Fragile Conviction
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Notes

Introduction

1. KelKel, which translates as “renaissance,” is a youth movement modeled on the Ukrainian and Georgian youth protest movements (which were influential during the Orange and Rose revolutions) and established for the purpose of fostering political change.

2. As is common practice in anthropology, I have replaced the names of my interlocutors with pseudonyms, except when they spoke in an official capacity or had asked me to use their actual name. In choosing pseudonyms I have tried to be mindful of their social, regional, and ethnic connotations.

3. As the last of the post-Soviet “color revolutions,” after Georgia’s Rose Revolution in 2003 and Ukraine’s Orange Revolution in 2004, Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution has been much commented on. See Pelkmans 2005; Cummings 2010; and Radnitz 2010.

4. In this book I use the term “affect” to refer to the emotive charges or “intensities” that arise in the complex interplay between human interiority and the exterior world and in which visceral and reflective responses merge. This use of the term implies that I distance myself from the central ideas promoted by authors associated with the affective turn, especially the idea that affect would be “prediscursive,” a position that focuses too narrowly on the materiality of the brain and ignores how emotive charges or “intensities” are socially, culturally, and cognitively mediated. See Martin 2013 for a particularly compelling critique of the assumptions underlying the affective turn.

5. I use the term “frontier town” to invoke the power asymmetries and ideas of superiority that are implied in the term, and that were part and parcel of Soviet development, not least in Central Asia.
6. For example, Appadurai argues that “Islamic fundamentalism, Christian fundamentalism, and many other local and regional forms of cultural fundamentalism may be seen as a part of an emerging repertoire of efforts to produce previously unrequired levels of certainty about social identity, values, survival, and dignity” (2006, 7).

7. A related issue, associated with Louis Althusser’s top-down or centered theory of the “ideological state apparatus,” is that if all aspects of society are seen as contributing to a single overarching ideological system, coherence tends to be overstated, thereby making it difficult to account for change. In response to these issues various alternatives have been proposed. Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, uses the terms “symbolic power” and “doxa” (unquestioned truth) to refer to the subtle and implicit ways by which ideational domination operates. Michel Foucault, rejecting Althusser’s top-down and state-centered understanding of ideological power, adopts the more fluid and agentless concept of “discourse.”

8. This was a central theme in post-Soviet literature. As Günther writes, “Emptiness may be considered to be a characteristic trait of the atmosphere of the 1990s when Russians felt to live in a cultural vacuum somewhere between state economy and unbridled capitalism” (2013: 100).

9. In the early 2010s others have written about the “rebirth of the Idea” as in a revival of ideological alternatives to the “corrupt, lifeless versions of ‘democracy’” (Badiou 2012, 6).

10. This reflects Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, which connects the direct (institutional) and indirect (cultural) ways by which the interests of the elite become part and parcel of the ideas of the people.

11. As Wolf suggests, “societies under increasing stress” caused by social, political, or ecological crisis often develop ideologies that are an extreme expression of underlying trends and tensions (1999, 274).

12. In the Marxist tradition ideology is traditionally seen as serving relations of domination, but as Eagleton argues, the ideas promoted by nondominant groups need not be less ideological, and he therefore defines ideology as being about “any kind of intersection between belief systems and political power” ([1991] 2007, 8).

13. It has been observed by others that interpellation works indeed almost effortlessly when these “types” or elements evoke each other and the chain of signification thus achieves “temporary coherence” (Finlayson 1996, 94; see also Laclau 1977, 102).

14. Althusser fails to convincingly explain why individuals would “accept as evident” the voice of ideology (Pêcheux 1994), with his theory presupposing “a prior and unelaborated doctrine of conscience” that is predicated on guilt (Butler 1995, 8). This unelaborated doctrine is reflected in his choice of examples—Christian sin and violation of the law—both of which suggest that the subject is drawn to ideology by being promised an identity that will soften this sense of guilt. But there is no reason why guilt should be singled out as the primary or even only emotive driver of “interpellation.”

15. The term “utopian horizon” is inspired by Ernst Bloch’s suggestion that “concrete utopia stands on the horizon of every reality” (1995, 223), as part of his emphasis on the role of the “Not-Yet” in history. As this suggests, I use “utopian” in a nonderogatory way to refer to imaginations and conceptualizations of a desired and better way of being (cf. Levitas 2011, 209).

16. The next day a new friend, from the train, made inquiries with the authorities. On learning that our undocumented traveling would get us into serious trouble, we decided to keep a low profile, staying in Kyrgyzstan for four weeks, before traveling back to Moscow by train.

1. Shattered Transition

1. This is not to say that all was quiet. The previous year (1990) had seen significant political unrest following ethnic conflict in Osh Province, with demonstrations demanding resignation of the first secretary Absamat Masaliev (Anderson 1999, 20; McGlinchey 2011, 77–78). But,
significantly, over 90% of the population voted in favor of retention of the Soviet Union (Cummings 2012, 52).


3. Given that Bishkek had several prominently placed Manas statues already, erecting the hero on the central square in 2011 was not a novel statement, but it was a significant one given the central location and sensitive moment.

4. Morozova writes that the untimely rotation of monuments suggests “a failed attempt by the state at collective national identity construction” (2008, 18).


6. Mikhail Gorbachev had frequently used the motto “The USSR is our common home” to express the view that in the Soviet Union the nationality question had been resolved (Zisserman-Brodsky 2003, 11).


8. This amounted to a decrease from 11,803,000 to 6,715,000 heads of cattle. The 63% decrease in sheep and goats was particularly steep. For an account of the impact on the village level, see Boris Petric’s Where Are All Our Sheep? (2015).

9. Frederick Lamy suggests that local actors “mobilized into informal networks faster than state institutions were able to re-establish formal social and economic relations with communities,” a process that “reinforced patterns of informality in state-society relations” (2013, 151).

10. McGlinchey (2011) argues that even the position of those who benefited most from privatization (such as the government) remained fragile. Although the government used economic resources to temporarily satisfy the elite, such rewards were insufficient to turn them into long-term loyal dependents.

11. Hirsch shows that by the early 1930s “even rural and nomadic populations that previously had not exhibited national consciousness were describing themselves as members of nationalities” (2005, 145).

12. This was not unlike the situation in post-Soviet Turkmenistan, about which Adrienne Edgar wrote that genealogy and tribal differences continued to be significant aspects of political ordering and were seen as a threat to national unity (2004, 264–65).

13. The term “European” is used locally to refer to Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, and people from the Baltic republics, in contrast to Turks, Caucasians, and Asians such as Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs.

14. Estimates of the death toll from fighting in Osh, Jalalabad, and Bazar-Korgon in 2010 ranged from the official figure of 393 to one thousand (International Crisis Group 2010, 1, 18).

15. Times of Central Asia, April 4, 2005.


17. International Crisis Group (2010) documented that most eyewitnesses agreed the conflict started as a fight between young Kyrgyz and Uzbek men in a gambling hall. When each side phoned their friends for assistance, the brawl started to escalate.


19. By 2009 my disillusioned acquaintances in the south were making jokes about the Bakiev family’s greed, saying that Kyrgyzstan is too small a country for a president with seven (greedy) brothers.
2. Condition of Uncertainty

1. Emigration peaked in 1994, when, in the span of just nine months, Kokjangak’s population dropped from 19,100 to 15,857 (Howell 1996, 63).
2. See also the works of Joshua Barker (2009, 47) and Janet Roitman (2006, 255), as these make similar claims about the structures of disorder in, respectively, Indonesia and Chad.
5. These lines of thought are further inspired by the work of Morten Pedersen (2012), Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004), and Henrik Vigh (2006), who each emphasize the reflective work that is triggered by personal and societal crises, and how this process activates aspirations, hopes, and desires.
6. In the late 1920s, when pressured to hand over his cattle to the newly established collective farm, Osman decided to chase his horses to an uninhabited mountain valley, hoping that things would have changed by the next spring. Things did not change, and most of his horses died during the cold winter.
8. For this purpose the town administration organized voskresniki, or “voluntary labor Sundays” (which coexisted with subbotniki, or “voluntary labor Saturdays”), ostensibly because of the enthusiasm of committed citizens, but surely also because labor was in short supply.
9. In 2004 approximately 160 men were involved in informal mining activities, but during the high season (in the fall) these numbers would go up. Arrangements varied from semi-professional brigades made up of former miners, to more informal groups of young men, called “apaches.” The problems they faced were similar in that they mostly worked manually, without contracts, and without guarantees.
10. According to data compiled by the town administration (otdel statistiki), as of January 1, 2004, Kokjangak had 10,727 inhabitants, of which 75% (8,091) was classified Kyrgyz; 7% (804) Russian; 6% (670) Uzbek; 3% (347) Tatars; 2% (251) Kurds; 2% (198) Kazakhs; 2% (159) Ukrainians; and some 200 people representing other nationalities.
11. This is consistent with other parts of Kyrgyzstan. Between 1989 and 1999 the official number of 688,000 people, the majority of which was Russian, emigrated (Schmidt and Sagynbekova 2008, 116).
12. Three of the four schools used Kyrgyz and one used Russian as the language of instruction, an inversion of the situation in Soviet times.
13. There had indeed been no open violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Kokjangak or other small industrial towns in 2010, despite the conflict having spread across both urban and rural settings across the region.
14. The joke was hardly funny but referred to the fact that most fifth-floor flats were occupied by single women (with or without children) and suggested that men ascending to this floor were visiting their (secret) lovers or in search of (paid) sex.
15. Apartments had been handed to their registered inhabitants in the early 1990s; industrial and communal buildings often remained public property. Many of these public buildings were “deregistered” in the 2000s, after which the construction materials were sold, with the profits usually ending up in the pockets of administrators.
16. Labor migration to Russia has become endemic throughout Kyrgyzstan, with an estimated one-third of the employable population working abroad, mostly in Russia (Schmidt and Sagynbekova 2008).
17. My use of the term “navigation” in this section is indebted to Vigh’s stimulating discussion of social navigation in Navigating Terrains of War (2006), which is equally concerned with the relation between uncertainty and agency.
18. In most cases, the miners paid around 30% of their income to “officials” (chinovniki), which in this context means well-connected people who obtained the property rights of land that previously belonged to the state and had been managed through the “state forest” (leskhoz) administration.

19. In August 2007 the mayor closed the informal mining pits for a week after three men died, probably because news had reached the provincial government and news agencies, thus making (symbolic) action necessary. The effect of such temporary closures was that casualties were dealt with in confidence. For explicit reference to Kokjangak, however, see “Illegal Coal Mining Takes Several Lives but . . . ,” which appeared several years earlier in the Bishkek Observer, April 5, 2004.

20. Hobbes refers to this saying in his work De Cive (1642/1651), which is also where he first mentions his idea of “war of all against all” (bellum omnium contra omnes).

21. As in Achille Mbembe’s characterization of the postcolonial “chaotic plurality,” there was an internal coherence, yet one that resulted not from a single specific order but was instead produced through the friction between different orders that were nevertheless inescapably linked (2006, 381). J.P. Olivier de Sardan’s (1999) depiction of the postcolonial condition as “schizophrenic,” that is, as a disempowering confrontation between an imposed (colonial) politico-legal structure and the locally prevalent sociocultural logics, also hints at the same problem.

22. Kokjangak was included in the program because of its reputation as one of the most destitute settlements in the region. Beyond this basic fact the UNDP workers knew little about the town and had no idea what to expect.


3. What Happened to Soviet Atheism?

1. Judging from the book’s final paragraph, the manuscript must have gone to press shortly after October 9, 1990, when Pravda published the new law “about freedom of consciousness and religious organization.” Melis Abdyldaev mentions that although this law may change the relationship with some facets of atheism, it was decided to publish the manuscript in its then-existing form (1991, 127).

2. Similar observations about the contradictory and counterproductive effects of anti-religious propaganda have been made by Kendzior (2006) and Exnerova (2006, 106).

3. The trend is not restricted to the former Soviet Union. Western scholars used to be interested in the “what” and “how” of Soviet atheist ideology and antireligious policies, but the production of knowledge on these topics came to an abrupt end with the collapse of the USSR. While for Western religious scholars the failure of atheism was to be celebrated rather than questioned, for liberal atheists Soviet atheism was an embarrassment of sorts, because of its associations with totalitarianism. As if to illustrate this descent into oblivion, The Cambridge Companion to Atheism (Martin 2007a) does not even mention the Soviet experience.

4. One of Yurchak’s telling examples concerns an interviewee who, while attending the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) meetings, hardly paid attention to what was being said, yet whenever a sign of affirmation was required, “a certain sensor would click in the head” telling him how to act (2003, 492).

5. See Yurchak’s (2005, 102–18) discussion of the concept svoi, which he suggests is best translated as “those who belong to our circle,” referring to a sense of intimacy and understanding among members.

6. Yurchak does not use the term “routinization” as such, but the idea is implied when he talks about the “progressively form-centered normalization of language” (2003, 490) in which ideological discourse became “hyper-normalized” (491).

7. It could be argued, with some justification, that this is a rather literal reading of Althusser that fails to sufficiently take into consideration his emphasis on the structural and material
underpinnings of ideology. However, the point of the literal reading is to make the concept of interpellation amenable to fragmented ideological landscapes, and to less than hegemonic assertions of ideology (as discussed in the introduction).

8. Similar distinctions have been suggested by others. Michael Martin (2007b) differentiates between positive and negative atheism, with negative atheism referring to a lack or absence of “theism,” and positive atheism indicating an ideological stance, which can either be antireligious or substantively “atheist.”

9. In contrast to my interviews with Olga Nikolaeva and Asel Kosobaeva, this one was recorded in Bishkek, and is included in this chapter because it contains important complementary views.

10. The sacralization of secular leaders is, of course, not restricted to the Soviet Union. For example, Yael Navaro-Yashin writes about Ataturk that this “secular founder of [the Turkish] state was not remembered in a secularist fashion” (2002, 191).

11. Malte Rolf similarly shows that in the 1920s and 1930s the organizers of Soviet festivals made great efforts to compete with the buoyant religious-festival culture—an invigorating struggle, but with limited success (2000).

12. Although admiring the revolutionary power of Luther’s reformation, Marx retained his ambivalence, as reflected in his statement that “if Protestantism was not the true solution it was at least the true setting of the problem” (Marx [1844] 1975, 182).

4. Walking the Truth in Islam with the Tablighi Jamaat

1. In contrast to the other chapters in this book, most of the research for this one was conducted outside of Kokjangak. The reason for this is that although Tablighis were active in Kokjangak, for my entrance to the group I depended on contacts in Bishkek. The three tours I participated in all took place in Chui Province, in northern Kyrgyzstan.

2. Dungans are a Chinese-speaking Muslim people. Most Dungans live in China, but several hundred thousand live in the Central Asian republics, including fifty thousand in Kyrgyzstan. Most of these Kyrgyz Dungans know Chinese, and all are fluent in Russian.

3. This Kyrgyz “joking relationship” with Islamic knowledge is reflected in the title of Maria Louw’s 2012 text “Being Muslim the Ironic Way.”


5. The method of Tabligh, as its founder Mawlana Ilyas envisioned it in 1920s India, was explicitly designed to combat complacency and instill vigor, qualities that were seen to be lacking in other techniques such as education and dhikr (remembrance) (Masud 2000b, 7).

6. This is one reason why academic literature on the Tablighis is sparser than the size and influence of the movement would predict, as also Janson (2008) and Noor (2010) have observed.

7. The number ten thousand was mentioned by Igor Rotar (2007). Kadyr Malikov, director of the Center for Religion, Law, and Politics in Kyrgyzstan, gave me an estimate of fifteen thousand adherents in 2011.

8. According to Shamsibek Zakirov, an official with the State Agency for Religious Affairs, most Tablighis in Kyrgyzstan are ethnic Kyrgyz (Rotar 2007).

9. The corresponding view holds that the Kyrgyz would be less receptive to intense forms of religiosity than Uzbeks and Tajiks. The reason for this would be their nomadic past, a view that was popularized in Soviet times but also expounded by, for example, President Akaev. (See also chapter 1.)

10. The reported answer of the dawatchi was that the purpose of dawat is to learn rather than to teach others.

11. Emil Nasritdinov (2012) argues that an important reason for Tablighi success is their emphasis on traveling, as this resonates better with formerly nomadic people such as the Kyrgyz than with the traditionally stationary Uzbeks. However, since there are few actual pastoralists among
the Tablighis, it may be more accurate to speak of “nomadic nostalgia” (which is largely urban based) than actual nomadism.

12. This is not to deny that the movement can have an empowering effect for its female participants, as Mukaram Toktogulova (2014) demonstrates. The potential emancipatory effect is also stressed by scholars working in other regions, such as Marloes Janson, who reports (2008) that in the Gambia, dawat encourages gender emancipation because it transgresses boundaries between male and female tasks.

13. For an in-depth discussion of the changing configurations of “religion” and “culture” in Kyrgyzstan, see Khalid 2006, 84–115; and Pelkmans 2007.

14. The muftiate issued a recommendation to wear a Kyrgyz-style robe and a kalpak, instead of Pakistani dress, which was being discussed within Tablighi circles during my last visit, in 2013. Farish Noor comments (2010, 720) on similar tensions in Southeast Asia, which resulted in the Tablighis opting for local modes of dress.

15. Despite their “relentless apoliticism,” which contributed to their harmless image (Metcalf 1996, 117), the Tablighis are seen by Kyrgyz authorities as potentially dangerous (Murzakhalilov and Arynov 2010). See Sikand 2003, for a discussion of this issue from a South Asian perspective.

16. The data presented in this section are largely based on one dawat in the summer of 2009, but have been augmented by two other three-day dawats I participated in, in 2009 and 2010.

17. The Tablighi jamaat has a clearly defined hierarchical structure in which at each level an amir takes charge, but this hierarchy is “mostly loose and temporary” (Masud 2000b, 28), with the amir expected to consider all opinions.

18. The mashwara, or council, is a central organizing feature of the Tablighis. Most decisions (at all levels) are made after consulting those involved, though the final decision rests with the amir.

19. The baian, or sermon, given by one person selected from the jamaat, discusses worldly life in relation to the hereafter, and is expected to highlight “the positive and negative aspects of the two worlds” (Masud 2000b, 27).

20. The six tenets are kalmah, article of faith; salah, the five daily prayers; ilm and zikr, knowledge and remembrance of Allah; ikraam-e-Muslim, respect for fellow Muslims; Ikhlas-e-Niyat, or self-transformation; and dawah or dawat.

21. The food is particularly basic on the first day. Thereafter villagers tend to provide food, the quantity of which depends on local attitudes to dawat.

22. Barbara Metcalf usefully suggests that the interview has limited value in studies of the Tablighi Jamaat because researcher and respondents adhere to different speech conventions. Similar to what I experienced, her questions were often brushed aside as irrelevant (1996, 117–19).

23. Jacques Cousteau (1910–1997) was a French scientist and filmmaker who became famous in Europe and the former Soviet Union through his documentaries of maritime expeditions that were shown on television for many decades.

24. Similarly, Justine Quijada has argued that as a result of the Soviet atheist experience, “science and religion exist in a long-standing dialogic” and co-constitutive relationship to one another (2012, 148).

25. In 1990 at least six hundred people died in Uzgen and Osh. In 2010 at least 393 and up to one thousand people were killed in Osh, Jalalabad, and Bazar-Korgon (ICG 2010, 1, 18).

26. Such logic is mirrored in this suggestion made by alim Muhammad: “Muslims always win! If he wins in war, then he has the spoils of victory, while if he dies, he goes to heaven. A beggar is only happy if he is a Muslim. A president is only happy if he is a Muslim.”

27. To quote Mohamed Tozy’s rendering of the parable: “Man is a ship in trouble in tumultuous sea. It is impossible to repair it without taking it away from the high seas where the waves of ignorance and the temptations of temporal life assail it. Its only chance is to come back to land to be dry-docked. The dry-dock is the mosque of the jamaat” (Tozy 2000, 166).

28. I am indebted to Sondra Hausner for directing me to this line of analysis.
5. Pentecostal Miracle Truth on the Frontier

1. The official name is Full Gospel Church of Jesus Christ, but was commonly referred to as Tserkhov' Niusa Khrista (Church of Jesus Christ).

2. Or to quote Weber’s phrasing, at times of distress the “natural” leaders “have been holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit” (1948, 245).

3. What I have in mind is the combination of assumed “superiority,” self-ascribed creativity, and imagined independence that tends to characterize the missionary, colonial settler, and development worker. I rely here on work that draws, critically, on Frederick Jackson Turner’s (1893) Frontier Thesis.

4. For example, church members mentioned being taken aback by the exuberant worshiping, and especially by “the speaking in tongues.” Reflecting more widely held sentiments, one young male congregant mentioned that “the word ‘God’ was fine with me. But when Jesus’s name was mentioned I would be scared. I feared that I was becoming a kaffir [infidel].”

5. As Robert Orsi has written, prayer is not an innocent psychological activity. Rather, “it is in and through prayer that the self comes into intimate and extended contact with the contradictions and constraints of the social world” (Orsi 1996, 186).

6. The development of such stable connections can refer to institutionalization in the Weberian sense, meaning that miracle occurrence gains bureaucratic authority by becoming embedded in church structures. It can also refer to a deepening of personal relationships with the divine. A good example is Tanya Luhrmann’s analysis of “new paradigm” Christians in California who described “spiritual maturity” as having developed a long-term friendship with God in which “the problem of unanswered prayer becomes the problem of why your good buddy appears to be letting you down” (2007, 95).

7. This is not to say that there are no other ways to deal with disappointment. Naomi Haynes discusses the problem of disappointment with the prosperity gospel among Pentecostal Christians on the Zambian Copperbelt, showing how they adjusted their expectations to local economic and social realities, producing what she calls a “limited prosperity gospel” (2012, 127). Such adjustment of expectations also happened in the Church of Jesus Christ, but the differences between Jalalabad and Kokjangak show the limitations of such adjustment and hence the fragility of the church in destitute contexts.

8. The remaining 30% tended to have family members who converted before them, belong to Russian or Tatar minorities, or had kept their conversion secret from their relatives.

6. The Tenacity of Spiritual Healing and Seeing

1. I should mention that while Nurgul knew that I was “writing about religion,” she was not fully aware of my financial situation and may have thought that my position was similar to those of the two Peace Corps Volunteers who were living in Kokjangak at the time.

2. In fact, Dinara had been painfully wrong a second time, when she saw that I did not have any children yet. When learning that I had two daughters, Sophie and Emma, living in a nearby town, she cleverly replied that I better take a DNA test.

3. In fact, most of my contacts with spiritual practitioners were established through acquaintances.

4. Elements of uncertainty and skepticism in post-Soviet “spirituality” have been noted by others. Marjorie Balzer writes that the Sakha she studies wonder about spiritual powers: “Are they real?” (2002, 144).

5. Similarly, Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka writes that in southern Kazakhstan “shamans were and still are highly esteemed” (2014, 42).

6. Zarcone (2013, xxv) mentions that the term emchi originates in Mongolia and means “healer,” but is also commonly used in Tibet.
7. This flexibility of categories due to the borrowing from multiple sources has been noted by several others including Penkala-Gawęcka 2014, 38 and Biard 2013, 88.

8. In their discussion of shamanism in, respectively, Siberia and Mongolia, King (1999) and Pedersen (2011) observed a similar tendency among their informants to lament that there were no “real” shamans left. In the Mongolian case this created serious existential and ontological problems because “far too many spirits were on the loose [and] far too little shamanic knowledge and skill were available to rein in this occult excess” (Pedersen 2011, 8).

9. This energizing quality of doubt has been brilliantly illustrated by Giulia Liberatore in her discussion of pondering pious Somali Muslim women in London (2013).

10. However, other clairvoyants in the neighborhood were of the opinion that one of these orphans was karmicheskii—i.e., had a bad karma—and that this was affecting Marzia’s powers negatively.

11. Stories about “shamanic sickness” are in fact very widespread, and constitute one of the elements through which the authenticity of a healer is assessed. See also Biard 2013.

12. These items are usually left by clients in the healer’s house for a designated period of time in order to absorb powers that can then be used to fight off bad spirits.

13. I rely here on Chinara’s memory because the whispered phrases were partly inaudible to me. In her appeals to invisible forces Marzia was assisted by the spirits of two holy women who showed her the way.

14. Perhaps I should mention that on the day of Akaev’s arrival, the president’s schedule was changed so that Chinara did not get a chance to actually give the talk.

15. A quantitative study of medical help-seeking behavior found that 25% of respondents in Kyrgyzstan mentioned financial difficulties as the main reason for their nonuse of biomedical services. An equal percentage mentioned not filling prescriptions because they were too expensive. The same study found that people in Tajikistan who made use of medical services spent as much money on informal payments as on formal payments for doctors and medicine combined (Falkingham 2002, 50–52).

16. For example, Vuillemenot (2013, 70–71) documents the story of a female bakhsi Khaiat living in southern Kazakhstan who had become temporarily deaf and ill as a teenager, was treated by two bakhsisis, and recovered fully after accepting the role of bakhsi. She was unable to marry as a consequence.

17. It is in light of similar observations that Patrick Garrone writes: “In the fight for the supremacy over souls, Islam gains advantages from its more institutional nature, its financial power, its capacity to penetrate the highest levels of society and the international support it enjoys” (2013, 18). Although I observed similar differences, in my analysis the absence of institutionalization is ironically also the strength of “shamanism.”

Conclusion

1. The term “frontier” is useful precisely because it is politically suspect, refracting reality through the prism of asserted superiority and (assumed) dominance. When this is kept in mind, the term highlights that we are talking about encounters playing out in a tilted and unstable zone of asymmetric forces. See Chappell (1993, 270) and Baud and Van Schendel (1997, 213) for elements of this definition of the frontier, and its critical grounding in Frederick Jackson Turner’s (1921) discussion of the frontier in US history.

2. Kadyrjan told me that he could always tell if someone was from Kokjangak by shaking hands: the hands of people from Kokjangak were noticeably colder than those of people living elsewhere—a clear sign of the presence of evil.

3. Risbek (Richard Hewitt) wrote several books about this, the first of which appeared in English and in Kyrgyz as Ak Kalpak in 2003. He subsequently wrote a more elaborate account,
Manas Lost and Found: A Bridge Linking Kyrgyzstan's Epic to Ancient Oracles, which was also self-published, and appeared in 2012. For a short discussion of “Manas-Christianity,” see Pelkmans 2007.

4. Three years after this encounter one of these dawatchis told me that such a spiritual awakening was under way in Ak-Tiuz: a new mosque had been constructed (with money from an external source), which was said to be increasingly used for the Friday prayers by the town’s inhabitants.

5. On “resource frontiers,” Anna Tsing insightfully writes that frontiers “create wilderness so that some—and not others—may reap its rewards” (2005, 27).

6. This idea has long been acknowledged in the study of borders, where it is argued that the existence of borders as barriers to movement simultaneously creates the reasons for crossing them (Donnan and Wilson 1999, 87).

7. Wittgenstein’s observations about the need for friction in order to make progress in logical investigations are suggestive here: “We have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk so we need friction. Back to the rough ground!” (Wittgenstein [1953] 2010, 46).

8. It is quite evident that a similar balancing played a role in what made the Pentecostal Church attractive. Some of its practices, such as speaking in tongues, were confounding to novices, while its message of empowerment was closely tuned to popular ideas of spiritual realities.

9. While agreeing with Zigon that the passive and active dimensions of hope should be seen in relation to hope’s temporal aspects (2009, 256), I disagree with him that Crapanzano (2004) fails to address this. In fact Crapanzano shows persuasively how undefined and silent hope may gain in concreteness and agency. It is just that when Crapanzano discusses these complex processes he uses the English term “desire” for the more concrete forms of the “not-yet,” while Zigon prefers to continue with the term “hope.”

10. This “being defined as the enemy” is the corollary to Buck-Morss’s suggestion (2000, 9) that “to define the enemy” brings the collective into being.

11. These findings point to what Laclau refers to as the constitutive role played by social heterogeneity in the construction of “the ‘people’” (2005, 223). For him collective identity gains in intensity when facing an “antagonistic frontier” as this provides direction to collective action (80, 84–85).

12. I am grateful to Jim Lance for bringing this quotation to my attention. Appropriately, the line has been associated as much with Joseph Conrad, the doubter who uses it as the epigraph of his book Lord Jim, as with its writer, Novalis, the man with a mission who wrote the line as a thought fragment.

13. The reader might have expected more engagement with Durkheim’s collective effervescence, not least because of his emphasis on reverberation: “each re-echoes the others, and is re-echoed by the others. The initial impulse thus proceeds, growing as it goes, as an avalanche grows in its advance” (1915, 215–16). However, Durkheim assumes that the “emotional and passionate faculties of the primitive” allow for effervescence to simply arise in the act of congregation (215), an obviously problematic view that is unhelpful in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of collective ideas.

14. In Weber’s sociology, “routinization” refers to the process by which charisma becomes embedded in or absorbed by rational-legal and traditional structures. Weber argues that the charismatic does not completely evaporate but can be enhanced by these other registers of authority (1968, 54–61).