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## *Localized Migrant Communities in the Absence of Ethnic Neighbourhoods: A Glimpse into Moscow's Ethnic Cafés<sup>1</sup>*

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This article addresses the question of whether one can speak of localized migrant communities in contexts without ethnic neighbourhoods. While recognizing that space plays an important role for the emergence and sustenance of migrant communities, we argue that the conventional neighbourhood-based understanding of localized migrant communities limits the research's potential and instead suggest shifting the focus to prevalent elements of migrant infrastructure; in particular, to ethnic cafés and restaurants. In an attempt to elucidate the vague term of a migrant community, we conceptualize it as densely tied fragments of social networks. The discussion draws on fieldwork in Moscow, a city that attracts significant migration flows from post-soviet republics, as well as from other regions of Russia, but has no ethnic neighbourhoods. The ethnographic study of migrant communities in ethnic cafés demonstrates how such localized migrant communities function and maintain themselves and what implications this spatial boundedness has for social relations. The article thus returns to a spatial understanding of migrant communities, but offers ways to avoid the 'dead-end' of neighbourhood-based research and strives to lay out ways through which to combine spatial and network-centred approaches. In so doing, and together with addressing an under-researched post-soviet context, the discussion contributes to current debates within urban anthropology and migration studies.

**Keywords:** Localized migrant communities, ethnic neighbourhoods, ethnic cafés, Moscow, Russia.

### **Introduction**

Localized migrant or ethnic communities have been an important subject for both migration studies and urban anthropology. Both fields were formed under the influence of the Chicago School of Human Ecology, which conceived of a city as consisting of neighbourhoods populated by specific social groups (Park 1915). The Chicago School scholars observed the formation of segregated monoethnic neighbourhoods — 'Little Italys' and 'Chinatowns', where newly arrived migrants settled in close proximity to their co-ethnics in areas that provided them with opportunities to live, work and satisfy other needs. This understanding of migrant communities was reinforced by the initiation and development of urban anthropology: looking to adapt ethnographic methodologies to the spatial complexity and heterogeneity of the urban setting, many anthropologists, who were accustomed to working in rural areas, turned to neighbourhood-based research as a means of circumscribing the field of their inquiry (Prato and Pardo 2013). Neighbourhood-centricity in migrant community research remained influential for several decades.

In 1981, Caroline Brettell published an essay that described her experience of studying Portuguese migrants in two cities, Toronto and Paris. Trained as an anthropologist, she sought a 'Little Portugal' in both locations and was successful in finding one in Toronto but not in Paris. She puzzled over the question of whether the Portuguese in Paris could still be considered a community: settled across Paris, they neither had well-developed associations nor maintained strong co-ethnic personal networks. The question remained without a clear answer, but her

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essay was emblematic of the problems faced by migration scholars at the time: there was a growing literature documenting dispersed migrant settlement (Chacko 2003, Skop and Li 2005, Johnston et al. 2008, Avenarius 2009), which challenged a conventional neighbourhood-based understanding of migrant communities and raised the question of whether the dispersed settlement of migrants meant they in fact no longer formed a community *stricto sensu*. This called for the necessity of revising the concept of a migrant community, but did not lead to a serious scholarly discussion and a migrant community became a rather vague concept. Some scholars still use it as a synonym for an ethnic neighbourhood (Pong and Hao 2007, Smajda and Gerteis 2012), others see a community through the lens of various organizations and events (Van Tran 1987, Weibel-Orlando 1999), while still others use it to signify all migrants of the same ethnic identification or origin living in a receiving city or state, no matter how dispersed or concentrated they may be and irrespective of how they are connected to one another, if at all (Stanger-Ross 2006, Tsai 2006, Chaichian 2008). A number of authors use the term with several meanings (Zhou and Li 2003, Fennema 2004) or else do not provide a definition, taking the category ‘ethnic community’ for granted (Menziez et al. 2007, Cerezo and Chang 2012). An alternative approach that has gained increasing traction among migration scholars, however, entails a network understanding of community (Markowitz 1992, Winters et al. 2001). It stems from the work of community scholars who aimed at ‘liberating a community from the space’ (Webber 1963; Wellman and Leighton 1979) and at establishing a distinction between community and neighbourhood (Everitt 1976). Studying a community with this approach entails looking at a ‘structure of primary ties’ (Wellman 1979: 1207), independent of their localization.

Following this logic of ‘freeing’ the concept of community from a spatial basis, Zelinsky and Lee proposed heterolocalism as a model that refers to ‘populations of shared ethnic identity which enter an area from distant sources, then quickly adopt a dispersed pattern of residential location, all the while managing to remain cohesive through a variety of means’ (1998: 281). Parallel to this, migration scholars coined the expression ‘transnational community’, as sustained by new technologies of communication and transport (Levitt 2001, Vertovec 2004, Basch et al. 2005, Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). With the advent and development of the Internet, research into online migrant communities has expanded (Navarrete and Huerta 2006, Komito 2011, Schrooten 2012). Space, it seems, has lost much of its significance for the concept of a migrant community.

However, there are two arguments against an entirely ‘spaceless’ conceptualization of a migrant community. The first concerns a recent twist in the field of community studies: as Bradshaw argues (2008), space still matters, at least for specific kinds of communities, as propinquity may allow certain transactions to be settled at a lower cost — and even, in some cases, to occur at all. Spatial concentration and mutual economic activities are features of an ethnic enclave (Portes and Manning 1986). Neighbourhood-based social networks are shown to influence the trajectories of youth (Galster and Killen 1995). Secondly, migrant infrastructure plays an important role in fostering migrants’ connections that, in turn, function as a basis for migrant networks (Drucker 2003, Bunmak 2011, Ferrero 2002). Migrant infrastructure, which

is run and attended by migrants, almost necessarily appears in newly-adopted locales and can be tied to ‘migrant neighbourhoods’ or function within ethnically diverse districts of the city. One of the first and most common types of such infrastructure is ethnic cafés and restaurants (Gitmez and Wilpert 1987, Drucker 2003).

We consider these two arguments significant enough to revisit the discussion of localized migrant communities, which has not happened so far in migration studies. To move beyond the hackneyed discourse of localized migrant communities as ethnic neighbourhoods, we address this issue in the research context of Moscow, a city that has significant migration flows but no ethnic neighbourhoods. We discuss the results of our ethnographic study of migrant communities in ethnic cafés looking at how these localized migrant communities function and maintain themselves and at the implications of this spatial boundedness for social relations. The analysis contributes to the field of migration and urban studies, as it addresses issues within the as yet under-researched post-soviet context.

### **The Research Context**

Russia is now considered the main receiving country in the post-soviet migration system (Ivakhnyuk 2012, Brunarska et al. 2014) which formed after the collapse of the USSR. It offers a visa-free regime of travel. Since the Russian ‘oil boom’ of the 2000s, the lion’s share of migration is of an economic nature. The Central Asian states are the main countries of origin of migrant workers. In 2017, among the 4.8 million foreign citizens in Russia who officially declared work to be their purpose of entry, around 3 million were from three countries: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Main Directorate<sup>3</sup> 2018). The strongest magnet for both international and internal migration in Russia is its capital, Moscow (Mkrtchyan and Karachurina 2014, Mkrtchyan 2015, Main Directorate 2018). In 2017, out of a total population of almost 12 million, around 3 million foreign citizens were registered in the city, 1.7 million of whom declared work to be their purpose of entry (Main Directorate 2018). Annually, Moscow attracts about one fifth of all international migrant workers coming to Russia (Florinskaya et al. 2015). In spite of hosting a large number of ethnic migrants — both internal and international — Moscow has no ethnic neighbourhoods (Vendina 2004), which is explained by its heritage of Soviet urban structures and institutions that aimed at social mixing along different axes (Demintseva 2017).

### **The Research Design**

The discussion is based on ethnographic work conducted in two types of migrant communities in Moscow. The first addresses communities of migrants from Samarkand, Uzbekistan, focusing on five ethnic cafés in three locations. The second concerns an Islamic community and focuses on two cafés close to one of Moscow’s mosques, in an area that has a high concentration of Muslim infrastructure. The results described in this article are part of a five-month qualitative project that entailed a study of 80 ethnic cafés in Moscow based on

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<sup>3</sup> This is short for ‘Main Directorate for Migration Affairs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia. Statistical Information on the Migration Situation’.

observation and interviews with the owners, workers and visitors.<sup>4</sup> Each of the two authors worked in one type of migrant community, which resulted in 50 hours of ethnographic work and 16 journal entries. This type of fieldwork can be referred to as a series of ethnographic case studies (Fusch et al. 2017). In each café, the researchers developed contacts with the owners or managers who served as gatekeepers. These relationships — together with regular visits — provided the basis for the fieldwork.

The cafés were considered ‘ethnic’ if they satisfied three conditions: 1) provision of ethnic cuisine; 2) presence of ethnic migrants among visitors (at least, at certain times or with some level of regularity); 3) presence of ethnic migrants among the café’s workers. During the project, we mainly focused on migrants who typically face the most xenophobic attitudes in Russia; specifically, international migrants from Central Asia and Transcaucasia and internal migrants from the Northern Caucasus (Mukomel 2014). Interviews were conducted with migrants irrespective of the length of their stay in Moscow and independent of their citizenship status. Following a network approach, in this study we define a community as a portion of a social network that possesses a high density of ties. To understand network density, we paid attention to the level of acquaintance between visitors at cafés, which was expressed through greetings, handshakes and conversation ‘at the table’. We also asked our informants about the people they know in a given café, how they came to know each other and how they interact. Following this logic, not every ethnic café was deemed a base for a community.

In what follows, we harness the potential of comparative ethnography describing two types of café-based migrant communities in Moscow and providing details on the nature of the ties they involve, how they are structured and function. Being based on different grounds, each allows for a delineation of the main principles of localized migrant communities’ maintenance and brings to the fore the complex relations between ‘communities as networks’ and ‘space’.

## Research Results

### *Communities of Migrants from Samarkand*

Samarkand is a city in Uzbekistan which, as a consequence of the complexities of both pre- and Soviet Central Asian history, is considered to be one of the main centres of Tajik culture (Abashin 2002). Among its inhabitants — and consequently among those who migrate to Moscow — there are significant numbers of both Tajiks and Uzbeks. Mechanisms of chain migration (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964) contribute to the formation of communities of Samarkandians in Moscow. We will show how these homeland-rooted communities — localized in special Samarkand cafés — function. For our study of communities of migrants from Samarkand, we chose three sites in Moscow: 1) a café in a marketplace located in the southwest of Moscow; 2) three cafés in a marketplace located in the northwest of Moscow; 3)

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<sup>4</sup> This project was carried out in January-June 2013 in cooperation with MSSSES (the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences) as part of a course on ‘Qualitative methods in sociology’. Alongside the authors, the project participants were A. Alkhasov, E. Belan, E. Bik, P. Dyachkina, M. Erofeeva, E. Kiselev, S. Kukol, M. Motylkov, A. Muradyan, I. Napreyenko, K. Puzanov, K. Smolentseva and Professor I. Steinberg.

a café in a commuter residential district in the northwest of Moscow. The communities around these three spots are weakly connected with each another, since visitors to these cafés remain strongly connected with one Region or a district of Moscow; there, within those bounds, they conduct their life.

### Communities' Structure

Each of the three communities has a 'core', which contains the closest, most frequent and most intensive ties, and a 'periphery', where the ties are weaker (for example, people who visit irregularly or rarely). The core consists of Samarkandians whose native tongue is Tajik, but who also speak Uzbek. This marginal position allows the core to be 'kinfolk' to both the Uzbeks from various parts of Uzbekistan, and to the Tajiks, who form the broader periphery of the community.

The 'core' members have influential positions in the cafés. They usually work or live close by and visit these establishments much more frequently — at least once a day — than the 'periphery' community members. They see the café as 'home turf', where they enjoy the benefits of sitting down to relax, carry out negotiations and issue orders — the latter often include special tasks given directly to waiters without involving the café's owners or managers (for example, to buy something from a shop nearby). They are well aware of what is going on in the community and café; thus, during the fieldwork, many of them knew about the study even before their first contact with the researchers. Even though they do not own or run the cafés, they behave as 'majority shareholders' and see the café as an enterprise into which they have put an investment, though not necessarily a monetary one:

When we were discussing how the café had added an awning and some little tables on the street, G. [one of the members of the community's core] said: 'Yeah, I've got some great prospects going on here.' He related how he'd been there since 7:30AM that day, and how each morning he brings the café workers mille-feuilles or some other pastries (journal entry, 05.06.2013).

Such a position allows the 'shareholders' to modify the café's work to meet their own demands, to propose and carry out changes. Thus, 'core' members of a Samarkand community asked the owner of one of the cafés, who was from Chechnya, to take on a certain individual as a cook — one who would need to be paid quite well (by the establishment's standards) — and the owner accepted their request.

Here the usual dish is rice pilaf — they made a special agreement with the café owner to invite a 'well-known pilaf specialist', who takes \$100 a day as his pay. They prepare twenty kilograms of rice, which is enough for a hundred people. Out of that hundred, M. [one of the members of the community's core] knows if not all of them personally, at least all of their faces. At 11:30AM they start serving the pilaf, and by 12:30PM it is already gone (journal entry, 08.06.2013).

The 'periphery' is essential for the running of the café as a business venture; it provides the necessary volume of orders. Additionally, the periphery provides the geographical footprint of the community, which serves as a means to increase the community's sense of its own



significance and pride based on its resources and ‘sphere of influence’; informants allude to localities outside of Moscow to boast how far away people are ready to go for a specific café. The periphery also offers a potential for growth to the community, since it possesses new resources that may interest the core.

### Community Functionality

The usual pragmatic nature of social networks of migrants in Russia (Brednikova and Pachenkov 2002), with regard to acquiring employment, accommodation and various official documents, holds no relevance for the Samarkand communities currently under discussion. This can be explained by the fact that the communities’ cores consist of individuals from the ‘old’ migration of the 1990s, for whom all such preliminary questions were long ago resolved. Instead, Samarkand communities perform other important functions. They serve as a reference group and as a substitute for a neighbourhood community, and represent ‘Samarkandians in Moscow’.

Samarkand communities include those who have had a common experience that is perceived as deviant among the sending and receiving societies, but which is not uncommon among migrants in Russia. Such an experience becomes a subject of discussion and subsequent ‘normalization’<sup>5</sup> within a migrant community. During the fieldwork there were two paradigmatic examples of such an experience: having two wives (or having stable, long-term though not necessarily formally registered relationships with two women, one in Moscow and one in Samarkand) and refusing to help someone build their career at the marketplace. We found that having a relationship with two women in two countries may be often discussed and both rational and emotional arguments are made in favour of such an arrangement. Alternatively, the matter is not discussed with any seriousness; it is instead couched in jokes. Either way, this situation serves as a means of confirming once again that an individual is not ‘abnormal’. Furthermore, it is also a means for the community to test its uniformity and integrity with regard to personal views and norms.

Another topic of heated discussions, which is characteristic of marketplace-based communities, is helping one’s fellow countrymen to attain high positions quickly (for example, to open their own shops). The currents flowing between Samarkand and Moscow marketplaces have reached a level of saturation in which the upper positions in marketplace hierarchy have become more or less entrenched. Immigration is ‘growing old’, and migrants who came to Moscow long ago and have achieved a certain status are beginning to question the expectations and circumstances imposed by their ‘sending’ society with regard to helping newcomers. In conversations held in the community, the lack of desire to help ‘freshmen’ becomes legitimized through claims that newcomers break the rules of reciprocity and go against the grain of established hierarchy — whereas social control, it would seem, does not always function flawlessly:

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<sup>5</sup> This term was introduced in the 1950s to indicate a principle for service development for disadvantaged groups and later became a theoretical perspective (Wolfensberger et al. 1972, Parker et al. 2002). Here, we use it to refer to the process of a re-evaluation of experiences which were hitherto considered deviant.

Sitting together at the table, G. and N. complained that people had become disrespectful: they would arrive from abroad, say ‘be a father to me, help me out’, then you would help them and in half a year’s time they would no longer even give you the time of day (journal entry, 03.06.2013).

He keeps his nephews in check [...] ‘Because it’s easy for them to go astray here’; if they argue, he reminds them, ‘Where did you come here from? Did you speak Russian then? Who taught you? Who was your teacher?’ (at which point G. grabs at his lips while speaking and acts like he’s ripping them out — a symbolic gesture, as if he were tearing from the lips of his nephews the words that he didn’t like) (journal entry, 05.06.2013).

Communities in cafés serve as neighbourhood communities, which is typical among migrants from Central Asia and hard to find in Moscow. One Friday evening in the café in the northwest was remarkable in that on one of the tables at which the ‘core’ community members were seated, there was a bottle of cognac and homemade little dumplings. The dumplings had been prepared and sent to the café as a gift by the wife of one of the men seated at the table. While it is a usual practice in Central Asia to bring such food gifts to neighbours (Abashin 2015), it is not implied nor always intelligible in ‘Muscovite’ individualistic conceptions of neighbourly relations. Coupled with xenophobia, it sometimes happens that an offering given to one’s neighbour ‘with one’s respects’ is rejected, in which case migrant communities in cafés come to the rescue and act towards the would-be gift giver as fitting ‘neighbours’ who, instead, accept the gift of food.

Communities may take on the representative function of ‘Samarkandians in Moscow’. When official representatives and diaspora organizations are severed from the real people whom they endeavour to represent, communities become noninstitutionalized representatives. This is exemplified by the way in which the café functions as a ‘lost and found’ centre for Samarkandians:

One time a man from Samarkand lost his handbag containing his documents at the airport. The bag was found by a man, also from Samarkand, who brought it to this café. U., through his network of connections, found the owner, reached him on the telephone and returned the passport and automobile registration papers (journal entry, 07.06.2013).

As we have seen, Samarkand communities are a space of symbolic or conceptual safety based on social networks that include people with experiences similar to one’s own, who can help in gaining a foothold and a semblance of ‘normalcy’ and can allow one to function with confidence in relation to others in ways that may not otherwise be possible; for example, in relation to one’s neighbours. Here, space play an important role; communities based in cafés across Moscow do not overlap much; a café’s location close to the workplace (in the case of marketplace cafés) or the place of residence (in the case of café in commuter districts) allows for more frequent visits from migrants who work long hours and have few days-off; thus, it fosters more intense communication and the maintenance of a community.

### *The Islamic Community*

There are several ‘clusters’ of Islamic infrastructure in Moscow, including mosques, prayer rooms, halal food stores, bookshops, cafés, and so on. These places can be either run by official Islamic institutions (connected with the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in Russia) or appear to have no connection with such institutions. Officially- and unofficially-run ‘clusters’ highly overlap in terms of location. One interesting site is located near one of Moscow’s four mosques, in an area that includes two cafés, a canteen next to the mosque and a restaurant across the road that has a special prayer room. The members of the community spend their time in the canteen, the restaurant and around the mosque (for example, in the mosque’s yard).

Two factors inherent in Islam influence this community’s emergence: practices of coming together as a congregation and the principle of Islamic ecumenism. In accordance with the first factor, believers gather at least once a week for Friday *salat* in a mosque. In keeping with the second factor, an Islamic community is conceptually multi-ethnic; thus, it can include ethnic migrants from various regions of Russia — including post-soviet states — as well as Muscovites.

#### Community Structure

As a result of the aforementioned dynamics, the Islamic community is internally heterogeneous. People enter it from all walks of life, different migration experiences, ethnic identifications, social class and religious views. To what extent are these potential dividing lines reflected in the actual community?

The framework of this community is fashioned by former residents of the eastern part of the Northern Caucasus with widely varying stories of how they immigrated; the typical case, though, consists of having arrived in Moscow from the Caucasus seven to ten years ago. The boundaries between the groups in this Caucasian<sup>6</sup> ‘core’ are traversable. Most groups consisted of individuals from same republic, or from various republics in the North Caucasus. The boundary between them, as the core of the community of migrants from Central Asia, is ‘bright’ (Alba 2005).

For a snapshot of a ‘peripheral’ community member from Central Asia, let us look at a migrant from Kyrgyzstan. Although this man works in the eastern portion of the city, he rents an apartment with other Kyrgyz in the centre, near a mosque, in order to facilitate regular trips there for prayer. He said that it was still early for him to begin associating with others in the mosque because his knowledge of Russian was poor. Informants from the Caucasus mentioned how in their circles there were no migrants from Central Asia because ‘friends are chosen by mindset and each people group has its own’. Additionally, the cafés are attended by a number of migrants from Muslim countries across Africa, including from Sub-Saharan countries like Senegal and Guinea. They form their own special group, with various degrees of integration into the community. A., a migrant from Guinea, goes to the mosque most of all to pray and does not view it as a source of social capital; conversely, U, a migrant from Senegal, uses the mosque

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<sup>6</sup> Hereinafter Caucasian refers to people from the Caucasus.



as to find dependable work and as a location for leisure activities and pastimes:

He's forty-one years old, though he doesn't look it. In 2006, he came to Russia from Senegal and stayed in a university dormitory [...] with others from Senegal. [...] he spends all his free time at the mosque, where he associates with individuals simply on his own initiative, prays, and looks for work. Nearly all the work he has found has been through the mosque. Do they ever scam him out of his money? He did recount one instance, but it involved a Ukrainian not connected with the mosque. Muslims, he believes, don't run scams (journal entry, 24.05.2013).

This case is particularly important since U. had initially relied on his fellow Senegalese in Moscow, but over the course of seven years, his social circles changed, and now they are primarily Muslim and multi-ethnic, and he keeps in touch with their members at the mosque. During our conversation, U. greeted those who came into the café in Russian and then switched to a language the researcher did not recognize, then back to Russian. As it turned out, the second language had been his native tongue; he had taught a greeting in it to one of his Caucasian employers, and thus the researcher was able to witness an exchange of greetings between an Ingush<sup>7</sup> and a Senegalese in the Senegalese's native tongue. Nevertheless, usually, the non-Caucasian migrants tend to be located either at the community's periphery or beyond its bounds, and their use of the mosque as a source of social capital varies significantly. Moreover, among the community members, there are some Russians who have turned to Islam and they form a separate peripheral 'cluster'.

The community is also heterogeneous in terms of 'Islamic sects'. The most evident religious discrepancy is between Salafis and Sufis, reflecting a conflict that is characteristic of Islamic communities across Russia and stems in part from different interpretations of Islam and different attitudes toward religious innovations and past traditions. It also stems from distribution of power, as Sufis are associated with the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims — which officially represents Muslims on the governmental level — while Salafis are considered to be rebels (Varshaver and Starodubrovskaya 2017). Both groups are well represented in the community; most community members, however, are located either somewhere in the middle of this ideological continuum or do not delve into the finer points of theology.

The community attracts a wide variety of individuals, from hired labourers to businessmen of all levels; from 'oligarchs', whose personal motor fleets the café owner describes with gusto, to petty traders. Class boundaries in this community are contextual and far from prominent. At one table, there might be only businessmen if they are conducting affairs. In cases where ethnicity is tied to a particular activity, a social circle may be homogenous according to both criteria. Nevertheless, if individuals know each other and there is a topic up for discussion (religion is the general and most heated topic, judging by the number of conversations about it), then social class ceases to play a role; especially since integration — both social and ethnic — plays an important part in Islamic discourse, according to which the *ummah* must be united. It is this factor that presumably encourages integration and mitigates

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<sup>7</sup> One of the ethnicities of the North Caucasus.

the formation of social boundaries.

### Community Functionality

The Islamic community is a tight, closely-knit one, and it could not be so were it not so functionally effective for its members. We have identified at least three ways in which the community ‘works’ for its members in a positive fashion.

First, the community functions as a labour market. Alongside unofficial conversations related to employment, there is a ‘bulletin board’ where information on job opportunities appears from time to time. Besides more or less formal means of job seeking, the community unites and increases the level of trust among mosque-goers who are connected with each other in their workplace. This creates more opportunities for peripheral community members to be re-hired and to bring along their acquaintances, who thus have a higher chance of being hired.

Second, the community is connected with various charity institutions that help to improve conditions for Muslim migrants who might otherwise ‘go adrift within Moscow’s machinery’. There is an official charity run by the mosque. There are also unofficial charity funds through which mosque-goers can pool their money to provide for those in need. For example, the owner of one of the cafés receives money from people in his circle, which he then uses to feed poor mosque-goers at his café:

X. has several personal friends or acquaintances who chip in so that X. can feed the poor from time to time. [...] And leading up to Eid al-Fitr they try to feed everyone for free every day. [...] the charity efforts are organized through the café ONLY by people who have some close connection with the owner. He says that he’d rather not put up a collection box for sadaqah<sup>8</sup> because then people might claim that he was using the money improperly and he doesn’t want to have to take that responsibility (journal entry, 22.05.2013).

Third, the community embodies the formulation and support of norms and values, which is particularly important for migrants in a context of urban anomie. To maintain the Islamic system of norms, community members talk to each other about God in Islam, retelling the *hadiths* and the *sunnah*, as well as discussing the problems that they encounter in their own lives with an end to interpreting them through the prism of Islam and understanding how to proceed correctly, in accordance with Islam’s guiding principles.

These three functions of the community, when superimposed, lend the community a high level of internal ‘concatenation’, while the Islamic discourses — consistent and effective — multiply this concatenation. This description of the community suggests that space matters: a mosque attracts mosque-goers, who then meet in cafés where informal communication takes place. Contrary to the expected absence of social boundaries in the community according to the *ummah* principle, people form specific subgroups. However, the boundaries are permeable.

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<sup>8</sup> The sadaqah are alms collected and given out according to specific rules.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this article we have revisited the discussion surrounding migrant communities and have argued that space does play an important role for their emergence and maintenance. We suggest that the concept of localized migrant communities can be used beyond the context of ethnic neighbourhoods as ‘urban villages’ (Krase 1997) in connection with migrant infrastructure and, more specifically, with ethnic cafés and restaurants. This approach allows us to tackle the question of whether we can speak of localized migrant communities in situations without ethnic neighbourhoods.

In line with the existing literature, we concede that the interrelation between migrant communities and migrant infrastructure is not straightforward (Bradshaw 2008); migrant infrastructure can be an economic enterprise (Rath et al. 2017), not always conducive to the formation and maintenance of social ties among migrants (Varshaver et al. 2014). Bearing in mind that not every ethnic café serves as a basis for a migrant community, in this study we have seen two different types of relations between them, depending on who initiated a given café’s emergence. Firstly, communities can organize cafés for themselves. Secondly, café owners can set up their business targeting at specific community. The first type of relation refers to the two market-based Samarkandian cafés, where communities arise at the intersection of corporate and homeland-oriented relations, so that their members, originating from the same city and already acquainted from Uzbekistan, work at the marketplace ‘shoulder to shoulder’. Under the influence of demands for a public catering service, appropriate individuals are found who can create such a business. Interestingly, in these two cafés, the café-businessmen were not the ‘core’ members and were not from Samarkand. The second type of relation refers to the non-marketplace Samarkandian café and the café across the road from the mosque. The non-marketplace Samarkandian café came about as a business venture after its non-Samarkandian owners ‘sifted through’ various target audiences, tried working for the ‘Bukharans’,<sup>9</sup> but in the end ‘seized upon’ the idea of the Samarkand community, which became their target audience instead. The café next to the mosque was set up for mosque-goers by a Muslim businessman who wanted his fellow businessmen to have access to *halal* food, be able to conduct meetings and pray.

Given the complex relations between ethnic cafés and migrant communities and our will to avoid the trap of a simple substitution of an ‘ethnic neighbourhood’ with an ‘ethnic café’, we use a network approach (Wellman 1979, Wellman and Leighton 1979). A network approach towards café-based communities entails a focus on the social ties that connect those who frequently visit a café. The density and intensity of social connections, in turn, imply solidarity, trust, collaborative actions, reciprocity, information exchange and shared norms and values (Weibel-Orlando 1999, Kandori 1992, Portes 1998, Putnam 2000). For many, migration from rural areas in Central Asia, Transcaucasia and the North Caucasus to an urban centre such as Moscow raises challenges that cannot be addressed through a previously-rooted ‘set of norms’ and for which the ‘mainstream core’ of the receiving society (Zhou 1997) does not provide a

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<sup>9</sup> These are migrants from Bukhara, which is another ‘Tajik’ city in Uzbekistan along with Samarkand.

readymade substitution. To deal with these challenges, a café-based community becomes a space for the creation and maintenance of norms and values relevant to the new situations of its members. As this study shows, discussions over ‘complex issues’, whether on the basis of religion or other systems, plays a significant role within communities. From these discussions, we can tell that the norms and values within these migrant communities may differ from both receiving and sending ‘sides’. Even in the case of a highly transnational Samarkand community, it emerges that its café-based fragment separates itself from the Uzbekistan-based one, which contradicts the view of a transnational community as homogenous in terms of norms and values and highlights its conflict-inducing nature (Coe 2011).

The localization of such fragments of social networks in cafés has important implications. First, localization allows for gatherings and, thus, for the strengthening of the existing ties and the emergence of new ones. The cafés under discussion are located either close to community members’ workplaces — as in the case of marketplace-based cafés — or are conveniently located on their everyday routes — as with those close to the mosque. Many members of the community are of an older generation and do not rely much on online communication, preferring instead to come, sit down and talk. This is how they replicate settings from their regions of origin: for migrants coming from Central Asia, where the neighbourhood-based *chaykhana* is a centre of local social life (Kochedamov 1957), a community in a café is a recognizable model. Connected with this, the second implication is that a café-based community can play the role of a local community for migrants who arrive from contexts with developed neighbourhood ties (*mahallah* in Uzbekistan) to a megalopolis that lacks such arrangements. In spite of xenophobic relations towards migrants and the absence of their co-ethnics among Muscovite neighbours due to the city’s dispersed patterns of settlement, migrants strive to reconstitute ‘neighbourhood-like’ ties through their interactions with café-based communities. Thirdly, although these localized communities do not transform into organizations, they perform the function of representing ‘groups of migrants,’ as we have seen in the case of the ‘lost and found’ function of a Samarkand community café. They do so in a context in which diasporic organizations claim their right to represent ‘ethnic groups’ at an official level but in fact have limited interaction with migrants (Varshaver and Rocheva 2014). Consequently, cafés that accommodate migrant communities have the potential to serve as ‘community headquarters’.

Looking at migrant communities as networks that are ‘anchored’ in elements of migrant infrastructure reveals aspects which would not otherwise be seen. A conventional spatial understanding of migrant communities takes ethnic neighbourhoods for granted and becomes lost in a research setting characterized by dispersed migrant settlements. A conventional ‘network understanding’ of migrant communities does not entail a spatial dimension. Instead, we suggest an approach that combines a network research angle and urban ethnography, thus contributing to blurring disciplinary boundaries within the social sciences. Moreover, this approach allows for the consideration of both micro- and macro-dimensions and offers opportunities for developing a multi-sited ethnography. As these issues are widely debated in current urban anthropology (Prato and Pardo 2013, Prato 2016), we believe that the analysis

offered here contributes to the development of the field.

Having demonstrated that ethnic cafés and restaurants are a very convenient entrance point for a researcher seeking localized communities in contexts without ethnic neighbourhoods, we should concede that the choice of elements of the migrant infrastructure can be a limiting factor. Cafés — considered a ‘male’ space by the majority of migrants coming from the regions under study — are attended first of all by men. Female and male social networks do not always overlap (Hagan 1998), therefore a study of female localized communities would require a different element of migrant infrastructure as an entrance point. Similarly, a focus on ethnic cafés would probably not suffice for a study of communities of migrant youth. Clearly, the choice of specific elements of migrant infrastructure is a crucial and defining step for any study within this framework.

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