

Ganguly), then other names from other media come to mind. Director Danis Tanović received an Academy Award for his film *Ničija Zemlja* (No Man's Land, 2002), and there is the towering success of conceptual and performance artist Marina Abramović, for instance for her performance *Balkan Baroque* (1997).

GUIDO SNEL  
University of Amsterdam

***Practicing Islam: Knowledge, Experience, and Social Navigation in Kyrgyzstan.***

By David W. Montgomery. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016. xix, 219 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Figures. Tables. Maps. \$28.95, paper.  
doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.40

This carefully composed book by David Montgomery reflects his extensive research and thinking on the diverse categories of everyday Islamic experience and knowledge and their social roles in Kyrgyzstan. Through exploring the religious lives of a large number of Kyrgyzstanis, mostly Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, Montgomery divides everyday religious life into a number of dichotomies with varying significance in people's lives. In addition to the experiential and scripturalist divide, which he parallels to phronesis (practical knowledge) and mimesis (represented, abstract knowledge) as discussed by Aristotle, Montgomery finds that Islamic practice in Kyrgyzstan can be divided into worship at mosques or sacred sites, life in valleys or mountains, and Uzbek or Kyrgyz ethnic culture.

These dichotomies emerge from Montgomery's effort to characterize Islamic practice widely in Kyrgyzstan. He chose to work primarily in sites in the mountainous Naryn and Ferghana valley regions, with one foothill site in between, Shangkol (11). He finds most villages are mono-ethnically Kyrgyz or Uzbek, while people are divided into ethnic neighborhoods in larger towns (12). As an example of mountain religious practice he presents Tolkun, a woman from Naryn in the north who fries *borsok* (dough) for the ancestors on Thursdays and visits *mazars* (sacred sites such as springs or tombs) to pray (20–22). In contrast, Azarmat, a Kyrgyz man from Osh in the south represents the opposite end of the religious spectrum, a strong Muslim “re-traditionalist” who prays five times a day. He meets friends daily for Qur'an study (22). Tolkun considers him more Uzbek than Kyrgyz (26). “Most people in Kyrgyzstan” are neither Tolkun nor Azarmat “but a combination of the two in varying degrees” (22). Both learned religion through experiential transmission: Tolkun through participation in the variety of family and local practices, while Azarmat learned a more transnationally-identified Islam through studies, text, and observation. “Tolkun can take him seriously, but he cannot take her seriously” (51).

Montgomery discusses the range of political problems emerging from people's efforts to improve their lives through political, religious, and economic changes. Radical Islam is one ideology seeking to create better society, but also stimulates fears and stereotypes about groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb ut-Tahrir. In addition, people protesting for political change led to violence in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2005. Such events, along with the war in Tajikistan in the 1990s, have led outsiders to see Central Asia as generally unstable and rife with radical Islamists (29–34).

Montgomery ends this chapter by recapitulating the contrasts of Kyrgyz-Uzbek, mountain-valley, heterodoxy-orthodoxy, and how these shape experience, knowledge, practice, and choices, and suggests they lead to violence (47–49). He amplifies

here his fervent conviction that both the 2005 and 2010 revolutions in Kyrgyzstan were coups masterminded by criminal elements, and that these regime changes only demonstrated that “thuggery works,” resulting in political violence during President Kurmanbek Bakiev’s regime and the interethnic violence in Osh in the summer of 2010 (31, 49).

The rest of Montgomery’s volume develops the above themes in greater complexity and variation, emphasizing experiential learning, contrasting community practices, and diverse social attitudes. He takes a pragmatic view of experience in social contexts, relying for philosophical foundation upon John Dewey and anthropologist Fredrik Barth, who map knowledge into social organization, corpus, and medium. Montgomery introduces twenty-eight additional individuals (nine Uzbeks, nineteen Kyrgyz) to show the diverse backgrounds and ways of life in Kyrgyzstan, and stories from their lives show effectively the variety of ways people’s lives unfold in their communities.

Remarkable aspects of Montgomery’s work are the long duration covered by his research, from 1999–2013, and the broad survey of religious practice with 869 respondents in Naryn and Osh regions (176–80). Unfortunately, the results of the survey are given quite briefly. This valuable survey data should be more accessible, and the editors are remiss in not encouraging better presentation with tables and charts here.

In order to present his theory about how to make sense of Islamic knowledge, Montgomery breaks up his ethnographic material. Some of his vignettes are vivid and evocative, describing bride kidnapping, or a father’s violence against his son. But many are too short, appearing as sentences dropped in to describe events and practices that deserve more details. He describes only one ritual in much detail (126–29), and briefly discusses others, such as ablutions (130), the omin gesture (105–6), or the burning of archa juniper (104). Ignoring healing rituals, the profession of faith (kelme), circumcision celebrations, the nikke that solemnizes a marriage, bata blessings, and sacred meals at funerals, commemorations (ash), or community blessing events (*kuday tamak* or *tülöö*), seems to miss fundamental sites where social navigation meets religious knowledge and experience.

For anthropologists, the slicing and rearranging of ethnographic narratives will feel unusual. The details of local experience are subordinated to a complex theoretical presentation. I was frequently frustrated by the lack of descriptive detail and the casual assigning of labels such as pre-Islamic, Tengrist, Zoroastrian, or syncretic to elements that my own experience suggests are integral parts of everyday Islam in Kyrgyzstan. To cover his wide topic Montgomery is drawn to emphasize labels, contrasts, and distinctions, both of locals and from the efforts of scholars and intellectual elites.

This is a book by someone committed to a broad vision and skilled in synthesizing and organizing important scholarly ideas, but editors and peer reviewers could have encouraged more attention to details and clarity of presentation, and less imposition of his vision on the world he investigates. Montgomery aims high, drawing widely and aptly from Aristotle and Dewey as mentioned, Clifford Geertz and Jack Goody on scripturalism and literacy, Shmuel Eisenstadt on the Axial Age, and Aleksandr Luria on literacy and cognition among Uzbek peasants. He engages little, however, with the many other ethnographers of Central Asian Islam, suggesting that they are a distraction from his own system-building. Nonetheless, this volume deserves attention and should stimulate interesting debate for its rich mixture of ideas and observations.

NATHAN LIGHT  
*Uppsala University*