Conclusion

Pulsation and the Dynamics of Conviction

pulsation noun | pul-sa-tion | ˌpul-sə-shən: 1: rhythmical throbbing or vibrating (as of an artery); also: a single beat or throb 2: a periodically recurring alternate increase and decrease of a quantity (as pressure, volume, or voltage)

The relationship between power and collective ideas is riddled with contradictions. The ideas that are most conspicuously present, that are most aggressively pushed, are also the most likely to collapse under their own weight. Seen from the opposite angle, ideas that form an integral part of society tend to be taken for granted, and as such lack the ability to stir people’s feelings, to motivate inspired action. Collective ideas can be motivational only when there is a tension—due to a discrepancy with reality or caused by challenges to their integrity—which makes them worthy and in need of propagation or defense. It is due to this dynamic that conviction thrives in contexts of instability. In other words, the potency of ideology is rooted in its fragility.

In this book we have explored the relationship between sociopolitical instability and conviction through an examination of how secular and religious collective ideas fared in conditions of existential uncertainty, paying attention to the hopes they instilled and the actions they inspired among
residents of a destitute former mining town, as well as to the suspicions, skepticisms, and disillusions these same ideas evoked. I have described the precarious attempts of “secularists” to position themselves between fading Soviet atheism and assertions of new forms of religiosity; the successes and failures in the activities of Tablighi Muslims as they moved into “uncharted” territory, and of a Pentecostal church on the religious frontier; and how spiritual practitioners who were sometimes labeled “shamans” operated in unpredictable spiritual fields. With the ethnographic engagements behind us it will be worthwhile to provide further reflections on the dynamics of conviction, to outline a conceptual framework that is capable of illuminating how collective ideas gain and lose force.

The term “pulsation” is such a productive metaphor for talking about conviction because it highlights that impermanence and fluctuation are key characteristics of ideational power. As in the above definition from *Merriam-Webster’s*, it is possible to distinguish between at least three aspects. Pulsation begins with the “single beat or throb,” that is, with the impulse that sets things in motion. In the realm of ideas this translates to a reaching out, a “voicing of hope” that is simultaneously a yearning for and a conceptualization of a utopian horizon. Second, the impulse needs to gain traction (or find pressure points to push against) if it is to produce an increase of “pressure or voltage.” This tends to happen when ideas are seen as relevant and important, which means that they should be neither completely taken for granted nor completely outrageous. Finally, even if one beat released in the right environment may produce a ripple, for collective ideas to be characterized by a “rhythmical throbbing or vibrating” the impulses or beats need to arrive in appropriate intervals or reverberate within a group of people.

Together these three aspects make up the process by which meaningful ideas attain affective and effervescent qualities, that is, by which ideas are endowed with a sense of not only truth, but also of imminence, importance, and justice. But while these dynamics should be seen as working in an ensemble, it should also be noted that they are never in complete harmony. The production of conviction is a delicate undertaking with distinctive temporal characteristics and limits. At each of the points—the voicing, the responding, the reverberating—things can and do go wrong.
Voicing Hope on the Frontier

The frontier was not the end (“tail”) but rather the beginning (“forehead”) . . .

it was the spearhead of light and knowledge expanding into the realm of
darkness and the unknown . . . pioneer settlements of a forward moving
culture bent on occupying the whole area.

Ladis K. D. Kristof (1959, 270)

Kristof’s historical definition of the frontier powerfully conveys the per-
spective of the settler, the pioneer, and the missionary as they look out over
what to them appears as barren land, an expanse into which they can ven-
ture, and which they set out to appropriate by transforming it, a process
through which they are themselves rejuvenated.¹

This perspective reflects well how the various “ideologues” in this book
talked about Kyrgyzstan and especially Kokjangak. International devel-
opment specialists had seen Kyrgyzstan as a testing ground for neoliberal
policies, with a population in need of being trained in the workings of the
free market. An example that comes to my mind is from a day in Kok-
jangak back in 1999 when a visiting German UNDP colleague (who, like
me, was in his twenties) was vigorously drawing business plans on a flip
chart. He solicited ideas from his mostly female and visibly impoverished
audience—to make and sell pastry, for example—then drew boxes and ar-
rows to which he attached numbers and words, which together purported
to demonstrate how the women’s ideas could be turned into successful busi-
nesses. What his performance conveyed was the certainty that his approach
was right and the conviction that it would bring prosperity to the poor.

This self-righteous attitude, which was based on a perceived contrast
between the “spearhead of light” and the “realm of darkness,” shone
through even more strongly in my conversations with Pastor Kadyrjan. As
the representative of a Pentecostal church that placed great emphasis on
evangelism, he talked about Kokjangak as if it was the ultimate frontier,
and elaborated in his sermons on the various evil spirits that still kept the
town in their “ice cold” grip.² Conquering this town (in the sense of estab-
lishing a thriving congregation) would deliver a decisive blow to Satan,
and thus not only save the lives of the converted but achieve an important
victory for Jesus in the whole region.

On the frontier the differentials between perceived superiority and in-
feriority are simultaneously very pronounced and at risk of collapsing or
inverting. The sense of superiority was reflected in the comportment of the
“pioneers”: the soft-spoken certainty of amir Nur Islam, the unreflective enthusiasm of my UNDP colleague, and the unwavering exclamations of Pastor Kadyrjan. This sense of superiority tends to grow, as it were, with each step deeper into the frontier as this reveals ever-larger contrasts with the pioneer’s “civilization.” And yet each step will make the pioneer more vulnerable, until he or she is either reduced to a voice in the desert or falls over to the other side. These dangers are recognized by the pioneers themselves, which makes reflecting on them all the more interesting.

The risk of failing to find an audience—of becoming a lone voice in the desert—is one that probably troubles most secular and religious missionaries as they set out on their missions. In light of this Simon Coleman has written that even when the missionary fails to convince others, they still “have an audience of at least one, given that the evangelical speaker is also perforce a listener, attending to a message that achieves an important part of its purpose merely by being powerfully and passionately projected out into the world” (2003, 24). Coleman’s is a valuable observation, as it emphasizes the invigorating effect of doing missionary work, whether religious or political. But although an “audience of one” may be sufficient for some preachers, it is definitely not for all. During my last encounter with Gulbarchyn (the church leader who was sent by Pastor Kadyrjan to live and work in Kokjangak), we talked about the difficulty of living in a place whose residents were either hostile or indifferent to her presence, and about how her difficulties were confounded by the partial disintegration of the local congregation. To me she appeared despondent, and thus I was not surprised when the following year I was informed that Gulbar-chyn had left Kokjangak to rejoin her family in Jalalabad city.

The other risk—of falling over to the other side—is one that perhaps speaks even more directly to the imagination. Just as anthropologists talk with a mix of intrigue and contempt about (former?) colleagues who ended up “going native,” so do Christian and development missionaries about theirs. An evangelical example from Kyrgyzstan concerned Risbek, a US missionary who had fallen in love with Kyrgyz culture and become convinced that the Kyrgyz were one of the lost tribes of Israel. As proof for this idea he embarked on a lengthy study of the Manas epic, ultimately concluding that the epic was rooted in the Bible. Risbek was controversial in evangelical circles because his ideas demonstrated to some that “contextualization” had turned into “syncretism,” meaning that efforts to make the biblical message meaningful to a local population had ended up corrupting
the message, which therefore was no longer biblical. A very different example is from my first days as a United Nations Volunteer (UNV), when I and several other new recruits were told the story of a colleague who had just been dismissed. This colleague had been working for several years in Kyrgyzstan’s remote Batken area when, during an unannounced visit, UNDP officials found him spending his workday, accompanied by two young women, in a sauna illegally built with development money.

Even if they were not always successful, the movements discussed in this book had their own strategies for dealing with the dangers of the frontier. The Tablighi approach is particularly useful for illustrating adaptations to frontier conditions. Their *dawatchis*, or travelers, would never venture into the unknown alone and risk being swallowed up by the frontier. All their activities—traveling to new places, inviting people to the mosque, eating and sleeping—were carried out in the company of fellow travelers, which allowed the “voice of ideology” to resonate within the fellowship even when there was no external audience. When in 2010 I conversed with visiting *dawatchis* in the former mining town of Ak-Tiuz, they mentioned that two days into their *dawat* I was the first person to come to their makeshift mosque. To them this did not indicate that their mission was a failure, because even their mere presence would leave behind “spiritual footprints” and thereby prepare the ground for a future spiritual awakening. Meanwhile, the *dawatchis’* own commitment to the true path was being strengthened by the confrontation with the horrors of life in a God-deserted place.

It is important to reemphasize that mining towns such as Kokjangak and Ak-Tiuz had not always been a “realm of darkness.” In fact, until recently Kokjangak had been an outpost of Soviet modernity—its own “spearhead of light and knowledge” (to use Kristof’s [1959] vocabulary once more). It used to be a well-off industrial town inhabited by people who considered themselves educated and cultured, some of whom would venture into the “backward” surrounding villages to battle the vestiges of religious traditions (chapter 3). The memories of this glorious past made the downfall into chaos all the more painful. But perhaps it is hardly surprising that the pioneers of Soviet modernity had become the post-Soviet targets of new civilizing missions. Painful as it was, the inversion is a reminder that frontiers are human constructs in which the dominant perspective gets to define “wildness,” something that had radically altered
with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its socialist and militantly secular ideology. The town’s modernist past also meant that Kokjangak inhabitants often saw themselves as more civilized than the missionaries who targeted them, with the result that while residents were on the one hand reaching out to new horizons, on the other they were often skeptical of new assertions of truth.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Let’s first summarize some key points. Pulsation starts with a clear ideological “voice”—the impulse—which is a necessary precondition for having an effect. The frontier, which to the pioneer and ideologue contained the promise of expansion and transformation, triggered such clear voices. And yet the same frontier conditions challenged ideological clarity, with the voice of ideology running the risk of either cracking or being deafened out by its surroundings. In that sense the frontier is also a frontier between conviction and doubt.

**Responding: Productive Tensions**

Friction is not just about slowing things down. Friction is required to keep global power in motion. . . . The effects of encounters across difference can be compromising or empowering.

Anna Tsing (2005, 6)

Anna Tsing’s statement about the need for friction to keep things moving applies not only to global power but has much broader applicability, as can be seen in the works of various thinkers. Not that they always use the word “friction” when talking about specific productive tensions. Slavoj Žižek speaks of the vital importance of “the obstacle,” which, on the one hand, prevents the full deployment of productive forces but, on the other, is simultaneously the “condition of possibility” because a complete realization (of love, for example) would remove the mystery and thereby deflate interest (Žižek 2001, 18). Ernesto Laclau writes (2005, 85) about a broken space that separates the people from power, a gap or lack in the sociopolitical field that is a necessary condition for the formation of genuine populist movements. Arjun Appadurai speaks about the tension between the national ideal of homogeneity and the messy reality of a globalizing world, which produces an “anxiety of incompleteness” (2006). To return to the term “friction,” Anna Tsing argues that notwithstanding popular talk of
a borderless world of flows, globalization “can only be charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters” (2005, 1). It would not be difficult to expand this rather eclectic list, but the point is that “friction” is also a key dimension in the trajectory of ideas. Ideas only come to matter—they “gain traction,” as I formulated it above—when they are not completely taken for granted, that is, when they are challenged, either from within or from without.

Friction is ultimately about “encounters across difference” (Tsing 2005, 3), which, applied to this book, concerns the tensions between people’s dreams, values, and ideas and the terrain onto which these are projected. Tsing rightly argues that friction can be enabling as much as it can be compromising. Too much friction slows things down, while the lack of friction means the loss of any grip. In the pages below, I will draw on the ethnographic evidence from this book to make tentative claims about the enabling and disabling role of friction. Starting with tensions in the properties of the advanced ideas themselves, attention will then move to discrepancies between these ideas and the realities of life as they are experienced.

Pascal Boyer’s theory of “minimal counter-intuitiveness” posits that concepts, images, and ideas are particularly appealing when they conform to certain intuitive assumptions about a class of objects, while simultaneously violating some of those assumptions (1994, 3–5; see also Sperber 1985). In other words, for ideas to gain traction they should be neither self-evident nor outlandish, but rather “thought provoking.” There is no need to enter the sterile debate as to whether or not “counter-intuitiveness” reflects “non-cultural properties of the human mind-brain” as Boyer has it (1994, 3) to recognize the relevance of the general principle for the study of conviction. It suffices here to say that newly introduced ideas on the one hand need to make sense, while on the other they need to “stand out.” And maintaining this balance is particularly important when the advanced ideas cannot fall back on dominant social conventions or institutional structures.

The balance between uniqueness and familiarity has been a recurrent theme in this book, coming across particularly vividly in the self-portrayals of spiritual healers who, while presenting themselves as novel and exceptional, simultaneously drew on established ideas of how spiritual healers are supposed to act. The example of Gulnara (chapter 6) is a good one to recall. Her invocation of alien doctors and her use of invisible needles and other surgical instruments were confounding to some of her patients, but she made these
digestible through her conventional story of becoming a “shaman,” which explained how she had been inaugurated into the profession after a protracted illness and with the blessing of her spiritual teachers. The discussion of the liminal position of the Tablighi Jamaat pointed in the same direction. Here it was a trade-off between their unusual and foreign appearance and their connection with Soviet and Kyrgyz “nomadic” practices that produced a “minimal counter-intuitiveness” that proved attractive to many men.  

“Counterintuitiveness” refers to principles of classification and the dilemma of what to do with elements that do not fit classificatory schemes. It is important to emphasize that such schemes cannot be understood separately from the context in which they arise and are employed. As Mary Douglas pointed out quite a few decades ago, classificatory schemes are ultimately expressions of existing patterns of social relations, such that anomalies in those schemes tend to be understood as violations of the social order (1975, 249). While initially arguing that such violations are generally considered dangerous “dirt” that as “matter out of place” require removal (1966), in one of her later essays Douglas (1975) refined this idea, saying that the evaluation of anomalies in classificatory schemes correlates with the evaluation of the relations between a community and the surrounding world. When these external relations are negative, anomalies tend to be seen as problematic and dangerous. When relations with the outside are positive, anomalies tend to be imbued with positive or even sacred value. This then brings us to the question of how the tension between the ideal and the real can spark desire as well as anxiety.

Ghassan Hage (2003) has argued that the shrinking of the state—in his case the Australian state under neoliberal reform—undermines the capacity to generate and distribute hope among its population, a process in which citizens develop a “worrying attachment” to society that reveals itself in xenophobic sentiments and more generally a “paranoid nationalism” (3). The disarray of the state system in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan similarly produced “worrying attachments” among citizens. This flared up with particular intensity in 2010, when the country’s sovereignty was felt to be under threat, resulting in mass violence against the Uzbek minority. The positive revaluation of Soviet atheism made by “secularists” and their negative response to assertions of religiosity could similarly be interpreted as projecting fears stemming from their own marginalization onto “everything classified as alien” (21).
However, these worrying or defensive attitudes coexisted with much more hopeful responses. Indeed, as suggested in writings about the “hope-in-hopelessness” of people who face extinction (Crapanzano 2004, 111) or who have been cut off from leading religiously and morally worthwhile lives (Naumescu 2013), the spark of hope appears especially bright in “hopeless” situations. Moreover, it is in such destabilized contexts that hope has transformative potential by reorienting people to new horizons. In a way, the collapse of the state in Kyrgyzstan also “freed” people from their attachment to the state and the nation, and pushed them to redirect their hopes to new points of reference. As was illustrated throughout this book, the promises of health and wealth made by Pentecostal Christianity, the futures of affluence laid out by development workers, and the route to fulfillment suggested by Tablighi teachings proved to be very attractive to marginalized inhabitants.

These redirections of hope entailed more than mere projection. Engagement with new utopian points of reference was a productive process in which vague hope gained concreteness and agency. As Jarrett Zigon (2009, 256) has pointed out, rather than seeing hope as either passive or active, it is important to see how these aspects feed into and give way to each other over time. People’s engagement with religious and secular ideological movements allowed them to act on their hopes, “rendering hope—now recontextualized—into efficacious desire” as Crapanzano (2004, 120) formulates it. Hope was concretized through acts of praying and healing, by joining protests against the president, indeed, even by writing up a business plan for a United Nations development project. This is what Miyazaki (2004) refers to as the “method of hope,” a process by which people attach themselves to this world and actively orient themselves toward the future.

The productive tensions between hope, desire, and reality were more than evident in the stories shared by Tablighi Muslims during their proselytizing trips (dawats), which focused on the inexplicable workings of the world, on frightening political events, and on relationships with women. To take the example of stories about sexual and caring relationships with women, these triggered the imagination precisely because such (idealized) relationships were wanting in the men’s own lives. By sharing such stories within an all-male companionship and connecting them to the teachings of the Prophet, the desires became even more intense and tangible while
remaining just out of reach, thereby keeping the tension alive. The tension remains productive as long as the object of desire remains unfulfilled yet within reach.

This last point is crucial because while the discrepancy between the ideal and the real keeps people motivated, the optimal distance between desire and its fulfillment is rarely maintained for a long period of time. Certainly, as we have seen, spiritual practitioners, Pentecostal preachers, Tablighi scholars, and development specialists worked hard to account for treatments that didn’t cure and prayers that remained unanswered, and to explain why foreign investments did not materialize or why unexpected violence did occur. But such attempts could not always prevent the gap between desire and its realization from widening, potentially even become seen as unbridgeable. To understand these issues better, it is essential to explore how collective ideas reverberate within groups of like-minded people and are related to the temporal and spatial dynamics of ideological movements.

Reverberating: Effervescence and Its Aftermath

It is certain my Conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it.

Novalis (1772–1801), quoted in Joseph Conrad, LORD JIM (1900)

Susan Buck-Morss has argued that “to define the enemy is, simultaneously, to define the collective. Indeed, defining the enemy is the act that brings the collective into being” (2000, 9). Analogously, challenges to the integrity of ideas can be powerful stimulants in the production of shared conviction. This logic surfaced in the discussion of the Tablighis, for whom challenges in the form of police detention and negative public preconceptions added to a sense of heroism, of belonging to a group of chosen people. Especially when congregating during their three-day mission trips, the collective facing of a hostile external world was exhilarating. Arguably, though, the logic of this principle was best phrased by Pastor Kadyrjan when he shared with me his thoughts on the matter: “We pray for [local government] officials to stop hindering us. But this may not be God’s way. Our faith thrives when it is being repressed.” It suggests, very concretely, that it is difference as such that keeps these movements alive, even in cases where difference takes the form of repression.¹⁰
The fervor produced through confrontation was also detected in the more long-term fluctuations of ideological movements. “Scientific atheism” reached its maximum momentum at times when its religious adversaries were, or were seen as, posing a real threat to modern society. As an ideological project, “scientific atheism” turned into a hollow shell once the battle against religion seemed to have been won. To retain some legitimacy, antireligious activists focused on “extreme forms” of religiosity, those that could continue to be seen as credibly dangerous adversaries. It is because of this that, ironically, atheism regained some of its attractions after it had been discarded. When the threat of excessive religiosity rose, some people realized that, after all, “what the communists taught us was right.”

It will be useful to step back to reflect on how these points about difference relate to the arguments presented in the previous two sections, to then see how to move forward. The “voicing of hope” on the frontier was about the conceptualization and projection of new and different possibilities—a utopian horizon—and its hopeful and invigorating dimensions. Subsequently, the theme of difference was elaborated by discussing how tensions within constellations of ideas, as well as between these ideas and the prevalent social reality, contributed to collective ideas gaining traction. Moreover, these frictions or “encounters across difference” gained particular momentum when they were challenged, hence the role attributed to defining or being defined as an enemy.

What happens, concretely, is that in such instances the outward-oriented experience of difference recoils, thereby intensifying the inward-oriented experience of recognition or sameness. Becoming aware of this mutuality, recognizing one’s experiences in others, has an exhilarating effect. Let me repeat the epigraph of Conrad’s Lord Jim, “It is certain my Conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it.” This line is revealing because it emphasizes the moment of becoming aware of this mutuality, which is simultaneously a moment of distinction from all those others who do not share in the belief. Here, the push of distinction and the pull of sameness join forces to produce the effervescent quality of shared conviction.

In this book, I have presented an ethnographic commentary on these points, demonstrating that the clarity and intensity of conviction is a dynamic and deeply social process. Using Weber’s insights on charisma
I showed how the disruption of stable structures of rational-legal and traditional authority in Kyrgyzstan paved the way not only for charismatic authority but for “divinely given” experiences more generally. As in Bakhtin, it was with the falling away, or the suspension, of ordinary power structures that the “utopian ideal and the realistic merged,” paving the way for festivals of the real ([1965] 1984). With Victor Turner I illustrated how in such situations the high and the low temporarily merge, allowing for inspired fellowship, an “intense comradeship and egalitarianism,” to emerge (1969, 95). Crucially, the affective potential was never fully realized, thus partially preserving a state of anticipation, a process energized by its own internal contradictions.

The sense of clarity and conviction has momentary highs, as during miracle occurrences in the Pentecostal Church that lighten up as an epiphany, to then sink back into ambiguity and insignificance. There are moments when specific messages resonate within the body, affecting a person deeply, such as when a spiritual healer repeats something that a grandmother had said in one’s childhood, or when a neophyte is overwhelmed by the kindness of the “brothers” and “sisters” in a congregation, or when young men are about to set fire to the houses belonging to people they had “always known was something wrong with.” These flashes have creative, transformative, and destructive potential: fellow Pentecostal congregants did become like relatives who help each other in battling everyday problems; in the two Kyrgyz revolutionary situations not only did everything seem possible but the despised leaders were in fact removed from power; when simmering anxieties became projected on the Uzbek minority, hundreds of people were killed and thousands of houses burned.

The classic accounts of “antistructure” have argued that the emotive intensities associated with effervescence, charisma, and communitas “can seldom be maintained for very long” and that it is their fate to undergo “a ‘decline and fall’ into structure and law” (Turner 1969, 132). To an extent this principle has been borne out by the examples presented in this book. When in a state of conviction, people say and do things that in hindsight they are often surprised by. “It was me who spoke these words,” exclaimed a previously committed antireligious teacher in surprise about what she had later come to see as vulgar materialist distortions. And a man who was still sympathetic to, but no longer deeply involved with, the Tablighi Jamaat told me, “When you are inside everything seems clear,
everything connects, but afterward, when you have gained distance, it turns out to be more complicated.” He was referring to the need to pay more attention to his family, and to no longer single-mindedly follow the tenets of his faith.

However, the ethnographic examples also suggested that the trajectories of conviction show important variation. The instable fervor becomes differently embedded in legal, customary, and hierarchical structures. The Church of Jesus Christ integrated miracle occurrences into a generalized discourse within the congregation; the intense experiences of the Tablighis were supposed to be repeated in a regular and predictable pattern. To an extent this was a trade-off, a balancing act that risked tipping over into indifference and disinterest. Still, in the unstable environment of Kyrgyzstan, complete routinization (and naturalization) of ideas rarely happened, and thus ideological currents were able to retain their potency.

The ideological movements discussed in this book had their own techniques for dealing with the tempering effects of routinization. Pastor Kadyrjan’s approach was to remain on the offensive, adopting a forward-moving strategy in which constantly new battles were sought and a pioneer mentality was fostered. Generating a continuous supply of impulses (such as miracle occurrence), the church had grown rapidly and produced an environment of constant fervor, yet one that was always on the brink of collapse and led to disillusion among those who could not keep up. The Tabighi Jamaat displayed a similar frontier mentality, but its practice of *dawat* revealed a somewhat different approach to tackle the balancing act. As in their “dry-dock” parable that spoke of the need of ships to regularly leave the rough sea to be patched up in a safe haven, so did their practice of *dawat* insist that adherents to the movement regularly retreat into the company of a fellowship and be nourished with spiritual food, providing them with strength to weather the storms of ordinary life. Ideological work in each of these movements was thus characterized by a form of pulsation, which served to maintain a sense of chosen-ness and uniqueness, and to perpetuate ideological fervor.

Let me end with a few final reflections on the notion of pulsation. For living organisms pulsation is a precondition of life: the impulse provides a boost of energy, and it is the retreating of energy that triggers a new
pulsation: the inhalation of oxygen, the intake of food, the pumping of blood, the contraction of muscles. While movements such as those of Tablighis and Pentecostals devised their own ways of generating new impulses, the contraction did not always have to be generated from within as it was also produced in the confrontation with an external adversary—a combination, so to speak, of the “beat and the pulse.”

Conviction, on the one hand, involves reaching out to a transcendental value, while on the other it implies a claim of uniqueness. The transcendental project provides a direction and a goal, while the assertion of uniqueness keeps the involved on their toes. Conviction is about keeping the external threat at bay; it is also about the utopian horizon that can be approached but that more often than not remains out of reach. These aspects work, however, in contradictory ways. The promise of the utopian horizon energizes, but its inaccessibility also frustrates and exhausts. The external threat provokes and stimulates up to a point, but once it becomes overwhelming it crushes communal integrity. The important point here is that convictions are not simply present, but are produced in dialogue with challenges.

And this, then, brings us back to the fragility of conviction. The efficacy of ideology should never be taken for granted: it takes arduous work, operating in the right conditions, to establish affective links between ideological messages and subjects. Ironically, at the very moment when ideational power reaches its greatest intensity, the risk of dissipation and disintegration reaches its peak as well, thereby setting in motion new cycles of affective belief and doubt.