Madrasa-based Religious Learning: Between Secular State and Competing Fellowships in Kyrgyzstan

Accepted version of an article published in *Central Asian Affairs*:
Doolotkeldieva, Asel. " Madrasa-based Religious Learning: Between Secular State and Competing Fellowships in Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asian Affairs* 7, 3 (2020): 211-235.

Asel Doolotkeldieva
Research Associate, OSCE Academy, 1 A, Botanichesky pereulok, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
asel.doolotkeldieva@gmail.com

Abstract

Kyrgyzstan has experienced a rapid and diverse expansion of religious educational offerings in the past two decades and presents a fascinating regional case study of the development of Islamic education. Based on a rich ethnographic study, this article explores recently developed processes by which madrasa-based knowledge is established and transmitted. In revealing these processes, the article draws attention to political struggles for control over the transmission of religious knowledge between state and non-state actors on the one hand, and religious actors on the other. It further delves into the material and spiritual world of madrasas as perceived by students motivated to gain education and their families. In the final section, it un- covers how different madrasas use religious education, under the varied concept of 'service to community', to establish and maintain networks of graduates, which are necessary to the further rooting of Islamic fellowships into society, politics and the economy.

Keywords

religious education – religious learning – madrasas – Islamic fellowships – state– religion relationship – youth – Kyrgyzstan – Central Asia

doi:10.30965/22142290-bja10010

1 Introduction

Presently, Kyrgyzstan is marked by an impressive growth of religious educational infrastructure, subjected to the State's first attempts to institutionalize.[1] There is great variety in the forms of religious learning available: from *ta'lim* (courses) under local imams and mosques, to religious 'summer camps' and private kindergartens for children, Qur'an courses for girls and *kelins* (housewives), informal study circles in student dormitories and systematic learning in madrasas and Islamic Institutes. This educational market skillfully adapted to the socio-economic conditions of various population groups. For example, the Qur'an courses for housewives complement their courses with a babysitting service. For just one thousand *som* per month (US$15), women can attend classes without worrying about organizing childcare. Needless to say, many Muslim women who cannot afford the otherwise expensive childcare or are simply happy be away from domestic pressures at low cost are attracted to such courses. Another seasonal hit are the so-called summer camps for children. They have recently grown popular among parents—not necessarily pious ones—who view the camps as an opportunity not only to organize summer holidays for their children but to 'fix their naughty behavior'. Likewise, the number of private madrasas has grown alongside the expansion of mosques in Kyrgyzstan to offer systematic religious teaching and comprehensive care to its students.[2] This diverse educational field indicates that religious learning based on texts (i.e., not solely based on oral transmission) is gaining importance in the development of Islamic knowledge in Kyrgyzstan.

Many scholars are interested in defining Islamic knowledge and learning practices as experienced by Central Asian populations in various historical periods (Tabyshalieva 1993, Khalid 1998, Kemper, Motika and Reichmuth 2010, Norihiro 2007, Muminov 2007, Privratsky 2001) as well as in contemporary conditions (Louw 2007, Laruelle et al. 2018, Khalid 2007, Rasanayagam 2010, Montgomery 2016). Through a more specific lens, the phenomenon of contemporary religious education has been explored in studies of private lessons (Stephan 2010), hujras of informal religious leaders (Borbieva 2009; Cieslewska

1 The processes of institutionalization refer here to the emergent body of regulations established by the state and partly by the Muftiate aimed at setting up norms, standards, and rules to oversee private religious education. These require religious organizations to register their educational activities with the state bodies, formalize these activities with the Muftiate by adopting (at least officially) the standardized curriculum, and comply to other requirements which govern education in general.

2 By madrasa we mean regular education taught in specialized regulated institutions by paid professional staff and following a fixed curriculum.

2017), education abroad (Abramson 2010; Bissenova 2005; Balci 2003; Stephan 2006), the impact of spiritual authorities (Epkenhans 2009) and influences of foreign missionaries through education (Balci 2003). Regarding developments in religious knowledge in Kyrgyzstan, existing literature emphasizes the importance of the oral transmission of knowledge in Tablighi Jamaat (hereinafter TJ) practice (Ismailbekova & Nasritdinov 2012) and its decentralized, grassroots character (Pelkmans 2017, Toktogulova 2007, 2014). Some scholars were even skeptical whether religious groups would invest into institutionalized education, pointing to the lack of need for the latter. Bayram Balci (2015: 26), for example, describes members of one of the influential Islamic groups in the country, Tablighi Jamaat, as:

> …not very learned, even amateurs. They therefore propagate a 'minimalist Islam' in the sense that the movement, as in all the countries where it is active, seeks first and foremost to reach out to young people, especially the poor and unemployed, divert them from bad habits (alcohol and drugs), and introduce them to the most important basics of Islam: how to pray and read the Quran and to engage in missionary activity that brings new recruits to the community.

In her study of madrasas in Issyk Kul province, Yanti Hölzchen emphasized TJ as a powerful resource for changing moral and religious values in Kyrgyz society (2017). Yet, the transmission of religious knowledge is 'an integral part of Islam' (Reetz, 2010), and the development of the religious educational infrastructure is, therefore, a logical follow up for the evolution of the religious field. Kyrgyzstan presents an interesting case due to the diversity and plurality of its religious field and the ensuing educational offers. By disseminating Islamic knowledge among society, madrasas also promote specific religious fellowships (*jamaats*), thus serving not only as an educational resource but as a political and ideological resource as well. This article thus aims at understanding these complex dynamics and the ways in which they shape the ongoing development of madrasas.

The article is structured as follows: After explaining the methods used, I explore the recent struggles around the establishment and expansion of religious schools, which involve the competing politics of the secular state and religious fellowships. To showcase these struggles, I discuss the emergent body of regulations (as evidence of the State's attempts to control private religious education) and the increasingly dominant position of TJ within the religious field. These examples contextualize the conditions that gave rise to the diversity of Kyrgyzstan's educational offerings but also their fragile status. In the second

part of the article, I examine the religious educational infrastructure itself. Here, I use my ethnographic findings to describe and problematize the material, discursive and spiritual world of madrasas to demonstrate how they function, attract students and work to sustain their futures. I explore the discourse of 'service to community,' employed in almost all schools, as an example of madrasas' divergent strategies to root themselves further into society, economics and politics.

2 Methodology

Although the number of officially registered madrasas in Kyrgyzstan has reached almost a hundred, there is a dearth of publicly available information about them, and many rumours draw societal attention to their foreign funding, shadowy connections to elites and alleged efforts at 'Arabization' of Kyrgyz society, obscuring their state of affairs. The existing negative perceptions of madrasas are also attributable to the ongoing securitization of Islam at both political and societal levels (Heathershaw and Montgomery 2014) and the geopolitical controversies that regularly politicize activities of Gülen-affiliated groups or TJ (Mostowlansky 2017).

Due to the lack of publicly available information on religious education, I employed several methods of data collection. An ethnographic study was carried out during the spring and summer of 2018 in the capital Bishkek and Tchui province, involving visits to fifteen madrasas. These seminaries were selected to reflect on the existing plurality of ideological affiliations in Kyrgyzstan, the varying degrees of education offered, the size of the institutions and the students' gender and ethnicity.3 This segment of the study included thirty- one in-depth, semi-structured interviews with teachers and directors of the schools and a small-scale survey among students.4 Far from aiming at drawing a representative picture of madrasas, the survey sought to tentatively explore

3 Tchui province hosts up to 37 officially registered schools, which represents roughly 40% of the total number of madrasas registered countrywide. The remaining schools are based in the South with very few exceptions in Naryn, Talas and Issyk-kul provinces. The collection of empirical material in madrasas was facilitated by the State commission for religious affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and carried out together with Dr. Altynbek Joldoshev (Manas University) and the research assistants Meerim Egemberdieva, Nazgul Joldosheva, Aigerim Almazbekova. I am thankful to their assistance.

4 The consent to the survey among students was given by the school administrations, in agreement between the Muftiate and the State commission for religious affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic.

questions regarding the students' socio-economic backgrounds, motivations to study in a madrasa and future aspirations.5 Based on these preliminary findings, I conducted additional interviews with several state officials, religious experts, parents and madrasa graduates.

3 Towards Greater Competition Among Religious Fellowships and Emergent State Regulation of Private Religious Education

Presently, religious fellowships engage in establishing madrasas across the country involving them in competition for hegemony over the transmission of religious knowledge. Central to the creation and expansion of madrasas is a liberal religious policy that has attracted religious missionaries to the country since its independence (Pelkmans 2014). The policy allows diverse religious groups to officially register as religious organizations, which allows them, among other things, to establish educational activities. The first post- independence educational institution, the Hazreti Umar Islamic Institute, was opened in 1993, based on the Muftiate's central madrasa. It was later upgraded to the status of an Islamic University in 2003. Two more institutes were opened in the 90s: Hazreti Osmon in Kara-Balta town and Alim in the village of Ken-Bulun, Tchui province. Such institutes continued spreading throughout the 2000s, including Amir Khamza in Tash-Kumyr town (Jalal-Abad province), Lukman al-Khakim in Tokmok town (Tchui province) and Rasul Akram in Bishkek. By 2008, there were already seven institutes and forty-seven madrasas, the latter's number growing to 77 in 2014. During the period between 1993 and 2013, 2989 graduates of Islamic schools became experts of Sharia and Arabic, with specializations of *imam-khatibs, mudarises* and *kaarylyks* (Kurbanova 2014).6

5 The sample involved 345 participants (272 male and 73 female), which were selected randomly based on the list of student names provided at each school upon the visits. However, due to the established networks among madrasas and wariness towards external inquiries including those by the state bodies, there is a suspicion that the survey questions might have been shared among the schools. In seminaries of the same network, for example, we noticed that students were answering to open questions in a homogenous fashion. This led to working with a limited set of the survey results.

6 It is important to note that the appropriation and usage of statuses of institute or madrasa by religious organizations does not follow an officially recognized classification. Gulnaz Isaeva, head of the analytical department of the State commission for religious affairs, considers that there is lack of classification of religious educational institutions. See Gulnaz Isaeva, "On the questions of reforming religious and theological education in Kyrgyz Republic", 09.08.2016 http://knews.kg/2016/08/budushhee-religioznogo-obrazovaniya-v-kyrgyzstane/, accessed 21.10.19.

Figure 1 Photo taken by the author, Imam Azam madrasa, located in Kara-Balta town behind the Soviet monument to wwii veterans

This is an impressive development in contrast to Central Asian states with illiberal religious policies.

This plurality of religious educational offerings stems from the diversity of Kyrgyzstan's religious fellowships, which draw their ideological and/or financial support from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, India and Iran among others (Esenamanova 2015, Karagiannis 2016). Thus, the educational field is represented by such groups as TJ,[7] Adep Bashaty,[8] Salafi, Islamic Brotherhood,

7 For the movement's history see Marc Gaborieau, "The Transformation of Tablighi Jama'at into a Transnational Movement," in *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*, ed. Khalid Masud (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 121–38. For the discussion of Tablighi Jamaat in Central Asia, see Bayram Balci, "The Rise of the Jama'at al Tabligh in Kyrgyzstan: The Revival of Islamic Ties between the Indian Subcon- tinent and Central Asia?," *Central Asian Survey* 31, no. 1 (2012): 61–76; Emil Nasritdinov, "Spiritual Nomadism and Central Asian Tablighi Travellers", *Ab Emperio* 2, (2012): 145–166; Aksana Ismailbekova and Emil Nasritdinov, "Transnational Religious Networks in Central Asia: Structure, Travel, and Culture of Kyrgyz Tablighi Jama'at"; Mukaram Toktogulova, "Le rôle de la *da'wa* dans la réislamisation au Kirghizistan», *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale* 15/16 (2007): 83–102.

8 In Central Asia, the Gülen movement is known for the establishment of the chain of secular schools Sebat and informal networks Hizmet in which the religious teaching does not follow

Nurcular,[9] Süleymancılar[10] and 'traditional' or Salttuu Islam,[11] among others. As elsewhere in the world, Kyrgyzstani madrasas tend to follow a 'particular sect or legal school' (Reetz 2010) but claim, nevertheless, religious orthodoxy (i.e., adherence to the Hanafi legal school) in order to be part of officially authorized Islam.[12]

The expansion of systematic religious education in the form of madrasas has raised critical questions in public space. Does a population of six million need so many religious clergy? How will madrasa graduates integrate in society and the market without having recognized diplomas? Is there a risk of sectarianism and different learning outcomes based on madrasas' ideological differences? Such questions point to public suspicions about the alleged 'exported' character of the religious educational boom. They also show that the societal critiques focus on the educational aspect of madrasas, overlooking their other role — providing a moral upbringing. The growing concerns about foreign

---

standardized structured courses but informal readings and meetings with spiritual and network leaders. See Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and Their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State and Society* 31, no. 2 (2003): 51–77. The Social and Progressive Fund Adep Bashaty was registered in 2003 and runs offices and six madrasas across the country (www.adep.kg). It has a reputation of Gülen affiliated jamaat due to its business connections with Turkey. See Aisalkyn Botoeva, "Islam and the Spirits of Capitalism: Competing Articulations of the Islamic Economy," *Politics & Society* 46, no.2 (2018): 235–264. For a more detailed discussion of Adep Bashaty, see Yanti Hölzchen, "Religious Education and Cultural Change. The case of Madrasas in Northern Kyrgyzstan", in Roland Hardenberg (ed.) *Approaching Ritual Economy: Socio- Cosmic Fields in Globalized Contexts* (Tubengen, 2017): 105–134.

9 Nurcu movement is based on followers of Said Nurci, a Kurdish Sunni theologian of 20th century, in Turkey and other countries.

10 A Muslim Sunni Hanafi *jamaat* based in Turkey and in other countries. They are followers of Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan, a 20-th century Islamic scholar.

11 It is difficult to say what is 'traditional' Islam. This term is highly contested: some scholars reserve it to describe those religions that existed prior to the Soviet period whereas the Central Asian authorities appropriate the term to designate a 'good' or 'moderate' Islam, which is molded in local culture and does not oppose to the official regime. However, an Islam that is too close to local culture can be considered as heterodox if that religious group is critical of the official regime. Some citizens refer to 'traditional' Islam to make a reference to Kyrgyzchylyk, a generic concept that embodies Kyrgyz customs and traditions, including faith (see Artman 2016, Tulebaeva 2017). Here I use the term 'traditional' or Salttuu Islam, following the way religious actors define themselves. The schools of Salttuu Islam were among the early established educational institutions in the 1990s, which entitles them to perceive themselves as representing 'old' schools compared to 'new', foreign, missionaries. Some graduates of Salttuu Islam have converted to other fellowships and today teach in Tablighi Jamaat's madrasas.

12 The previous National Concept of religious policy has limited the officially authorized Islam to the Hanafi school.

religious influences among secular society gave rise to intense debates and increasing attempts to bring madrasa-based learning under state regulation.

In 2008, the Kyrgyz state began tightening its religious policies, including those in the sphere of religious education. The Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations (passed in 2008) banned private teaching of religion and, among other things, ascribed new rights and duties to religious organizations that establish and run educational institutions, set new requirements for teachers and lecturers and regulated material and financial provisions, technical safety, etc. The continuous efforts to bring religion under state control can be traced through the emergent body of legislation and policy on this matter, including the Concept of Religious Policy 2014–2020 (and one of its priorities on the 'modernization of Islamic pedagogy and education'), the draft project of the Concept of Religious Education, and the draft Provision on the Procedure of Implementation of the Right to Religious Education (hereinafter, the Provision).13 As the analysis of the ongoing reform of religious policy is beyond the scope of this article, I will focus on the state–religion dynamics around the recent attempts to 'license' madrasas. The process of licensing implies the state regulation of institutions that offer primary, secondary, and tertiary education. By obtaining a license, an institution formalizes its right to open and conduct educational activities and is entitled to issue a state-recognized diploma or certificate.

The issue of the potential licensing of madrasas is complex as it offers great- er possibilities for graduates to use their now-recognized education yet also entails undesirable state intrusion into the internal affairs of religious organizations. However, the successful integration of graduates into the market could ultimately lead to the strengthening of the position of fellowships in society. Currently, hundreds of graduates complete madrasa-based studies, which can take up to seven years, but do not receive state-recognized diplomas. Only the state-sponsored theological college under the Arabaev University can is- sue an official diploma. Without proof of secondary or higher education, madrasa graduates can hardly compete with other young people in the job market.

However, licensing involves different implications and stakes for each madrasa. State control of madrasas in the proposed policy changes would come in the form of mandatory standards for teaching and curriculum, state-determined financial and material provisions, safety regulations and more.

13 Presently, the draft projects have passed expert and public hearings and will be soon presented to the Parliament of Kyrgyz Republic.

The proposed changes seek to go beyond the present loose requirement for madrasas to coordinate their activities with the Muftiate and abide to the curriculum, established by the Spiritual Board in 2013. Not all madrasas would be able to meet the new requirements, and the new regulations would thus inadvertently eliminate some schools. Less competitive madrasas express concerns that the forthcoming regulations will prove detrimental to smaller and poorer schools, to the benefit of larger fellowships that can afford investing time, money, and human resources into meeting the standards. Thus, standardization will lead to greater homogenization in the educational market in favour of more influential fellowships. However, influential fellowships such as TJ are also concerned that the proposed regulations are merely a pretext for encroaching on religious freedoms or banning specific fellowships as was done in neighbouring countries (Levy 2018).

Interestingly, the proposed standardization of madrasa-based learning is welcomed by other fellowships. Despite the discursive unity of Umma, certain religious groups find the current plurality of the religious field detrimental to the integrity of Kyrgyz identity and the 'correct' Islam. Likewise, much of Kyrgyzstan's secular society views the diversity of religious missionaries in the country as a sign of post-Soviet chaos and state weakness (Louw 2013). This opinion is shared by the representatives of Salttuu Islam, who view the previous, 'laissez faire' state policy as leading to 'excessive' religious freedoms and the proliferation of new *jamaats* that preach values and beliefs foreign to Kyrgyz culture. The Salttuu Islamists, who claim more legitimacy than some religious groups as representatives of a more 'Kyrgyz' — and therefore more 'authentic' — Islam, became marginalized under the expansion of TJ and Gülen-affiliated fellowships. As Pelkmans (2014: 442) rightly notes:

> In Kyrgyzstan, far-reaching religious liberalization was particularly beneficial to religious groups that had transnational financial connections, a strong mission component, a focus on the individual, and an emphasis on disentangling faith and culture. Moreover, the rapid growth of such groups hardly indicated an emerging 'equilibrium' but instead produced social friction at the local level.

Representatives of Salttuu Islam are also critical of past liberal policies be- cause 'new' religious groups took advantage of it and made their way to the highest echelons of power. These new groups were also incorporated into the Muftiate's decision-making structures and resources, using this advantageous position to sideline competing fellowships. Thus, Salttuu Islam views the State

regaining control as instrumental to targeting groups that Salttuu Islam views as 'new'.14

Still more smaller madrasas, who struggle to maintain their sustainability, are reluctant to develop explicit positions towards the State and other fellow- ships. What is obvious, however, is that the competition among these schools adds a powerful dynamic to the relationship between secularism and religion and the ensuing official regulation of madrasa-based education.

4 Madrasas in Tchui Province and the Capital Bishkek

Having laid out a brief overview of the political and legislative context that currently shape the development of religious education, it is time to pay attention

Figure 2 Photo taken by the author, Kolmo madrasa, Bishkek

14 My findings also correlate with the results of debates that took place among religious organizations during the nation-wide public hearings that were organized by the state bodies to present the draft project of the Provision in spring and summer 2019. A human rights expert, who was invited to attend the public hearings, noted in the interview with author, that it was unexpected that many religious organizations supported the proposedstate regulations.

to the material, spiritual and discursive world of Islamic schools. In this section, I first examine their material infrastructure and funding, and secondly, the multidimensionality of religious education in Kyrgyzstan and the various values that students and their families attach to it. This discussion rests on the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in madrasas in Tchui province and Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek.

4.1 *Material Infrastructure and Funding*

While visiting various madrasas, one thing was clearly observable: their growth, expansion and decline have been uneven. While recently established institutions have acquired the resources necessary for expansion and modernization, the older schools struggle to maintain their crumbling material base and attract new students. Within this diverse mosaic, the seminaries of TJ impress with better-developed infrastructure in comparison to other seminaries. They hold larger territories and villas, which enable them to create attractive conditions for studying, leisure time and living.

Perhaps the most impressive school of the TJ network is the Imam Azam madrasa for boys, located in Kara-Balta town. Imam Azam became known as the centre of TJ in the country. The cause for this reputation becomes evident upon visiting. The madrasa rests on a large territory, beautifully transformed into 'heaven's garden', a green oasis inhabited by animals and birds, even boasting a pond with fish. The villa represents several blocks and stories, occupied by classrooms, a dormitory, a library, a kitchen and multiple leisure rooms. Other TJ seminaries I visited were less expansive but also constituted large villas with modern conditions.

Another modern institution is the Adep Bashaty's madrasa, named after Maatkabyl uulu Sharshenbai ajy and located in Bishkek. This seminary is equipped with modern facilities and stuffed with large tv screens, video surveillance, an advanced sport gym and a large library. Compared to the typical *sunnah*-style dresses worn at TJ seminaries, the students and teachers in Adep Bashaty wear contemporary clothes and *ak-kalpak* (a Kyrgyz traditional hat). In Adep Bashaty and TJ madrasas alike, teachers themselves boast that even average parental homes cannot provide children with such good conditions.

Salttuu Islam's Bishkek and Tchui-province schools were, comparatively, in worse shape. However, one of the oldest religious schools of the post-independence period, a Salttuu madrasa called Hazreti Osmon, in Kara-Balta town, has received private sponsorship (allegedly from Turkey) and is currently constructing a new building to attract new students. Other schools enjoy more modest infrastructures, sometimes inviting criticism for failing to meet basic safety requirements (Bulan Institute 2017).

Due to their material resources, TJ seminaries are able to host the largest number of students. The Imam Azam madrasa is said to enroll (unofficially) over 500 students. Other TJ madrasas, such as Abdullah ibn Masoud in Kolmo, located in one of the capital's suburban areas, have approximately 300 officially registered students each. Compared to the seminaries of other religious fellowships, which recruit between 50 and 150 students on average, TJ's high enrollment rate points to the successful development of TJ in the country.

Parents are attracted by this infrastructure, the comprehensive care and comparatively cheap study expenses. In most schools, there is no tuition fee, but parents pay for food, bedding, and book supplies. Depending on the material conditions of madrasas, their policies and financial possibilities, these expenses range between 12000 and 25000 *som* per year (US$180–250).15 In cases where families cannot afford to pay this sum, madrasas keep children free of charge or at a diminished fee. Given the material expansion of religious fellowships and the comprehensive care provided for the children, the issue of madrasas' funding attracts much public attention. Local authors highlight the importance of foreign sponsorship, but Islamic seminaries are generally reluctant to disclose information about their external funds. However, they are more willing to discuss local donors while still maintaining their anonymity. According to madrasa teachers, religious schools rely increasingly on local donations. Teachers stress that their chief donors are local lay believers. There are, of course, politicians and big businessmen included among donors as well, but most of the madrasas' support comes from the lower and middle classes. These are Dordoi traders, farmers, state employees, taxi drivers, petty entrepreneurs and others.16 Their help can come in the form of meat, flower and seasonal vegetables. The wealthier ones donate construction materials such as cement, brick, roofing, furniture, etc. Sometimes, donations can be very generous — including gifts of land and buildings — as in the case of the Imam Azam madrasa. The increase of charity donations indicates, firstly, that the madrasas' mission to spread Islamic knowledge and moral upbringing is appreciated among lay believers (see also Holsten 2017 on this point). Secondly, it demonstrates how teachers stress the role of local sponsors to emphasize the fact that the demand for religious education is internal, an argument that helps them offset public speculations about the 'exported' nature of religious education.

15 Tuition in some institutions was higher than this amount but it was very rare.

16 In his study of Tablighi Jamaat, Emil Nasritdinov highlights that TJ followers have been occupying commerce as an economic niche that allows both for making income and flexibility to worship. See Emil Nasritdinov, "Mobile Livelihoods: How Kyrgyz Tablighis Balance Din and Duniya", unpublished manuscript.

In addition to private sponsorship, madrasas receive part of the Islamic welfare tax (*zakat*), redistributed by the Muftiate. However, it seems like the Muftiate's financial support benefits madrasas unevenly. While TJ seminaries report receiving funds for construction and renovation from the Muftiate, other institutions are less lucky. Teachers of smaller madrasas were reluctant to reflect further on the current relationship between the Muftiate and TJ, but some were critical of the ongoing 'favouritism,' which according to them, leads to an unfair distribution of resources inside the religious community in favour of TJ.

4.2 *Mutidimensionality of Religious Education*

Why is madrasa-based education gaining popularity among Kyrgyzstani families? What values or practical virtues do they attach to madrasas when choosing the format and source of their education? What are the aspirations of students who seek to get religious education? In this section, I ask these questions to help shedding light on the growing demand for text-based learning on the part of Kyrgyzstani families and students. What becomes clear from this inquiry is that the popularity of madrasas stems from their double role in providing both knowledge of Islam and a moral unbringing (*tarbiya*, both in Arabic and Kyrgyz, meaning proper moral conduct) to their students. Irrespective of their ideological profiles, all madrasas refered to this double role in explaining their mandates. As historian Adeeb Khalid (1998: 20) writes, the tradition of learning in the pre-Soviet period 'was characterized by two overriding concerns: the transmission of knowledge (*ilm*) and the cultivation of proper modes of behavior and comportment (*adab*)'. Presently, as in other parts of the Islamic world (Reetz 2010), Kyrgyz madrasas are concerned with raising *adeptuu* (well mannered) young boys and girls. Teachers strive to inculcate piety, humility and respect for elders (and husbands, in case of female students) in the youth. To form proper *tarbiya*, Islamic seminaries maintain rigourous discipline. Teachers and senior students make sure that the students wake up in time for the early morning prayers and do not miss other prayers. Phones are typically forbidden inside the schools during the week and become accessible at the weekend, allowing the students to connect to parents and relatives. tv and radio use are generally restricted, except for in Adep Bashaty, where studentscan watch an authorized number of movies and news.

This vision of Islamic education is also reflected in the opinions of parents, who send their children to madrasas to embrace the 'right path' (*tuura jolgo tushuu*). The parents I interviewed did not differentiate between *jamaats* and the madrasas' teachings, except in the case of TJ. For them, it suffices that the madrasa stands as 'God's house' (*kudaidyn yiuu*), a safe place that 'will not harm their child' (*balam al jerden jamandyk korboit*) and where the child will

learn faith (*yimandy uyronot*). Some parents, among both practicing and non-practicing Muslims, considered gaining religious knowledge as a way for their children to gain the 'right' knowledge. They express that to have such knowledge, in addition to the secular education, will not hurt in the future:

> It is good to have someone at home who has a proper knowledge, who can read Arabic and knows Qu'ran. If at least one of us has this real knowledge, *soop bolot* (the religious merits will increase).17

Such opinions are quite spread among the population as people believe the madrasa-based education is complementary to other types of education and that text-based religious knowledge will enhance their and their children's well-being. But there are also immediate or more 'practical' motivations. Some parents do not shy away from admitting that they came to a religious school in hopes of correcting their children's behaviour. They describe their children as not accepting the parental authority, giving up on their studies at school, spending too much time in social networks or with the opposite sex. They believe that madrasas are 'natural' places for behavioural correction because of their own belief in the madrasas' religious authority. Harsh discipline and isolation from the Internet add a practical dimension to this belief. Some parents were happy with the effects of madrasa-based education as children came back home with reversed attitudes, such as 'kissing the parents' hands' and helping with household chores.18 Other parents reported that their child's religious education did not succeed in changing their character. One mother expressed that she sent her teenage daughter to a madrasa because she spent too much time in What's App hanging out virtually with young men and the mother was concerned for her reputation. While in the seminary, the daughter was not consulting her What's App messages simply due to the ban of smartphones but, upon her return home, she resumed her former practices.19

However, this pre-occupation with the moral upbringing of one's children is not a common feature among all parents. As teachers in almost all seminaries acknowledged, average parents do not follow the children's progress. In fact, teachers complained that most parents do not attend school gatherings and rarely visit their children. This might be related to multiple causes ranging from the parents being involved in labour migration or internal resettlement to

17 Conversation with a parent, Bishkek.
18 Conversation with a parent, Bishkek.
19 Conversation with a parent, Bishkek.

parents trusting religious education as a 'good place to be' and, therefore, feeling no need to inquire about the children's progress.

The teaching staff described most students as coming from low-income families (*jakyr uibuloolor*). Sometimes, during my research, teachers and pupils used the word *orto* (middle, average) to describe students, adding that they were 'like others' to avoid the stigma associated with being *jakyr* (poor). A small survey conducted among students gave the following preliminary idea about parents' occupations: the majority of students' fathers (29.7%) are self- employed in farming, 20% are involved in trade and business, 7.8% work in construction, 7.2% are unemployed, 5.3% are currently in labour migration, and 5.3% are taxi drivers. Most mothers (62.1%) are housewives, 7.8% are private entrepreneurs, 6.6% are teachers and 6% are seamstresses in private workshops. While we must take these answers with caution,20 the image is still useful for our understanding of the socio-economic backgrounds of students. It draws attention to similar trends in other countries where Islamic schools still mostly attract the lower strata of society: 'for those who see no other option of advancement, graduation from one of the major religious seminaries is key to upward mobility, the only road out of the narrow confines of their village and its poverty'.21 Similarly, as Anna Cieslewska (2017: 166) notes in the context of a madrasa in Southern Kyrgyzstan, Islamic seminaries help individuals and families to cope with hardships: 'chances for a job are limited in Shahrak, thus many people believe that higher education will not bring desirable benefits. The *madrasa* gives at least some opportunities for girls'.

In my research, parents also referred to problems linked to their precarious economic situation. Unable to participate in material competition for status attributes such as expensive gadgets and clothes present in secular schools, some found refuge in madrasas, whose policies reject displays of consumerism

20 Methodologically it is challenging to reconstruct a real picture of economic situations of the student population. These problems were revealed during the survey. Young people were ashamed to disclose the real state of affairs of their households. Also, not all students had a precise knowledge about the economic situation of their families. Another methodological problem was connected to the students' difficulties to assign occupations because in the context of the precarious job market in Kyrgyzstan, employment involves temporary and combined occupations. To provide an example, a household woman is perfectly a sewer or a trader at a time. A father can work at a construction site at day and be a taxi driver at night. These figures draw a typical portrait of what an average Kyrgyz person outside of the capital does to bring income home or simply meddle through.

21 Dietrich Reetz, "From Madrasa to University – the challenges and formats of Islamic education" in Akbar S. Ahmed and Tamara Sonn (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Islamic Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 2010): 106–139.

and promote equality. As one single mother explained her choice for madrasa, putting together her faith and other earthly considerations:

> Today in [public] schools, a child must have smartphone and good clothes to display the material ease. Otherwise he will be bullied and stigmatized. As a single mother, I struggle to sustain my children, I could not keep up with these new societal norms. Here in madrasa, everyone wears a uniform and phones are not allowed. Everybody is equal in front of Allah. As my child is in peace, I am also in peace.22

If low study expenses are undeniably attractive and even decisive in some cases, however, it is not an exclusive source of motivation. Equality, absence of material competition, comprehensive care, and an alternative education in the absence of other possibilities are additional significant factors. It is thus important to understand that madrasas are social lifts, limited in scope, yet relevant for certain population groups.

By highlighting the values attached to madrasa-based education and char- acter formation above, I do not mean to dissociate the social from the spiritual or to downplay the latter. There is a growing population of 'newly pious' Muslims in Kyrgyzstan (McBrien 2009, Hölzchen 2017), comprised of individuals who became aware of Islam in the past three decades (*dinge kirgen*). Madrasa teachers I interviewed expressed that their institutions are increasingly sought after by such pious parents, seeking a 'proper' religious education for their children. The recent proliferation of Islamic schools is viewed as a possibility to gain 'solid' religious knowledge that is based on the learning of texts and not only on rituals. According to the teaching staff, children coming from such families are already familiar with the Qur'an and can even read Arabic before starting at the madrasa. In addition to the teachers' observations, my survey results show that the majority of students grew up in practicing Muslim families. Thus, 83.8% of students' fathers and 86.7% of mothers perform the five daily prayers. Furthermore, 60% of parents have been reading *namaz* (prayer) for a considerably 'long time', 21.1% of parents have been reading *namaz* for the past 5–10 years, 14.7% for the past 1–5 years. These answers should be taken with caution because, during the survey, I noticed that some students were ashamed to confess that their parents do not practice Islam. It is possible that a portion of these positive answers were given as a reaction to shame. Nevertheless, the answers given point to a logical relationship between the recent

22 Conversation with a single parent, Bishkek.

history of re-Islamization and the growing interest in text-based learning among lay believers.

If we look further at students' answers to the question about their motivations to study in a madrasa, 60.2% of respondents reported that they were guided by their own interest, whereas 30.4% and 6.3% said that they were placed in madrasas by their parents and relatives respectively. In favouring religious education, motivations to 'learn religion' and become '*yimanduu'* (a generic term that encompasses positive qualities and values such as faithful, pious, good-hearted, good-intentioned, etc.) were central. Also interestingly, in response to the question 'What major problems do young people face today?' they answered, independent of age and sex, in the following order: 'absence of faith' (*yimanduuluktun joktugu*), 'unemployment' and 'smartphones and social networks'.

To sum up, madrasa-based education offers more than scriptural knowledge and learning practices; madrasas have become a social institution targeting the private realms of families who struggle with parenthood and capitalism. With its egalitarian philosophy, cheap comprehensive care, rigourous discipline and a moral compass, it represents additional values for certain families against the background of the unaffordable conventional educational system.

5 Madrasas of Tablighi Jamaat, Adep Bashaty and Salttuu Islam: Occupying Economic and Political Niches through the Concept of 'service to community'

In the previous section I looked at how and why families and students value madrasa-based education. If upbringing of *adeptuu* children is one objective of religious schools, forming a generation of 'true' believers seems to be madrasas' larger mission. As one senior teacher exclaimed during my visit to a TJ madrasa, 'all these people that come to the Friday prayer are just some sort of traders (*komersanty*23) who work in nearby bazars. Are they a real congregation? No! We need a different type of followers!'24 He further contextualized his bitter comment through a recurrent discourse about the past Soviet period in Kyrgyzstan and the devasting effects the Soviet anti-religious policies had on Kyrgyz people through 'de-Islamization'. To follow his discourse, the

23 The word 'kommersant' (trader) has usually a negative connotation to indicate such qualities in a person as readiness to sacrifice principles for a monetary gain and the lack of ideological commitment.

24 Interview with a senior teacher, TJ seminary, spring 2018.

Figure 3 Photograph taken by the author, Imam Azam madrasa, Kara-Balta

negative effects of the policy are still felt today since Kyrgyz people lack persistence in practicing Islam. Referring, however, to the present developments, he was pleased with the ongoing construction of mosques and madrasas as vehicles of 'new knowledge'. If madrasas, then, are vehicles of new knowledge, they contribute to the formation of a new generation of believers and, speaking in the context of competing religious fellowships, also contribute to the reproduction of distinct fellowships.

In this section, I investigate how Islamic schools respond to this mission in their varying strategies and worldviews. One such strategy links the dissemination of religious messages and the promotion of fellowships to the future success of graduates. In this regard, it will be interesting to explore whether madrasas have strategies to promote their graduates as well as the ways in which networks of graduates contribute back to their fellowships. I explore these questions by following an important discourse of 'service to community' (*elime/jamaatyma kyzmat kyluu*), which is developed in many madrasas and deeply internalized by students, irrespective of their ideological profiles. Based on discussion of three schools — Tablighi Jamaat, Adep Bashaty and Salttuu Islam — I explore what the madrasas' strategies to promote their graduates

can tell us about how these fellowships view their place in society, the economy, and politics.

Strategies of spreading knowledge and enhancing the quality of faith among believers through networks of graduates begin early on, during recruitment of students. For example, TJ seminaries apply a so-called regional quota in addition to conventional student selection procedures. This regional quota is employed in regard to the origin of prospect students. If applicants from Southern Kyrgyzstan are selected based on merit, applicants from Northern Kyrgyzstan are admitted with any level of knowledge. This 'affirmative geographic action' was created in order to attract students from the North. As TJ teachers explained, this geographic discrimination is designed to spread religion in the North and level out the current uneven practice of Islam across the provinces.25 This recruitment practice could be understood as a TJ strategy to occupying niches that are currently free.

While religious schools work to attract students from as many geographical areas and social groups as possible, they sometimes struggle to maintain their current students. One such problem is related to the above-discussed lack of state recognition of madrasa-based education. Currently, students invest up to seven years of their lives into religious studies and receive no officially recognized diploma. The non-recognition of religious studies can pose a serious problem for those young people who seek to enter a highly competitive job market or continue their studies. According to teachers, the lack of a recognized diploma is one reason that a percentage of students drop out. But here madrasas differ again in the ways they shape their students' ambitions and their possibilities to integrate the market. Some madrasas, such as Adep Bashaty, view the lack of a recognized diploma as a serious issue that might hinder the chances of successful integration of their graduates into society. The fellowship's standing in society is made up of its successful members. Within Adep Bashaty's worldview, the successful promotion of faith is linked to one's achievements in earthly careers. The acquisition of a state-recognized diploma, next to religious knowledge, is thus seen as an indispensable resource

25 Although the seminaries covered by this study are located in Tchui province, most of the students that participated in the survey were born in Osh province (31.5%), 19% in Batken province and 10.5% in Jalal-Abad province. This geographic disbalance is due, as teachers explain, to the discrepancies in religious practices in the country's North and South during the Soviet period. Given a deeper spread of Islam in the South, Southern students have a better command of Qu'ran and Arabic than their colleagues from the North at the time they apply to madrasas. To the question, however, why these students do not apply to the many institutions available in the South, the teachers told that the North and in particular the capital are more attractive to them due to better employment chances.

enabling their graduates to excel in the future. Out of fifteen seminaries, it was the only one training students equally in religious and secular subjects. Furthermore, the administration decided to complement the religious curriculum with secular courses that help students to prepare for the nation-wide testing, ort (*obche-respublikanskoe testirovanie*), a comprehensive examine needed to enter to the university.

Other madrasas tend to downplay the risks posed by the non-recognition of their diplomas either by focusing on character formation and religious careers as their main products or directing their students towards less ambitious professions that do not require diplomas. On the one hand, these schools have a pragmatic approach towards emphasizing the economic niches their graduates can realistically occupy given their modest backgrounds and the limited possibilities to pursue higher education. On the other hand, the privileging of less ambitious earthly careers is also in line with the worldview in which professional occupations should not conflict with religious beliefs. In pursuing this double reasoning, TJ madrasas sought, for example, to help their graduates with additional vocational courses that include such skills as electricity, plumbing and mechanics for boys, and sewing and cooking for girls.26

Other madrasas privilege religious careers for their graduates. For example, besides Kyrgyzstan, graduates of the Salttuu Islam schools also find employment in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states as teachers in religious institutions. Due to the historical legacy and religious policies shared by these countries, personal reputation of the *mudurs* (directors) and long-established networks, these graduates are demanded in the region. Schools of Salttuu Islam are proponents of Islam that consider not only scripture-based knowledge but also local traditions and culture (*salt*). It is this type of Islam that has been promoted by official authorities in the region since independence. Given the illiberal religious policies in the rest of Central Asia, it would be improbable for the 'non-conventional' fellowships such as Tablighi Jamaat to secure official religious careers for their graduates outside of Kyrgyzstan.

The above-mentioned visions and attempts to promote graduates into different niches correlate with the visions of students themselves. In response to interview questions about their future aspirations, students of TJ seminaries responded that they planned to work as cooks, electricians, plumbers, etc. after

26 Several development aid projects help madrasas incorporating vocational courses into their curriculum: "ptu in Madrasas: Islamic Schools Began Teaching not Only Religion But Also a Profession" [ptu pri Medrese: v Islamskih Shkolas Nachali Uchit ne Tolko Religii, no i Professii], 13.09.17, Azattyk, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G96ax4ukRcA, accessed 14.10.19.

graduation. Further questioned on these choices of occupation, they explained that such jobs are convenient since they provide income on the one hand and flexibility and time for spreading religion on the other. However, students of TJ seminaries also expressed desires to follow a religious career more often compared to students of other schools. Young men saw themselves becoming imams, leading imams (*imam khatib)* and madrasa teachers, memorizing and chanting the Qur'an (*qari*) and serving as 'religious specialists' (*din kyzmatker/ adis*). They understand religious specialists as individuals with 'solid religious knowledge' who work to disseminate it in society. Either a religious career alone, or combined with an earthly occupation, spreading the religious knowledge constitutes their vocation as 'serving to community' (*oz elime kyzmat kyluu/ jamaatyma kyzmat kyluu*).

In contrast, for students of Adep Bashaty and Salttuu Islam, service to community implied firstly a concept of being a good person (*insan*), which entails cultivating such qualities as faith (*yimanduu*), patriotism (*ozun elin oilongon*) and a sense of justice (*adilettuu*). Thus, service to community begins with one- self, with the responsibility of being a good *insan*. In comparison to the students of TJ, the students of Adep Bashaty do not necessarily associate their future paths with religious careers in order to serve their community. In inter- views, they voiced such desires as becoming doctors, teachers, lawyers, architects, politicians, etc. They viewed religious education rather as a foundation for character formation (*yiman*), which is necessary to pursue a good life and become a successful *insan*. My understanding is that religious knowledge in these madrasas is not considered as a totality of the knowledge corpus available to humans but only one part, albeit a crucial one. Such ambitions among Adep Bashaty students, at least on the level of career aspirations, perhaps resonates with the real possibilities of employment and pursuing higher education that this *jamaat* provides. By motivating students to apply to secular universities, Adep Bashaty shows a different vision of its place in society. This *jamaat* enjoys connections to politics and business structures (Botoeva 2018), through which it can promote its graduates to occupy higher places in society and thusenhance its own standing.

While Adep Bashaty and the related *jamaat* has produced prominent businessmen and mid-level state officials, TJ has been proactive in promoting their graduates and senior students into the religious clergy. Central to this strategy has been TJ's privileged access to the Muftiate's resources. TJ schools, for example, proudly report that their graduates find employment within various Muftiate structures, whether in its regional branches (*kazyat*) or its central organization in the capital, and also as *imams* in villages and teachers in

their network of madrasas. Armed with discourse on the lack of 'solid' knowledge among Kyrgyzstan's Muslim community, TJ madrasas seek to produce religious clergy to address these needs. Interestingly, other schools report that the Muftiate does not employ their graduates and even inhibits their growth.

Against the background of an uneven access to power and resources and uncertain legislative context, *jamaats* and religious schools invest in their networks of graduates as one way of reproduction. Through their different strategies for promoting graduates, madrasas also demonstrate divergent visions of their role in society, the economy, and politics.

6 Conclusion

The development of systematic madrasa-based religious learning is a significant phenomenon in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. This type of education attracts many practicing and non-practicing families due to the general increased religiosity in the country as well as immediate socio-economic considerations. Madrasas appeal to families with their comprehensive care for students, cheap study expenses, material infrastructure, and an environment free from consumerism. Importantly, they are perceived as social institutions that shape the 'right' moral values and convey a model of behaviour in accordance with Islamic ethics.

However, the current religious educational market is subject to competition among diverse fellowships who vie for hegemony. Because of an uneven access to resources, some Islamic schools are currently booming while others are stagnating. This competition is taking place within an uncertain legislative framework marked by increasing attempts to bring the currently pluralistic religious education landscape under state control. While state regulation meets suspicion and resistance among many religious actors, it is instrumentalized by other religious actors in their desire to reduce religious diversity and establish hegemony. While the emergent state regulation involves varying risks and stakes for each fellowship, the state bodies seek to homogenize the religious educational market, track foreign funds and anticipate possible sectarianism. This article attempted to shed light on the complex dynamics taking place between the secular state and religious actors on the one hand, and among competing religious actors on the other. These dynamics shape processes related to the development of madrasa-based learning and divergent strategies madrasas deploy in order to sustain their networks.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editorial board of *Central Asian Affairs* for their constructive comments and questions on the earlier version of this article. I am grateful to Alexander Wolters for reading several iterations of the paper. The earlier draft also benefited from the feedback received from Sophie Hohmann and Catherine Poujol.

Bibliography

Abramson, David. "Foreign Religious Education and the Central Asian Islamic Revival: Impact and Prospects for Stability." *Silk Road Paper*. (March 2010).

Balci, Bayram. "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and Their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam." *Religion, State and Society*. 31, no. 2 (2003): 51–77.

Balci, Bayram. "Reviving Central Asia's Religious Ties with the Indian Subcontinent? The Jamaat al Tabligh." *Religion, State and Society*. 43, No. 1 (2015): 20–34.

Balci, Bayram. "The Rise of the Jama'at al Tabligh in Kyrgyzstan: The Revival of Islamic Ties between the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia?." *Central Asian Survey.* 31, No. 1 (2012): 61–76.

Bissenova, Alima. "Central Asian Encounters in the Middle East: Nationalism, Is- lam and Postcoloniality in Al-Azhar." *Religion, State and Society*. 33, No. 3 (2005): 253–263.

Botoeva, Aisalkyn. "Islam and the Spirits of Capitalism: Competing Articulations of the Islamic Economy." *Politics & Society.* 46, No. 2 (2018): 235–264.

Cieślewska, Anna. *Islam with a Female Face: How Women Are Changing the Religious Landscape in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan*. Kraków, 2017.

Esenamanova, Nurgul. "Kyrgyzstan's Islamic Reference Points: the Role of Foreign Religious Trends." *Central Asia and the Caucasus*. 16, No. 3–4 (2015): 186–199.

Gaborieau, Marc. "The Transformation of Tablighi Jama'at into a Transnational Movement" in *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*, ed. Khalid Masud, Leiden: Brill, 2000, 121–38.

Heathershaw John and Montgomery, David W. "The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics." *Russia and Eurasia Programme*. (November 2014).

Hölzchen, Yanti "Religious Education and Cultural Change. The case of Madrasas in Northern Kyrgyzstan" in Roland Hardenberg (ed.) *Approaching Ritual Economy: Socio-Cosmic Fields in Globalized Contexts*. Tubengen, 2017: 105–134.

Ismailbekova, Aksana and Nasritdinov, Emil. "Transnational Religious Networks in Central Asia: Structure, Travel, and Culture of Kyrgyz Tablighi Jama'at." *Transnational Social Review: A Social Work Journal*. 2, No. 2 (2012): 177–195.

Karagiannis, Emmanuel. "The New Face of Political Islam in Central Asia: The Rise of Islamo-democrats." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. 36, No. 2 (2016): 267–281.

Kemper, Michael, Motika, Raoul and Reichmuth, Stefan. *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and its Successor States*. Routledge, 2009.

Khalid, Adeeb. *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Khalid, Adeeb. *Islam After Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. University of California Press, 2007.

Kurbanova, Nazira. "Islamic Education in Kyrgyzstan." *Central Asia and the Caucasus*. 15, No. 1 (2014): 90–103.

Laruelle, Marlene (ed.) *Being Muslim in Central Asia. Practices, Politics and Identities*. Brill 2018.

Levy, David. "The Impulse to Orthodoxy: Why Illiberal Democracies Treat Religious Pluralism as a Threat." *Religion, State & Society*. 46, No. 3 (2018): 243–265.

Louw, Maria. "Even Honey May Become Bitter When There is Too Much of It: Islam and the Struggle for a Balanced Existence in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan." *Central Asian Survey*. 32, No. 4 (2013): 514–526.

Louw, Maria E. *Everyday Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia*. Routledge, 2007.

McBrien, Julie. *From Belonging to Belief: Modern Secularisms and the Construction of Religion in Kyrgyzstan*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017.

Montgomery, David W. *Practicing Islam: Knowledge, Experience, and Social Navigation in Kyrgyzstan*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016.

Mostowlansky, Till. *Azan on the Moon: Entangling Modernity along Tajikistan's Pamir Highway*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017.

Muminov, Ashirbek. "Fundamentalist Challenges to Local Islamic Traditions in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia" in *Empire, Islam and Politics in Central Eurasia*, ed. Uyama Tomohiko, Slavic Eurasian Studies, Sapporo 2007, 249–263.

Naganawa Norihiro, *"Maktab* or School? Introduction of Universal Primary Education among the Volga-Ural Muslims" in *Empire, Islam and Politics in Central Eurasia*, ed. Uyama Tomohiko, Slavic Eurasian Studies, Sapporo 2007, 65–99.

Nasritdinov, Emil. "Spiritual Nomadism and Central Asian Tablighi Travellers." *Ab Emperio*. 2 (2012): 145–166.

Nasritdinov, Emil. "Mobile Livelihoods: How Kyrgyz Tablighis Balance Din and Duniya", *unpublished manuscript*.

Pelkmans, Mathijs. "Paradoxes of Religious Freedom *and* Repression in (Post-)Soviet Contexts." *Journal of Law and Religion*. 29 (2014): 436–446.

Pelkmans, Mathijs. *Fragile Conviction: Changing Ideological Landscapes in Urban Kyrgyzstan*. Cornell University Press, 2017.

Privratsky, Bruce G. *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory*. Routledge, 2001.

Rasanayagam, Johan. *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan the Morality of Experience*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Reetz, Dietrich. "From Madrasa to University – the Challenges and Formats of Islamic Education" in Akbar S. Ahmed and Sonn, Tamara (eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Islamic Studies*. London: Sage Publications, 2010: 106–139.

Stephan, Manja. "Education, Youth and Islam: the Growing Popularity of Private Religious Lessons in Dushanbe, Tajikistan." *Central Asian Survey*. 29, No. 4 (2009): 469–483.

Stephan, M. "You Come to Us Like a 'Black Cloud': Universal Versus Local Islam in Tajikistan." In C. Hann, & "Civil Religion" Group (Eds.), *The Postsocialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe*. Münster: LIT, 2006.

Tabyshalieva, Anara. *Faith in Turkestan* [Vera v Turkestane] Bishkek, 1993. Toktogulova, Mukaram. "Le Rôle de la *Da'wa* dans la Réislamisation au Kirghizistan." *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*. 15, No. 16 (2007): 83–102.

Toktogulova, Mukaram. "The Localisation of the Transnational Tablighi Jama'at in Kyrgyzstan: Structures, Concepts, Practices and Metaphors". *Crossroads Asia Working Paper Series*. No. 17 (2014).

Tomohiko, Uyama (ed.) *Empire, Islam and Politics in Central Eurasia*. Slavic Eurasian Studies, Sapporo 2007.

Tulebaeva, Baktygül. "In Search of the Good Life Value Conflicts and Dilemmas in the Practice of Islam in Kochkor, Kyrgyzstan" in Roland Hardenberg (ed.) *Approaching Ritual Economy: Socio-Cosmic Fields in Globalized Contexts*. Tubengen, 2017.

"Religious education in Kyrgyzstan: madrasas require urgent reform." *Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations*, 2017 (in Russian).