

МОГУТ ЛИ ДРУГИЕ ГОВОРИТЬ: КОНТР-НАРРАТИВЫ ТАТАР И МАППИЛОВ В СРЕДСТВАХ МАССОВОЙ ИНФОРМАЦИИ

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Татары в России и маппилы в Индии – два «воображаемых сообщества» с разной социокультурной, этнонациональной и геополитической идентичностью – имеют больше различного, чем схожего. Главное, что их объединяет – это категория «другого» в отношении описания их происхождения, распространения и выживания этих двух общин. Востоковедная историография, литературные образы и идеологические программы обращаются к общим стереотипным медийным образам и предвзятым нарративам «другого», что становится сегодня частью повседневной дискурсивной практики. Отвергая вековые интеллектуальные нарративы и медийные образы, новая волна интеллигенции среди татарской и маппильской общин приносит встречные нарративы об истории, традициях и повседневной жизни уважаемых общин. Средства массовой информации, особенно кинематограф, стали основным инструментом для переосмысления татарской и маппильской самобытности и культуры, а также для того, чтобы выявить искажение образа этих сообществ.

Ключевые слова: Татары, маппилы, образ «другого», субалтерность, репрезентация в СМИ.

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CAN THE OTHER SPEAK? MEDIATED COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF TATARS AND MAPPILAS

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Tatars in Russia and Mappilas in India, two imagined communities of different socio-cultural, ethno-national and geo-political identities, have more contrasts than commonalities. Their similarity lies in the constructed otherness of Tatars and Mappilas regarding the origin, spread, and survival of these two communities. Orientalist historiography, literary imageries, and ideological intrusions have constructed a common 'other' whose stereotyped media images and biased narratives are now part of everyday discursive practice. Rejecting these age-old intellectual narratives and media images, a new wave of intelligentsia among the Tatar and Mappila communities brings counter-narratives on the history, tradition, and everyday life of these communities. Media, especially cinema, have become a major tool for reinterpreting Tatar and Mappila identity and culture and challenging the distorted images of these subaltern communities.

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Tatars in Russia and Mappilas in India, two imagined communities of different socio-cultural, ethno-national, and geo-political identities, have more contrasts than commonalities. Tatars maintain their ethnic, linguistic, and national identity in official terms whereas Mappilas remain as an unauthorized community with a banal identity in terms of language, culture, and statehood. While the Tatar language and Tatarstan realize national imaginaries, Arabi-Malayalam and Malabar are still historically-imagined identities of Mappilas. However, these two communities share common subalternity in the form of religious minority and being represented as an ethno-cultural other of Slavic-Christian Russia and Aryan-Hindu India. There is many a similarity in the otherness of Tatars and Mappilas, as they have been represented across historical narratives, political discourses, and media images, regarding the origin, spread, and survival of these two communities.

Age-old hegemonic social apparatuses and notions of cultural superiority rule the roost in the construction and reproduction of othering narratives about Tatars and Mappilas, who are marginal in present socio-political and economic terms in their respective countries. Despite local diversities and historical discontinuities in the evolution of communities of Muslims in Russia and India, narratives about the "Tatar yoke" and "Mughal despotism" link to overarching representations of a global other, namely: Islam. Orientalist historiography, literary imageries, and ideological intrusions constructed a common other whose stereo-

typed media images and biased narratives have become part of everyday discursive practice. On the other hand, the self-representing subaltern voice of Tatars and Mappilas has been either apologetic in relation to the miseries of the distant past or it was distorted by the superior communities in respective countries to keep inferior 'other' in control. To decipher this power play of othering we have to explore the history and evolution of Tatar and Mappila communities, which will uncover the current politics of media representations of Muslims and Islam at large in Russia and India.

CONCEPTUALIZING OTHERING

The history of Muslim communities beyond the Arab world has been usually knit around the question of Islam's entry into these lands, either in the form of invasion or invitation, and the case of Tatars and Mappilas is no different. Though the presence of Islam is reported as far back as the seventh century, the invasions of Arabs, Timurids, and Mongols prevail in popular historical narratives both in Russia and India. Archeological records have unveiled Islam's smooth entry into Bulgar and Malabar through trade relations before the interventions of general Marvan into the Khazar Khaganate in AD 737 and Muhammed bin al-Qasim in AD 711–712 into Sindh (Yemelinova, 2003; Mohanty, 2016; Schimmel, 1980). While Muslims emerged on the banks of Volga River when King Almush made Islam the state religion of Volga Bulgaria in 922, Indians welcomed Arab traders via the Arabian Sea, with marked Muslim settlement in Malabar, and the conversion of the last Perumal King to Islam in seventh century (Bukharaev, 1996; Panikkar, 1989; Randathani, 2005).

However, colonial orientalist historiography highlighted the narrative of Mongol-Tatar invasion into Russia and Ghazni-Ghauri interventions into India, which resulted in the reproduction of a distorted history of the origin and development of Muslims and of Islam. Apart from the colonial interest of the European forces and their rivalry with Arab Muslim rulers and traders, the power struggles of local elites also influenced orientalist historiography on Islam in Russia and India (Hunter, 2004; Mukhia, 1983; Chatterjee, 1992; Eaton 2000). The Russian perception of Islam and Muslims was largely influenced by the stories of the Mongol conquest of Kievan Rus and the conversion of Ozbek Khan of the Golden Horde, which has been represented as the era of the "Tatar yoke" (Yemelianova, 2003, p. 23). Similarly, orientalist tropes constructed by colonialists against Islam and Muslim rulers helped communally influenced local historians to construct half-baked narratives of a hostile other in the Indian subcontinent (Thapar, 1970).

Post-colonial studies have unveiled the hegemonic power of Eurocentric colonial historiography that used the civilizing mission as an excuse to represent subaltern others not only as subordinate but also as a threat to the superior self in local and global contexts. Despite indigenous diversities, the imperialist cultural notion of 'us versus them' demarcated non-Western, especially Muslim, experiences as despotic and barbaric to justify this othering in the name of civilizing (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 1991). The orientalist intelligentsia and media covered and (mis)represented Islam, whereas the lived experiences of Muslim world were reduced to a "handful of rules, stereotypes and generalizations which reinforce negative notions like violence, primitiveness and atavism" (Said 1997, p. 12). Almond (Almond, 2007) admits the "peripherality of Islam in the discourses of new Orientalists" (p. 196) and the prevalence of such an "otherness control" of Islam in their texts that uncover the "compartmentalization involved in the representation of Islam" (Almond, 2007, p. 203).

As this Eurocentric discursive practice has been in progress for centuries, it has become a “textual attitude” (Karim 1996, p. 207) which prefers texts to actual experiences. In the age of the imperialist media-military complex, orientalism has been “colonizing new territories and has moved into media spaces” (Sardar, 1999, p. 2) and the media actually obscure Islam, representing this aggression as natural: “the local contexts and circumstances are always obliterated” (Said, 1997, p. 13). Meanwhile, to engage with post-colonial criticism, media and intellectual discourses constructed a new stereotype, an “acceptable Other” (Poole, 2002, p. 16) to make the debate more attractive to the liberal world, whereas the media still “limit the way in which Muslims are known” (Poole, 2011, p. 53). According to Brown (2006), in the context of the terrorist attacks on America on 11 September 2001, there was only a “paradigm shift from exotic sensual stereotype of Islam to a stereotyped Muslim fanaticism” (p. 310) in global media representations.

The neo-orientalist media and intellectual discourse of global media were conveniently circulated by social and political elites in local contexts across the West and East that resulted in the othering of Muslims in the name of “militant Islam” that replaced the so-called “red peril” of the last century (Nationalist myths, 2006, p. 4). Once the dominant discourses, frames, and representations across countries reproduced the civilizational “clash” thesis and emphasized “fear” factors after 9/11, a new “global enemy” was in the making akin to the “Evil Empire” of the Cold War era (Kellner, 2004, p. 41). As the “fear of political Islam persisted in discursive environments” (Mishra, 2006, p. 160), in post-9/11 representations it domesticated the enemy image of an “evil Other” and retrieved the civilizational discourse on “an irrational and deeply disturbing Muslim East that breeds those who attack without reason” (Abu-Lughod, 2006, p. 5).

Ultimately, the prejudiced debates differentiating “good Muslims” from “bad Muslims,” rather than “terrorists” from “civilians” (Mamdani, 2002, p. 766), resulted in a “growing climate of suspicion, deterioration of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims and the growth of Islamophobia” (Esposito, 2011, p. xxxiii). The blatant and targeted discursive othering practice that “function[s] on a culturalist and reductionist reading not only of Islam but also of Muslims” (Kerboua, 2016, p. 24), popularized through media narratives and Hollywood tropes, thus constructed a black and white image of the Muslim world at large (Sardar & Davies, 2010, p. 241).

Governed by the ideologies of these apparatuses, Russian and Indian media also joined the neo-orientalist global discourse, othering their own minorities in recent years despite their anti-colonial non-Western character during the Soviet and non-aligned past (Zassorin, 2006; Lokshina, 2006; Malashenko, 2006; Yilmaz, 2013; Rajagopal, 2001, 2009; Sinha, 2009; Ram, 2011; Lankala, 2011; Mecklai, 2010; Narayana & Kapur, 2011). This localization of global media discourse on the Islamic/Muslim other, negating the local socio-cultural experiences of religious minorities like Tatars and Mappilas, can be perceived as the hegemonic power play between the imperialist and nationalist interests of the media military complex in the post-9/11 context (Abdullakkutty, 2018).

IMAGINED OTHERNESS OF TATARS AND MAPPILAS

The national imagination of Tatars and Mappilas are very different from the dominant identities of their respective countries in terms of ethnicity, language, and geographic statehood. While non-Slavic ethnicity, the Tatar language, and the Republic of

Tatarstan are surviving national realities in Russia, non-Aryan ethnicity, the Arabi-Malayalam language, and Malabar are imagined as historical identities in India. However, the history of Tatars and Mappilas are recorded regarding their 'otherness' in terms of the Tatar-Mongol blend and Arab-Mappila convergence in the historical origin and development of these two communities, as they evolved through tribal, colonial, and federal phases.

Despite being subjects of Mongol invasion, the indigenous Tatar tribes were subsequently equated with the invaders and the ethnonym "Tatar" has been conferred upon all Muslims and Turkic-speakers, irrespective of local diversities, who were amassed into the Russian Empire and later into Soviet Union (Faller, 2011). Ever since the Slavic principalities under the Kazan Khanate were invaded by Russians in 1552, Tatar identity has been constructed through linguistic and cultural "orientation towards or away from Russian language and culture" (Wertheim, 2005). Being the largest non-Russian nationality, the otherness of Tatar identity also influenced the historiography in the form of Islam because Tatarstan, populated by the descendants of indigenous Bulgars, has been known as the "cradle of Russian Islam" (March, 2010;Kocak, 2017). Local diversities like Mishari and Nogai are incorporated in a larger Tatar identity, which is also different from that of Muslims in places beyond Tatarstan such as Bashkortostan and Dagestan in terms of Islamic culture and tradition(Wertheim, 2005; March, 2010).

With Dravidian linguistic and cultural lineage, Mappilas are the tribes named after the Arab diaspora who settled across the costal belts of Kerala for centuries with marital, cultural, and commercial ties. Mappilas who are actually the erstwhile "Malabaris," or the indigenous people of Malabar, and "Paradesis," or those who came from overseas and "integrated with the indigenous community"(Ilyas, 2007, p. 437), now identify as Muslims and are located mostly in north Kerala (Joseph, 2017). However, their historical identity has been derived from the otherness of Mappilas as sons-in-law yet to prove their Indianness, despite their mythological lineage with panthirukulam (family of twelve siblings) through Uppukoottan, son of pariah wife of Vararuchi (Pillai, 2019; Randathani, 2005).

While Christians and Jews were also called Mappilas, thanks to their overseas relations even before the arrival of Islam into Kerala Muslims were dominant in this identity, since Arabian settlers were the first to accept Islam in the seventh century, followed by local people converting to Islam who were called as Mappilas (Ilias, 2007). Within the overarching Mappila identity there are local diversities such as Khalasis, Pooslans, Ossans, and "those geographically located even in Tamilnadu and Lakshadweep apart from in hinter lands of Arabian Sea spread across Manglore in north and Kanyakumari in south"(Randathani, 2005, p. 12). However, Mappilas were always historically represented as other due to their Arab relations, Hydarali-Tippu invasions, and their struggle against European colonial powers (Dale, 1980) whereas Mappila warriors fought for Hindu kingdoms in Malabar and resisted even the Delhi Sultanate (Joseph, 2017).

ORIENTALIZING THE OTHER

In spite of other factors, the very otherness of Tatars and Mappilas is the product of orientalizing discursive narratives about Islam and the religious identity of Muslims that have persisted both in Russia and India for centuries. These narratives are reproduced through stories of the Islamized Mongols' reign over Muscovy and the Tsarist Empire's colonizing of the Volga region, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Crimea (Merati, 2017;

Wheeler, 1977). The memory of the Pugachev uprising led by Tatars and the phenomenon called “Musul’manskiivopros” (“Muslim question”) also contributed to biased orientalist notions, as Khalid (Khalid, 2000) noted, blaming the backward “Muslim East” for lagging behind modernity (Campbell, 2015; Wheeler, 1977; Yemelianova, 2003). Though Jadidism under Gaspirali brought a Muslim awakening in the cultural and political spheres, the stigma of backwardness persisted and accusations of counter-revolutionism were leveled at Muslims during the Soviet era, which witnessed mass displacements as well as indoctrination through “Red mullahs” (Kerimov, 1996; Hunter, 2004).

The image of otherness took a new dimension in the post-Soviet context as media depicted the reappearance of religion in the public sphere as a “return to the Middle Ages” (Sabirova, 2011, p. 327). While Sabirova (personal communication, 19 April 2017) agrees with Khalid’s critique of Russian orientalism, Kuznetov (personal communication, 10 April 2017) underscores Sergei Abashin’s argument that “orientalism is everywhere” to admit that “there is [a] problem with some local national tradition including Islamic Tatar culture when they were included in global Russian culture” (Kuznetov, 2017). However, Alikberov (personal communication, 12 April 2017) rejects the Saidian version of negative orientalism in Russia, arguing that “though discriminations between Russians and Tatars can be found this divide is more ethnic than religious because Slavs feel the superiority” (Alikberov, 2017). Kolomiets (personal communication, 17 April 2017), agrees about the survival of this orientalizing notion: “we still are mentally western people and Russian culture is closer to the west though we don’t have references regarding this orientalist tradition” (Kolomiets, 2017).

The religious identity of Muslims has been the target of orientalizing discourse in India, and the representation of Mappilas in pre-colonial and colonial eras is carried forward into present day othering. Though Chinese captain Cheng Ho (1406–33), Central Asian diplomat Abdul Razzaq (1442), and Russian merchant Afanasy Nikitin (1470) reached Malabar decades before Vasco da Gama declared the “great European discovery” of India in 1498, colonial interests defined the history of Mappilas. Given the context of crusades with the Muslim world, European forces targeted Arab traders across Arabian Sea and tried to distance Hindu King Samudri Raja of Calicut from Mappila advisors and admirals (Eaton, 2000; Panikkar, 1960; Randathani, 2005). Gradually the anti-colonial and agrarian struggles of Mappilas against Portuguese and British powers, similar to the uprisings of the Farazi peasants of Bengal against colonial planters and Hindu zamindari, were a common cause to orientalize Muslims as fanatical and anti-modern (Ahmad, 2004; Dale, 1980).

The colonial construct of the “Muslim problem” set the tone of the othering discourse about Indian Muslims when traditional ulamas like Makhdooms of Malabar and Gangohi of Bihar declared jihad against colonizers, despite opposition from revivalist scholars like Ahmad Khan (Engineer, 1985; Ashraf, 1975; Muslims in India, 1975; Randathani, 2005). Though the pan-Islamic Khilafat and nationalist noncooperation movements under Moulana and Gandhi inspired Mappilas for a united fight, the distorted narratives of colonialists about the Malabar (Moplah) Rebellion of 1921 essentialized the otherness of Muslims in India at large, strengthening the “two nation theory” among the elites of Hindu and Muslim communities. Ultra-nationalist divisive policies and colonial historiography presented the community consciousness of Mappilas as reflection of the backwardness of post-independence Malabar, sustaining the orientalized image of a fanatical community resisting integration with Kerala’s modernity until the present day.

Rmakrishnan (personal communication, 10 May 2017) reiterates that there are “two aspects of othering in India; on the one hand the global monolithic image on Islam as an enemy of western civilization” is reproduced and on other hand “a long-standing Indian idea about minorities in general and Islam in particular is popularized” (Rmakrishnan, 2017). However, Gopinath (personal communication, 29 May 2017) denies the otherness of Muslims or Islam arguing that “we had centuries-old trade relations with Arabs” and that Western powers constructed the narrative of their otherness because “they were envious of the Arab trade monopoly” (Gopinath, 2017). Though Mappilas have been identified in religious terms ever since Cheraman Perumal’s so-called conversion after meeting the Prophet Mohammed, and despite their rich cultural presence in art and literature (Hikmathulla, 2017), their historical identity is unchanging: “I have been here for almost 1,500 years. Yet, I am the Other” (Salam, 2016).

Therefore, the Eurocentric politics of othering is practiced by the dominant communities in the form of “re-orientalizing” the “oriental within” (Re-Orientalism, 2011) through hegemonic ethno-cultural discourses on identities such as Tatars and Mappilas, who share the socio-cultural periphery both in Russia and India. Khalid (Khalid, 2000) criticizes Said for making an exception of Russia in his critique of Orientalism despite the fact that Russian orientalist tried to construct “cultural superiority[over] colonized people depicting them as savage natives” (Brower and Lazzerini, 1997, p. xvii). This orientalizing trend in historiography and textbook history during the Imperial and Soviet eras (Gibatdinov, 2007) consequently resulted in perceiving Islam as something “alien to Russia on the subconscious level” (Malashenko, 2006, p. 29) and othering Muslims in political and media spheres as a demographic “threat” (Malashenko, Nuritova, 2009, p. 321).

Similarly, the discourses on Muslims in India as the “oriental within” (Lau, 2009) reinforce their “other asset” (Hasan, 1994, p. 443) stereotyping them as “homogeneous, orthodox-sectarian, anti-national and rabid evangelical” (Engineer, 1999, p. 2134). There are different dimensions of stereotyping Mappila “Muslim masculinities” by colonialists and such constructs are reproduced in the hegemonic narrative in present times (Kasim, 2018). The 1921 anti-colonial struggle called the Moplah Rebellion was the historical turning point in asserting the otherness of Mappilas as aggressive, uncivilized, and fanatical which still causes “strong resentment and distrust while the memory of subalternity remains present” (Punathil, 2013). In the beginning, the British accused the Khilafat organizations and the Congress of rebellion, and later the whole blame was put on Mappilas for the collapse of noncooperation movement and Gandhi’s efforts for Hindu-Muslim unity (Nanda, 2012), whereas the role of non-Muslim leaders like Brahmadattan Nambudhiri in the struggle were ignored (Haripiry, 2019).

CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

Media representation defined as a textual function not only reproduces the dominant discourse in a given social/political context but also re-presents “reality” by constructing and circulating ideas, identities, and social images (Representation, 1997, p. 15). Films, like any other media text, not only reproduce constructed narratives on the subject but also reflect the diverse frames of real life of the people represented. Subaltern films, furthermore, use cinematography to deconstruct distorted historiographies and to construct an alternative narrative on the so-called other in a dominant socio-cultural context.

Considering such dimensions of cinematic representations, I examine the Tatar film *Mullah* (Akmetshin, Fazliyev & Galiaskarov, 2018) and the Malayalam film, *Adminte Makan Abu* (Ahmad, 2011) to explore the otherness of Tatar and Mappila identities against the backdrop of everyday lived experiences of the respective communities. *Mullah* (2018), based on an original script by playwright Tufan Munnnullin, is an alternative cinematographic self-assertion of an ethnically marginal and culturally rich community experiencing historical alienation and cultural dilemma in the present. *Adminte Makan Abu* (Abu Son of Adam), is also a counter-narrative exposing the stereotypes regarding the Mappila community and how it has faced historical injustice in the socio-cultural representation of Mappila people on and off media screens.

Apart from official support from the president of the Republic of Tatarstan, *Mullah* won critical acclaim with national and international audiences, including the award of the Golden Samaritan Lion at the IX International Film Festival, Orenburg. *Adminte Makan Abu* got wider attention when it was selected as India's official entry for the Best Foreign Language Film for the Academy Awards in 2011. As part of the textual analysis of these films, this article compares elements such as the title and storyline, the treatment of the hero's masculinities, the representations of feminine characters, the framing of religious identities, and the imageries of religiosity and natural beauty. Cinematic representations are further discussed in the context of lived experiences, collected through observations and interactions by the author during field work across Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan, and Ufa in Russia, and Malappuram, Kozhikkode, Kochi, and Kasargod in India.

Assertive Title and Storyline. The very titles *Mullah* and *Adminte Makan Abu* carry the baggage of ethnic, cultural, and traditional identity signs representing subaltern communities, while the storylines revolve around the complexities of everyday life and the religious piety of the protagonists and their surroundings. The screenplay of both films is centered around the presence and absence of religiosity in the everyday life of members of a traditional village surrounded by evil instincts within and out of the Muslim community. The simple story development and dramatic climax of the films spread larger-than-life messages about personal purity, social compassion, and religious piety to ensure the survival of not only the cultural humanity but the natural diversity of planet Earth, which is dependent on human nature. Both films are set in traditional village backgrounds of mutual dependence and collective openness, in contrast to the individualistic free flow and personal isolation of the city. Throughout the dialogues, costumes, and music, the subaltern language and culture of Tatars and Mappilas are asserted intentionally not only to counter the hegemonic narrative styles but also to teach the marginal communities to represent themselves and not to entrust others to speak for them.

In moments of mutual othering, the story line of both films underscore what I experienced with Chelnokova, professor of Oriental Studies at Saint Petersburg State University, and her husband, an army man originally from Chechnya who hosted me with halal meat and Georgian mineral water. On the other hand, Umarov, a retired scientist, debated with me on Islamic aspects of drinking and criticized me for not having vodka. However, as the films unveil, there are prejudiced perceptions about the Tatar Muslim centers and settlements such as Arbat Street in Moscow and Sennoy Markets in Kazan and St. Petersburg. Natasha and her Muslim friend Renat, despite being scholars of Oriental Studies at the Saint Petersburg State University, warned me about untidy vendors and pickpockets in the bazaar.

Mappila experiences are not much different, in exchanging culture and cuisine with fellow communities where as many Muslims decline their affinity with so-called Mappila food menu. During a conversation on Muslim's cultural and political priorities Rahman, a retired government employee from Kochi criticized Mappilas of Malappuram and Malabar at large for "eating beef, porota and biriyani even in the breakfast" which are mostly included in lunch or dinner feast. On the other hand, Sandeep and Shibi hosted me for an 'Onam Sadya,' a traditional vegetarian feast on the day remembering the myth of Hindu King Mahabali's sacrifice for his subject, reminding that its "special for you with fried beef and all." Despite his upbringing in a traditional Hindu family who believe cow as holy animal, Dinesh, a waiter at 'Adaminte Chyayakkada' at Calicut Beach, described me the Mappila lineage and recipe for 'Irachichoru' (beef mixed rice). Muhsin, a legislative member of the Kerala Assembly, who is a committed vegetarian despite being from a traditional Muslim family, shared me his experience of being an unpleasant son-in-law during his wedding feast at the bride's home in Lucknow, where kebabs and biryani is part and parcel of Muslim culture.

Framing Masculine Heroes. As the titles of the films denote, both the mullah and Abu are typical personifications of Tatar and Mappila masculine identities, while the term mullah retrieves the comic images of a semi-intellectual priest in traditional dress speaking of non-worldly things. The film uses this stereotypical image in reverse to tell the story of a Tatar village guided and revered by an ideal modern-day young mullah named Asfandiyar. Expected to be a casual, unruly Mappila, Abu on the other hand represents the ideal man with humanistic goodness and religious virtues in his personal and social life that could reverse the erstwhile negative images of men of the community. While the mullah is an accidental young hero on an intentional mission to improve the life of people like him, Adminte Makan Abu plays the role of an ordinary Mappila old man who spreads kindness not only to humans around him but to the nature he lives in.

The mullah's unknown past and unexpected present, relentless courage to face physical and professional threats, empathy towards the victimized and love for a sexually abused girl bring counter-narratives to the typical images of men of religious authority and community leadership. With the typical weakness of a village elder struggling to meet the end of his life, ready to forgive physical challengers and financial cheaters, too innocent to face the official security people and break the law, and being a kind-hearted husband with too much care for his life partner, Abu contrasts with the conventional cinematic images of Mappila masculinity.

If the men on screen are judged by their stereotyped roles, their religious authority and activities have invited diverse responses in the field. As Sabirova noted, "Eastern men" are usually stereotyped, as a famous Soviet song goes: "if I were a Sultan, I would have four wives" (Sabirova, 2017). Dimitry, taking me to Qulsharif Mosque at Kazan Kremlin for Friday prayer, pointed to such otherness of the religious leaders and their incapability to deal with the everyday life of the people. Ugina not only unfolded her displeasure with migrant Muslim youth congregating in the mosques of city, but also blamed the new mullahs for corrupting traditional Tatar Islam (Venina, 2017).

As the films demonstrate, the old stereotypes of mullahs are broken as Dr. Bahauddeen, vice chancellor of Darul Huda Islamic University and Prof. Alikkuttu, the working secretary of a Samastha, a Sunni Muslim organization and Quasi of Malik-bin-Deenar Mosque at Kasargod, represent modern-day scholars who teach multiple languages and are used to

new technologies in Islamic institutions. Asserting their modern outlook in thinking and teachings, Sulaimanov, vice chancellor of Ufa Islamic University discussed his experiences as student of Moscow State University and Shamil, imam of the martyrs' mosque in Moscow, shared the books he authored on psychology and entrepreneurship.

Redefining Feminine Characters. The old lady characters in both Mullah and Adminte Makan Abu are too stereotypical in terms of their ignorance of the world beyond their home life, emotionally and economically dependent on the men around them and fixating too closely on social habits rather than personal insights. Ayshu acts like a typical Mappila wife of Abu, caring for the home and her husband, a loving mother dreaming of her expatriate son's return to serve them, a kind neighbor and cattle breeder, and innocent and sincere towards the people around her. Muslima Apa in Mullah is a village woman who takes care of the people and the responsibilities that she has come across during her life but very intelligent in managing a crisis and persuasive for others to be active in life.

While Adminte Makan Abu doesn't portray any young women in an active role, Nalima in Mullah breaks the cultural-hierarchical frames around Muslim feminine gender roles, challenging men and women who treated women as silent victims of professional, sexual, and physical abuse and questioning the unjust system they face at home and outside. Instead of the usual references to multiple wives of Tatar and Mappila men, the life and dreams of both Asfandiyar and Abu are depicted as connected to the wishes and will of their loving partners.

Similarly to these cinematic narratives, the multiple othering faced by Muslim women is an everyday story both in Russia and India as Sabirova (2017) noted; despite being a liberal, Russian-speaking university professor in St. Petersburg, she is often referred to as Tatar and Russian colleagues refer her as an "Eastern woman." At the same time Sabirova remembers the gentle reminder from a Muslim devotee to speak in Tatar instead of Russian during her field work visit to a mosque in Moscow (personal communication, 19 April 2017) while Dilnara of Ufa Islamic University expressed her disagreement with her own students regarding the roles of Muslim women in family and society.

A political scientist of Jawaharlal Nehru University who did field visits to Malabar, Usha (2019) still cherishes her experience as a well-treated guest in Mappila families in Malappuram, underscoring that (personal communication, 23 August 2019) "patriarchal gender hierarchies among Muslims [are] being exaggerated whereas the trend is part and parcel of so-called Kerala modernity at large" (Usha, 2019). At the same time, certain Mappila women enjoy even political power through the matriarchal lineage of family rites as the Beevi (eldest woman), the surviving title holder of Arakkal kingdom in Kannur (Kooria, personal communication, 20 May 2018). Gopinath (2017), former news reader of All India Radio, pointed to the similarity in Hindu and Mappila women in preferring certain dress codes "as part of certain traditions," whereas Shareena, a senior executive in an information technology company, discloses the "negative comments" even from fellow community members for wearing a hijab at her workplace in Kochi. Thus, the narratives of complex gender relations practiced among Mappilas and Tatars on and off screen help to redefine the otherness of the community at large.

Contrasting Portrayal of Communities. The Muslim characters in Mullah and Adminte Makan Abu are depicted in a mixed way: as representatives of personal good and social evil that reflect their relations with religion and community feelings. The image of lazy people gathering at tea shop and the self-aggrandizing Haji are contrasted with the hard working

umbrella-maker and empathetic travel agent in *Adminte Makan Abu*, whereas Mullah depicts the lethargic oldcleric Salakhuddeen and greedy farmer Valiakhmet in opposition to the ill-fated Badaruddin and gentle businessman Samat to convey the contradictory nature of a community rather than the stereotypical, homogenized evil image of Muslim characters.

Mullah presents very few images of fellow community characters but frames Russian friends of Valiakhmet as evil influences and Asfandiyar's friend as a well-wisher for his future devoid of any cultural or ethnic taboos. *Adminte Makan Abu*, on the other hand, portrays a couple of fellow community members, such as Mash and Johnson who are friends in need and represent the human quality to share the cultural and social space for common good. Though both films center on the unappreciated virtues of humans, there are certain villain characters that represent socially generated evils. The expatriate son of Abu, who never appears on screen, is depicted as an ungrateful child brought up like a tree is cultivated, but that proved hollow inside when it was needed the most. The young Elbrus—who appears once as a normal fellow at home, but otherwise goes for all evil deeds, including cattle theft, sexual abuses, and a final hit on the mullah's back with the help of his social gang—is represented as the product of the social context in which he grew up.

In the real life, experiences of (mis)understandings as well as mutual trust with fellow community members are not odd for the Tatar and Mappila communities. I could face such a situation when security personnel at the metro station near the Cathedral Mosque in Moscow detained me in the late evening asking whether I was from Tatarstan before asking for my name and identity card. Similarly, Bupindar, an Indian medical student in Kazan Federal University, warned me of getting acquainted with people wearing “dhadi topi,” (beard and skull-cap) because I was accompanied by students, from Tatarstan and Dagestan, of Kazan Islamic University. I could see a lay Hindu man with pottu (a religious symbol) on his forehead is seen breaking down emotionally after getting a reference letter from Panakkad Munavvar Thangal for a job in a Muslim management school in Malappuram. Many a time I could watch the Kaliyattam (Hindu festival) procession getting blessings from the Sufi shrine of Mampuram and hundreds of poor people, irrespective of religion and ideology, coming for food grain distributed free of cost from one of the oldest mosques at Monnakkal. The cinematic imageries of good and evil may be reflecting these experiences in the everyday relations of Tatars and Mappilas with fellow communities.

Live-Streaming Religiosity. From the opening scenes of *Adminte Makan Abu* and Mullah, the mosque, adhan, graveyards and Sufi music scores reverberate the ethical undercurrent of a religious community that is struggling to find its soul, lost in the course of atheist and impious life experiences in the past and present. The mullah is advised by an old man to “pray first and listen to the call of your heart,” while the old mullah reminds him that “people here are evil, they need neither Allah nor Mullah.” In the very beginning Abu is seen getting ready for morning prayer and meeting Ustad to find out whether he will get the chance to go on the Hajj, whereas the people of the village are later depicted fighting to own the burial place of Ustad.

The symbolic beauty of mosque minarets, thasbeeh beads, attar bottles, and calligraphic Quranic verses, the frequent discussion on halal meat and money, the debates on the role of mullahs and ustadhs, are cinematographic threads of the religiosity of Tatars and Mappilas whose piety in everyday life has been presented as arresting modernity. The closing scenes of Mullah, with Nalima in traditional hijabi dress reciting from the Quran and nursing Asfandi-

yar to recover from a deadly attack, and Samat's return cursing the village for not protecting their spiritual guide, the hopeful voice of the adhan performed by a child trained by the mullah, are the very depiction of an idea: it's impossible to kill the people's soul and faith. Resonating with Abu's comment that it's a question of belief, despite the tragic turn of canceling the much dreamed-of Hajj, the closing scenes of *Adminte Makan* Abu reinstate faith and hope through the couple's midnight dreams locating them at Medina walking hand in hand among the crowd congregated for Hajj.

The lived experiences of religiosity among Tatar and Mappila has been felt in the public display of Islamic practices, dress codes, and the growing youth presence in mosques and at religious gatherings. Consequently, the attempt to overcome subalternity is reflected in these alternative cinematic representations that produce assertive counter-narratives challenging the popular sayings, verses, images, jokes and symbols constructed by literary artists and media that essentialize the otherness of Tatars and Mappilas on everyday basis.

Tatar film exposes many popular sayings such as "if you scratch a Russian you will find a Tatar" and "a Tatar is worse than an uninvited guest" (Sabirova, 2017). The film tries to undo the popular comic images of mullahs and Tatar men represented as chaplashka (referring to yarmulke like *töbäte* Tatar men traditionally wear) in popular expressions (Faller, 2011). It attempts to counter the narratives of mainstream Russian and Tatar films that normalized the mockery of their identities. The Soviet-era (incomplete) trilogy *Ivan the Terrible* (1944), directed by Sergei Eisenstein, portrays Tatars as Asian savages, and *Andrei Rublev* (1966), directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, depicts Tatars as butchers of "Russian grammar while they take advantage of [a] Russian half-wit girl" (Faller, 2011). Therefore, new Tatar cinema has been in a struggle to overcome the age of racial and gendered stereotypes, as seen in *Bulat-Batyr* (1927) and *The Mullah's Third Wife* (1928), to assert Tatar national history and culture (Galimzyanova, 2016).

Acknowledging similar assertive measures from Mappila community Santheep (2020) questions the casteist and misogynist representations of Mappila characters by Muslim directors and actors in Malayalam films like *Paleri Manikyam* (2009) and *Ustad Hotel* (2012). There is need of counter-narratives to challenge the misconceptions and misrepresentations in Malayalam films like *Kuttikkuppayam* (1964), *Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam* (2003), and *Thattathin Marayath* (2012), which reproduce biased images of Muslim women either "as silenced victims or as sexually available and exotic beings" (Salim & Lokeswari, 2018). As these dominant narratives leave imprints on the public perception of Mappila community at large, their self-assertion can be defined as "oppositional" in their adoption of "a self-consciously Islamic language" and "Islamic visual ethics" (Karinkurayil, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Given the subaltern ethno-national and cultural identity of Tatars and Mappilas, having different geographic but common religious backdrops, historical and contemporary discursive representations reflect the colonialist, orientalist tradition. Though the history of the origin and evolution of Muslim communities in Tatarstan and Malabar have many similarities—such as their peaceful entry through maritime trade-exchanges and costal settlements—hegemonic narratives in both countries represent Tatars and Mappilas as the carriers of a valiant ideology into culturally diverse civilizations. Given the imperial past and post-colonial present, these two diverse communities in Russia and India still struggle

to discard their otherness in social and political and cultural spheres dominated by different apparatus of power.

Once subaltern studies got currency in post-soviet and postcolonial contexts, marginalized identities struggled to break the existing stereotypes and to assert the self in academic and media discourses. Rejecting age-old intellectual narratives and media images, a new wave of intelligentsia among the Tatar and Mappila communities have developed counter-narratives on the history, tradition, and everyday life of their respective communities. Among other means of self-expression, media, especially cinema, have become a major tool for re-interpreting Tatar and Mappila identity and culture and challenging the distorted images of the community produced during the colonial, Soviet, and independent eras (Sabirova, 2017; Shykhuddinov, 2017; Hikmathullah, 2017, Santheep, 2020).

Cinematic depictions of Tatars and Mappilas reflect the quest of subaltern identities to represent themselves and their will to speak their heart and soul immersed in religiosity, especially resisting the assumption that piety is a brake on the progress of modernity. Very similar to the writings on the walls around Khulsharif Mosque in Kazan, which represent the pedigree of Tatars with the rich cultural arena beyond the Volga River, the carvings on the wooden roof of Malik-bin-Dinar Mosque in Kasaragod reflect the lineage of Mappilas who enriched the cultural milieu on the banks of the Arabian Sea. Notwithstanding a few anti-social elements trying to desecrate sacred places of mutual understanding, the harmonious cultural life of Mappilas is explicit in the writings on the shared walls of the temple and mosque in Malappuram, and the cultural coexistence of Tatars is visible on the walls of the Temple of All Religions in Kazan.

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