

## Introduction

# An Anthropology of Knowledge and Life “in the Field”

“It’s a strange image,” he said, “and strange prisoners you’re telling of.”  
“They’re like us,” I said. “For in the first place, do you suppose such men would have seen anything of themselves and one another other than the shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave facing them?”

Plato, *The Republic*

Knowledge about a thing is not the thing itself. You remember what Al-Ghazzali told us in the Lecture on Mysticism—that to understand the causes of drunkenness, as a physician understands them, is not to be drunk.

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Religion is what it does. What it *does*, however, is contentious terrain. Contentious not only because it is the actual doing, the expression in action of something inward and at times collective, that challenges community, but also because what religion does involves a great deal of interpretive ambiguity that eludes neat categorization. Getting at what someone believes is generally studied—both informally and academically—by reconciling what one says with observations of what one does. Assessing internal states of meaning is complicated, but essential to navigating the demands of sociality.

It is the relationship between doing and knowing, between action and social navigation that is of concern here. Knowing what it is to be Kyrgyz, Muslim, and/or a Kyrgyz Muslim is formed through the events out of which an individual tries to make sense and meaning of experience. Being Muslim involves some aspect of doing, some part of repetition that frames a particular meaning of Islam. Thus, this book is not a manual of practices, but rather a claim that through the art of doing and the training of practice, Islam is imbued with meaning and creates an environment for community and contestation. Addressing the relationship between meaning and lived experience of Islam in Central Asia—and how events, opportunities, and potentialities create the context from which knowing emerges—sets up the moral distinctiveness of interpreting what religion does.

Introductions to religion generally center on works. Theology is important to the religious, but goes unnoticed except when it gets explicitly tied to action. The pillars of (Sunni) Islam—*shahadah* (declaration of faith), *salat* (prayer), *sawm* (fasting), *zakat* (alms-giving), *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca)—are markers of the causal (and casual) association of one’s religiousness with the public expression, in one sense, of Islam.<sup>1</sup> It is thus action and environment that become central to making sense of what a religion does.

Of the five pillars of Islam, keeping the fast during Ramadan is perhaps the most dramatic for a traveler to a Muslim country. Friday prayers, of course, are an event and sometimes a statement (though less of a statement about religiosity than many infer) about religious prayer in numbers, but when a community collectively keeps the fast, restaurants are often closed or at least empty during the day, and reopen in full as the sun sets and the fast is broken. The streets fill with excitement as people commune over the evening meal and exuberance emerges from the quiet of the day.

This can be seen in Muslim communities throughout the world, but the picture must not be overly essentialized. In 2004, on a typical Wednesday afternoon during Ramadan in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, I went for a walk to get a feel for the activity on the streets.<sup>2</sup> A few hundred men were hurrying to the main mosque for afternoon prayers; just behind the mosque, a man was having a quick lunch outside before going to meet others for prayers at the mosque; and at a restaurant one block away, there was a normal-sized crowd where some women joked about having smaller portions to “work their way into” the fast while a table of men in suits toasted Muhammad with vodka.

To what extent these actions bring people together and hold meaning for those who partake is interesting, but one has to note variation and be mindful that religious activity is not merely a synonym for religious belief. Any number of influences can be seen as relevant to describing the (occasionally unorthodox) behavior in Bishkek during Ramadan, but here I argue that, among other things, such variation can be best understood through an inquiry into the relationship between *knowledge*—by which I imply a social organization, corpus, and medium of knowledge—and *action*—the expresser and informer of religion.

### SEEING THE DOING AS KNOWING

Eleven years after Kyrgyzstan declared its independence in 1991, twelve years after the ethnic violence of the first Osh riots, and four years after the first incursion of armed *jihadis* (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, IMU), Murat began to discover what religion meant for him. The same year signified twenty-five years since Murat’s birth, one year since his cousin’s death, and one year before the birth of his first child. It was also seven years since Murat met his first missionary, five years since his first prostitute, and twelve years since he stole away with his schoolmates to get drunk on his first bottle of vodka (see Montgomery 2007a).

Murat's sense of self—his identity—was not determined by his birth so much as by the community in which he was raised. He was not merely born Muslim and Kyrgyz so much as he became Muslim and Kyrgyz, becoming one of the many possible variations of what that might mean. As he got older, the environment in which he was raised was determined for him. Within that environment, he was brought up within a social structure that allowed a number of social options, determined his present, guided his future, and regulated his behavior. The social structure was not perceived by him as structure so much as a prevailing presence of what people do. And it was early on that he began the process of distinguishing what he *knows* from what he does not know.

There are gradations of certainty in his knowing, but community offers ways of resolving uncertainty. And while neither Murat nor anyone else can be forced to behave or to believe in any particular way, socialization is a process rooted most fundamentally in the actions and interactions of our everyday world. Sometimes significant events that lie beyond the everyday—a revolution, a war or peace, an earthquake, drought or abundance—determine the restrictions of action, and sometimes the political environment—an oppressive regime or a liberal politic—determines them. But the parameters of what he comes to *know* is a combination of events and options situated in a habitat that is immediate and makes sense to Murat throughout the stages of his development.

Murat experienced a lot before he adopted an orthopraxic approach to Islam, and his experiences were formed largely by community and a combination of what he knows and the potentiality of action. Culture plays a role at numerous levels and contributes greatly to society's structure and the social organization of knowledge. But calling it knowledge—something Murat would do; after all, he knows his culture as well as other things he would not call culture—forces one to look at Murat's situation differently.<sup>3</sup> Many would see Murat's adoption of religion as a discrete event, for example, without seeing that his understanding of religion and culture is continuously under construction. The issue then is not what knowledge means, but rather that people are grappling with what it means in relation to their potentialities and the everyday.



Knowledge allows us to interpret.<sup>4</sup> Thus, maneuvering through life, making sense of life, and coming to terms with the profound problems of existence are all accomplished by working through what we have learned and claim as part of what we know. This is not to say that knowledge is located only as part of what is recognized, or that the process of acquiring knowledge is necessarily a formalized or even a cognizant one. The reality of action is that we do not always think it out or at least we do not always hold thought at the most immediate level. Murat's experiences, for example, led to his understanding of, among other things, life and death, sex and politics. Through experience, he recognized the boundedness of his place within his community and began to

discover what constitutes the parameters of everyday practice, what can be shared publicly and what must be kept private. The same applies to the worlds of others to be introduced later, who have also experimented with the limits of their actions within the social confines of their respective communities.

Murat shares a myriad of ideas with others. His abbreviated history does not constitute a series of isolated events but rather significant moments that stimulated conversations among close friends and placed the actions he revealed within the approval and disapproval of those around him. He knew to keep his visit to the prostitute from his mother and the more religiously pious, but shared it with his closest schoolmates; this secret not only bound them together but marked him as the most knowledgeable about the sex act. The wrath of his father after he got sick from the vodka he drank with his friends and the praise he got for receiving high marks in tenth grade gave him a strong idea of the expectations others placed upon his behavior. The buzz about the IMU left him with a cautious interest in what the group was allegedly trying to accomplish and, while watching others in his community, led him to begin to discern how the elders practiced Islam and the difference between his classmates who wanted carefree lives and those who began to turn their interests to the strictures of Islam. Though Murat is not as certain as some of his friends and his religious identity remains in flux, the birth of his son brought an increased sense of responsibility for the life he lives.

### SEEING THE KNOWING ANTHROPOLOGICALLY

Terms of knowledge and culture are used with a certain looseness. When talking with Murat and others, the justification they articulate for their actions oscillates between statements of cultural certainty—“it is our culture to do it this way”—and discussions about moral certainty—“I know this is right [or wrong].” While the former is a relative claim and the latter a normative claim, my interlocutors do not make these distinctions. Murat, for example, will frequently talk about culture as if it was normative, but he does acknowledge that different cultures exist and that this makes the reasons for doing things relative. As discussed later, this distinction becomes more important when it is an argument between religion and culture. Because culture comes from man, cultural claims may be relative; but religious claims, if taken to be transcendent, must be normative. The distinction between the two is constituted in knowledge.

Anthropology concerns itself with the study of culture and in so doing creates a lexicon and way of defining what is, at some level, an abstract yet recognizable grouping of behaviors. People’s motivations for action and inaction, their sense of feeling at home or out of place in the world comes together with what constitutes culture—a vague grouping that at once justifies the parameters of behavior and at the same time limits discussion/criticism by outsiders.<sup>5</sup> Though a reference group constitutes culture and individuals know many things that include culture, knowledge is more than culture.

Culture forms a sense of intuited embeddedness that discourages others from questioning the normative perception of what should be done. As a concept, culture has developed such a self-evident/taken-for-granted character that it runs the risk of turning into something other than an analytical tool for describing and grouping behavior.<sup>6</sup> It becomes enough to explain behavior as culture. But one can identify behaviors, events, and the means of maintaining and institutionalizing power within the realm of culture precisely because the making of meaning drives understandings of culture, and culture is about prioritizing different types of knowledge. Furthermore, both culture and meaning are public (Geertz 1973, 12, 14). Murat makes sense of what he has learned by interacting with his family, friends, and neighbors. His embeddedness in the community in which he lives provides the medium for the creation of significance.

Thus, viewing culture as an aspect of knowledge possessed by individuals gives us an added way of appreciating the complexities of existence and social interaction that Murat and others face on a daily basis. It is what they know, situated in a particular cultural setting, that allows them to derive meaning from their experiences, to distinguish between when they are being taken advantage of in the market or a cultural setting as well as foundations of relationships upon which they can base trust (Seligman 1997, 2000). The goal of this argument is neither to provide an abstraction of knowledge that is purely theoretical and normative in its assertions about what knowledge constitutes, nor to be relativistic. Rather, the idea is to look at how Murat and others construct a net that can hold the events they experience together in a context of meaning and direction.

Such a net is formed by a social organization, a medium, and a corpus of knowledge, none of which exist independent of the others. The social organization is the structural component, the contextualization through which one understands knowledge. The corpus of knowledge is the body, the reservoir, of what is known. And the medium of knowledge is the mode through which what is known can be shared and acquired (Barth 2002).

All knowledge is experienced and from a variety of experiences, meaning is inferred. While all three aspects of knowledge exist in a fluid relationship with each other, there is a complex interrelationship between different aspects of knowledge: verbal language is not merely spoken but is performed, and nondiscursive gestures that may accompany the discursive message may emphasize meaning or entirely negate meaning (see Luckmann 1967). The challenge is to understand how people come to know about their surroundings and how they exchange the messages they use to come to a state of what they say they *know*.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of Murat, he explains why he did not practice religion earlier in his life, as well as why he now practices religion, in part by apologia and in part through discursive justification. This provides both an excuse for growing up in a cultural environment that has religious roots of varying depths

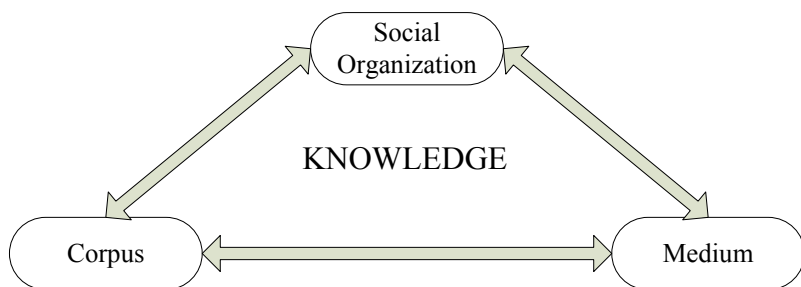


FIGURE I.1. Anthropology of knowledge.

and a reason for succumbing to the pull of at times contradictory calls for action. For example, it is common for Central Asians to refer to Kyrgyz as being less orthodox, in an orthodox sense, and Murat could eschew many Islamic obligations by claiming that it is part of his culture not to be regularly observant. When he made his decision to become more religious, his justification for the transformation was marked by a sense of obligation to overcome his predestined past.

The reality, of course, is that each culture has multiple histories that influence the manner in which life is lived and thereby influence the manner of knowing. Discussing history is incomplete without noting the factors and influences beyond the immediate sphere of observation and describing the contexts of existence, which include the social organization, the medium and the corpus of knowledge to be learned, intuited, and appreciated.

It is argued that in addition to offering a grounded understanding of what influences the everyday and the political, approaching behavior through a lens of knowledge addresses the challenge of how to theorize variation and change. An anthropology of knowledge gives form to the pragmatic nature of social navigation and draws attention to the influence of framing in creating categories—for example, a political frame, an ethnographic frame, and a local frame have differing agendas that get reified in and by each other—that influence practice and thus, religious and political change.

### EXPLAINING “THE FIELD”

Kyrgyzstan is mountainous—on a clear day, there is nowhere that one can go without seeing mountains. In economic terms, it is considered a poor country and certainly poverty occupies the time of many Kyrgyz. It is jokingly said that a foreigner can be thought to have mastered the Kyrgyz language if he can talk about three things: family, health, and how expensive everything is in the bazaar. In many respects, this captures what is important to many Kyrgyz (and many in the world, more generally). And while there is always a struggle for money, a salary is more likely to be spent right away and shared with extended family rather than saved. Community identification is more

important than individualism, and this is seen in discussions of culture and religion (Montgomery 2013b).

Traditionally, and due to the terrain, which always has been a significant factor in people's way of life, most Kyrgyz were nomadic pastoralists. In the mountain areas, this is still an active way of life for some, with schools reminding parents every year that they should wait until after the school year is over before they begin summer migrations in the upper mountain pastures (*jailoo*). In the valleys, most Kyrgyz and other ethnic groups have adopted sedentary lives and cultures. And though the economy remains predominately agricultural, there has been a large influx of migrants to the capital, Bishkek, and further abroad in hopes of securing a better, more lucrative job.

The country is a republic administratively divided into seven *oblasts* (Kyrgyz: province)—Batken, Chuy, Jalal-Abad, Naryn, Osh, Talas, and Issyk-Kul—and one city, Bishkek. The Ala-Too mountain range separates the northern part of the country from the south and is seen as a marker of differentiation in both culture and economy. The north produces more meat and wool, and some of the large crops in the south are cotton and tobacco. As the first country in the Commonwealth of Independent States to carry out market reforms, Kyrgyzstan became a member of the World Trade Organization in 1998. In the early 1990s, it was perceived as an island of democracy in a relatively nondemocratic region.<sup>8</sup> The presidency of Askar Akayev, however, began a trend toward presidential seizure of power. Nonetheless, there was greater openness to political dissent and that affected the tone of political expression in the country.

While the focus of this work is Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan plays a prominent role in the imagination of those living in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan and thus a brief description for comparison is warranted. Uzbekistan is a much drier country, relying on water from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to irrigate its crops, the most profitable of which is cotton. It is more populous, with a population of over 28 million versus Kyrgyzstan's 5.4 million. Over half the Uzbek population lives rurally,<sup>9</sup> in a republic with authoritative presidential rule and administratively divided into twelve *viloyats* (Uzbek: province), the autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan (*Qoraqalpog'iston Respublikasi*), and the capital city of Tashkent. There are significant differences between the regions; my research in Uzbekistan focused largely on the Ferghana Valley viloyats of Ferghana, Kokand, and Namangan.

The Uzbek government controls most businesses and has a record of general disregard for human rights (see Human Rights Watch 2004, 2007, 2011). The standard of living has been in decline and this has influenced people's discussions and perceptions about the differences between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks have often felt themselves to be culturally superior to the Kyrgyz; in early 2000 one would hear Uzbeks in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan articulate this.<sup>10</sup> By 2004 and 2005, however, the discussion had changed, and my interlocutors in Uzbekistan most frequently asked questions about how much better life was in Kyrgyzstan.

Thus, the environment in which I conducted field research between 2004 and 2005 was one where both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks were dissatisfied with their respective governments and wishing for change and better lives. The Kyrgyz were able to articulate this dissatisfaction more publicly, while the situation in Uzbekistan was becoming increasingly oppressive.



Questions of methodology arise early in almost every work, as a means of establishing the author's legitimacy to claims of what is written; to gauge the representative accuracy of the conclusions he has drawn and the relation of observations, assumptions, and the "real world" to each other. My first interactions with Kyrgyz and Uzbeks came during an extended stay between 1999 and 2001, when I lived and worked in the mountain community of Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. During that period, I made trips throughout Kyrgyzstan as well as Uzbekistan. I collected most of the field data for the writing of this book while conducting anthropological field research between 2004 and 2005. During this time, I was based in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, and traveled extensively throughout the Ferghana Valley, a region administratively shared by Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. There were follow-up visits to the region in 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2013.

In Naryn I learned what the harshness of mountain life in the winter and the freedom that a nomadic life in the summer entail. The severity of the winters, the scarcity of vegetables, the reality of unemployment; the vastness of mountain pastures, the cleanness of water and air, and the continuance of a traditional way of living created a pride among locals that they were able to live, and even be happy, in an environment that was undesirable and intimidating to Kyrgyz living in less harsh surroundings.

Associated with being Kyrgyz in Naryn was the stereotype that residents lived both a more traditional life and a less Islamic life. The ways of the city were slowest to reach these kinds of villages, and this was also the case with a more syncretic way of practicing religion. During field research carried out between 2004 and 2005 and in 2012, I returned to Naryn oblast to renew acquaintances, collect data, and administer a survey of religious practice. During these later research stays my primary residence was in the Ferghana Valley sections of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which represented a different way of life with milder winters, greater population density, and more abundant produce.

My general approach to understanding the lived situation of the Kyrgyz involved the consideration of the environment and an analysis of events in which they lived (see Jackson 2005). The events of the 2005 Kyrgyz putsch and the Andijan massacre, for example, influenced my research plan. While the long-term impact of these events on the lives of locals is ongoing, as it was part of the shared experience of people and was the concern of many, it fit within my focus on the everyday impacts of events in life. The coup led people to ex-



press their fears about a possible return to the Osh riots of 1990 (see Tishkov 1995), and after the Andijan killings there was a heightened fear of religious militancy that could spread and lead to uncontrolled violence.

Despite the fears and concerns raised by these events, after a few days the closed stores reopened and people returned to their daily routines. While it is easy to focus on the significance of the Kyrgyz putsch, it cannot be overlooked that a block from the White House (presidential office building) a woman continued selling sunflower seeds, gum, and cigarettes at the corner and traffic continued while people stormed the White House, effectively ousting the Akayev government.<sup>11</sup> And in Andijan, the borders of the city were closed and people were genuinely afraid. But despite caution in discussing the events, people still went to the markets and tried to resume as normal a life as possible.

My research did not just focus on major events like holidays or protests, but was often carried out over endless pots of tea in *chaikhanas* (teahouses) and during meals in people's homes. It was a multisited research project that built on the experience of life in the mountains and sought to complement it with understandings of life in the valley, largely focused on participant-guided interviews and field observations.

In Kyrgyzstan, I carried out quantitative (survey) and qualitative research in Aravan, Arbyn, At-Bashi, Jangi-Nookat (Yangi-Nookat), Karasuu, Kochkor, Korshab, Naryn, Nookat (Eski-Nookat), Osh, and Shangkol. I also conducted qualitative research in Kyrgyzstan in Achakainda, Batken, Bishkek, Ivanovka, Jalal-Abad, Karakol, Talas, Üser, and Uzgen. Due to the tragic political events in Andijan and the general research climate, I was unable to carry out quantitative research in Uzbekistan as I had intended. I focused my qualitative research in Uzbekistan on the communities of Andijan, Ferghana, Kokand, Margilan, Namangan, Oq'Korgon, Rishton, and Sokh.<sup>12</sup> I also carried out research in Bukhara, Samarqand, and Tashkent.

There are a multitude of boundaries that people recognize. Those that influenced the selection of my research sites were based on location, ethnicity, and nationality. The locational differences are those of mountains and valleys as well as the groups that live in between, at the edge of the valley and the base of the mountains. These boundary communities are at times subject to interpretation and a hard delineation is not overly important. Naryn is clearly in the mountains. Andijan is undeniably not in the mountains but rather in the heart of the valley. And Shangkol is at the foothills.

The general frame of reference in regard to these differences is how people make a living; this is what determines whether a given locality is a mountain or valley community. And while it is clearly the environment that determines the mode of living rather than the other way around, it is the mode of living that people use to categorize the environment. Shangkol is a place that makes use of various modes; people say they are from the valley and they also say they are from the mountains. The distinction I try to make is one of local perception as well as geographical observation; that is, if the mountains begin

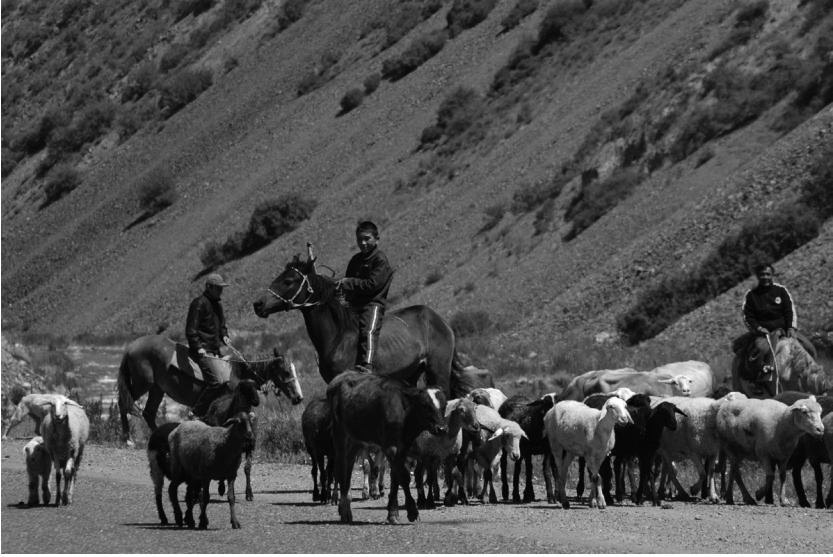


FIGURE I.2. A boy herding sheep with his brother and uncle along a highway in the mountains, 2006.



FIGURE I.3. Planting spring crops in the valley, 2012.

TABLE I.1. Communities by Geography

Mountain communities	In-between communities	Valley communities
At-Bashi	Arbyn	Andijan
Kochkor	Jangi-Nookat	Aravan
Naryn	Karatai	Ferghana
Sokh	Korshab	Karasuu
	Shangkol	Kokand
		Margillan
		Namangan
		Nookat (Eski-)
		Osh
		Rishton

in someone’s backyard and he claims to be in the valley—as is the case with Jangi-Nookat—I classify this as an in-between community.

Much is made of ethnicity, and most of the communities are separated by ethnicity: it is either a Kyrgyz community or an Uzbek community. And even where populations of both ethnic groups live in the same community, they generally live in different neighborhoods, separated by different types of homes and different ways of living. Thus, the selection of my research sites tried to include a range of ethnic groups along the variables of not only geography but also those of ethnic community in order to better understand the differences in what ethnic interaction—or at least the idea of having to share space even if ethnic interaction was often kept at a minimum—meant in the community.

Perhaps the most straightforward delineation of groups was along national boundaries. These boundaries, while an inconvenience for many, have become the political boundaries and are delineated by a map. A map of ethnicity would suggest different boundaries and typological delineations would also yield a different map. A map that divides mountains and valleys would assign the Kyrgyz section of the Ferghana Valley to the broader territory of the valley. And a map of ethnic density would cut further into Kyrgyz territory that would roughly, though not exactly, correspond to the foothills of the mountains. The reality this creates is that there are ethnic Uzbeks who are under the political administration of Kyrgyzstan and some Kyrgyz who are under the political administration of Uzbekistan. And while these two communities may have family connections, different state policies influence how their lives can be lived. Thus, a third border is that of national boundaries.

The sites were selected based on the need to diversify the variables of the populations and also in places where I had established relationships through

**TABLE I.2. Communities by Ethnicity**

Kyrgyz communities	Mixed communities (Kyrgyz and Uzbek)	Uzbek communities	Tajik communities
Arbyn	Karasuu	Andijan	Rishton
At-Bashi	Korshab	Aravan	Sokh
Kochkor	Nookat (Eski-)	Ferghana	
Naryn	Osh	Jangi-Nookat	
Shangkol		Kokand	
		Margilan	
		Namangan	

**TABLE I.3. Communities by National Boundaries**

Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyzstan (along border or strong identification with Uzbekistan)	Uzbekistan	Uzbekistan (along border and strong identification with Tajikistan)
Arbyn	Aravan	Andijan	Rishton
At-Bashi	Jangi-Nookat	Ferghana	Sokh
Karatai	Karasuu	Kokand	
Kochkor	Nookat (Eski-)	Margilan	
Korshab	Osh	Namangan	
Naryn			
Shangkol			

earlier visits to the region. While an arbitrary marking in some respects, the political borders did influence my research; some questions that I could ask in Kyrgyzstan had to be asked differently or avoided in Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the political situation in both countries, but especially Uzbekistan, varied the environment in which discussions on religion could be conducted.

In general, I was concerned with the everyday aspects of life and found that official interviews with religious and intellectual elites often solicited formal and staged responses that were, to some degree, a construction of what people felt I wanted to hear. This is not to say that all official interviews were devoid of honesty, for I believe many of the people I interviewed in these cases no doubt at least wanted to believe what they were saying. But as is the case with formal and recorded conversations, people are more guarded and less spontaneous in their descriptions about what might actually be happening. That, in combina-

tion with a face-saving cultural milieu that is more concerned with relaying a pleasing story than a truthful story, led me to rely most heavily on casual conversations and informal interviews in people's homes and common public spaces. These conversations were often an extension of the discourse begun in friendships and developed after months, or years, of cultivating relations in various communities. At all times, interactions with my interlocutors guided the dialogues we shared. These conversations took place in both public and private spaces.

Because my primary concern was how people lived and came to terms with the challenges of everyday life, interacting with the religious and intellectual elites, while at times illuminating, was often a secondary concern. Some of the more enlightening conversations were with taxi drivers, barbers, shepherds, salespersons, teachers, and pensioners over tea, vodka, or traditional meals. And generally, conversations would begin around what were the concerns of their lives and progress toward the role religion played (or did not play) in making sense of a meaningful life.

However, I soon became concerned about the representative nature of the conversations that I was having—after all, despite my best efforts I could be talking with the only twenty people in a village who might feel a particular way!—and decided to administer a survey of religious and cultural practice in the locations where I was conducting field research. The survey consisted of four parts: the first section asked questions designed to understand how people described their practice of religion and culture; the second section asked questions connected to how people learned about religion and culture; the third section looked at the issue of religion and culture's role in the community; and the fourth section asked basic identifying information. The survey contained 189 questions and took between 50 and 90 minutes to administer.

I intended to administer the survey in three locations, corresponding to the regions where I conducted ethnographic research. I planned the administration of the surveys to be done in three stages between May and June 2005. The first and second stages were in Osh and Naryn oblasts in Kyrgyzstan and the third stage was to be administered in Andijan and Ferghana viloyats in Uzbekistan.

The survey was administered in Kyrgyzstan; regrettably, due to the May 2005 political events in Andijan, it was not administered in Uzbekistan. I had done some trials of the survey in Andijan in May, but the situation remained too tense and the population too fearful to permit it to be administered, as this could have placed many people in danger. Despite people's interest in the survey and the information it contained, the risk was too great and honest answers could not be expected. This has forced me to rely more on the qualitative portions of my work in Uzbekistan rather than the quantitative information the survey was designed to provide. I have been able to discuss all of the questions with a number of Uzbeks living in many of the villages where I worked, but the format of those discussions was informal.

TABLE I.4. Communities by Administrative Groupings

Naryn Oblast (Kyrgyzstan)	Osh Oblast (Kyrgyzstan)	Andijan Viloyat (Uzbekistan)	Ferghana Viloyat (Uzbekistan)
At-Bashi	Aravan	Andijan	Ferghana
Kochkor	Arbyn		Kokand
Naryn	Jangi-Nookat		Margilan
	Karasuu		Rishton
	Karatai		Sokh
	Korshab		
	Nookat (Eski-)		
	Osh		
	Shangkol		

When administering the survey, I drew a map of the village or city; a grid placed on it marked Kyrgyz neighborhoods, Uzbek neighborhoods, and mixed neighborhoods. I assigned assistants to each quadrant and instructed them to randomly visit homes and alternate between age and gender of the interviewee. For example, if a middle-aged male was interviewed at the first house on the street, an elderly woman would be a good match to be interviewed at a house seven houses down on the other side of the road or on a different road altogether.

Of the total of 866 surveys administered, 829 were complete. The surveys were administered by assistants whom I had trained, in Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek. All assistants had copies of the surveys in the relevant languages and they were either bi- or trilingual. For the most part, ethnic Kyrgyz were sent to Kyrgyz neighborhoods and ethnic Uzbeks were sent to Uzbek neighborhoods. I accompanied a number of the assistants during the interviews and checked every survey for accuracy, completeness, and irregularities.<sup>13</sup>

We carried out the survey over a short period of time, which helped keep people from talking about “appropriate” answers. The participants were selected randomly with the exception of two populations that I specifically targeted: a group of Hizb-ut Tahrir members and some members of Tablighi Jama’at, who were referred to as the “local Wahhabis.”<sup>14</sup> I gave a number of surveys—in Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek—to various Hizb-ut Tahrir members who agreed to have them filled out by their co-religionists. When I went to collect the surveys, however, none had been filled out completely. One individual said they had been too busy campaigning for the upcoming presidential elections. Another implied that they did not know many of the answers and thus did not want to fill it out, presumably because it would show a contradiction between their approach of acting knowledgeable and the actual breadth of their knowledge about Islam. In the case of Tablighi Jama’at, one member

offered to help administer the surveys to like believers. When I met him to collect the surveys, however, he said that most of the people he tried to get to fill them out did not approach it with enough seriousness and did not answer them “correctly.” He gave me two surveys out of the fifteen I had given him.

In neither instance was this data included in the qualitative analysis because it was direct solicitation aimed at learning more about two particular segments of population. The results of the experience were, however, quite informative in a general sense. Members of both groups were represented in the surveys that were randomly collected, as a number of interviewees verbally identified themselves as belonging to those groups at the conclusion of the survey. In all instances, the survey served as a useful tool to initiate conversation about the relationship between religious and cultural knowledge and practice.

To give an idea of the relationship of the survey to my qualitative research and how it created opportunities, one story from its administration proved quite telling about the broader social relations within my research sites in Kyrgyzstan. I was administering a survey when I received a phone call from the police in a medium-size village in Osh oblast. They had detained two young men who were helping me administer the survey on suspicion that they were distributing Islamist propaganda. I went to the police station with two friends from the village with whom I had been talking and who, I knew, had economic and political connections in the community. As I walked into the police station to explain about the survey and get my assistants out of custody, I was given a long explanation as to why the police responded as they did and how dangerous the Islamist elements were, especially following the Andijan killings. I explained the nature of my research and they offered to help administer surveys, saying that it would be better if I informed them about my research. I promised that at no point would I share the names of anyone with whom I met, including theirs.

Within twenty minutes of leaving the police station, I returned to the village center with my friends as a new black Mercedes Benz pulled up. First exited a bodyguard, whose size and presence was meant to emphasize the importance of the passengers who approached me, their long beards and imported Islamic dress distinguishing them as Muslims with connections outside the community in which they were living. They had heard about my research and had come to talk to me about it, to inquire what I was seeking to learn. They knew I had just returned from the police station and also knew that I did not reveal any names. It was an opportunity for open discussion, continuing over the remaining months of my research, and I found them as interested in my research as the police had been.<sup>15</sup>

This experience points to the interconnectedness of the community and how much everyone knows about each other.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while throughout this work it is the ethnographic context that gives color to the stories of my interlocutors, the survey gives context to the broader demographics of my field

sites and provides a sense of the material and emotional environment of the various communities in which they live (see Appendix B).

## PRACTICING ISLAM

Though the theoretical structure explored in this book is applicable elsewhere, ethnographically it focuses on the Kyrgyz Republic, a former Soviet republic that has received international media attention because of two coups (2005 and 2010), its proximity to Afghanistan, and Western fears commonly associated with rising Islamic activity. Thus, while the book examines how Muslims in Kyrgyzstan socially navigate their lives in direct relation to local potentialities and political agendas commonly controlled by (interactions with) the state, its discussion of knowledge as containing: (1) a *social organization* that accommodates to geography, economy, and political structure; (2) a *medium* that preferences creativeness of oral storytelling or a more rigid textual (Qur'an-centered) interpretation articulated as orthopraxy; and (3) a *corpus of knowledge* that draws upon experiences in schooling, profession, and history, gives it theoretical applicability beyond the particular region.

Viewing culture as an aspect of knowledge possessed by individuals in a community functions as an added way of appreciating the complexity of existence and social interactions. What we know allows us to filter experience and generate meaningful cultural worlds; to engage in both gossip and the division of labor; and to situate events, interactions, and relationships in a meaningful frame (Barth 2002). This does not suggest an abstraction of knowledge that is purely theoretical and normative, or even relativistic, in its argument about what knowledge constitutes. Rather, this approach toward an anthropology of knowledge begins to look at how people construct a net that can hold the happenings of the world and gather them together for the making of meaning.

This net, as suggested earlier, consists of a social organization, a medium, and a corpus of knowledge, none of which exists independently of the others. Chapter 1 continues with an overview of learning and the everyday as it relates to the case of the Kyrgyz Republic. It includes some of the historical background necessary to convey the environment in which my interlocutors live. History was not always at the forefront of their minds, but social memory and awareness of their past are important, formative, and often used to justify who they saw themselves as being.<sup>17</sup>

Chapter 2 begins a more detailed analysis of the anthropology of knowledge, addressing its first component: social organization. Social organization includes state, social, and economic restrictions or potentialities and is the structural component through which knowledge is understood. Chapter 3 examines the corpus of knowledge, which constitutes the body of what is known and includes the frame of reference one develops in a particular trade or profession as well as an educational frame related to one's level and type of schooling. The medium of knowledge—the manner by which what is known can be expressed—is explored in Chapter 4. This includes oral and textual



transmission as well as experiential transmission—the doing of an act. Chapter 5 frames the political and moral aspects of understanding, both as interpreted by my interlocutors and as viewed by outside observers; it is a move toward showing how an anthropology of knowledge can be applied, through exploring the context of bias. All the earlier chapters come together to see (how to see) local variation in relation to the biases with which we view all cases. The Conclusion returns to the issue of potentiality and social navigation, which is ever present in the relationship between knowledge and action.

What people know and what people do is contained within the parameters of their potential to know and to do, and this is in no way static. People are always finding ways to navigate the choices and challenges of life, from elders or youth coming to terms with the IMU and increasing orthopraxy, to others trying to make sense of their world and its concomitant obligations. People become Muslims and develop their understanding of what such Muslimness implies through a continuous, practical engagement with their surroundings. In the end, it is not a one-off affair but rather an understanding that is an ongoing practice. They are, after all, always *practicing* Islam.