Soviet period in light of

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the growing demand for places to worship made by the migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus who form the majority of Muslims in Moscow. With a more serious political consideration of Islam in the *Kreml*, the role of Islamic leadership has also been elevated. Although they are a minority among Muslims in Moscow, Tatars here too are dominant authorities in Islamic leadership; they are considered loyal to the state (more so than North Caucasians) and trusted as religious representatives. Muslims from the North Caucasus, however, are underrepresented in religious administration in Moscow; they are mainly engaged in business affairs. Thus, the organisation of mosques is marked by ethnic differentiation: Tatars in administrative positions, other Russian Muslims largely absent, and migrants from Central Asia and the South Caucasus forming the majority of mosque visitors and potential clients for mosque-related economic opportunities.

Mosques and medreses (religious educational establishments) are not the only Muslim spaces in Russia. Halal businesses such as cafes, food processing industries, cattle farms, shops and religious healing practices also draw Muslims to work and consume. These businesses also present growing economic opportunities for Muslims because halal (which indicates food and other items permitted under Sharia law) has become almost like a brand, signifying good quality (much like the terms *bio, organic* and *eco* in Europe and the West), and attracting high numbers of non-Muslim clients. The market in halal has become so promising that the religious leadership in Moscow, and in Russia more generally, is actively involved in expanding and institutionalising this 'Islamic economy' through certification, marketing, production controls and banking.[3]

In all these Muslim spaces, the relations between the various institutions, organisations, political actors, Muslims and others in them are being progressively structured, regulated and controlled. They are becoming more clearly marked as 'Muslim', and by an increasingly narrow definition of 'Islam'. The regulation of Muslim spaces in Russia is strictly regulated and administered from above through state approved Islamic Authority. However, there are also some on ground initiatives shaping Muslim spaces. In this article, I look inside this structure and space to understand how various groups, networks, individuals, entrepreneurs and others shape the development of Muslim spaces. Importantly, Muslims in Moscow imagine that they are all members of one community, whose members identify themselves as Muslims and believe one God (Allah), attend services at mosques, eat halal food, celebrate the same holidays (e.g. *Kurban hayit, Ramadan*) and have the same values. Of course, not all people practise fully: though most claim to eat halal, many do not. There are, moreover, visible divisions within the supposed community along ethnic and regional lines, as well as by kinship.

In this article, I will try to give some snapshots into the spaces where the above community becomes more real than imagined, and I will describe how the real events enable such an imagination. Both processes are in constant dialogue, reshaping both the imagined community and real interactions within Muslim spaces. To this end, I will present a subjective definition of the community of Muslim migrants in Moscow and then some snapshot realities of the community in different forms in order to contextualise the imagination. The article is structured in the following order. I start with the introduction of two mosques in Moscow followed by presenting the places where I ended up from following the networks in the mosques. Such places are trade networks

and their offices in Moscow as well as networks of cosmetic sales (both predominantly attended by Kyrgyz migrants). I then analyse the presented material through Benedict Anderson's framework of imagined community.

Materials and methods

The material presented in this article includes data drawn from two mosques in Moscow, a case study of a women's network and a description of halal cafes. The material is ethnographic and was collected through participant observation, interviews and photography during field research in 2016–2017. That same field stay included a short trip to Perm, but the material presented here came from several shorter stays (of about 3 weeks each) and longer stays (up to 6 weeks at a time) in Moscow. During fieldwork, I spent most of my time in two mosques and lived in a shared room with migrants from Tajikistan. The quarters were close; I shared a bed with one of the female migrants.

My access to the field was enabled through a research partner who is a prominent religious and respected figure among migrant Muslims, and actively involved in their legal, economic, social and moral support. His authority was decisive in opening many doors and in obtaining meetings with very many different Muslim networks, groups, communities and individuals. Interviews were conducted within mosques, and beyond mosques in cafes, cars, homes, schools, clubs, metro stations, offices and open-air settings. Both formal interviews and informal conversations were conducted; some were recorded. The conventional practice of writing up field notes each evening was challenged by the lack of privacy in my living arrangements, so I also made voice recordings of my notes from interviews and observations while walking or traveling between appointments.

Islam in Russia and Muslim Central Asia migrants

Russia has been the destination of first choice for labour migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus (Azerbaijan) since the fall of the Soviet Union. It is a traditional pathway from the Soviet period, a place for which most migrants are linguistically prepared and which requires no visa. There are at least 12 million such migrants, and the real number is certainly higher considering the absence of sound statistical information on migrants, not to mention those who obtained Russian citizenship but continue living as migrants (facing deportation and abused by police). The way the Russian judicial and punitive system operates is similar to how Agamben[4] describes the state's treatment of *homo sacer*: persons are deprived of documents and then acted upon as if they have no rights. The state finds reasons to take away Russian citizenship from those who hold it, and it deported, for instance, Tajiks to Tajikistan.

These millions of predominant Muslim migrants in Russian cities are socially important. They have provided a great visibility of Islam. Their migration has brought cheap labour. And, their presence has contributed to growing xenophobia and Islamophobia.[5]

Russia is a secular state, but the religious organisations operating on its territory have different relations with the state. The Russian Orthodox Church has a very powerful

position within state politics and the economy. The prominence of this Church, coupled with the secular legal system, presents a challenge for the state administration of Islam.[6] Nevertheless, the number of Muslims is so great, that Islamic organisations command a certain negotiating power with the state, especially on questions of security. These tensions both on the level of state administration of Islam and on the level of everyday politics of practicing Islam are important aspects of Islam in Russia.

Despite its presence and importance, Islam in Russia is generally understudied. There are in-depth historical studies of Islam in Russia.[7] However, the majority of research with a contemporary focus examines regions where Muslims comprise the majority of the population.[8] Crews[9] has produced a particularly interesting study of the interface between Islam and Christianity, as well as on the relations between the Russian government and Muslim religious leaders. Other works predominantly focus on the issues of security and political Islam.[10] There are some critical studies done in the field of administration of Islam in Russia and Islamic movements.[11]

Islam in contemporary Central Asia has been studied predominantly in relation to the end of Soviet rule. After more than 70 years of the atheist ideology promoted by the Soviet Union, Islamic practices have been analysed through the lenses of 'revival' or 're-Islamisation' discourses.[12] Yemelianova provides a detailed and insightful study of Islam in Central Asia as well as in Russia.[13]

The interaction between migration and an Islamic religious 'revival' in Russia, however, has certainly not been discussed. The importance of religion among migrants stems from the imagination of the migrant Muslim community in a place hostile to any migrant. As some of my Kyrgyz informants stated: 'I learned about Islam in Moscow. At home, only old people are practicing Islam.' In other words, the 'revival' of Islam among migrants is not only about the uptake of new ways of returning to Islam, but even the discovery of new practices and opportunities within Muslim spaces. This revival is a complex process involving the transformation of systems of belonging, identity politics, networking, and religious practices and belief systems that are intertwined with the difficulties of migration and migrant lives.

Russian migration policies fail to integrate and accommodate the country's millions of migrants. The lack of integration can be easily observed from the daily suffering of migrants. Whether a migrant is legal or illegal, he or she is subjected to the conditions of a de facto illegal existence. I myself had to reside in Moscow illegally because I failed in my efforts to register myself officially. Yet even if I had obtained a fully legal registration (*propiska*), I would not have been saved from fear of encountering police.

Everyone in Russia must have a registered address (*propiska*). The problem is that there are no places to rent both inexpensively and legally. I found no alternative to register myself except at a hotel, hostel or expensive luxury accommodation. In less expensive accommodations, it is rarely possible to register: either too many people are already registered in the same flat, or the owner simply refuses to sponsor your registration in order to avoid taxes. At the end of the day, most newcomers to Moscow who live in a private flat must get half-legal registration, using another address which is often fake or for an uninhabitable place.

The police, of course, know that foreigners in Moscow have fake and half-fake registrations. They prey on this vulnerability, stopping foreigners and demanding to see their documents and *propiska*. But beyond fear and the other threats posed by the

police, life without a *propiska* severely limits one's options. The *propiska* grants its holder a legal status, the right to work, access to health care and to education; without it, one is thrown out of the state's social welfare system to survive in the shadows. Muslim migrants fill this gap with alternative systems of belonging such as Muslim spaces of self-support, economic and other trust networks, alternative medical care, social and cultural spaces and moral support. Islam has thus provided important fields and spaces where migrants can find refuge from daily racism and abuse from police, and where they can network to find employment and opportunities for education, health care and other forms social support.

Muslim communities in Moscow

Studying mosques, religious administration, formal and informal schools, movements, organisations, networks and businesses, I have come to realise that Moscow provides opportunities for Muslims to organise their social, economic and political lives around Islam. From virtual worlds to real ones, in cafes, praying halls and rooms, offices, homes and streets, there is a kind of community formed and maintained by Muslims in Moscow. This community is both imagined and real at the same time. It is imagined because most 'members' will never meet or know each other 'yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.[14]

It is real because many Muslims do meet and know each other through their common interactions in 'Muslim' spaces.

It is, furthermore, a limited Muslim community. This feeling of unity among Muslims who identify as Muslim to reach beyond the networks of kinship and ethnicity is not what is ordinarily meant by theologians who describe the Muslim community of the Ummah. This community is still bounded by the experience of migration, and by Central Asian origins. As one of my informants explained about the Afghan migrants who lived on the same floor:

> They are foreigners and they are different although they are also Muslims and speak similar languages. I don't have anything common with them. We have no contact. I do not trust them. They have their own ways and I have nothing to share with them. We are different and we don't have the same culture.[15]

Central Asian Muslim migrants saw other Muslim migrants who did not share a common Soviet past as 'foreign Muslims', but even among themselves regional affiliations (Central Asia versus Caucasus) mattered, and ethnic divisions into Tajiks, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Turkmen sometimes also mattered.

Migrants in Russia live mainly isolated lives. There is little space, time or opportunity to interact with the host population in all but the most perfunctory transactions. The working hours of most migrants are so dense that they hardly maintain a social life. Most migrants I came to know work without real days off or at best have one day off per week. Most prefer to work with no breaks to earn as much money as possible; they try to spend as little as possible (but to still have enough in an expensive place like Moscow) and to send as much as possible home. This also explains sleeping arrangements of migrants with 3 to 15 persons in small rooms. Rooms are rarely gender-specific, and more often of mixed gender. It is difficult to keep rooms separated by

gender considering the scarcity of choice and difficulties related to trust in finding a place to sleep. There are many accommodation traps, in which rooms are announced only to rob those who apply. Fake rent offers require prepayments but no contracts are issued. Usually even with real rent there are no contracts. It is so important to secure a place where one can trust the landlord, that most other preferences for particular living arrangements are sacrificed.

Isolation and precarity prevent migrants from interacting with those they perceive as different from themselves. Networks based on shared religion, ethnicity and kinship are perceived as safe spaces for social, economic and political lives in Russian society. Religion unites migrants of diverse ethnicities (e.g. Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tadjik, Kazakh and others) connecting through economic and political ties. Mosques offer the space to connect and social lives, access to economic opportunities as well as physical well-being. Religious schools offer not only a chance for learning but also widen one's social networks and improve life quality. Now more and more migrants must bring or are willing to bring their children to Moscow (instead of leaving children behind with older family members). Religious schools, where also other subjects are taught, offer good opportunities for integrating children into a more inclusive educational system, safe from discrimination, 'western evils' and other bad things imagined by migrants.

Ethnic and religious (halal) cafes offer not only food at affordable prices for migrants (sometimes cafes within mosques also offer free food) but also a relatively safe space to socialise, celebrate, connect, network, access information and other opportunities. Cafés are the most important places for migrants to attend since their overcrowded rooms are not the best place to have a cup of tea or meal after a long working day. Many cafes also offer praying rooms which are not publicly announced but internally shared within the cafe-community (frequent attenders, friends/acquaintance, co-ethnics of the café administration or just migrant looking persons mainly of Central Asian looks).

Networks, business locations and offices run and administered by migrants offer a similar kind of space but in a more limited manner than cafes, mosques or schools. Formal and informal office spaces can also serve as space for socialising, meeting, common praying, doing business and networking. Times spent in three different offices where all the mentioned events took place in a friendly, safe and cheerful atmosphere showed that offices are not only formal rooms where businesses are administered but also can offer space and room for other important social events such as meetings, having a cup of tea, talking, praying, sharing food or just hanging out.

Mosques

There are four formally registered mosques in Moscow. I spent most of my time in two: the mosque on *Prospekt Mira* and *Istoricheskiy* mosque at the *Tretyakovskiy* metro-stop. The mosque on *Prospekt Mira* is one of the biggest mosques in Russia. *Istoricheskiy* mosque is more centrally located in the heart of Moscow.

Friday is an important day in the lives of Muslim migrants in Moscow because Friday is the main day for visiting mosques. The Friday prayers are important, but mosques are also seen by migrants as an opportunity space to make contacts; join networks; find employment, support and interesting information; catch up with friends;

and just have a rest from the very noisy and crowded streets of the megacity and the room (home) shared by 7 or 10 others. Mosques offer peace, safety and moral enhancement. Mosques are the spaces where one can rest, ask God for support, find peace of mind, and learn from and connect with others. There are plenty of possibilities to find the right contact, groups, information and employment opportunities or the space to sell things.

The mosque

The mosque on *Prospekt Mira* was completed in 2015. The architecture resembles that of Russian Orthodox churches and some people told me that they thought it was a church. There are three different entrances to the mosque (men's entrance, general entrance and women's entrance). Both the men's entrance and the general entrance are on the ground level of the main building. The women's entrance goes downstairs. There is another parallel longer building against the main building which is an administrative building for the mosque. The administrative building of the mosque includes the department of International Relations and big halls for celebrations, weddings and conferences. The administrative building also accommodates shops, a tourist information office, cafes and a restaurant, as well as other offices belonging to the mosque administration.

The women's prayer hall is huge and can accommodate some 500 to 600 women sitting next to each other. The wardrobe on the underground floor is also very wide and long. On the left hand of the main entrance hall, there are bathrooms with space for ablution. The majority of women perform ablution at the mosque and many do it at home.

Ablution can be performed both in the washing space of the mosque and at home unless one lives in one of the overcrowded and so-called rubber flats (*rezinovie kvartiry)*. Rubber flats are rooms shared by five or more persons. The maximum number of persons is defined by the number of mattresses (sometimes 90-cm wide, but usually only 70-cm wide and specially made for the rubber flats) fit next to each other on the floor in addition to the built-in-beds on the walls (usually two to three on each wall). If there is space, a path is left to walk through the room; otherwise, one must jump from one mattress to another to reach one's own bed. If the flat has two rooms, then 10 to 15 people share one tiny bathroom which creates long queues. This makes it impossible to perform a proper ablution at home.

On Fridays, the women's hall of the mosque will be filled by more than 300 women for the noon prayer *Juma Namaz*. Weekends are also full but less so than on Fridays. On working days, fewer women come, and those have often worked on weekends and Fridays. Some women come in modest clothing (some even in *hijab*); others come in modern clothing and bring a scarf; yet others come in tight trousers or miniskirts and must put on extra clothing which can be borrowed at the entrance (*hijab* or a longer gown). Approaching mosques, one sees women getting their scarves out of their bags. On Fridays, there is not enough clothing to borrow from the mosque so it is better that one brings it herself.

There are religious services offered both within and outside mosques. These services are authorised by the religious administration. Unauthorised services are not permitted

within the mosques, but are often performed by Mullahs in cars. Elsewhere (Turaeva forthcoming), I have described the spaces around mosques where boundaries have been created between official and authorised Islamic services and unofficial/unauthorised Islamic services as well as space divided between the inside and outside of mosques.

The women's hall of the mosque on Fridays is most interesting to observe and more lively than on other days. Women sit in groups. Those who came alone and have not found acquaintances look around, listen to others or read a book (either an Arabic one from the shelf in the hall or their own book in Kyrgyz, Kazakh or Uzbek written in Cyrillic). Children play around, some small girls wear *hijab* if their mothers do. Some women in tight jeans or leggings (both young and middle aged!) are likely to be asked to leave the hall and borrow proper clothing. To share space with *hijab*-wearing women is often challenging for those who do not wear *hijab*. They feel guilty for not wearing proper Islamic clothing, while those who do feel proud. The *hijab* creates boundaries within the hall, but language is the primary factor in creating distinct groups among the women. I could join most of the groups since I could speak Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Russian, but I could not join any Tadjik-speaking groups.

After the prayers, most of the women leave but many also remain until around 5.00 or 6.00pm. Those who stay have brought books, snacks and water. They enjoy the cosy warm hall where their children can play, and they can relax. Some eat only the sweets which are sometimes distributed before prayers by women making *sadaqa* (religious offering).

From mosque to trade networks

Some groups I joined inside the women's prayer halls led me to business offices and selling networks. The office of one of the trade networks I reached through two women I met at a mosque was within a high-rise building in the suburbs of Moscow. The network promotes health products, some Tibetan herbal medicine and food supplements. The members are mostly women of Kazakh and Kirgiz ethnicity between the ages of 25 and 55. The office is a very busy place: the women who work in the network come here to make their telephone calls, meet clients and welcome newcomers.

The activities undertaken through this office were based on the network business model (*setevoy biznes*). Product sellers recruit further sellers into their own network. As a seller builds up her network, she earns contributions from the sales made by those she has recruited in addition to her own sales. New sellers follow the same model, paying some fees up while earning others from below. Members must also pay a kind of entrance fee (of about $200 in the form of the offered products) as a condition to join. Part of the entrance fee also goes to the recruiter.

I learned of business opportunities at the mosque, just as migrants did. I also learned that the mosques provide a platform for selling numerous goods. The women involved in selling the Tibetan medicines, for example, consider mosques the best places for gaining good clients. One of them stated:

> The type of people who come to mosque, they wouldn't trick you, one could trust them, and they have clean souls or heart (Ru. chistaya dusha). It is also important to do business with people whom you can trust and those who attend mosques. Attending a mosque

every Friday is really something good because obviously those who are on the way to God are given the profits. For example, I would not meet Rano there [pointing to me] if I were not attending the mosque regularly.[16]

As indicated by this quote, the pursuit of business opportunities and financial gain was never far from migrants' religious practices. Devotion and prayer seemed to create an atmosphere of financial trust among mosque goers, whether they were buyers or sellers, recruiters or recruitees.

From mosque to a cafe

There are many cafes offering halal food around both of the mosques which I studied, and particularly many around the mosque at *Prospekt Mira*. I will bring here, however, an example of a very small cafe which is located within the territory of *Istoricheskiy* mosque.

The cafe is located behind the mosque. It does not have big signs, and cannot be located from any distance. The mosque itself is located within residential blocks and is not easily locatable. It too has no clear signs leading to it. The cafe is very small and serves mainly the mosque attendants. The café has only 10 tables. Four people can fit at each table, but in fact the café is too small for more than 30 people. During my visits, there were always several customers, and up to 25 at any time. The café was owned by a young man of Caucasian ethnicity; the staff were mainly of Central Asian origin (Tajiks and Uzbek-Tajiks); the ethnicity of the visitors was mixed but dominated by Caucasians.

I made very close contact with a Tadjik woman who was working full time in the cafe and living in the vicinity. I used to eat in the cafe and late in the evenings help her with cleaning up. The woman spent most of her time working. Women working in the cafe were not fully veiled, but wore headscarves. This seemed to cause no problems, even though almost all of the customers they served were male. The only other woman I ever saw eating in the café was a very old beggar woman. I too was once mistaken for a beggar and offered small cash – which reinforced my understanding that women only eat in this cafe if they are beggars receiving food. (Indeed the daily distribution of leftover food was well attended.) During the times I spent in the cafe, I saw mosque attendants meet friends and family members, share meals, discuss business and network. The visitors knew each other, talked openly even with those at different tables and scrutinised each new visitor who entered.

Other halal cafes had a more diverse clientele but remained male-dominated. The space of the cafe was used for different combinations of religious and business socialising. The cafe within the mosque was one of the more restrictive in terms of its access, and controling the visitors (dress code, visiting times). Not only were women almost completely absent, but clients were assumed to be practicing Muslims who belonged to the mosque community. During prayers or periods of fasting, clients were not welcome. My presence was ignored during prayers as long as I was 'waiting for my friend', but other clients were turned away. Once, a Kyrgyz man was reprimanded for his desire to eat instead of joining the prayers in the mosque.

Visitors to the cafes offering halal food share religious identity as well as migrant experience. These cafes are organised to accommodate the Muslim community in

Moscow, but they make Muslim-migrant spaces too. This is particularly clear in the cafes within the mosques, where the mosque's schedule, practices and attendance shape not only how food is shared within the community but also how networking, business and socialising take place among the members of the same community. It should be noted that the spaces outside of the mosques depending on place and the location are male-dominated, for example the cafes within the mosques are predominantly if not fully male besides one or two women in exceptional cases. This is an important gender divide within Muslim space which needs to be systemically studied further.

Muslims and Anderson: discussion

Above I presented some snapshots of various spaces which are part of communities around mosques and the networks structuring these communities. The networks stretch beyond the mosques, reaching business offices and cafes. They are maintained by entrepreneurial women and men, not all of whom are *practicing* Muslims. Yet the members of these networks, men and women, all belong to Muslim ethnic groups. As they make connections through attendance at the mosques, they come to share a Muslim identity that seems to supersede ethnicity and kinship, at least among the ethnic groups with a shared Soviet past. I argue therefore that these communities, in a more abstract sense, are what Anderson called 'imagined communities'. They are formed around mosques and cafes, but that is because these spaces are 'Muslim'; they are 'safe' places to go, meet people, relax, network, do business, pray, enter into dialogue with God and ask for support, clean oneself from sins, and seek protection and support.

Shahab Ahmed[17] has also described the 'Muslim Community' as both bounded and imagined.

> This Muslim community, routinely designated in the everyday parlances of Muslims by reference to the Qur'anic *ummah muslimah* (literally, "Muslim community") is constituted in the self-consciousness of each Muslim by the held and experienced fact that all of its members share a *somehow* or a *something* called Islam – whatever that may be or mean to each one of them. In the self-consciousness and self-identity of every Muslim *qua* Muslim is the sense that s/he is a part of *an isolable and bounded domain of meaningful phenomena* – and, one would add, an isolable and bounded domain of persons and spaces – that *is* Islam; no matter how vast, differentiated or contested that domain of meaning might be (and it is difficult to meaningfully characterize this condition other than by the very term that el-Zein dismisses, viz., "Islamic consciousness"). The fact that this community is, as Ahmet Karamustafa emphasizes, *an idea* [the italics are his] – that is to say, in the immortal phrase of Benedict Anderson, it is an *imagined community* – does not make it any less *real* or salient to conceptualizing and understanding the phenomenon of Islam which is, itself, precisely an *idea* and the consequences of the human and historical engagement with and imagining of that idea. (Ahmed 2015: 141)

Anderson's concept[18] is meant to explain how people can feel deeply that they belong to a community (e.g. a nation) where they have little face-to-face contact with most other members. Muslim migrants in Moscow are not unusual for feeling a common identity with other migrants. There are numerous works which apply Anderson's imagined community to the analysis of migrant communities.[19] Indeed, there are so many

imagined communities, which the term 'community' itself seems to need a more thorough critique.[20] Delanty proposes a new approach to studying communities that detaches them from place (and face-to-face interactions between members) altogether:

> What the new discourses of community have in common is not the hankering after a lost totality or a concern with difference or individualism, but a search for a new cultural imaginary. The post-modernised communities of the global era are highly fragmented, contested and far from holistic collectivities; they are characterised more by aesthetic codes than by a moral voice. [...] It will suffice here to remark that new cultural imaginaries suggest that social responsibility cannot be reduced to the sense of personal moral responsibility and that globalisation involves the emergence of new kinds of proximity that cannot be reduced to a sense of place. (Castells, 1996)[21]

Yet Mulligan[22] extends Delanty's framework by returning to the older definitions, he differentiates 'grounded' from 'projected' communities. The Muslim community (of migrants) in Moscow is again both grounded and projected.

An immediate question about the boundaries of this community arises. It is Muslim, but is it the global Ummah? It is not – but could it be? Can Muslim migrants to Moscow, living in a context of maximal isolation (with the surrounding xenophobia, regular police raids and personal insecurity), imagine belonging to the Ummah and dispensing entirely with ethnic and kinship belonging systems? The question is difficult to answer at the outset, if only because the imagination of individual identities and belonging systems is not as advanced as it might be among other migrants living under different national conditions.[23] McDuie-Ra presents similar dynamics of negotiating the boundaries of belonging in the city of Imphal in Manipur where ethnic organisations affirm ethnic boundaries and create places and senses of belonging.[24]

Migrant living conditions in Russia are harsh and survival-oriented, and this has implications for the imagination of systems of belonging. There are several belonging networks available to and present among Muslim migrants, and they are concentrated around survival and keeping safe. Imagined communities have their boundaries and also references to places that an individual knows. If an individual attends regularly one of the mosques, then it is highly probable that his or her networks spread from the mosque; those who regularly attend mosques also try to introduce their other friends or family members to contacts they have made through the mosque. Halal cafes similarly function as nodes in these networks.

Not all Muslim migrants attend mosque services. Some, both women and men, prefer to practice their religion at home. (Even some of those who attend the mosques would prefer this, but find they have no opportunity to pray in a rubber flat with so many people in each room.) 'If one has everything and has no problem one does not have to go out to look for help and can work and pray at home', said a Tadjik woman who had never attended a mosque and did not go out much in Moscow. She had better living conditions than an average migrant in Moscow, and because her children were in Tajikistan, she went only to work and back, going little elsewhere in the city, so that she could save as much money as possible to send back home. Others like her also have little imagination of a common Muslim community, even if they take some time off to relax and socialise in mosques or cafes. The social relations and social life of these migrants are limited to their direct relatives (sisters,

brothers, uncles and aunts), and it is these kinship connections that are activated in case of sickness or acute problems.

Here, however, I have considered the lives of migrants who do attend mosques and cafes for a combination of economic opportunities and religious reasons. For some, it is crucial to be part of these networks and the community to survive. Here I will detail Muslim migrants' own imagination of their mosque communities. First, those who participate are identified as *soblyudayushiy* (practicing Muslims) or *ne soblyudayushiy* (non-practicing). Those who are considered practicing Muslims have higher prestige; their greater religious knowledge and authority, religious capital (respect, trust and authority) and participation in religious networks are all valued.

Non-practicing Muslims try to follow the example, advice and instructions of the practicing ones to elevate their own status and gain. Respect and trust are the most valued capital which clearly can be decisive in many respects when dividing between practicing and non-practicing Muslims. This can influence partnership and promotion in business, employment chances, leadership, access to networks, social life, friendship, marriage and other events. I was told by a prospective businessman who claims to do only halal businesses:

> I work only with *soblyudayushie* because I can trust them. In our work trust is the most important thing and even more important than money or family. Without trust nothing works. One can only work with *soblyudayshiy* and trust real Muslims who fear Allah. If one does not fear Allah, he does not also follow the rules. If he does not fear Allah then he is not afraid to steal from others.

To my question as to how one can find someone who is really following the religious rules, he said:

> One meets people in the mosque at Friday prayers, one sees how one prays and one learns about the other. I have attended this mosque for more than 15 years and I know who a stranger is and who belongs to us. [...] Mosques are not only places to pray and go. Some do, but many attend the same mosque for many years. There is a *kostyak* (colloq. Ru. skeleton or fundament) of our mosque and we know each other.[25]

The *kostyak* to which he and other respondents referred is a group of people (regular attendants) who frequently attend and at least recognise each other by face, name and ethnicity. In other words, people who attend mosque sense that a real face-to-face community exists as the *kostyak mecheti* (basis of the mosque). But there is also the community formed as the networks flow out from the mosque.

Conclusion

In this article, I presented some snapshots of communities formed around mosques in Moscow and described both imagined and real aspects of these communities. Although each mosque may have a 'skeleton' of people who have attended for a long time, I argue that there is not a clearly defined and united Muslim community based on face-to-face contact or mosque membership. But attendance at mosques, and at cafes, does give rise to imagined Muslim communities; these communities are imagined as having a mosque at the centre. Even Internet platforms, which are extremely popular and very active,

foster these communities in formation around various topics and interests such as religion, ethnicity and economic projects. The online flyers and announcements about some religious communities are also available in mosques, cafés, medreses (religious schools) and other places where Muslim migrants meet.

It is important to underscore that the imagination of a Muslim community in Moscow is not the global Ummah. Moscow's Muslim community is marked in important ways by the Soviet past. Soviet Muslims underwent more than 70 years of atheism and were isolated from the rest of the Muslim world. Muslims outside the former Soviet republics community continue to be seen as foreign, dangerous and different. As in the Soviet period, state control over religious space continues to be strong in Russia; Islam is allowed to be practiced, but in state-designated and approved spaces. Connections with the rest of the Muslim world continue to be restricted.

The imagination of this 'Muslim' community is therefore more or less limited to Muslim migrants who live in Moscow. Sharing a common history (Soviet past, culture and migration history), common experiences as Muslims living in a non-Muslim society, shared minority status and shared values are all critical.

In this article, I showed that the term 'community', despite its long critique, can be still helpful to understand belonging systems in uncertain environments. Whether found in the form of groups or networks, the collectives of community in both imagined and real dimensions incorporate lively social relations among individuals who create spaces of social (and often religious) engagement to survive and keep safe. There is a long debate around the contested term 'community' as well as Anderson's 'imagined community'. However, there are not enough systematic studies that explain how belonging systems form and function in uncertain environments, the globalised world of capitalism and recent times of accelerated discrimination and religious clashes.

Notes

1. Ahmed, "What Is Islam?" 142.
2. Bukharaev, "Islam in Russia," 167–182.
3. See Hasan et al., "Halal Studies in Universities"; and Ismaeel and Blaim, "Toward Applied Islamic Business Ethics."
4. Agamben, "Homo Sacer."
5. Preston, "Islam in Russia under the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations."
6. Karpov and Lisovskaya, "Orthodoxy, Islam, and Religious Tolerance in Russia;" and Shlapentokh, "Islam and Orthodox Russia."
7. Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay, "Islam in the Soviet Union;" Mostashari, "On the Religious Frontier;" and Bukharaev, "Islam in Russia."
8. Malashenko, "Islam in Russia;" Giuliano, "Islamic Identity and Political Mobilization in Russia;" and Sabirova, "Young Muslim-Tatar Girls of the Big City."
9. Crews, "Empire and the Confessional State" and "For Prophet and Tsar."
10. Dannreuther and Luke, "Russia and Islam;" Jonson and Esenov, "Political Islam and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia;" Hunter, "Islam in Russia;" Shlapentokh, "Islam and Orthodox Russia;" and Markedonov, "The North Caucasus."
11. See Yemelianova's works published in 2002, 2003 and 2009 with titles "Russia and Islam," "Russia's Umma and Its Muftis," and "Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union;" see also Aitamurto, "Protected and Controlled;" Pilkington and Yemelianova, "Islam in Post-Soviet Russia;" and Bukharaev, "Islam in Russia."

12. Valiyev, "Azerbaijan;" Balci, "Between Sunnism and Shiism;" and Heyat, "Re-Islamisation in Kyrgyzstan."
13. See Yemelianova's works "Islam, National Identity and Politics in Contemporary Kazakhstan," "Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union" and "Russia's Umma and Its Muftis."
14. See Anderson, "Imagined Community." More than an imagined community, it is a moral community. Durkheim's (1995 [1912]: 44) template for a "moral community" is a Church, but it can apply equally to a community bounded by a religion other than Christianity which "is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them (italics in original)."
15. Interviews, Moscow, April 2017.
16. Interviews, Female, 53, April 2017, Moscow.
17. Ahmed, ibid.
18. Anderson, "Imagined Communities" and "Imagined Communities."
19. Hage, "A Not So Multi-Sited Ethnography of a Not So Imagined community."
20. Bauman, "Community;" Brent, "Searching for Community;" Castells, "The Rise of the Network Society;" Cohen, "The Symbolic Construction of Community;" Delanty, "Community;" Esposito, "Communitas;" Goldbard, "New Creative Community;" Kenny, "Developing Communities for the Future;" Putnam, "Bowling Alone;" Shaw, "Community Development and the Politics of Community;" and Studdert, "Conceptualising Community."
21. Delanty, "Reinventing Community and Citizenship in the Global Era," 42.
22. Mulligan, "On Ambivalence and Hope in the Restless Search for Community."
23. McDuie-Ra, "Ethnicity and Place in a 'Disturbed City';" On and Shih, "Introduction to Asian Ethnicity's Special Issue on Ethnicities, Governance, and Human Rights;" Parrenas, "Transgressing the Nation-State;" see the edited book by Ward and Jenkins, "Ethnic Communities in Business;" and Portes and Grosfoguel, "Caribbean Diasporas."
24. McDuie-Ra, ibid.
25. Interviews, Muhammad, April 2017.

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