each other efficiently. Böhler is very critical of the social scope of Polish national identity. He reminds us that the majority of potential Poles were peasants who generally did not think in national terms. As a result, the Polish authorities had problems with mobilizing the peasant population to fight for borders. Even the situation threatening the existence of the state did not provoke patriotic enthusiasm among the peasants.

The narrative is bound together by the concept of Central European civil war. However, I am not entirely convinced by this argument. I would rather say that the conflicts described were of a different nature: some resembled regular war, others partisan fighting, an uprising, or a civil war. I do not see any sense in looking for a single label blurring the differences between conflicts, while in addition referring to the poorly justified, in this context, category of "Central European." It is not entirely clear how the author defines the concept of Central Europe (the book also refers to Central and Eastern Europe and East-Central Europe, but they are left undefined). And the involvement of paramilitary organizations, characteristic of the conflicts described in the book, is a wider phenomenon, not limited to Central Europe (consider, for example, the Anglo-Irish War, 1919–1921, to name but one).

The author also has a rather traditional approach to the history of Poland, emphasizing, first of all, its continuity. He writes routinely about Poland's loss of independence as a consequence of the partitions and its 123 years of absence from the map of Europe. He does not consider the issue of continuity in the context of differences between the early modern nobleman state of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Polish nation-state, or the historical meaning of the notion of independence. Moreover, it is surprising that Böhler, who argues with such energy that wars over borders were actually civil wars, stubbornly calls conflicts in Upper Silesia "uprisings" (even some Polish historians use the term "civil war" here). A mistake also needs to be corrected: the author of the distinction between "private homeland" and "ideological homeland" is not Jan Molenda, but Stanisław Ossowski, who treated it as a typology and not as a developmental scheme.

To sum up, I expected a little bit more criticism from this book. However, the book is definitely very important and valuable: it shows the formation of the Polish state in a new light that undermines traditional nationalist historiography and popular ideas. Traditionalist professional historians will probably turn their noses up at the book: they will find few new facts as Böhler rarely reaches for previously unexplored sources. However, this does not mean that they cannot benefit from his work. New interpretations often say more about reality (and require more knowledge, ingenuity, and analytical skills) than further allegedly new analyses of novel sources, which bring only detailed corrections to the well-known and familiar overall picture, which only reflects popular and common-sense beliefs. The book allows us to go beyond nationalist conventional wisdom.

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Fragile Conviction: Changing Ideological Landscapes in Urban Kyrgyzstan, by Mathijs Pelkmans, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2017, 232 pages, $89.95 (hardcover), ISBN 9781501705137, $26.95 (paperback), ISBN 9781501705144

During the course of 20 years, the sculptural centerpiece of Kyrgyzstan's Ala-Too Square has been, until 2003, Vladimir Lenin, followed by the Erkindek (Freedom) statue symbolizing the country's aspirations for a liberal post-Soviet economic and political path, and, finally, the statue of Manas, hero of a Kyrgyz epic poem and a symbol of the historic Kyrgyz nation. Mathijs Pelkmans posits that this succession of monuments purportedly symbolizing core values of the Kyrgyzstani state and society is intricately tied to the country's struggle to discover a unifying idea or set of ideas in the

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post-Soviet period. Some have even contended that post-Soviet Eurasia exists in an ideological vacuum where societies have become irretrievably cynical. Contrasting this view, Pelkmans argues that the region exhibits ideological excess, in which the multitude of possibilities is associated with the inability of a single ideology to predominate. Kyrgyzstan, peculiarly among the post-Soviet states, exists as a "laboratory for testing out ideologies" (7) as sociopolitical instability has disconnected ideologies from institutional foundations and made their tenets less self-evident. Post-Soviet experience has made questionable the "dominance of dominant power" (9).

Pelkmans, an anthropologist, helps us to understand Kyrgyzstan through the lens of a particular post-urban locale, Kokjangak. The author spent time in the field on and off from 1998 to 2014 and has the advantage of experiencing this site in multiple roles, first as a UN volunteer and later as an academic researcher. In the Soviet period, much of Kokjangak's local economy was dependent upon the operation of a coal mine, and locals remember the city as a modern, industrial oasis with all of the comforts of socialist urbanity. With the dissolution of the USSR and closure of the mine, what had been a model city in the midst of an underdeveloped region became an origin point for labor emigration and a den of alcoholism and drug use. The "wild market" produced by the economic reforms originating in Washington Consensus orthodoxy swiftly hollowed out state institutions and produced qualitatively novel forms of corruption. Kokjangak residents came to understand public officials not as guardians of stability and relative comfort, as they now remember Soviet administrators, but as "parasitic predators backed by fake documents and a corrupt legal system" (67). Dangerous informal coal mining practices came into vogue among underemployed men, serving as a fitting symbol of the chaos and uncertainty roiling Kyrgyzstani society.

Capitalism and democracy were in the 1990s particularly strong "empty signifiers" promising a better life. However, it progressively became clear that the welfare state demolished by Washington Consensus policies was not to return and that the new order was structured by networks of clientelism and patronage (42). The first post-Soviet president of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, showed himself to be prone to nepotism and self-dealing in a way that belied his professions of democratic reform and liberalization, culminating in his ouster in the 2005 Tulip Revolution. As Pelkmans argues, the chaotic and incomplete transition to a system not liberal democratic, but similarly lacking the ideological apparatus of totalitarianism, supplied space for new belief systems to develop and thrive.

Kyrgyzstan developed a fragmented ideological marketplace, within which each potential system of understanding proved quite delicate in light of lived experience. Pelkmans particularly emphasizes the process by which groups of people come to share structuring beliefs about the world. The first stage of belief in a system, he suggests, is the initial impulse, provided by the presentation of novel modes of understanding. This is followed by the interaction of a set of ideas with the social field into which it is emplaced. The pull of an ideology often rests on this "frontier," the gap between what is promised by ideological precepts and the reality that one perceives. An ideology, be it capitalism, socialism, or a given religion, is in the end an aspirational project, the full realization of which is likely neither possible nor wholly desirable. Pelkmans posits, moreover, that it is most often the failure to meet one's goals through the embrace of an ideological construct that leads to loss of conviction. This fragility is both destructive of conviction and a crucial element in producing and maintaining it, as the "tension [between reality and the ideal] remains productive as long as the object of desire remains unfulfilled yet within reach" (179).

Pelkmans examines three fascinating case studies of emergent ideologies in Kyrgyzstan. In each instance, he illustrates through the words of his respondents both the initial impulse that drew them toward new ways of thinking, followed by an explanation of the ultimate effervescence of his subjects' convictions. With independence, the relative religious liberalism of Kyrgyzstan—particularly in contrast to its post-Soviet Central Asian peers—supplied the conditions for entry into the country of various foreign missions espousing a multitude of forms of Islam. Among these groups were the Tablighi Jamaat, the primary activity of which are *dawats*, proselytizing pilgrimages conducted by six–ten men for as long as four months. The men generally stay at mosques or

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madrasas to which they have been invited by local mullahs, often outside of their home town or village, effectively separating them from their everyday concerns. Through the shared experiences of traveling, conversation, and an inclusive social leveling, Pelkmans observes an intensification in religious conviction among the *dawatchis* (104). Yet the characteristic of *dawat* that supplies its success—isolation from worldly troubles—also holds the significance that the conviction that accrues during the experience is short-lived once the men return to their everyday lives.

Pelkmans contrasts the experience of *dawat* with the observance of miracles among Kyrgyzstani Pentecostals. Unlike with Islam, women and internal migrants are particularly likely to be represented in Evangelical and Protestant congregations. These are populations that face unique challenges in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and, Pelkmans argues, it is precisely this positioning "on the edge" that permits them to develop conviction through instances of miracles. Many approached Pentecostalism as a last resort after seeking to be cured of illness or addiction through more formal institutions, and successful instances of miraculous healing were actively circulated among the congregation and interpreted as divine will enacted through prayer (134). However, the fragility of conviction in this case rests on the fundamental role of miracles themselves, as the chasm between the reality of congregants' lives and their desired outcomes—Pelkmans's "frontier"—was often so great that failure was inevitable.

Given the fragility of convictions associated with institutionalized religion in Kyrgyzstan, Pelkmans reflects on the emergence of less formal systems of belief. The popularization of what the author terms "spiritual beliefs" (fortune telling, traditional shamanistic practices, etc.) began in the 1990s and 2000s, often arising in areas of particular socioeconomic instability. Rather than missionaries attempting to convince others of an absolute truth, both the spiritual practitioners and those that came to them operated within a space of "multilayered uncertainty" (151). Spiritual healers attempted to demonstrate their effectiveness and necessity by telling clients about past successes and informing them of the severity of their illnesses or personal crises. When a result did not take hold, healers often claimed that clients failed to follow the directions given or that another spell had been cast on the client (165). Conviction delivered through spiritual practices was ultimately unstable owing to an absence of institutional legitimacy and, further, the persistent challenges to spiritual authority inherent in the larger Islamic context within which healers worked.

Pelkmans provides a valuable addition to the growing body of knowledge about Kyrgyzstani society through the descriptions of the processes by which individuals gain, and subsequently lose, conviction in these systems of belief. His detailed conceptualization of this pattern allows readers to understand more deeply ideological fragmentation and the fragility of belief systems in Kyrgyzstan. This manuscript would be of interest not only to scholars of post-Soviet Central Asia, but also to those with a broad interest in political transitions and their impact on societies.

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