

Mediating Mobile Traditions: The Tablighi Jama'at and the International Islamic University between Pakistan and Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan)

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This paper discusses how Muslim networks from South Asia contributed to the reconstruction of religious, cultural, and social belonging by creating new modes and formats¹ of regional interaction and connectivity² with actors and institutions in Post-Soviet Central Asia. This is shown by using examples of the activities of the Muslim missionary movement's conservative preaching groups, such as the Tablighi Jama'at (TJ) and related Deoband traditions of Sunni Islam, as well as the activities of the comparatively modern International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan (IIUI) and its graduates. After providing background for these institutions and their perspectives on Central Asia—Kyrgyzstan for the Tablighis and Tajikistan for the IIUI—this paper discusses forms of expansion and local adaptation of their networks, practices, and concepts. The religious actors and institutions from South Asia are presented here in their social, cultural, and political context as part of a larger process of the transformation of neighbouring regions. The growing number of South Asian students studying in Central Asia is also part of this larger interaction, where they add a secular dimension to social mobility in both directions. Religious actors and institutions merge with new opportunity structures³ of social and economic interaction, representing educational institutions, formats of knowledge transfer, and business networks, but also rely on social mobilisation. In the process of such interaction, these religious actors and institutions form translocal and transregional networks or

1 Formats are seen here as stable and usually organised forms of social connectivity. See also Reetz 2010a: 323.

2 Connectivity is used here as a state of connectedness of members of a transnational social network that has also been classified as a new, more advanced stage of mobility in transnational globalisation, notably in diaspora research. See also Tsagarousianou 2004; Tomlinson 1999.

3 “Opportunity structures” is used here as a concept to “examine factors external to the movement or individuals within it that inhibit or facilitate the viability of a particular movement in a particular time and place” (Reynard 2014, 2–3). Regarding Muslim networks from South Asia, the concept refers to social and economic factors that are external to the religious movements while still being relevant and sometimes crucial to explain their mobilisation and impact.

arrangements in what Elias (1978) called “figurations.” Here, local dynamics of translation, adaptation, and transfer acquire new meaning and importance.

Religious networks from South Asia operating in the “neighbourhood”

If we follow Bourdieu’s understanding of the formation and distribution of cultural, religious, or sacred capital (1991, 23), religious networks emerging out of South Asia have become an influential factor in the globalising “Islamic field.” Those religious networks are understood here as a relationship of connectivity and mobility among religious actors through shared religious practices, ideologies, and institutions (see Leutloff-Grandits, Peleikis, and Thelen 2009, 5). They are marked by a particular level of density and regularity of communication (see Mitchell 1961). However, the current essay deals less with the density of their mutual interaction than with the ability of connected religious actors to translate their shared symbolic capital from one context to another. The emphasis is therefore less on the mutual interaction than on the shared values, concepts, and practices. Thus it is more productive to analyse how the religious networks established a translocal and transnational religious field as discussed by Bourdieu. Following his work, the religious actors and institutions are understood to trade in symbolic goods or sacred capital, the distribution of which instantly creates power and facilitates political relations among them (Bourdieu 1991, 3).

The religious aspect of those networks can therefore be imagined as religious capital, constituted by knowledge about and the practice of religious norms and concepts. While Bourdieu understood the actors involved as constituting a mainly local community of religious specialists and laymen, this perspective is expanded here beyond national and regional borders as encompassing translocal and transregional networks. Following Bourdieu, who regarded religious knowledge and practice as a form of social capital for manifesting and negotiating positions of social power and control over resources, these networks are presented here in its social capacity. Through these networks, religious actors and institutions engage with issues of shared sociability, economy, or cultural and ethnic identity.⁴ As the variety of these dimensions of interaction increases, the religious factor, while never absent, does not always dominate.

⁴ See, for instance, the distinctions in social networks between those based on social and symbolic ties highlighted by Faist (1997, 218). Social ties imply personal relations and acquaintance, such as those that exist in the household, family and kinship, friendship, or village networks. Symbolic ties in turn rest on collective identities and representations, as is the case in networks based on religion, ethnicity, or nationality.

The increasing impact of such religious networks is an important marker of today's world. While sociologists view globalisation differently, with some arguing that it creates social and cultural homogenisation while others see an emergence of more differentiation and diversification,⁵ it is argued here that both directions of globalisation cannot be neatly separated and instead belong together, where one becomes more visible than the other depending on the perspective taken. While the religious networks contribute to the emergence of some form of homogenisation across national borders and regions among their potential constituencies, the fact that various networks get the chance to operate side-by-side, in places where previously only one or the other was dominant, speaks to an increase of differentiation.⁶ By differentiation, we refer to both geographic and denominational diversification. The geographic expansion of South Asian Muslim groups can be understood as a tendency of such variation. Muslim groups are spreading beyond their original centres of formation to other parts of the world, not only from the historical centres of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, but also from regions such as South Asia. To some extent, South Asia occupies a strong position to compete with the Arabian Peninsula. Most groups, denominations, and interpretations of Islam that emerged in South Asia managed to expand beyond their home regions into the wider Muslim world. This applies to the Purists (Deobandis, Ahl-i Hadith), the Sufi-oriented groups (Barelwi), the Shia minority, and the Ahmadiyya (considered heterodox by most Sunni Muslims) (Reetz 2010a). They did so not only by relying on their shared religious identities, but also by using cultural and social connections that had formed in the course of history and strengthened in recent years. Between Central and South Asia, these connections emerged under the Mughal Empire, which had its roots in Central Asia (Balabanlilar 2012). Its emperors ruled over South Asia in the name of Islam from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. For other parts of the world, such expansion beyond South Asia was partly due to the global expanses of the former British colonial empire. Today, following the tracks of globalisation, the strong and vibrant modern South Asian diaspora has travelled beyond territories formerly under British rule, with South Asian Muslims active in North America, North Africa (Maghreb), and Southern Europe (France, Spain). It was through these different trajectories that the geographic expansion expressed itself in social and cultural diversity as well, which marked the conditions of local

5 See Turner 2010, especially the introduction.

6 This is also argued by sociologists who contend that the homogenizing effects of capitalist globalisation are linked to the differentiation of markets, resources, consumption, and production (Nederveen Pieterse 2015, ch. 3).

followers of the Tablighi Jama'at, or the more political Jamaat-i Islami, in different parts of the world.

This differentiation also applies to denominational variety among Muslims from South Asia, where it is a particularly striking feature. There we can conditionally distinguish groups following Islamic reformism (*islah*), such as the groups under the influence of the Islamic seminary in Deoband (North India) or the South Asian Ahl-i Hadith (People of the Tradition); groups emphasising Sufism (*tasawwuf*), as practiced by Sufi orders, or by Barelwi groups affiliated with institutions in the North Indian town of Bareilly; and those applying modernist interpretations as embodied by the Jama'at-i Islami (Islamic Party, see also Reetz 2009). While such differentiation is not unique to South Asia, it acquires a specific profile in the South Asian context where these groups project their diverse interpretations and practices. If we understand modernity as a process of social differentiation,⁷ the expanding and discerning influence of South Asian Muslim groups can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Reetz 2006). In that sense, the expansion of these groups was part of the differentiation process, and therefore a reflection of modernisation (see also Turner 2014).

Central and South Asia share a long history of related Muslim institutions, cultural traditions, and religious practices. Those historical links gained new strength in the early twentieth century when Central Asian scholars—who had graduated from Deobandi or Barelwi institutions in British India—returned and established like-minded networks of friends and institutions in Central Asia. They laid the foundations of regular connectivity, opening channels through which cultural and religious capital of Islamic reference or provenance circulated. However, such flows and transfers often changed the reference and context environment for the acquired knowledge or learnt practices.⁸

I have discussed those dynamics as alternate forms of globalisation by religious actors and institutions from South Asia for other geographic contexts

7 See the interview with Niklas Luhman, “What is modernity?” where he discusses different forms and modes of differentiation (Rasch 2000, 195).

8 A good example is the religious scholar Mullah Hindustani (1892–1989) from Tajikistan, whom scholars and analysts wrongly assumed to be a Salafi and Deobandi, because of his strong orthodox views and influence. He actually graduated from the Madrasa Usmaniya in Ajmer, India (Darul Uloom Moinia Usmania Dargah Shareef), a Barelwi madrasa of Sufi-oriented Islam. The Deoband connection is assumed by Tim Epkenhans (2010, 318), Kirill Nourzhanov and Christian Bleuer (2013, 258), and Praveen Swami (2008). The Ajmer reference is based on Hindustani’s autobiography, quoted in Olimov (2008).

(Reetz 2010a, 2007, 2013a, 2010, 2011). Those actors and institutions engaged in various ways of world-making by establishing their own modes of regional interaction. They went beyond translocality⁹—characterising the spatial interaction of different Muslim networks—and moved into transregionalism. In the process, they crossed the boundaries of regions with their particular cultural, linguistic, and political characteristics. With their normative value system, these Muslim actors and institutions challenge the dominant Western concepts of globalisation, examples being the critical take on globalisation by the Indian Ahl-i Hadith scholar Maulana Abdul Ghaffar Salafi (2014), or the Deobandi scholar Maulana Yasir Nadeem (2003). At the same time, Muslim actors and institutions continued to partake in many mainstream economic and social forms of global exchange and connectivity. In particular, the religious networks retained close relations with Muslim trading groups from South Asia, which in their turn had established transregional connections well before the advent of British colonial rule, particularly with East Africa and Southeast Asia.

The current paper looks at the specifics of those exchange dynamics between South Asia and Post-Soviet Central Asia to understand the modes of engagement of select religious actors and institutions as well as the dynamics of their local adaptation. The purpose is to understand how religious capital translated into the social and spatial mobility that was cutting across the political, cultural, ethnic, and religious divides between the two regions. For this purpose, qualitative interviews were conducted with members of the Muslim networks as well as representatives of state institutions in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan during several trips to the region in the years 2012–15. The study builds on additional research and interviews at the International Islamic University in Islamabad during the same period. The focus was on the transregional impact of two networks, the missionary movement of the Tablighi Jama'at and its related Deobandi madrasa system on the one side, and the modernist International Islamic University of Islamabad (IIUI) and its graduates on the other. Both networks are historically rooted in South Asia. The Deobandi doctrine and the system of Deobandi madrasas goes back to the Darul Ulum Deoband (Islamic University of Deoband),¹⁰ which was opened in 1866. The lay preaching movement of the Tablighi Jama'at was founded by Muhammad Ilyas (1885–1944) in North India in 1926, primarily as an internal missionary

9 For the concept of translocality as a research perspective, see Freitag and von Oppen 2010. For its application to Muslim actors from South Asia, see Reetz 2010a, 296.

10 <http://www.darululoom-deoband.com/>. [Accessed on 12. January 2016]; see Reetz 2007; Metcalf 1982.

movement to re-awaken faith among Muslims. The International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI)¹¹ was inaugurated in 1980. Although the Tablighi and Deobandi movements were highly innovative in their own time, they were later seen as conservative and more or less orthodox. The founding of the IIUI, on the other hand, resulted from the modern Islamist project of the “Islamization of knowledge” in the 1970s.¹² While it was founded around a core of strong departments devoted to orthodox Islamic studies (*Usul-ud-Din*, lit. rules of religion) and missionary activity (*da'wa*), it has since gravitated towards secular education with major fee-earning faculties like management sciences, applied sciences, engineering technology, law, and social sciences (Reetz 2010b).

Both institutions and networks attracted a steady number of foreign students, not least from Central Asia. As will be shown here, using the examples of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the exchange processes outside South Asia followed different dynamics for every region or even country. Those dynamics were influenced by the host institutions in South Asia as much as by the recipient networks and institutions in Central Asia. The latter interpreted, selected, and adapted the knowledge, practices, and experiences acquired in the light of their own needs, values, and capacities.

While the flows of religious connectivity between South and Central Asia were disrupted or curtailed during the Soviet era, they were never fully cut. A small number of students from Russia and Central Asia continued to graduate from Darul Ulum Deoband and the International Islamic University even during this period.¹³

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Pakistani leaders—based on ideological Islamist assumptions—entertained high hopes about the potential of re-uniting the Islamic Republic of Pakistan with the Muslim brother states of Central Asia. In 1991–92, Pakistan’s President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and key ministers repeatedly visited Central Asia, while leaders from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan paid return visits as well (Reetz 1993). Pakistan’s hopes were not only driven by historic nostalgia but also by strategic expectations that these states would, because of their Muslim identity, support Pakistan in its confrontation with

11 <http://www.iiu.edu.pk/>. [Accessed on 12. January 2016]; see Reetz 2010b.

12 For more on this see p. 22 of this article.

13 From the statistics of the Darul Ulum Deoband, we know that about seventy students from Russia and about twenty from Central Asia graduated between 1866 and 1994 (Reetz 2007, 145). For the IIUI, see below.

India and provide a “strategic hinterland” (Reetz 1993). In this way, they would make up for what was felt to be a lack of “geographic depth” in the event of a military confrontation with India. Simultaneously, religious actors such as the Jama’at-i Islami invested heavily in spreading religious material in Post-Soviet Central Asia, sponsoring translations of (largely historical) religious tracts into Russian and Central Asian languages. They sought to assist in the revival of religious thought and practice after what they perceived as the end of the atheist era there. However, because both the Pakistani government and the religious actors underestimated the closeness of the secular former Soviet elites to India, these hopes did not materialise. The influence of the Pakistani government in the region ran into many obstacles as there was only limited response during the early nineties to the overtures of the South Asian religious networks with their hopes for proselytization, Muslim religious bonding, and political solidarity in Central Asia. India, on the other hand, continued to benefit from the existing networks and institutional links as well as the cultural affinity and economic connections created during the Soviet era.

Central Asia rediscovers South Asia and its Muslim networks

From the perspective of Central Asia, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was also the strategic watershed event for relations with South Asia. Most of the respondents interviewed for this study twenty-five years later remembered it only as “collapse” (Russian: *razval*). The dissolution of the Soviet Union caught many Central Asian states such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan by surprise, as they were unexpectedly confronted with the demands of their own nation building. Their Soviet-trained Central Asian elites had not pushed for national sovereignty because they feared it would lead to a loss in resources, connectivity, and international political standing. The dissolution process accelerated the elevation of ethnic and religious references in the articulation of their re-asserted nation state identities, a process that had already begun during the late Soviet period when ethnic cultural markers enjoyed growing popularity. Meanwhile, the interest in Islam, its practices, festivals, and religious doctrine had grown significantly (see Olimov and Olimova 2003; Stephan 2010). Making use of the new liberties granted during Perestroika, an All-Union Islamic Renaissance Party was founded in Astrakhan, Muslim Russia, on July 9, 1990 (Babak, Vaisman, and Wasserman 2000; Khalid 2007). It quickly developed branches in other parts of the Soviet Union and it was the precursor of the only legal Islamic political party in the post-Soviet era, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) of Tajikistan, which has now been banned (see below).

After the Afghan civil war against the Islamist Mujahidin insurgency of the eighties, post-Soviet state elites in Central Asia were fearful of the revival of religious practices. The Soviet Union had to withdraw in defeat from Afghanistan while the Central Asian states, which had been heavily involved in this struggle, continued to suffer from its consequences. Yet Islamic practice reasserted itself partly from the grassroots, partly through opportunistic government policies designed to exploit Muslim cultural references, and partly through interaction with the Muslim world (Louw 2007; Khalid 2007). Governments responded with a mix of tight state regulations and repression, which also led to civil war in Tajikistan and flashes of violence in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Muslim actors in post-Soviet Central Asia engaged with various transnational Islamic movements that arrived to promote their concepts and formats in a growing competition over defining true Islam and gaining the support of Central Asian Muslims. These transnational movements included influential players from Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Turkey, and Iran (Lenz-Raymann 2014). At the same time, post-Soviet Central Asia re-discovered South Asia by taking advantage of the geographic proximity and reviving historical bonds. Some actors in these states also responded to the charm offensive by Pakistan religious actors and institutions,¹⁴ often seeking support in their political contestation with the post-Soviet bureaucratic elite, the *nomenklatura*. After violent clashes with government forces, Islamic opposition forces crossed the border from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and moved further into Pakistan in the early nineties.¹⁵ A significant number of Central Asian Muslim activists also availed themselves of scholarships offered to study at local Islamic schools in Pakistan, such as the Syed Maudoodi International Islamic Educational Institute¹⁶ of the

14 Several of Pakistan's religious actors and institutions made overtures in Central Asia during the nineties. These included fellowship offers from the International Islamic University, which registered the highest number of Central Asian students during those years (see p. 141). The Jama'at-i Islami translated numerous religious tracts into Central Asian languages and distributed them there; Deobandi madrasas in both India and Pakistan, as well as Tablighi activism, attracted a growing number of Central Asian students and lay preachers. Islamic leaders from Central Asia visited Pakistan and secured financial support for the revival of Islam, partly through the Pakistani government and partly through the international organisation *Motamar al-Alam al-Islami*, the World Muslim Congress, with its headquarters in Karachi. See Reetz 1993, 1999.

15 Uzbek and Tajik civil war fighters used the tribal regions of Pakistan as "safe havens," where some Tajik participants stayed on to attend madrasas and other schools like the IIUI or Jama'at-i Islami Maududi Institute in Lahore (see Table 3). Uzbek fighters settled with their families; some continue to be involved in local militant activities inside Pakistan in the border regions with Afghanistan. (Interviews with respondents in Islamabad, Peshawar, and Dushanbe).

16 <https://www.facebook.com/institute.official>. [Accessed on 12. January 2016].

Jama'at-i Islami in Lahore, the International Islamic University, and also at both local and foreign madrasas—including those set up or funded in Pakistan by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states in the aftermath of the Afghan jihad of the 1980s.

Twenty years later, Central Asian graduates of “traditional” and “modern” Islamic schools (madrasas, colleges, universities) in Pakistan and India, as well as followers of missionary networks who had returned to their countries of origin, were engaged in reshaping the environment there in different ways. Adding another dimension to the transregional mobility beyond the religious aspect, secular students from Pakistan and India at universities and institutes in Central Asia and other Post-Soviet states have slowly extended their own diaspora networks within Central Asia.¹⁷ At the same time, Pakistan and India were developing their political and economic relations with the new Central Asian states with varying degrees of success. These relations were shaped by their own evolving capacities and needs as well as the opportunities offered by Central Asia, especially the latter's natural and energy resources. China's appearance on the regional scene and a re-emerging Russia further added to the complexity of the situation.

Against this background, this paper looks at the dynamics of the connections between the two regions through the example of Tablighi and Deobandi activists in Kyrgyzstan and of IUI graduates in Tajikistan. These selections have been made without claiming to cover the whole range of Islamist activism in Central Asia. Of particular interest are the ways in which these activists and graduates embedded themselves in the local “Islamic field” in both countries and reconciled their transregional connectivity with their local life-worlds.¹⁸

The Tablighi Jama'at between South Asia and Kyrgyzstan

Since the Tablighi Jama'at established itself as a global actor in the mid-1950s (Reetz 2008), it has directed its international activities from its global headquarters in the Nizamuddin district of Delhi, India. In comparison, the national TJ centre in Raiwind, near Lahore, Pakistan, became a “second-among-equals” global actor of the Tablighi system. This was partly due to the madrasa in Raiwind (Madrasa Arabiyya Islamiyya), which was

17 See the cases of medical institutes in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as shown below, p. 154.

18 For a discussion of the concept of life-worlds in relation to religious commitment and specifically Islam, see Abenante and Cantini 2015, which treats life-worlds as the subjectivities of social experience.

one of the few madrasa institutions in South Asia officially aligned with the TJ movement. The curriculum taught at this madrasa largely followed the teaching programme of the Islamic University (Dar-ul-Ulum) in Deoband, India, which was affiliated with several hundred Deobandi madrasas across South Asia and beyond. This teaching programme was based on the seventeenth century Dars-e Nizami curriculum, originally developed by the Islamic scholar Mulla Nizamuddin (d. 1748). It privileged the study of the Prophetic traditions (Hadith) in addition to the Quran (Robinson 1974). The Raiwind madrasa developed a tradition of hosting a large number of international students, either for the whole eight-year ‘alim course of a religious scholar (‘alimiyya), or for the final year (daura-i hadith) after attending other Deobandi madrasas in Pakistan. Foreign students usually benefitted from local scholarships, which would cover a frugal lifestyle in line with rural conditions. The madrasa system was traditionally funded by local donations, foundations (waqf), and a religious tax (zakat). Central Asian students formed a visible and continuous, albeit small, component of those students. The author learnt from respondents that Central Asian madrasa and IIUI students in Pakistan would meet on the sidelines of the traditional annual TJ congregations (ijtima) in some sort of regional community bonding effort.

The TJ expanded to Central Asia during the mid-nineties in the post-Soviet era (Ismailbekova and Nasritdinov 2012; Balci 2015). Former Soviet elite representatives with authoritarian reflexes, who dominated several governments there, were suspicious of Islamic groups arriving from abroad. They remembered only too well the violent and humiliating experience of confronting orthodox Islamic fighters in Afghanistan—the by now famous mujahidin—after the Soviet Union had militarily and politically intervened there in the eighties. However, some local politicians toyed with the idea of using the ostensibly peaceful Tablighi missionaries for their own internal religious politics. But growing competition in the Islamic field, specifically a perceived challenge of authority in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, made them change their minds. As a consequence, TJ was banned in all Central Asian republics except Kyrgyzstan, where, however, it was also not formally registered (Toktogulova 2014). These prohibitions did not prevent the TJ from conducting their preaching missions in almost every Central Asian country as well as in Russia. We will focus here on Kyrgyzstan, where their presence also manifested itself structurally in society and in the administration.

During the last five years, the TJ has had a remarkable impact on the Islamic field in Kyrgyzstan. This fact and the relative liberalism of the local political

system in comparison to its neighbours apparently allowed more freedom of action and contributed to the growing popularity of the movement in Kyrgyzstan. This development led to a flurry of new studies of its activities by both local and international scholars.¹⁹

Looking at the global system of branches and institutions run by the TJ in almost every country where Muslims live, the Kyrgyz TJ was one of those remarkable units that managed to go beyond the cultural and ethnic confines of the South Asian Muslim diaspora. It was run almost entirely by natives, mostly Kyrgyz, and a few representatives of the Uzbek minority. Kyrgyz Tablighis share this feature of endogeneity with their counterparts in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, France, and those from the Arab Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia). In contrast, TJ activities in the UK, the US, Canada, South Africa, as well as countries in East Africa, still rely heavily, though to a varying degree, on diaspora Muslims of South Asian descent. This endogenous character demonstrates the remarkable adaptability of the TJ, as it managed to become an accepted normative actor of Islam despite its South Asian roots and in effect turned itself into a global religious service provider. Their endogeneity in countries such as Kyrgyzstan provided cultural and religious space for moulding, reading, and interpreting TJ values and practices according to local demands, needs, and expectations. Social cohesion and networks that were seen as being under threat by the advancing market economy and the restructuring of the post-Soviet administration, were being revived—partially through Tablighi formats—in local communities for both young men and women. The supposed lack of ethical values under the current market conditions made preaching and religious learning more attractive again. As a consequence, the Kyrgyz TJ branches—like other TJ units in similar conditions—became effective local actors and institutions. Its activists managed to claim not only the sacred capital (Bourdieu 1991) of global Islamic norms in a heavily contested field, but also stood for the local representation of such normativity.

The TJ programme in Kyrgyzstan was almost identical to practices in other TJ branches. The local Tablighis convened weekly Thursday night meetings at local mosques, such as the main mosque in Bishkek or the Mosque in the ninth microrayon of the town (fig. 1). There they called for the formation of voluntary preaching groups, which in turn moved to other towns or areas to

19 Those studies mainly focused on the local conditions, with little reference to the South Asian origins and sources of the Tablighis. See Toktoguova 2014; Ismailbekova and Nasritdinov 2012; Nasritdinov and O'Connor 2010; Balci 2010.



Fig. 1: Mosque in 9th microrayon in Bishkek where the Tablighi Jama'at regularly convenes

spread their message among the local Muslim communities.²⁰ The missionary trips for the Kyrgyz Tablighis, who in local parlance are called *daavatchi* or *daavatisty*—the Russian adaptation of a practitioner of *da'wa* (Islamic mission)—also extended to India and Pakistan. They would go from door to door to invite Muslims to prayer sessions at the local mosque. The idea was to involve a larger number of (supposedly secularised) Muslims in preaching and praying to revive regular religious practice among them. The new recruits would study the *Faza'il-e 'Amal*, the collection of Hadith (Prophetic traditions) compiled by one of the founders of the movement, which was supposed to help them transmit more formal religious knowledge through the TJ's six-point programme of action, which was said to capture key elements of Islam.²¹ Separate gatherings were organised to address women, together with their spouses or close male relatives.²²

20 For a detailed and balanced description of the Tablighi programme in Kyrgyzstan by a local analyst, see Aman Saliev, "Jama'at Tabligh v Kyrgyzii" (n.d.), at the information portal *Materik*, <http://materik.ru/problem/detail.php?ID=10769>. [Accessed on 12. January 2016].

21 See below, note 28.

22 For a detailed description of the Tablighis' practice and their internal rules and administration, see Reetz 2008.

Local roles and impact formats of the Tablighis

This broadly based interaction with local society turned the TJ activists into a local power broker of religious, cultural, and social norms and behaviour without claiming or directly exercising political power. Yet critics from among the post-Soviet security elites feared that this local involvement of the Tablighis prepared the ground for a more observant and potentially radical Islamic activism to emerge. Parts of the local population resented the TJ's interventions, which they saw as moral pressure to change inherited and customary practices of religious observance. These reservations revealed the internal tensions and contradictions of the TJ programme; the local preaching engagement of the Tablighis was a key condition of their success but also set them apart from the local population. Local elites could not directly use them for political purposes, since the scope of their preaching was strictly circumscribed by procedural rules, which discouraged them from involvement in any form of activism—religious or non-religious—on behalf of the TJ (see Reetz 2008). At the same time, the TJ's aim to integrate the common believers and the governance system also showed in Kyrgyzstan.²³

If we trace the activities of the Tablighis in Kyrgyzstan, we can see that they made an impact through particular forms of engagement. The TJ's activism in Kyrgyzstan particularly benefited from the perceived need for a rebirth of religious knowledge and practice after living under the official atheism and secularism of the Soviet era.²⁴ Tablighi preaching questioned whether local traditional religious practices modelled on the ways of their forefathers were “truly” following the right guidance of Islam. The TJ argued that local Muslims were in need of more structured and formal normative knowledge and practice,²⁵ as brought and taught by the Tablighi missionaries. The Tablighis introduced different styles of clothing, even a different style of sitting—one respondent observed that he had to re-learn the squatted style of “Muslim sitting.” TJ followers saw this as a recovery of genuine Islamic practices that had been forgotten, but critics saw it as an imposition of alien innovations that struck at the heart of Kyrgyz

23 See, for instance, the TJ's interaction with the local administration, below, p. 140.

24 There are several studies on other conversion movements in Kyrgyzstan showing the widespread interest in new religious orientations, see for example Pelkmans and McBrien 2008. I am grateful for this reference to Aksana Ismailbekova.

25 Structured knowledge and practice of Islam are understood here as knowing about and following the explicit formalised demands of the Quran, and the Prophetic traditions (Hadith), notably from the founding generations of Islam-as-salaf.

culture and identity.²⁶ In the process, however, TJ activists were also making compromises, such as allowing the traditional ankle-length trousers to be embroidered with Kyrgyz folklore motives to increase their acceptability (Toktogulova 2014). The local preaching department of the state Muftiyat even passed rules that made such considerations mandatory for the preaching missions, so that they would raise less concern.²⁷

The TJ also responded to local demands for more formal religious education, filling a gap left by the secular state education system. As in similar contexts in the UK, the US, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Africa, TJ activists started influencing the teaching of religion in madrasas in Kyrgyzstan. In Bishkek, they helped create a Deobandi-style madrasa, which they adapted to the local format. Respondents confirmed that this madrasa taught the regular eight-year curriculum of 'alimiyya, followed the same sequence of subjects, and used similar books as in South Asia.²⁸ There was, however, a minor adaptation in the selection of reference books, although Central Asia shares the Hanafi legal code of South Asia and was therefore legally compatible with the curriculum from Deoband.²⁹ The Tablighis also translated their reference collection of Hadith, known by its original Urdu title as *Faza'il-e 'Amal*, into Kyrgyz and Tajik (figs. 2 and 3).³⁰

The ambivalence of impact and influence on both religious behaviour and social life became clearer when talking to some respondents. The Tablighi role of social broker³¹ emerged from accounts of TJ followers who emphasised the advantages of the movement for the restoration of social harmony in Kyrgyz society and especially in rural communities. By various accounts, TJ practices, such as sending a group of lay preachers

26 Interviews in Bishkek on 22. October 2012.

27 Guidelines for local preaching received at the Muftiyat, see below, note 38.

28 Interview in Bishkek on 27. October 2012.

29 Other local curricula that are based on adaptations from Soviet times, like SADUM, the state institution regulating Islam, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, are much closer to the modernist Tajdid tradition than to the Hanafi code (Khalid 2007). The Hanafi code, named after Abu Hanifa (699–767), is one of four major legal doctrines of Islam, see also p. 144 of this article.

30 The co-founder of the Tablighi Jama'at, Muhammad Zakariyya, compiled the Hadith collection *Faza'il-e 'Amal* [On the virtue of good deeds], which became the single most important reference book for religious knowledge in Tablighi activism (Zakariyya 1994). Editions in Kyrgyz and Tajik were published in Bishkek and Dushanbe and are available at local Islamic book stalls (Field research in 2012 and 2014).

31 A social broker is a social network position, seen here as someone integrating different norms of behaviour. See also Fleming and Waguespack 2007.



Fig. 2: Hadith collection of the Tablighi Jama'at, Fazail-e Amal, in Kyrgyz, in Islamic bookstall in Bishkek (2nd row, 3rd from right)

door to door to invite Muslim neighbours to pray at the local mosque and listen to inspirational religious talks, had a healing social effect. Repeated narratives of respondents emphasised how young men in a particular village who used to drink and neglect “religious and social duties” after being out of work in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet system, started modifying their behaviour and attending religious services at local mosques after they had joined TJ activities.³² Metaphorically, TJ activism could be seen as re-appearance of a social bond amongst young people that had previously been fostered by organisations like the Komsomol, whose rituals and practices were destroyed by the social upheaval following the end of the Soviet era and the introduction of the market economy. Such an understanding would be in line with the thinking of religious sociologists such as Emile Durkheim, who “argued that religion is functional for society because it reaffirms the social bonds that people have with each other, creating social cohesion and integration” (Andersen and Taylor 2008, 452–53; Durkheim 2012 [1915]). This phenomenon can also be observed in other similar endogenous settings of the Tablighis. In France, for instance, the TJ was the second-most influential Islamic movement, providing Muslims with an Arabian or African migration background with social pride and confidence. Social activists often expressed

32 Interviews with several respondents in Bishkek in October 2012.

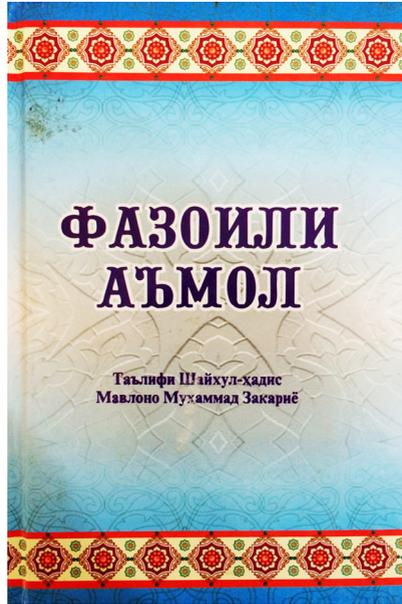


Fig. 3: Fazail-e Amal in Tajik, Dushanbe.

hopes that the TJ could potentially heal many social or even economic wounds in society (see Reetz 2010c). In Kyrgyzstan, a young activist named Muhammad Azam, who was also a local preacher on television and at times a government consultant, expressed enthusiasm about the potential of the movement to contribute to peace and social or even ethnic harmony, which in 2010 had been disrupted by clashes with the Uzbek minority.³³ Yet the TJ global organisation was very cautious and circumspect about such expectations from Tablighi activism. Being in close and direct contact with the Kyrgyz unit, Tablighi leaders from Raiwind and Nizamuddin gave advice both in writing and through personal consultations when they visited the country or Kyrgyz preachers visited them. They strongly advised the local Kyrgyz activists to stay within the limits of its ritualised practice, which focused exclusively on re-activating religious practice and knowledge of the individual and the family.³⁴

Female participation in TJ activities, which was traditionally conducted through groups where the females were accompanied by the husband or

33 Interview in Bishkek on 25. October 2012.

34 Interview in Bishkek on 24. October 2012.

a trusted male relative (*masturat jama'at*), had also taken on its own character in Kyrgyzstan. Given strong female self-respect and emancipation in the tradition of the Soviet system, women's participation in these activities opened other contested binaries: what was meant to re-introduce traditional Islamic gender segregation, echoed for local Muslim women the social activities of women in Soviet times. Women who participated in all-female education sessions (*ta'lim*) recreated female traditions of social life that they fondly remembered from the activities of branches of the Soviet Women's Committee. Yet Kyrgyz opponents of the Tablighi activities found it difficult to accept changes among female TJ followers in demeanour, behaviour, and dress that signified gender segregation (see Toktogulova 2014).

In Kyrgyzstan, as hinted above by Azam, TJ activism was increasingly tested as a possible means for diffusing ethnic tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbek Muslims. According to evidence from several TJ activist respondents and local researchers, local TJ units and activists played a key role in several Uzbek communities in the South when riots broke out in 2010,³⁵ trying to keep tempers down by reminding everyone of their shared Muslim identity.³⁶ However, the hopes of local government and NGO representatives to expand the peace-building role of the TJ were not fulfilled. The reason was not only the persistent refusal of TJ organisers to engage in local or other politics, but also the fact that Uzbeks so far had abstained from joining the TJ ranks in larger numbers. Their refusal to join followed local stereotypes that saw traditional Kyrgyz families in need of expanding their formal religious knowledge, while Uzbek Muslims considered themselves, or were considered to be, strongly observant of the rules of Islam. Yet the social fabric was dynamic and the TJ's emphasis on common religious identity led to greater interaction between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz within its ranks.³⁷

35 In June 2010, a fight among youth gangs in a city club in Osh in the Ferghana Valley sparked violent clashes with the country's Uzbek minority, which accounts for about fifteen percent of Kyrgyzstan's population of roughly five million. While ethnic tensions had mounted over the years of asserting Kyrgyz nationalism in line with post-Soviet power dynamics, areas where the Uzbek minority was concentrated felt particularly volatile after major clashes in 1990. The Uzbek population often feels discriminated against, while the Kyrgyz feel that their nationalist identity claims are challenged by the strong religious commitments of Uzbek families. See also Wilkinson 2015.

36 Interviews in Bishkek in October 2012.

37 As witnessed by local TJ Kyrgyz respondents mentioned above, interviews in Bishkek in October 2012.

The TJ also connected with the local political systems that governed religion.³⁸ As discussed by Toktogulova (2014) and experienced by the author, the department of the Muftiyat, the State Administration of Islam in Kyrgyzstan, an institution inherited from Soviet times, was strongly influenced by Tablighi activists. In 2012, the section officer in charge of missionary activities in foreign countries was Djigit Ali, a bureaucrat who was a Tablighi activist himself and who had graduated from a madrasa in Pakistan.³⁹ The Muftiyat responded to local criticism of TJ activities by codifying rules that local TJ followers must observe. These mandated that their clothing must be in line with Kyrgyz tradition and that TJ groups visiting villages must register and get documentation. There were also provisions for training and self-education, since sermons and talks given by Tablighi activists about what is correct Islamic behaviour frequently provoked controversy.⁴⁰ It is remarkable how religiosity and secularity became intertwined in the case of this official. The exercise of secular duties was not seen as preventing Muslims from practicing Islam and participating in TJ activities. Such understanding of secularism came close to the interpretation in India, where secularism was seen as a strategy of managing the diversity of religion and protecting its followers from each other. Religiosity was seen here as a basic and indispensable moral value of society, a concept that in the West is perhaps most closely followed and lived in the US only. With opponents of Tablighi influence increasingly demanding a formal proscription of TJ activities in Kyrgyzstan in line with other Central Asian states, its defenders also publicly articulated its benefits for society from a global perspective, citing the unique public engagement of TJ followers (Schenkkan 2011). Within the local political configuration, the opponents of the TJ found themselves in the same camp with new radical Kyrgyz nationalists who preached ethnic segregation. The TJ, which was perceived as conservative in many other countries, or more precisely by their elites, in this way found itself in Kyrgyzstan on the side of political liberalism, tolerance, and inter-ethnic peace.

38 Governance of religion is treated here as a political sciences perspective focusing on actors, institutions, and their interaction. See also Kooiman 2003.

39 The *Da'wa* department in the Muftiyat was run by Ravshanbek Eratov, who was away on Hajj during those days. Interview in Bishkek on 25. October 2012.

40 “Кыргызстан Мусулмандарынын Дин Башкармасынын Даават (үгүт-насаат) болүмүнү иш жүргүтүү боюнча жобосу” [Instructions of the Da'wa Department—Preaching and Mission—of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan regarding procedures to be followed], Bishkek, 13 September 2011. The document was received during the interviews in 2012 (translated by Aksana Ismailbekova). In this document, the missionary department of Da'wa under the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan had approved certain requirements for those who pursue missionary preaching (in Kyrgyz daavat), which foremost applies to the Tablighi Jama'at. Point 4.5 of the instructions specifically requires “a person, who is intending to do daavat, should keep his appearance clean and tidy as well as wear local clothing, which does not contradict religious norms (sunnah).”

The International Islamic University Islamabad and Central Asia

The International Islamic University (IIUI), as mentioned above, emerged from the larger project of “Islamization of Knowledge,” which set out to find Islamic answers to academic inquiries not only related to religion but also with regard to the humanities and social sciences. It was championed by scholars like Muhammad Naguib Syed al-Attas (b. 1931) and Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi (1921–1986). The latter had established the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in Virginia, USA in 1981, while al-Attas had established the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC) in Kuala Lumpur in 1987. The idea was to Islamize (Western) secular sciences so that Muslims could regain their identity (al-Attas 1998 [1978]; Moten 2004). The university in Islamabad continued its close relationship with its sister university in Kuala Lumpur, which had been established around the same time (1983). But the IIUI had less intense contacts with other Islamic Universities that followed a similar model in Indonesia, India, or the Muslim regions of Africa (see Reetz 2010b). Right from the beginning, the “Islamization of knowledge” project also had an internationalist side to it, as it aimed at strengthening solidarity among students from the global Muslim *umma* and providing them with equal access to “Islamized” knowledge. The universities in Islamabad and Kuala Lumpur have since evolved into primarily national universities that provide access to secular knowledge in an environment marked by Muslim ethics. At the same time, the departments of *Usul-ud-Din* and *Da'wa* retained their religious importance, particularly in Islamabad. While originally relying on substantial financial contributions from donors in the Gulf region, since the September 11 attacks, the IIUI in Pakistan is a state institution primarily financed with public money.⁴¹

As part of its internationalist calling, the IIUI has opened its doors to foreign students since the 1990s. Although the number of foreign students nearly doubled between 1988–89 and again in 2003–04, their share of the total enrolment actually fell from forty-eight to twelve percent, as overall enrolment increased faster than the number of foreign students rose. Within this period, there was significant fluctuation and the number of foreign students was temporarily much higher: The peak years of foreign student enrolment were 1995–96 to 1998–99, with numbers fluctuating between nine hundred and one thousand foreign students. Those were the years of increasingly active internationalist ambitions amongst many of its foreign students, as the Islamic resistance movements in Afghanistan,

41 Interviews with IIUI administration representatives in Islamabad in September 2011 and October 2012.

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan gained momentum, partly through and from Pakistani territory (Reetz 1999). After the Islamic Renaissance Party was legalised in Tajikistan and participated in the government in 1997–99, students from Tajikistan were sent to the IIU Islamabad on the official Tajikistan state quota—with state consent but not on state funding. The Pakistani government provided scholarships for international students, partly relying on international donors. Haji Akbar Turajonzodah (b. 1954), a prominent religious scholar associated with the Islamic opposition,⁴² was on the advisory board of the IIU while he held different public offices in Tajikistan in the 1990s.⁴³

Within the international student body at the IIU, student groups from the post-Soviet Central Asian states and Muslim territories reached their peak numbers between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, declining afterwards: from Tajikistan in 2002–03 (62), Kazakhstan in 1997–98 (30), Uzbekistan in 1994–95 (5), and Chechnya in 1997–98 (19).⁴⁴ However, it was not Islamic activism but religious knowledge transfer that had the most enduring impact. From the data for 2001–02, we know that the students from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Chechnya, who formed the largest groups at the IIU from post-Soviet Muslim territories, primarily enrolled in the faculties of Usul-ud-Din, Sharia and Law, and Arabic, with only a few taking courses at the faculties of English, computer sciences, and social studies (*ibid.*).

Once back home in Tajikistan, the returning IIU graduates struggled to gain wider social recognition of their education so as to turn it into employment opportunities.⁴⁵ The Tajik government increasingly asserted itself in efforts to fully control Islamic studies and the public activities of Muslim activists. In 2010, it recalled all Tajik students from foreign Islamic schools (ASIA-Plus 2011). The IIU as a state institution presented an ambiguous case for Tajik state regulation as many of the Tajik students had enjoyed state support in both Tajikistan and Pakistan in their time. Still, most Tajik students chose to comply with the demands of their government and return home.

In spite of existing political limitations, several graduates of the IIU took up prestigious positions in the religious bureaucracy of Tajikistan. They not

42 While he sympathised with the Islamic opposition, he did not identify with the party politics of the IRP.

43 Interview in Dushanbe on 3. April 2014.

44 These figures are from administrative reports of the International Islamic University for the respective years, provided to the author, see also Table 1.

45 Interviews in Dushanbe in April 2014.

Table 1: Composition of International Student Body at International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) by Place of Origin, for wider Central Asia

Year	AFG	AZE	CHE	CHN	DAG	ING	IRN	KSH (IND)	KAZ	KGZ	RUS	TJK	UZB	Total	PSCA	%	PSMT	%
1988-89	74			53			3							130	0	0,00	0	0,00
1989-90	67			44			4							115	0	0,00	0	0,00
1990-91														0	0		0	
1991-92														0	0		0	
1992-93	66		2	51		3	2	1				21	2	148	23	15,54	28	18,92
1993-94	67		2	52		3	2	1				21	2	150	23	15,33	28	18,67
1994-95	68		4	59		2	2	1				21	5	162	26	16,05	32	19,75
1994-95	73		4	61		2	3	2				24	4	173	28	16,18	34	19,65
1995-96	125			45			6							176	0	0,00	0	0,00
1996-97	131			49			6							186	0	0,00	0	0,00
1997-98	203	1	19	134	3		3	1	30			48	1	443	79	17,83	102	23,02
1998-99														0	0		0	
1999-2000	212		9		2		3		22		5	42		295	64	21,69	80	27,12
2000-01	213	3	1	122	1		3		20		4	40		407	60	14,74	69	16,95
2001-02	237	3	1	113			2		12	1	2	39		410	52	12,68	58	14,15
2002-03	240	3	1	142			1		5	1	3	62		458	68	14,85	75	16,38
2002-04	265			158			2		5	1	2	52		485	58	11,96	60	12,37

Source: Administrative Reports of the International Islamic University for the respective years, provided to the author. Listing follows the IIUI administration procedures where post-Soviet Muslim territories and autonomous republics have been listed according to the self-identification by the students even if they belonged to another state, as Dagestan, Chechnya or Ingushetia belong to Russia. These country names are abbreviated according to the standards of ISO 3166-1 Numeric 3 country codes. Other abbreviations are as follows: Chechnya (CHE), Dagestan (DAG), Ingushetia (ING), Kashmir (India) (KSH (IND)); also post-Soviet Central Asia (PSCA) and post-Soviet Muslim territories (PSMT).

only included the Mufti of the country, Saidmukarram Abdulkodirzoda,⁴⁶ but also Sulaiman Davlatov, the former rector of the Abu Hanifa State Islamic Institute in Dushanbe, and some of the teachers at that Institute, the only one of its kind.⁴⁷

The Dushanbe Islamic Institute had originally been named after Imam Tirmizi (824–892), a famous scholar of classical Islam, which in itself was an important and programmatic reference because Tirmizi was a Persian scholar of Sunni Islam. That helped create a symbolic connection with Iran, with which Tajikistan shared a strong linguistic and cultural affinity. Tirmizi had compiled one of the six classical collections of Hadith, the traditions or narrations of the way of life of the Prophet and his companions, which serve as the second-most important reference of Islamic knowledge and practice after the Quran. At the time of its founding, the university thus emphasised its commitment to both its Persian traditions and to conservative Sunni theology—clearly separating itself from Shia theology while highlighting regional belonging and cultural connectivity with Iran. The school started as a private institution in 1991 after Tajikistan had become independent. It was transformed into the Tajik State Islamic Institute in 2007 when the government forcibly took over control of the school.⁴⁸ In 2009, in line with government initiatives to commemorate Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Hanafi legal school and doctrine, the Islamic Institute was renamed after him (fig. 4).⁴⁹ That name change put more emphasis on the mainstream Sunni Islam popular in the Arab Gulf countries, which became a significant source of funding for religious institutions in Tajikistan. At the same time, references to the Persian heritage were withdrawn.

As a member of the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World (FUIW), the Institute appeared to follow the model of the IIUI and other sister schools. After taking over the institute, the Tajik government converted the religious courses to the internationally recognised Bachelor of Arts

46 Interview in Dushanbe on 10. April 2014.

47 Interviews in Dushanbe in April 2014.

48 The Tajik State Islamic Institute was also a member of the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World (FUIW), which is an organisation working within the framework of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) to support universities and higher education institutions in the Islamic world. [Accessed on 4. September 2017]. <https://www.isesco.org.ma/fuiw.org/en/>.

49 Applicant's Guide, Tajikistan Islamic Institute. (Dushanbe, 2014, Tajik, Translated by Umedjon Majidi).



Fig. 4: Entrance to the Tajikistan Islamic Institute Abu Hanifa, Dushanbe.

and Master of Arts format. The authorities' concern was to provide religious education in a format that would get its graduates into reliable regular employment.⁵⁰ This emphasis was apparently meant to clearly distinguish the institute from religious schools belonging to the South Asian madrasa system. The political backdrop to this argument was the assumption that the perceived lack of employment opportunities for madrasa graduates provided incentives for them to join radical or militant movements. Following this line of thinking, structural and systemic changes mandated by the Tajik state ensured that the teachers as well as the Islamic institute itself—as much as the only Islamic high school—would form inalienable parts of the unified

⁵⁰ Informal talks with University teachers in April 2014 and May 2015.

public education system and its administration, which had been formed during the Soviet era. Yet the Tajik Institute's involvement in secular education subjects remained limited—contrary to the International Islamic Universities in Pakistan and Malaysia, and in spite of wide-ranging government intervention, though that was largely limited to the administrative and educational formats and procedures (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: Courses offered in the Abu Hanifa Islamic Institute in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, for 2014-15.

Daytime Studies Department				
No	Index of specialty	Name of specialty	Payment	
1.	21010103	Islamic science	Contractual (3000 TJS)	
2.	1210114	Psychology	Contractual (2600 TJS)	
3.	21020107	Philosophy of religion	Contractual (2700 TJS)	
4.	21010104	Qur'anic science	Contractual (3000 TJS)	
5.	21030113	History of Islam and religion studies	Contractual (3000 TJS)	
6.	210507	Eastern philology (Arabic Language and Literature)	Contractual (4000 TJS)	
7.	230102	Language in intercultural communication (Linguistic)	Contractual (4300 TJS)	
8.		Preparation courses	Contractual (770 TJS)	By interview
Nighttime Studies Department				
1.	1-210301-0113	History of religion and religion studies	Contractual (2900 TJS)	Language and Literature (Essay) Test Exam
2.	1-21010103	Islamic science	Contractual (2900 TJS)	Language and Literature (Essay) Test Exam

Source: Applicant's Guide. Tajikistan Islamic Institute. (Dushanbe, 2014, Tajik, Translated by Umedjon Majidi).

The role of the Pakistan-trained religious teachers had primarily been to teach the sanctioned religious curriculum, such as Arabic and the Prophetic traditions of Hadith, Tafsir, Fiqh, etc.⁵¹ The Institute deliberately drew on the education and teaching experience gained by the Tajik graduates at the IIUI in Pakistan. This gave their input a more professional dimension, rather than a purely theological perspective: They were seen more as offering a structured and professional approach to the teaching of religion than as inculcating a particular religious understanding.

⁵¹ Interviews in Dushanbe in April 2014.

Table 3: Faculties at the International Islamic University in 2016

International Islamic University, Islamabad	
Faculties	Year of foundation
Arabic	
Shariah and Law	1979, 1980
<i>Usul-ud-din</i> /Islamic Studies	1981
Islamic Economics	1983
Languages and Literature	1996
Management Sciences	1996
Social Sciences	2000
Basic and Applied Sciences	2003
Engineering & Technology	2007
<i>Institutes, Academies and Centers</i>	
Islamic Research Institute	1960, 1980
Shariah Academy	1982, 1985
Dawah Academy Faisal Mosque Islamic Centre	1983, 1985
Iqra College for Technology	1995
Iqbal International Institute for Research and Dialogue (IRD)	2008
English Language Centre	2008
Directorate of Distance Education	2015
Institute of Professional Development	

Source: IIUI website, <http://www.iiu.edu.pk/>. [Accessed on 20. January 2016].

Intervention options and constraints for Tajik graduates

Interviews with select graduates of the International Islamic University and the Lahore-based Maududi Institute of the Jama'at-i Islami, conducted in April 2014 and May 2015 in Dushanbe, suggested that their impact in Tajikistan followed a pattern of cultural and social mobility that was similar to that observed among the Tablighi followers in Kyrgyzstan. For example, the knowledge they had obtained in Pakistan allowed them to intervene not only in religious but also in secular affairs. At the same time, the impact of their graduation from the IIUI on their religious positioning was less visible or pronounced than in the cases of the Tablighis. They also faced a much more constrained environment in Tajikistan.

Their greatest asset proved to be the formal educational credentials they brought back. They managed to use them in different capacities and at various levels. Those opportunities ranged from the religious bureaucracy of the state to independent religious institutes, academic teaching positions (mainly of languages like Arabic and Urdu), international NGOs, and media positions where they could use their English-language proficiency. For some of them, the structured religious knowledge they had obtained in different institutes in Pakistan enabled them to occupy positions of authority in the public religious administration of the state. The most prominent of them were the Mufti of Tajikistan, Saidmukkaram Abdulkodirzoda, who was also the head of the Ulama council of the Islamic Centre of Tajikistan,⁵² and Sulaiman Davlatov, who was the Rector of the above-mentioned State Islamic Institute from 2012 until he was promoted to the position of chairman of the influential Committee of Religious Affairs under the President's office in early 2015.⁵³ They both used the religious knowledge, political understanding, and international experience in administration and governance that they had obtained while studying at the IIUI, albeit in different ways. The Mufti, as head of the national Tajik Ulama council, also oversaw the religious instruction programmes at the Islamic Institute. Moreover, he headed the fatwa administration of the Central Mosque. At times, he took on a political role when making arguments in public about various government policies concerning believers and the regulation of religious institutions and practices.⁵⁴ He also publicly joined the critique of the leader of the recently proscribed Islamic Renaissance Party, Muhiddin Kabiri.⁵⁵ Davlatov, on the other hand, as head of the Islamic Institute, was deeply involved in issues of state administration. The challenge he faced was to reconcile the demands of his state functions regarding religious knowledge with the administrative traditions of the secular education system of post-Soviet Tajikistan. He also had to accommodate the apprehensions of the political elite about the potential radicalisation of Muslims, which increasingly drove government policies. The traditional religious instruction courses also had to be adjusted to the demands of the European Bologna education system, with regular Bachelor's and Master's degree courses. The government's aspiration was not only to retain full control over religious education, but also to ensure graduate access to regular jobs, not restricted to the religious sector. Yet after the government had restricted the access

52 For the structure of state religious institutions of Islam, see Schmitz 2015.

53 Interviews in Dushanbe on 9. April 2014 and 30. May 2015.

54 Interview in Dushanbe on 10. April 2014.

55 After briefly meeting Kabiri at an international Islamic conference at Teheran (27.–29. December 2015), he called him a "traitor" in his New Year's prayer on 1. January 2016, as reported in ASIA-Plus 2016.

of minors and under-aged students to institutionalised religious education, the Islamic Institute found it difficult to get applicants sufficiently well-versed in religious knowledge. Even more, they could not be tested in this field because they had to go through standard testing procedures at secular national testing centres, which were only allowed to test mainstream subjects such as literature, history, and foreign languages.⁵⁶ The only Islamic high school in the country that provided religious education for secondary-level students faced institutional and regulatory problems, resulting in its supposedly temporary closure in 2015 (ASIA-Plus 2015).

However, what appeared to be important for the Tajik graduates of the IIUI was that their education enabled them to pursue a career in religious administration both in the state and the private sector, with the latter relating to mosques and other religious institutions. Their studies put them in a somewhat privileged position compared to their compatriots: They had not only completed structured courses on Islamic studies and Arabic, but had also gained international experience outside their home country and outside the post-Soviet area. Central Asian respondents at the IIUI confirmed that their access to an English-speaking environment and Western knowledge both at the university and in Pakistan helped them in their individual adaptation to the rapid changes in the society and economy of their home countries. They acquired first-hand experience of the conditions of a market economy and of relative freedom of operation for political forces and the media, which was common in Pakistan yet was only gradually taking root in post-Soviet Central Asia, where it is now being reversed again. The knowledge transfer thus provided several dimensions of structured knowledge, with Islam occupying a place of prime importance, while knowledge in secular areas such as English, business management, and computers was complementary.

The secular knowledge obtained during their studies at the IIUI in Pakistan benefitted graduates with degrees in religious or Arabic studies who now worked in public NGOs or as media and public relations officers. One of them, Mustafo Surkhov, who had studied Arabic for his Bachelor's degree and International Relations for his MA at the IIUI, was working with the US NGO Creative Associates International.⁵⁷ This organisation, which had international funding, worked on programmes to reduce the number of high school dropouts in countries such as Tajikistan, India, Cambodia, and East Timor. In Tajikistan, Creative Associates International was engaged in

56 Interview in Dushanbe on 30. May 2015.

57 Interview in Dushanbe on 6. April 2014.

a pilot programme in the Eastern district of Khatlon.⁵⁸ Another graduate, Saadi Yusuf, became a media person at the Qatar embassy after working for several years as a journalist covering religious topics.⁵⁹ Yet not all IIUI graduates managed to secure such stable and privileged positions. Some were precariously self-employed as Arabic interpreters, or part-time language teachers in academia. Some of the difficulties the graduates faced were related to clichés associated with Pakistan as the source of radical Islam. Other obstacles were connected with the reasons that had prompted them to go to Pakistan in the first place, such as being members of the Islamic opposition in defiance of state authority, which for some of them in the past had also led to temporary persecution and confinement.⁶⁰

The Pakistan factor and the securitization of Islam

The roots of their studies in Pakistan were often related to the painful events of the past; during the civil war in Tajikistan between 1992–97, substantial numbers of refugee migrants had settled in Pakistan and Afghanistan for several years. The Islamic opposition represented the project of a new life with secured rights for believers. Several of those students had studied in smaller religious schools in Pakistan, not only in madrasas with a complete curriculum to become a religious scholar (‘alim), but also at schools established by international private funding from countries such as Saudi Arabia. Among them was the Ma’had-e Sharā’i al-’Ala al-Darāshāt (School of Higher Learning of the Islamic Law Sharia) in Peshawar which existed until 1996. These schools taught Arabic and provided instruction in selected religious subjects, but offered no degree programs.⁶¹

Several students had to adjust their biographies to the changing political circumstances, institutional histories, and religious concepts. There was strong informal pressure on the Tajik students to legitimise their education by acquiring a second degree in Islamic studies from institutions in countries like Saudi Arabia or Egypt. Several of them opted for an additional Master’s degree in Tajikistan, like Davlatov.⁶²

58 For more information on the project, see <http://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/projects/tajikistan-school-dropout-prevention-pilot-program/>. [Accessed on 11. January 2016].

59 Interview in Dushanbe on 7. April 2014.

60 Interviews in Dushanbe in April 2014.

61 Interview in Dushanbe on 21. May 2015. See also earlier interviews with Tajik religious students in Peshawar in 1997 (Reetz 1999, 17).

62 See note 51.

Interviews conducted in 2015 suggested that the environment for them to employ their skills had become more precarious. The Tajik state perceived developments in Pakistan and Afghanistan as a growing threat. The only legal Islamic party in the post-Soviet area, the Islamic Renaissance Party, lost all its seats in the March 2015 parliamentary elections, which critics claimed were rigged. As a follow-up, the party was gradually disenfranchised. First, it was denied its all-republican status as a national party. After several of its branches and connected offices had been forcibly closed down, the Ministry of Justice argued that the party was no longer present in the majority of cities and districts and therefore did not qualify as a valid national party. This seemed to be a pretext for the government to take further action against the party (Radio Ozodi 2015). After a violent clash between security forces and a reported group of three hundred activists, the IRP was blamed for supposedly funding them. The party was banned on September 29, 2015 (Radio Ozodi 2015a) and was ultimately declared to be an illegal extremist group (Radio Ozodi 2016). At the same time, the government maintained some degree of ambivalence. It criticised Iran for inviting the IRP leader Kabiri for a conference in Tehran in December 2015, while it was reported that its own representatives personally communicated with Kabiri during this meeting, where the Mufti of Tajikistan, Abdulkodirzoda (mentioned above), sat next to Kabiri (ASIA-Plus 2015a; Qishloq Ovozi 2016).

Those were the signs of the growing tension and fear among the political elites of post-Soviet Central Asia, where only Kyrgyzstan adhered to some form of political pluralism. This fear was partly fuelled by the rise of militant Islam in the larger Muslim world, and in particular on the southern borders of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. After the gradual withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan at the end of 2014, it was feared that the Taliban or the Islamic State might gradually gain control, which would also impact the situation in Tajikistan. Fighting moved near the Afghan borders with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, where the provincial capital of Kunduz, which is in close proximity to Tajikistan, was briefly held by the Taliban for two weeks in October 2015 (Nordland, 2015). At the same time, there was concern that the post-Soviet political system might be challenged by more “colour revolutions,” a concern particularly nourished by the Russian leadership after the Orange revolution in the Ukraine in 2004. Not only did the cadres of the past see their positions threatened, but they also believed that the “colour revolutions” were engineered by the West to weaken the post-Soviet states and Russia in particular, bringing nothing but destruction. Internally, any resumption of religious practices

going beyond traditional home-grown ethical beliefs and rituals was viewed with suspicion as radicalisation. Any public articulation of structured religious beliefs was viewed as “Salafi” and externally-induced (Radio Ozodi 2015b).⁶³ The designation “Salafi” commonly refers to the religious practice of the founding generations of Islam and the pious ancestors (as-salaf). Yet the term is contested because it is also widely used for competing claims to an assumed purity of doctrine to justify politics and even warfare (jihad) in the name of religion. Often for political reasons, various critics in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan saw the Islamic education and knowledge obtained in Pakistan as radical or “Salafi”-oriented. Some local Muslim activists in those countries expressed such reservations in interviews with the author about the character of Islamic education in Pakistan and the IIUI, thus partly identifying with the post-Soviet discourse on radical Islam. They rarely referred to the additional local meaning of “Salafi” in the South Asian context, where it describes adherence to a specific doctrine established by the local Ahl-i Hadith group in South Asia (see Reetz 2006).

In Kyrgyzstan, the TJ influence on ritual, behaviour, and dress was viewed with suspicion, with critics frequently referencing their Pakistani and Indian origins (Kabar 2015). The contestation about their idea of real Islam and its radical potential was widely echoed by the public and the administration. At the same time, sections of the public and also some decision-makers in Kyrgyzstan appeared ready to consider the TJ influence not as a burden but as an inspiration, which clearly distinguished the local situation from that of the neighbouring countries.⁶⁴

In the larger region of post-Soviet Central Asia, the governing elites became increasingly wary of Pakistan’s role as a source of Islamic education and mobilisation. Yet the official position of Tajikistan towards Pakistan remained neutral and at times friendly, with the hope for increased economic exchange within the wider Central and South Asian region.⁶⁵ The same applied to Kyrgyzstan, particularly with reference to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), where the membership

63 Interview with Davlatov on 30. May 2015. For the larger trajectory of political and discursive developments in relation to Islam, in the case of Central Asia, see Roche, Wilkowsky, and Féaux de la Croix 2014; for Tajikistan, Heathershaw and Herzig 2013; Heathershaw and Roche 2011; and for Kyrgyzstan, Radford 2014.

64 Interviews in Bishkek in 2012; see also Ismailbekova and Nasritdinov 2012; Toktogulova 2014.

65 Interviews at the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of Tajikistan on 9. April 2014 and 29. May 2015.

applications of both India and Pakistan were endorsed at the SCO summit in Astana in June 2017 (Bhuyan 2017). Nevertheless, the governing elites of the states bordering Afghanistan consider Pakistan ultimately responsible for the continuing unrest in the region.⁶⁶

Given the prevailing ambivalence towards Pakistan, one can see that the multi-level mobility between Central and South Asia, which also manifested in Islamic mobilisation, constituted both a threat perception and an opportunity structure. To the chagrin of the elites, the increased mobility coming with the widening of the public sphere through transregional interaction, migration, and the new border-crossing medium of the Internet was increasingly difficult to control (see Nozimova and Epkenhans 2013). In interviews, the IIUI graduates in Tajikistan, as well as the TJ activists in Kyrgyzstan, continued to stress the opportunities and benefits of their previous and current interaction with Pakistan. Graduates and others familiar with conditions in Pakistan spoke highly of the professionalism of the IIUI, which they compared favourably with the Tajik Islamic Institute.⁶⁷ When the Pakistani embassy officially offered a new quota for Tajik students at the IIIUI in 2015, the Tajik government seemed at least ready to consider it.⁶⁸ In Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, the government consulted with TJ activists and engaged them to use their religious capital to defuse ethnic and religious tension.⁶⁹

While the social side of the Muslim actors' religious capital was mobilised, addressed, and harnessed, it is useful to take a separate look at streams of secular capital along the same trajectories between South and Central Asia to understand how those compared with and were linked to religious mobility.

Flows of secular and sacred capital

The religious actors mentioned above had established their own modes of connectivity. However, those modes were not necessarily confined to religious knowledge and practice. They fed into wider regional transformation processes, which will be briefly introduced here. Those secular exchanges were rebuilding older historical connections between

66 Conference on Afghanistan in Dushanbe at the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences, 26. May 2015, participants' discussion.

67 Interview with Mufti Mukarram in Dushanbe on 10. April 2014.

68 Interview with Davlatov on 30. May 2015.

69 Interview in Bishkek on 25 October 2012.

the two regions that go back to the Silk Road era.⁷⁰ My field studies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan showed a secular stream of interactions between South and Central Asia that was generated by Indian and Pakistani students attending Central Asian medical institutions. This secular stream was not isolated from the religious connectivity discussed above. Two Kyrgyzstan institutions, the International School of Medicine (ISM) in Bishkek (opened in 2003)⁷¹ and the Asian Medical Institute (AMI) in Kant (fifteen kilometres away from Bishkek and established in 2004),⁷² were nodal points in the secular interaction. Both significantly focused on the South Asian market. The ISM offered fee-based medical training to candidates from the subcontinent. At US\$1250 per semester, compared to as much as US\$6000 per semester at top private Pakistani medical colleges, it catered to the lower end of the emerging middle class in South Asia. Out of the over one thousand students enrolled at the ISM in 2012, two-thirds came from India and the remaining third came from Pakistan.

The Avicenna State Medical University of Dushanbe in Tajikistan followed a similar strategy, attracting many students from India and a smaller number from Pakistan. This university⁷³ consciously marketed itself not only as the erstwhile second-best medical institute in the entire Soviet Union, but also had separate websites for international applicants, particularly from South Asia.⁷⁴ In an interview, Sanjay Chowdhry, a student from Rajasthan who wanted to specialise in cardio-vascular medicine, explained that in the last two batches there had been 250 students from different parts of India (he mentioned Bihar, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh) and also some students from Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Tuition ranged around US\$3500 dollars per year, which was higher than in Kyrgyzstan, but still far below that of the prestigious private institutes in South Asia.⁷⁵

70 During the Soviet era, exchanges between Kyrgyzstan and South Asia had been limited, although Rajiv Gandhi visited Bishkek in 1985 as part of a trip to the Soviet Union. Tajikistan also had extensive connections with South Asia at that time. See also Jain 1979.

71 <http://ism.edu.kg> [Accessed on 12. January 2016].

72 <http://www.asmi.edu.kg/> [Accessed on 12. January 2016].

73 <http://tajmedun.tj/> [Accessed on 12. January 2016].

74 For the website catering to the international market and Indian applicants in particular, see their web presentations on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Avicenna-Tajik-State-Medical-University-Dushanbe-Tajikistan-266671463441921/>), Blogspot (<http://avicennatsmu.blogspot.in/>), and HPAGE (<http://medicaluniversity.hpaged.com/>).

75 Interviews with medical students from India and Pakistan in Dushanbe on 15 April 2014.

Here in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, social and economic capital flowed in reverse to South Asia. The South Asian students from India and Pakistan lived together in one hostel, ignoring the constraints and polarities of the tense political relationship between their home countries. In Bishkek, they even had joint student representation. Their presence created a small South Asian world near the Bishkek medical institute hostel, with a separate student restaurant named “Bollywood” that served Indian food (fig. 5) and a local business established by one of the Pakistani students that produced and traded South Asian food and sweets. The ISM tried to make the town attractive for South Asian students by highlighting on its website that “Bishkek is also a centre for several Indian and Pakistani restaurants (like The Host, Indian Village, Pizza one, Mac Burger, Begemot etc.) giving several options for students to dine and hang out.”⁷⁶ In the same vein, Dushanbe city hosted several Indian and South Asian eating places, adding to the feeling of home for South Asian students.



Fig. 5 Student restaurant “Bollywood” in Bishkek offering Indian food.

76 http://ism.edu.kg/?s_id=631 [Accessed on 12. January 2016].

Those two life-worlds of secular and religious interaction between Central and South Asia were not mutually exclusive. They had some shared nodal points. Respondents confirmed that some of the Pakistani students occasionally participated in the Tablighi missionary tours in Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, Kyrgyz and Tajik respondents who had been to Pakistan confirmed that some combined their studies at madrasas and the IIUI with business activities both at home and in Pakistan.⁷⁷

The flows of religious and cultural capital connecting Pakistan and India with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in these cases show how connectivity within the wider region operated on different yet related levels and in several intertwined directions. Together they formed what one might call opportunity structures. Religious as well as secular actors and institutions used spaces provided by new forms of connectivity and mobility. This was an outcome of the re-ordering of the region after the collapse of the Soviet system and the end of the Cold War. Citizens of both Central and South Asia now went where they could not go before and received services and knowledge from sources previously closed to them. They were not passive recipients, but active agents in the process—bringing with them their own objectives and programmes, both religious and secular, which in turn structured their selection and application.

Regional mobility and connectivity

As this paper primarily focused on the ways in which Islamic actors and institutions fit into transregional patterns of social interaction, it is important to understand the different dimensions of this process. While primarily engaged in the acquisition and re-distribution of sacred capital, these actors and institutions were also involved in the circulation of wider social capital. And, as the case of the medical students shows, the religious actors were not separate from similar secular network flows. The examples of the medical students taking part in missionary work and of the TJ activists being involved in mediating inter-ethnic conflict show that sacred and secular actors were engaged in activities that could not be neatly categorized as political or pertaining to security. While the religious actors might be value-driven, they might also pursue career opportunities, and while secular actors might be career-driven, they might also be conscious of the value dimensions embedded in their culture and religion.

⁷⁷ Interviews in Bishkek in October 2012; Dushanbe 2014 and 2015; Islamabad 2012.

Religious actors appeared here as self-conscious agents of change who not only pursued religious agendas but also contributed to social interaction in all its facets. It is argued here that the formats of their religious networking were entangled with their local engagements, which formed a dynamic figuration in line with the analytical frames of Norbert Elias's concept of figurations (1978). He investigated the mutual dynamics of connectivity in what he called "groupings of people" who, "through their basic dispositions and inclinations, are directed towards and linked with each other in the most diverse ways" (ibid., 14–15). The interaction of discourse and practice of TJ activities from South Asia with Central Asian traditions and values produced a rich diversity of polarities that reflected on the burning issues of social, cultural, and political contestation in Kyrgyzstan. The preaching activities were seen and practiced by their supporters as religious interventions for the re-building of social harmony and cohesion in the face of the dramatic socio-economic changes that followed the introduction of a market economy. Yet their claims to a true Islamic knowledge and education were frequently challenged by the locals. Local Muslims often engaged in debates with TJ followers, since TJ practices were resented as controversial and interpreted as pressure to change local lifestyles in accordance with Tablighi preferences. In the process, the local Tablighis engaged with personal lives, community conditions, and the functions of state institutions in often ambivalent ways.

The Central Asian graduates of the IUI recreated modes of intervention in terms of knowledge and practice that were partly similar to those of the Tablighi activists. While they also put prime emphasis on structured knowledge and practice of religion as opposed to inherited popular knowledge and practices of Islam, their input was less on a personal level than through interaction with state and private (including religious) institutions. That also reflected the nature of their education and of the IUI institutional format, which was more focused on a synthesis of religious knowledge and practice, with both its public and political meaning. This figuration involved them to a greater degree in the post-Soviet political and security discourse of Tajikistan and other post-Soviet Central Asian states, which in turn made the social positions they acquired much more vulnerable to political pressures.

At the same time, the IUI graduates derived additional benefits from acquiring knowledge and training in the market economy and related political and public institutions in Pakistan, most of which came with English language training. Their increased adaptability helped improve their chances back home and opened new spaces for them in the private

sector. These different forms of benefits that graduates and followers of religious institutions brought back to their home countries equally demonstrate the limits of practices and discourse aimed at a securitisation of Islam. They also showed the limits of state control over religion in times of globalisation and expanding market economies, even more so as the governing elites pushing for more state control also retained high stakes in those market economies.

The new forms of mobility after the end of Soviet-era travel restrictions created and recreated transregional mobile flows of values, practices, and institutional modes, which were adapted and re-appropriated locally. The new mobility across vast distances became operative and effective only through local adaptation. It transported and reshaped the distance-locale binary—between South and Central Asia—to local polarities of contestations between the state and religious mobilisation. But while the connectivity across distance could only come about when anchored in a local perspective, the contestations it produced were strictly local in nature, even when post-Soviet elites blamed them on outside intervention. At the other end of the spectrum, the transregional mobility and connectivity might help negotiate local processes of change and adaptation. At the same time, the original formats of Islamic knowledge and practice—here the TJ activities and the “Islamization of knowledge” concept of the IIUI—underwent adaptive interpretation. The religious capital, in order to reap benefits, had to be re-invested locally.

The newly opened mobility facilitated flows, but the flows studied here were structured by the type of religious engagement students chose to pursue. Their preferences connected discourses and practices moving across space and time, what one might figuratively call “floating projects”: the Tablighi Jama’at mission of re-conversion and the IIUI’s concept of the “Islamization of knowledge.” Each of them was preconfigured by the nominal centres and reference points of those engagements, but their mobility was only successful where they took into full consideration the local conditions at the other end of those mobility flows.

In this sense, the original figurations of the Tablighi followers and the IIUI graduates, the specific ways by which members of those networks were connected—speaking with Elias—were re-configured through their local adaptation. Such local appropriation appeared to be a pre-condition of their own mobility, extending the “grouping of people” across national borders. Elias, in his time, was less concerned with connectivity across borders as “Nations [were] as yet unable to see themselves as integral components of

a figuration, the dynamics of which [were] compelling them to make these efforts” (ibid., 30). One could therefore argue that only those Islamic projects whose figurations were able to adapt, and ready to undergo modification for this purpose, could be successfully transmitted across the cultural and political divides of different regions.

For Elias, to interpret social relations and concepts as figurations meant emphasising that they do not represent something alien, outside human behaviour, but “the kind of forces which people exert over each other” (ibid., 21). Applying his perspective to the Tablighi and IIUI networks could help to understand that it was individual human beings, with all their manifold interests and concurrent activities, who created those figurations by exerting influence and command over each other. It would then help to see them in their different capacities alternatively as social, political, or cultural actors—beyond their religious positioning in those figurations. As for Elias, the power differentials between those individuals determined the kind of figurations they formed; significant changes in those power differentials modified the whole figuration (ibid., 15). The interaction of local followers of the Tablighi Jama’at in Kyrgyzstan or the Tajik graduates of the IIUI followed and created different power differentials between those individuals. This is where the figurations acquired their adaptability, in addition to the changing regional dynamics discussed above. And this is where the identity of these networks and the self-identification of its members could be understood as the product of social interaction, both in the localities and across regional spatial, social, political, or cultural divides.

Connectivity, therefore, included not only the ability to connect, but also the direction and intensity of flows, as much as their changing and modulating character.⁷⁸ Where connectivity was mutual and enduring, it produced networks. While the networks represented changing figurations in themselves, they triggered and fed on local figurations, raising the question of scale. Mobility is therefore understood here as a multilevel process where a lens was required to distinguish the different scales. In reverse, it was the issue of scale that allowed us to learn about the nature, direction, and stability of mobility. Where connections between the two regions opened new opportunity structures, their meaning and usage could only be understood if scale was considered and applied, revealing how the

⁷⁸ See Mielke and Hornidge (2017) discussing the conceptual approach of the Crossroads Asia research network and its take on area studies after the “mobility turn” and in the context of the “figuration” approach by Elias, esp. pp. 14 and 68.

locale-distance binary was translated to local polarities. Therefore, it was impossible to judge the effect or impact of such connectivity by only knowing the source and format of that mobility; it was not enough to know that we are analysing Tablighis and IIUI graduates coming from Pakistan in South Asia. We also had to look at the local translation and adaptation at the receiving end, which could feed into the source mode or what we know about the “original” formats of these networks in Pakistan. It could also differ significantly in adjusting to needs, requirements, and opportunity spaces. The dynamism of transregional interaction was therefore primarily driven by the dynamism of local interaction, the ability of local societies to absorb such interaction, to participate in it, and contribute to it.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: Mosque in 9th microrayon in Bishkek where the Tablighi Jama'at regularly convenes, 23.10.2012.

Fig. 2: Hadith collection of the Tablighi Jama'at, Fazail-e Amal, in Kyrghyz, in Islamic bookstall in Bishkek, 2nd row, 3rd from right, 22.10.2012.

Fig. 3: Fazail-e Amal in Tajik, Dushanbe, 13.04.2014.

Fig. 4: Entrance to the Tajikistan Islamic Institute Abu Hanifa, Dushanbe, 09.04.2014.

Fig. 5: Student restaurant “Bollywood” in Bishkek offering Indian food, 27.10.2012.