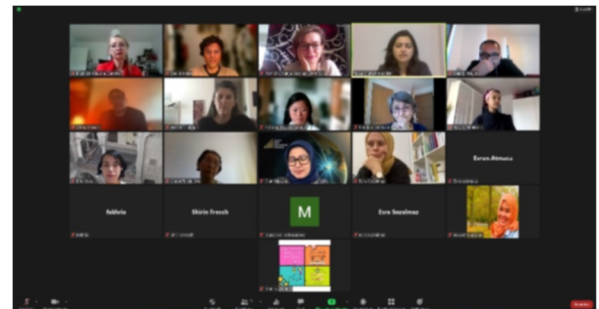




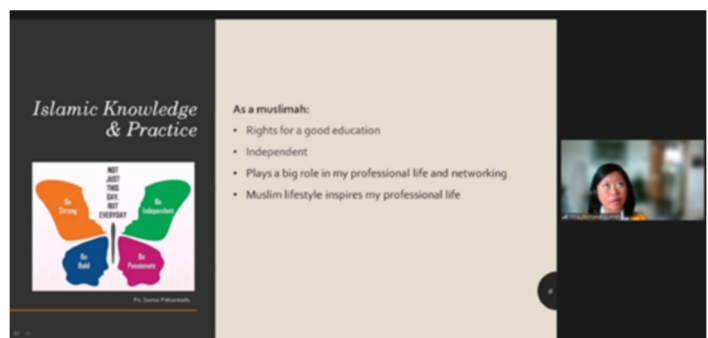
Religious knowledge, women and Muslim professionalism

The workshop, “Religious knowledge, women and Muslim professionalism,” was held on Thursday the 26th & Friday the 27th of August 2021, 9 am to 1 pm by Transregional Southeast Asian & Transregional Central Asian Studies at the Institute of Asian & African Studies (IAAW), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. This workshop was the first in a series of three annual events (2021-2023). It aimed at mapping the intersecting fields of religious knowledge and Muslim women’s professionalism in Asia. Along this vein, it provided a platform to discuss how Muslim women relate to their faith while engaging in various occupations. The workshop was an exercise to explore and map the multiple creative fields in which religious knowledge informs professional practices. Through empirical case studies, it sought to engage in the conceptual and analytical potential of the term ‘Muslim professionalism.’ Four women from various countries and backgrounds in Asia offered first-hand input on faith-related professional practices. They shared with the audience how Muslim faith, identity, piety, and notions of belonging inform their work ethics and professional self-understanding, mobilities and networks in diverse ways.

The speakers in the workshop included both academics (from the social sciences, anthropology, cultural and religious studies) and professionals – understood here as persons practising a particular activity in a trained manner, with specialized expertise, and hence “professional” from an emic perspective. The four presenters on the first day included a parenting and life coach from Pakistan, a yoga expert from Afghanistan, an Islamic Finance professor from Indonesia, and a Halal Certification food expert from Germany.¹ These women shared how their living contexts in different religious-cultural and political environments shaped their professional trajectories, identities and experiences. All four related their educational biographies, which impacted their transnational mobility experiences.



The second day included five presentations of current ethnography-based research projects in the focus areas of the project, i.e. Central Asia, South and South-East Asia. The workshop organizers, Prof. Dr. Claudia Derichs, Prof. Dr. Manja Stephan-Emmrich and Dr. Faiza Muhammad Din, presented their collaborative article about “Online (im)mobility and professional knowledge” in South Asia. The presentation highlighted case studies of stay at home mothers who could reconvene their professional activities through online religious education networks. The panel about Kyrgyzstan included three presentations. Dr. Mukaram Toktogulova from the American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, presented the case study of two educational training centres wherein the female leaders of the training



¹ Since some cases are sensitive for a number of reasons, we follow the “do no harm” principle and do not mention the names of the presenters in this report.



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centres translate their religious knowledge into professional activities. Gulniza Taalaibekova, from Goethe University, Frankfurt, presented about female preachers from Kyrgyzstan and their religious ideas, which hinder them from gaining prominence as female preachers despite their significant role in disseminating Islamic knowledge. Naomi Ntakiyica from Humboldt Universität zu Berlin presented her recent experiences of observing female solidarity networks which relied on shared religious values and a wish to become economically independent. Dr. Syafiq Hasyim from Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia presented the theological discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama on women’s rights and the issues of gender equality in Indonesia. The participants brought expertise from different fields within social sciences and humanities, which helped view the empirical case studies through the analytical lenses of gender, culture, economy, religion, mobility, and power, and the intersection of these factors. A very engaging discussion ensued on both days during round table sessions that followed the presentations.

The round table sessions served as a format for collaborative reflection of insights and questions about the workshop’s key conceptual terms: professionalism, Muslim (women), mobility, and religious knowledge. The active discussion helped the workshop participants dig deeper into the



question if and how the variables of Muslimness and womanhood were influential in the individual trajectories introduced on the first day and the researched cases presented on the second day. Another theme was the impact of the immediate political, national and cultural makeup on women’s experiences and professional

journeys – be it in or away from Asia. While the shared values and experiences of living and working in a (non-)Muslim country/family certainly influenced the professional journeys, the immediate context in which everyone interpreted her or his value system and religious obligations seemed to count stronger. These factors of contextual influence were as varied as the larger power structures in nation-states, patriarchy, the institution of family, cultural expectations of gender roles, the ideas and ideals of success, or available means of learning the conditions of peace and security.

The workshop also brought the project’s cooperation partners in conversation with the larger group of interested researchers and the project team. Professors Emi Goto from the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Ahmad Farouk Musa from the Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF) in Malaysia, Syafiq Hasyim from the International Islamic University in Depok, Indonesia; Dr. Mukaram Toktogulova and Dr. Cholpon Turdalieva from the American University of Central Asia, Bishkek met online for the first time and provided inspiring ideas for the research ahead. The partners’ inputs were constructive in envisaging the next steps for advancing the research area further. Since the project addresses a topical area in which still much needs to be done, further workshop plans were also presented to zoom in on regional perspectives. This will be the next step, i.e. exploring particular regional perspectives while working together with cooperation partners from all areas of Asia.