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*I.M. Nokhrin***REVOLUTION IN KYRGYZSTAN OF 2020 AND THE SADYR JAPAROV'S POPULIST PROJECT**

There are two tendencies in populism studies that this paper addresses. The first can be defined as empirical Western-centrism manifested as the dominance of the European and American agenda in mainstream works on populism. Although, some researchers emphasize the global significance of the phenomenon, the proportion of studies related to the populist parties, movements, and leaders in the rest of the world is significantly inferior to the number of works on the Western agenda. The second trend is the tradition to approach populism, mainly, as a manifestation of some kind of crisis of democratic 'normality' in the context of electoral processes and party competition in liberal democratic political systems. If so, does it mean that populism is an indistinctive phenomenon beyond democratic party systems or the Western world? Moreover, what should be done with cases discovered in the non-democratic or non-liberal context, do they have the potential to develop the theory of populism. Therefore, my intention in this paper is to broaden the understanding of populism with the case of the revolution in Kyrgyzstan of October 2020 and the new Kyrgyz president Sadyr Japarov elected in January 2021. I believe that populism can be found beyond the Western left-right ideological opposition as well as to draw its strength and distinct symbolic content from alternative sources. Therefore, I am going to argue within the framework of Laclauian that Japarov's political logic is essentially populist, although the Kyrgyz political system cannot be described as liberal or democratic. Moreover, I am convinced that the Kyrgyz case can contribute to the development of populism studies, while the theory of populism can suggest the further development of the situation in Kyrgyzstan.

Keywords: populism, nationalism, ethno-nationalism, populist nationalism, Kyrgyzstan, Sadyr Japarov.

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Introduction

There are two tendencies in populism studies that this paper addresses. The first can be defined as empirical Western-centrism manifested as the dominance of the European and American agenda in mainstream works on populism [1-5]. Although, some researchers emphasize the global significance of the phenomenon [6], the proportion of studies related to the populist parties, movements, and leaders in the rest of the world is significantly inferior to the number of works on the Western agenda.

The second trend is the tradition to approach populism, mainly, as a manifestation of some kind of crisis of democratic 'normality' in the context of electoral processes and party competition in liberal democratic political systems [7-10]. For instance, as Brubaker [11] stresses supporting Mair [12; 13] and Kriesi [14], the transformation of parties and party systems in Europe and America and the weakening of representative democracy is the structural trend that expanded opportunities for populism. Mudde and Kaltwasser go further and claim that populism can be found first and foremost within the context of liberal democracy [10]. If so, does it mean that populism is an indistinctive phenomenon beyond democratic party systems or the Western world? Moreover, what should be done with cases discovered in the non-democratic or non-liberal context [15-18], do they have the potential to develop the theory of populism.

Therefore, my intention in this paper is to broaden the understanding of populism with the case of the revolution in Kyrgyzstan of October 2020 and the new Kyrgyz president Sadyr Japarov elected in January 2021. I believe that populism can be found beyond the Western left-right ideological opposition as well as to draw its strength and distinct symbolic content from alternative sources. Therefore, I am going to argue within the framework of Laclauian theory [19-21] that Japarov's political logic is essentially populist, although the Kyrgyz political system cannot be described as liberal or democratic. Moreover, I am convinced that the Kyrgyz case can contribute to the development of populism studies, while the theory of populism can suggest the further development of the situation in Kyrgyzstan.

In this regard, the object under study is Japarov's populist discourse [22-24] which is built on the construction of 'the Kyrgyz people' through the antagonism with 'the elite' formed by the so-called corrupted Kyrgyz bureaucrats and officials associated with the Sooronbai Jeenbekov's government ousted in October 2020. Claiming to represent the Kyrgyz people as an underdog of 'the corrupted officials' Japarov constructed the gap between the former and the latter emphasizing kinship relations between 'corrupted officials' or representing, in other words 'the elite' as a genealogically distinct group. Moreover, he formed the opposition between himself and the parliament as a reflection of the dichotomy between 'the people' and 'the corrupt officials' which allowed him to garner broad support during the presidential elections and substantiate the constitutional reform that significantly strengthened presidential powers in January 2021. Finally, the Kyrgyz case gives support for the Laclauian insight that anomie is a necessary precondition for populism that determines its specific forms and therefore essential for its understanding [20]. Clearly, Japarov's populism rests on the Soviet ideological and symbolic legacy rethought and upcycled for a new political context. It resurrected the Soviet concept of the people's democracy as a direct democracy to legitimize the constitutional reform of 2021 through the institution of the People's Kurultai which I discuss later. Also, Japarov's populism draws strength from the essentially Soviet understanding of the people as the synonym of a nation both of which are performed in ethnic terms. Finally, the Soviet symbolic legacy can be found in the specifics of his political style and rhetoric representing Japarov as the political leader of 'the people's origin' and, at the same time, an extraordinary person.

The paper is processed as follows. The first part is intended to fit the phenomenon of Kyrgyz populism with the theoretical paradigm of populism research and thereby substantiate the possibility of populism outside the Western political agenda. Based on Ernesto Laclau's approach, the specificity of Kyrgyz populism is explained through the concept of anomie, which links the logic of Japarov's populism with the specifics of Kyrgyzstani Post-Soviet political development. It allows defining his populist project as an attempt to overcome post-Soviet anomie and create a new social order after three failures of the nation-state project in 2005, 2010, and 2020.

In the second part, Sadyr Japarov's discourse [23-25], rhetoric [11], and style [6; 26] is examined to point out the common trends and techniques with populists of Europe and America. The drawing of different theoretical approaches intended, on the one hand, to verify from different standpoints the relevance of the Soviet ideological and symbolic background for Japarov's populism, and on the other hand, to evaluate the potential of these theories on the material from the non-democratic and non-liberal agenda. The fact that these theories work well in the Kyrgyz context raises the question of the degree to which the context of liberal democracy is important for understanding populism. It also points out that the issue of the symbolic origins of populism is still quite underestimated.

In the conclusion, some assumptions regarding the further development of populism in Kyrgyzstan are made. First, Japarov's populist mobilization was rapid and successful because it had no alternatives while the ethno-nationalist project of the 2000s was completely discredited but no viable alternatives were formulated in the 2010s. Therefore, it provided Japarov with strong credibility to win the presidential elections and carry out constitutional reform. For the same reason, it is highly likely that he will hold out in power at least until the end of his first presidential term (provided that no powerful challenges from outside Kyrgyzstan will play havoc with his plans). On the other hand, elected as a president Japarov crossed the political frontier that divided 'the Kyrgyz people' and the elite as 'the corrupt officials' associated himself with the latter. Moreover, this frontier still exists as well as the social demands of 'the people'. Therefore, Japarov has to satisfy at least some of these demands to destroy the frontier or the emergence of another populist politician is inevitable who will simply take Japarov's place as the people's leader. In this case, another political crisis or revolution may happen. Finally, the symbolic content of Japarov's populist project full of allusions to the Soviet past indicates his intention to break with everything associated with the post-Soviet transition period or 'the last thirty years of problems' including representative democracy, parliamentarism, and political pluralism. Therefore, there is reason to believe that in the coming years the political system of Kyrgyzstan will become more traditional and undemocratic.

Post-Soviet anomie and the nation-building in Kyrgyzstan

The first challenge that arises for one who is going to discuss Kyrgyz populism is to substantiate that populism, in general, is possible in Kyrgyzstan. Current approaches to populism as an ideology [4], an electoral strategy [3], or a political repertoire [11] portray populism as a (radical) right challenge to the contem-

porary liberal consensus. So, the very possibility of such a challenge may seem dubious in a society where liberal ideas and symbols have never been dominant.

However, another founding father of the contemporary theory of populism Ernesto Laclau offers a different approach to populism as “the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such”. He associated its origin with the concept of anomie or “the need for some kind of order that becomes more important than the actual ontic order” [20]. So, this profound insight gives a lot for understanding the phenomenon of populism in the societies of the former USSR since the deepest state of anomie stroke them a decade before and, at least, a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, it is necessary to turn to the events of the late 1980s when the collapse of the USSR was brewing preceded by a deep crisis of Soviet ideology and the rapid spread of anomie to find the origins of contemporary Post-Soviet populism.

As Michael Mann rightly remarked in his famous volume, by 1980 almost no one believed in Marxism-Leninism in the USSR while the Soviet society was embraced by ‘moral depletion’ [27]. Social fragmentation, nihilism, and cynicism among youth, the cult of a self-sufficient entrepreneur who does not feel any responsibility to the society in pursuit of individual prosperity came in place of the earlier ideal image of a Soviet citizen as ‘a builder of communism’ who was supposed to have a consciousness of societal duty, to be an active participant in labour for the benefit of society, ready for comradely mutual aid and intolerant towards speculators of people's property and everyone who acts only in selfish interests [28; 29].

At the same time, the disappointment with the existing social order embraced not only morality but almost all the ideas and concepts on which Soviet society held for a long time including Soviet multinationalism which was symbolically expressed by the metaphor ‘the friendship of the peoples’ or ‘the brotherhood of the peoples’ [30]. The national discourse that the Bolsheviks and the Soviet government long used to obtain mass support in the national republics turned against them as soon as its inability became evident to continue the policy, to say by Terry Martin words, of ‘affirmative action’ imperialism [30-33]. Moreover, since national identity was one of the few officially permitted forms of identity in the USSR (unlike of gender, religious, and class which were silenced for decades) it was not surprising that the protest engendered by the crisis of the Soviet system took the form of national separatism of the 1980s.

In the national discourse of the Soviet republics of the late 1980s, the ‘freedom’ in the sense of national independence was one of the strongest symbols representing, at the same time, the vivid example of an empty signifier that Laclau defined as a point of crystallization of a new identity and at the same time an expression of particular demands [20]. In the public discussions of the late Soviet times ‘freedom’ meant simultaneously getting rid of the rule of *the nomenklatura* (the communist party bureaucracy), discredited morality and the Iron Curtain as well as the obtaining by ‘the people’ civil rights and freedoms, parliamentarism, economic prosperity, and high living standards.

However, the situation in the Kyrgyz SSR (Soviet Socialistic Republic) was visibly different from Georgia, Armenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, or Ukraine with a mostly agricultural economy and the vast majority of the population living in rural areas. According to the 1989 census, the share of the urban population in the Kirghiz SSR was 38.2 % – the lowest figure among the republics of the USSR (except the Tajik SSR where this indicator was 33 %). At the same time, the Kyrgyz SSR had the lowest level of the so-called ‘titular nation’ among the urban population – 52.4 %. The rest identified themselves as Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, etc. Moreover, only 22.8 % of residents of Bishkek, the capital and the largest city of the Kyrgyz SSR, identified themselves as Kyrgyz while the rest were mainly Russians (55.7 %) ¹.

All the above explains why strong nationalist movements did not form in the Kyrgyz SSR. If to follow the modernist tradition in the nationalism studies it can be explained by the assumption that the nation-building process in Kyrgyzstan was at the very initial stage [34-36]. It was only the phase A, in the words of Miroslav Hroch [37] when the Soviet Union collapsed. At the same time, as Morozova points out, most of the Kyrgyz intelligentsia that appeared in 1960–1970 as a result of the Soviet welfare state project merged into *the nomenklatura*. They used a career in the communist party as a kind of social lift paying by loyalty for personal benefits [38]. Finally, since the processes of industrialization and urbanization were still very far from completion the potential of the ‘affirmative action empire’ was not yet exhausted making the economic benefits of being part of the USSR more attractive than the alluring prospects of independence. It seems like the latter was

¹ For the full data of the Soviet census of 1989 see *Demoscope Weekly*, available at <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/census.php?cy=6>, accessed 06 March 2021.

obvious to the elites as well as to the masses, given that 96.4 % of the population (the second largest indicator among the national republics after Turkmenistan) voted to preserve the USSR in the 1991 referendum². Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan had no choice other than independence given the nomenklatura from Bishkek had no role in the negotiating the Belovezhskoye agreement which ended the existence of the USSR.

As a result, the situation had become quite contradictory. On the one hand, the elites of Kyrgyzstan had to dress in nationalist clothes in order to maintain power and suppress political opponents, just as the nomenklatura had already done in other republics. Moreover, they had to give in to the demands of thin but rapidly growing nationalists to begin the institutionalization of a nation-state as well as to initialize the politics of nationalization in order to convert the population of the Kirghiz SSR into the Kirghiz nation. Consequently, informal nationalization practices in favour of 'titular nationality' spread, in the first instance, in the public sector, which was under the control of thin intelligentsia, the former party nomenklatura and new national leaders providing people defined as the Kyrgyz with privileges in competition for jobs, access to education, and informal communication practices [39; 40]. The discriminatory practices for minorities were even more open and rough legitimized by the Soviet tradition of ethnoterritorial federalism in which the national republics of the USSR were considered to belong to the nations whose names they bear [41; 42]. Paradoxically, but the logic of 'freedom' as the getting rid of Soviet values including 'the brotherhood of the peoples' meant that 'non-titular' ethnic groups are alien and therefore can be limited in rights and opportunities.

On the other hand, the leaders of independent Kyrgyzstan could foresee that radical nationalization would lead to large-scale emigration of the non-Kirgiz population, primarily Russians, who were a significant part of the high skilled urban population. Unlike the Baltic countries, for instance, well-known for their discriminatory politics towards the Russian minority, the 'titular' nation of Kyrgyzstan could hardly fill this gap on the labour market [39]. As a result, the first official project of the national ideology developed personally by the first president Askar Akayev was designed to soften the politics of nationalisation with the slogan 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home'³. It was a combination of the Soviet rhetoric of 'the friendship of peoples' and liberal values of equal rights and civil liberties which influenced Akayev during the first years of his rule. Its central idea was the 'international unity' in the sense of solidarity between nations like the Soviet 'brotherhood of peoples' which allowed ethnic non-Kyrgyz to become a full-fledged part of society. However, the new edition of Soviet multinationalism did not find support among the elites as well as the broad masses, especially because it required those who defined themselves as the 'titular nation' to give up attempts to secure a privileged position in society. Moreover, as Marat emphasizes, Akayev's ideas conflicted with Kyrgyzstan's constitution where 'titular nationality' and 'titular language' were just defined in ethnic terms in 1993 [43].

As a result, two competing visions of a nation framed in Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s and early 2000s: the president's project of 'common home' and the unofficial ethnonationalism. The strength of the former directly depended on the mass support of the president, which dropped to a minimum in the early 2000s. The reason was self-evident: contrary to the broad popular expectations, 'freedom' in the sense of national independence did not bring democracy and prosperity but followed by economic decline, new authoritarianism, poverty, and social disruption. The trigger for the broad popular protests that eventually led to the 2005 Tulip Revolution was the Aksy tragedy of 2002. The unrest was raised by the arrest of the local deputy of the Kyrgyz parliament Azimbek Beknazarov, who criticized the authorities for the signing of the border demarcation agreement with China in 2001 according to which Kyrgyzstan lost the part of Üzöngü-Kuush area [44]. As Beknazarov later stated, the issue was not just about the disputed land, but more about the manner how President Akaev made a decision without addressing all the members of Parliament and informing the general public. Moreover, the fact that the territories transferred to China were located in the south of Kyrgyzstan while the beneficiary of the deal supposed to be 'the northerners' (with the opportunities for obtaining Chinese loans and investments) allowed Beknazarov to accuse the government and personally president Akayev in regional factionalism [44]. As a result, six were killed when the people of Bospiek, the village in the South-West of Kyrgyzstan went on the demonstration against the transfer of Kyrgyz territories to China.

² For the full data see *Soobshchenie Central'noj komissii referendumov SSSR Ob itogah referendumov SSSR, sostoyavshegosya 17 marta 1991 goda*, available at https://www.gorby.ru/userfiles/file/referendum_rezultat.pdf, accessed 06 March 2021.

³ For more information about Askar Akayev national project see 43. Marat E. Imagined Past, Uncertain Future: The Creation of National Ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan // *Problems of post-communism*. 2008. Vol. 55, № 1. P. 12-24.

Explaining the crisis scholars usually address the problems of tribalism and separation by kinship including the excessive strengthening of president Akayev's family as well as to the traditional conflict of the northern and south-western elites divided both geographically and historically since the era of the Soviet Union and even before [45-48]. From this perspective, the Aksy tragedy can be explained as an example of regionalism and the weakness of democracy given that Kyrgyz society was almost at the very beginning of the modernization process [48].

However, another perspective on the events is possible given that the loss of territories in Üzöngü-Kuush was a largely symbolic issue because the transferred highlands were not inhabited, there were no proven resources and economic activities except occasional grazing. As Smith emphasizes, one of the key processes of nation formation is territorialization – the symbolical allocation of the majority of the community in the “homeland”, and the development of collective memories and attachments to particular historic territories within recognized borders [49]. Again, it was a long-term intellectual tradition in the Soviet Union and even earlier, in the Russian Empire to explain the existence of nations by a common territory and to associate national dignity with the size of the territory [41; 50]. Therefore, the tragedy in Aksy and the following Tulip revolution can be explained as the culmination of a rivalry between the two national projects, in which Akayev's project lost after being discredited by the government's economic failures. During the events, ethnic nationalism and lost lands of Üzöngü-Kuush became a symbol around which opponents of the regime were mobilized.

Unlike Askar Akayev, the new president of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiev, did not have his own national project. During his rule, ethnic nationalism continued to strengthen its position while no vestige remained of Akayev's ‘interethnic unity’ concept [43]. The attempts to raise political capital on the demands to provide the Kyrgyz with privileged status became customary for many politicians including Bakiyev himself. This explains why the next political crisis, the so-called Melon Revolution of 2010, was accompanied by unprecedented clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southwestern Kyrgyzstan. As a result of the riots, about 1000 people were killed, 2000 injured and 400 thousand displaced.⁴ International observers, as well as many scholars, blamed the Bakiyev government for the tragedy, pointing out the continuing discriminatory pressure on the Uzbek community [40; 51].

The international attention to the tragedy in Osh made the new government of Kyrgyzstan salience ethnic issues on the public agenda [52]. Trying to evade the negative perception of Kyrgyzstan as a weak state torn apart by internal conflicts government returned to the concept of ‘the friendship of peoples’ in the official discourse. However, unlike the Soviet times, it was just a rhetorical façade without an institutional framework. The ‘friendship’ meant the inability to discuss the causes and consequences of violence in Osh (since it was evidently far from friendship) and turned into a taboo on the public expression of ethno-national demands as well as the politicization of national identity in general. Indeed, the question remained open how the ‘friendship’ is possible after decades of discriminatory practices and violence without inter-ethnic reconciliation and open discussion of mutual grievances and demands.

Thus, the Kyrgyz national ideology made a loop from the Soviet institutionalized friendship of peoples to the declarative friendship of the peoples of the 2010s through the ethnic nationalism of the 2000s, which turned into the tragedies in Aksy and Osh, as well as the revolutions of 2005 and 2010. During this time, political elites have failed to go beyond the egg-like Soviet ideological paradigm with a thin layer of official multinationalism outside and a deep hidden ethnonationalism inside and formulate an ideological project for a new Kyrgyz nation-state. In other words, it was an era of chronic anomie, or to say by Laclau's words, the long-lasting situation of uncertainty and crisis when the need for some kind of order has become more important than the actual ontic order [20].

The important specificity of the Kyrgyz case of anomie was that the previous social order had been destroyed as a result of the external processes, mainly by the collapse of the USSR, and therefore it was not preceded by the emergence of extended ‘equivalential chain of unsatisfied demands’ in Kyrgyz society [20; 21]. Civic nationalism in the spirit of Akayev's ‘common home’ project could become the ‘common denominator’ [20], however, the economic crisis of the 1990s and the slide of Akayev's regime into authoritarianism, again, thwarted the creation of the stable social order. Likewise, the revolutions of 2005 and 2010 were not successful

⁴ For more information about events in Osh see Kyrgyzstan: *Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South*. Crisis Group Asia Report N°222, 29 March 2012, available at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/222-kyrgyzstan-widening-ethnic-divisions-in-the-south.pdf>, accessed 06 March 2021.

because the social demands of the opposition were limited by ethno-nationalist foundations. Therefore, new political crises were inevitable since there were no signs of consolidation. The next revolution happened in October 2020, when massive violations during the elections to the *Jogorku Kenesh* (the unicameral Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic) led to massive protests in Bishkek and the resignation of President Sooronbai Jeenbekov.

Sadyr Japarov's populist logic

Perhaps the most interesting fact of Sadyr Japarov's political career is that he did not run in the parliamentary elections of 2020 that were the main reason for unrest, and even more, he was imprisoned when the protests had begun. Only on October 6, he was released by supporters and then immediately appointed as the prime minister by the Kyrgyz parliament. Afterwards, without any public debates or discussions, Japarov was appointed by the parliament to act as President of Kyrgyzstan on October 15, 2020.

a) *'The people' and 'the elite' as nodal points*. From the very beginning of his new political career, just after being released from prison, Japarov built his political discourse on the construction of the 'people' through the antagonism between 'the people' and 'the elite' along the vertical down / up axis claiming to represent 'the people' as an underdog of illegitimate 'elite' [22]. In Japarov's interpretation, the Kyrgyz people are a victim of the corrupt officials who has literally robbed the people using criminal schemes by appropriating money from the budget (i.e., money that should serve the needs of 'the people'). In an address dated October 21, 2020 (the only address on the official website of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic from October 2020 to January 2021), he stated:

Over the past 30 years, systemic corruption schemes have flourished in industries such as energy, customs and tax services, pharmaceuticals, licensing, subsoil use and others. In this regard, corrupt officials who organized criminal schemes, profiting from the common people, robbing them [...] I GIVE YOU 30 DAYS !!! I want you to disclose everything and provide real information about the available facts. Everything that was grabbed by you, I demand to return to the state treasury! [...] This is the demand of the people! This is the goal of the people who have entrusted me with the fate of the country [53].

This is a very vivid appeal in which Japarov not only claims to represent the people but also demands on behalf of the people and then (not included in the citation) also threatens with 'the most stringent measures' on behalf of the people. Moreover, here we can see how an equivalent chain is being formulated: the people determined not through something positive they have in common, but through the fact that all of them were 'robbed' by 'the officials' [20, 22-24].

During the presidential election campaign, which began on November 14, 2020, Sadyr Japarov actively used the technique of engaging in correspondence polemics with anonymous opponents from among 'corrupted officials' (although, he had never mentioned specific names). However, while arguing with this imaginary opposition, he appealed to 'the people' as witnesses to 'the crimes' of the past regime and blamed 'the corrupted officials' who were in power before the revolution of 2020 for all the troubles. At a rally in Talas, he addressed the townspeople:

Many of the existing problems are [...] the result of bureaucratic delays and corruption schemes. Relocation and reconstruction of the cattle market, which you have been waiting for so long, solving the issue of flooding and launching drainage systems, renovating a school, etc. - all this is can be resolved very quickly. You just need to change the system [...] In the future, it will work on the principles of serving the people and responsibility to them!⁵

This way, the wide range of demands of various social groups, whether they concerned the renovation of a school or the reconstruction of a cattle market, was homogenized *vis-a-vis* 'the corrupt officials' – a true outside of the excluded identity [20] in order to form 'the people's identity'.

b) *Deepening the gap between 'the people' and 'the officials'*. As De Cleen emphasizes, the category of people has to be opposed to 'the elite', or 'the establishment' by symbolic manners of pointing out the 'high' position of 'elite' and its disconnection from the 'low'. It can include references to 'the elite' in its 'ivory tower', or to the well-off neighborhoods where they live, the kinds of houses they live in, and the kind of cafés and restaurants they visit [22]. In other words, populist logic requires drawing a gap between 'the peo-

⁵ Sadyr Zhaparov: Byt' prezidentom Kyrgyzstana – sluzhit' narodu Kyrgyzstana! [Online]. AKIpress, 15 December 2020, available at <https://kg.akipress.org/news:1668614>, accessed 06 March 2021.

ple' and 'the elite' making this gap as profound as possible, ideally, completely insuperable. Japarov draws this gap, emphasizing kinship relations between 'corrupted officials':

In our republic, about 250–300 families have settled 'at the top' over the past 30 years. Only they are engaged in corruption, they steal from the budget. It is plainly visible. Everyone is visible. They know, and all the people know, that they are corrupt. Only they steal, only their children get jobs in the civil service, and this has been going on for decades [54].

It seems very interesting that Japarov exploits stereotypes about Kyrgyzstan as a country in which the politics and state institutions are subordinated to clan and kinship interests. Although the difference in Japarov's rhetoric lies in the fact that he calls patronage a characteristic feature of 'the elite', i.e. 'the corrupt officials'. At the same time, it is supposed that 'the people' who are not associated with the 'families at the top' do not participate in the vicious practice of patronage just because they do not have the appropriate personal network. Thus, through the idea of kinship, the biologisation of 'the people' and 'the elite' occurs constructing them as different groups with separate genealogy.

Special attention should also be paid to the words 'the past 30 years', which produce more negative connotations for the image of 'the corrupted officials' symbolically linking it to the era of chronic anomie (even without distinctions between the times of such leaders as Akayev and Bakiev). Japarov constantly claims that during the years of his presidency, the vicious practices from the past will be terminated:

For 30 years it was practiced that if someone [from 'the elite'] does not get a position, then they immediately created a ministry [to appoint one as a minister]. They spend billions from the treasury, while not bringing any benefit to the people ... [now] we have reduced everything unnecessary, there are only 12 ministries left [55].

Accordingly, it will be finished with the practice of providing privileges through kinship:

... now is not the time to be at war or become related. Forget the past for the sake of the people, for the sake of the future state. Let's be patient. The Almighty is on the side of the patient. We attract to each ministry, not trough pull as before but hire specialists from these industries. Everyone must do their job [55].

Thus, the reader can get a feeling that there will be no 'corrupt officials' soon. So, 'the people' will restore their integrity and homogeneity or, in Laclau's words, their historical singularity [20]. However, the fact that this moment was carried over to an uncertain future only underlined the deep split between 'the people' and 'the elite' in the present.

c) *Japarov as a populist leader.* Finally, a common strategy for populist leaders is to legitimize their own claims to power by presenting themselves as the true voice of the people [10]. Japarov achieves this aim with two basic rhetorical techniques. On the one hand, he emphasizes the correspondence of his own life to what is defined as 'the people's' way of life. The experience of being in prison is especially helpful for him in this regard. It works for Japarov as proof of his intimate connection with 'the people' and, consequently, his profound understanding of 'the people's' needs. In an interview with the Kommersant newspaper, Japarov said:

After I was released from the prison, as soon as the people appointed me as prime minister, I thought that God had sent me there on purpose to see who was in prison, their truth. 90–95 % of them are ordinary citizens. Not a single official, the son of an official, or relatives of officials is there. The 5–10 % of them are criminals who have devoted their entire lives to crime. And the 90 % are ordinary people: who stole a phone, who stole a chicken [54].

The same goal of forming the symbolic link between Japarov and 'the people' had the constitutional reform initiated in parallel with the presidential elections. The essence of the proposed changes was to broaden the powers of the president at the expense of the parliament⁶. In the context of populist logic, it is

⁶ For more information about the constitutional reform in Kyrgyzstan see Kyrgyz Parliament Approves Constitutional-Amendments Law In First Reading, *RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service*, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyz-parliament-approves-constitutional-amendments-law-in-first-reading/30992400.html>, accessed 11 February 2021.

highly important that the reform was explained by Japarov and his supporters as an act to protect ‘the people’ from ‘the corrupt officials’ who get their positions in the parliament by bribes and kin relations. The same was called the reason for the inability of parliamentary parties to work for ‘the people’ [56]. In other words, the opposition between the president and the parliament was constructed as a reflection of the opposition between ‘the people’ and ‘the corrupt officials’. As Japarov stated in his official election program, ‘now the president is personally responsible’ to the people [57]. Therefore, the re-enforcement of the president’s power symbolically meant the strengthening of ‘the people’. The amendments to the Constitution were approved on January 10, 2021, on the same day that Japarov was elected President of Kyrgyzstan. Thus, the populist logic received an institutional embodiment.

On the other hand, Japarov legitimized his claims emphasizing his separation from the ‘anti-popular’ policy of the past. This is one of his Facebook posts in which he gets into polemics with unnamed opponents.

They personally proved that they had been stealing for thirty years, while forgetting about their duty to the people. From now on, we must learn to reckon with the people, and if someone does not want this, then we will teach [...] As it turned out, these people are accustomed to freely using the benefits of the people for their own purposes and to change the constitution solely in their own interests. And now, when they see that they are about to lose their free feeding trough, they began to fight desperately, arranging useless, hopeless rallies. In this vein, I would like to say: “Don't try, people woke up long ago and understood your ulterior motives long ago, and nothing will help you!” [58]

Here we have a vivid example of Laclau’s empty signifier [20] since the reader is not given a positive definition of who ‘they’ are, however, the reader can understand that ‘they’ are not ‘the people’ and Japarov stands apart from ‘them’.

Thus, Japarov’s populist developed as another attempt to overcome post-Soviet anomie and create a new stable social order after two failures in 2005 and 2010. Notably, for this purpose, he draws on symbols from the Soviet past which is widely perceived as the era *before* the ‘last thirty years’ of troubles. The Soviet symbolic footprint can be found in the concept of ‘corrupt officials’ which has much in common with the communist party nomenklatura as an enemy of ‘the people’s freedom’ of the late 1980s. Moreover, it is clearly the Soviet tradition of understanding the nation in the spirit of ethno-nationalism that still dominates in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, there is no escaping the fact that the concepts of ‘robbing of the people’s property’, selfishness and nepotism, which make it possible to define ‘the people’ as all those who are not involved in such ‘crimes’, actually repeat the ‘deadly sins’ of the ‘builder of communism’ [28] and therefore associated with Soviet official morality.

All this explains why Japarov’s project has a shortage of left or right, socialist or neoliberal content, since none of this has a symbolic meaning for Kyrgyz society. As an alternative, it draws on symbols from the Soviet past. Indeed, this is not just copying, but to a greater extent, a creative rethinking of outgoing ideas and symbols that are still circulating in society and have the potential to be rethought and upcycled in a new populist project. Therefore, in the next part of the paper, I am going to address the phenomenon of symbolic upcycling in the context of shaping Japarov’s populist repertoire.

The upcycling of pre-existing symbols and meanings

One of the prominent researchers of nationalism Anthony D. Smith has continuously argued that nationalist identity is inevitably associated with the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations. and the identification of individuals with that pattern and heritage [49, 59, 60]. Although populist discourse has a number of important differences from the nationalist, both are closely interconnected as well as related to the phenomenon of identity [23, 25, 61, 62]. Therefore, there is the reason, in the spirit of Smith’s ethnosymbolic approach, to assume that populists cannot ignore the values, symbols and myths of the past commonly perceived as meaningful. At the same time, since the rise of populism is associated with anomie and the rejection of a certain ‘ontic order’ [20], symbols cannot be directly borrowed from the past without some kind of rethinking or, to say metaphorically, upcycling.

Upcycling is a term from the industrial lexicon often defined as value-added recycling. This metaphor seems very appropriate for explaining the ability of populists to achieve broad popularity quickly and unexpectedly without profound ideological preparations. For example, in the case of Sadyr Japarov, it took only three months from the moment of his release from prison until he was elected president of Kyrgyzstan. The

point is that symbolic upcycling, like the industrial one, saves resources on the production of social myths in a time when social reproduction depends less and less on repetitive practices and requires the constant production of social myths [63]. Japarov's myth, as shown above, is a kind of myth about the 'golden age', the myth about the era before the 'last thirty years' of troubles, the era when the people were a singularity, i.e. there were no 'corrupt officials'. This myth is formed with the help of three constitutive elements: the people's democracy, the people's nationalism, and the Japarov's self-performance as leader of the people's origin.

a) *The people's democracy.* Researchers usually agree that the claim to regain the people's control over political decision-making which is believed to had been usurped by elites is the crucial element of populist's rhetoric [11, 64-66]. In the context of the Kyrgyz agenda, it eloquently expressed by Japarov's idea of constitutional reform. As mentioned above, the reform aims to significantly reduce the powers of the parliament and, accordingly, the parliamentary parties, which Japarov has repeatedly accused of being unable to represent the interests of the people:

All versions of the Constitution, including the current one, stipulate that the source of power is the people. However, in reality, the people of Kyrgyzstan can only exercise their power once every five years by voting in elections. But in the elections, the votes are traded and then the government forgets about the people for five years. The leaders of the country are doing malign deeds, engaging in corruption, and the people will learn about their deeds only after a few years⁷.

Not surprisingly this initiative raised a wave of criticism precisely from the point of view of compliance with democratic norms. However, Japarov had a ready-made answer – the People's Kurultai⁸ – a deliberative, supervisory assembly with the mandate to hear the reports of the President, the Torog of the Jogorku Kenesh (the Chair of the Kyrgyz parliament), and to make proposals on the malpractice of officials. As Japarov himself stated:

Kurultai is a time-tested advisory institution and control body. We, the Kyrgyz, understand it at the genetic level. Kurultai is the very essence of direct democracy, just like a referendum. When the president, government and parliament are ANNUALLY accountable to citizens, it will be difficult for those in power to cheat. A representative from each village will be able to come and ask for the promises made by high-ranking officials⁹.

In the history of contemporary Kyrgyzstan, the People's Kurultai was not a Japarov's invention. The institution was already assembled in Kyrgyzstan in 1994 and 1995, although, the only discussed issue was relations between ethnic groups. Later, in 2001, the kurultais (in plural) were brought back for local communities with the principles of recruitment and functions resembling the soviets of people's deputies of the last years of the Soviet Union¹⁰. Like the soviets, the kurultais were not supposed to be a body ruled by professional politicians and parties, they have no place for party struggles, complex procedural issues, and long debates. Kurultais were presented as a tribune where 'ordinary people' could speak, and the authorities would hear their opinion and act accordingly. In other words, both were supposed to be institutions of direct rather than representative democracy. However, in practice, like the soviets, kurultais were completely under

⁷ Sadyr Zhaparov: Kurultaj – eto samaya sut' pryamoj demokratii. *VESTI.KG*, 24 December 2020, available at: <https://vesti.kg/politika/item/80041-sadyr-zhaparov-kurultaj-eto-samaya-sut-pryamoj-demokratii.html>, accessed 06 March 2021.

⁸ Historically, Kurultai, first introduced in the Mongol Empire in the 13th century, was a congress of Mongolian and Turkic princes and nobility. At kurultais important state issues were resolved including such as the election of a new khan. In Central Asia, kurultais remained in this form until the beginning of the 20th century. Since the end of the 20th century, the term 'kurultai' has been used in the regions with the Turkic-speaking population as a synonym for 'parliament' in the sense of a body of popular representation.

⁹ Sadyr Zhaparov: Kurultaj – eto samaya sut' pryamoj demokratii. *VESTI.KG*, 24 December 2020, available at: <https://vesti.kg/politika/item/80041-sadyr-zhaparov-kurultaj-eto-samaya-sut-pryamoj-demokratii.html>, accessed 06 March 2021.

¹⁰ For more information about the People's Kurultai of 2001 see Ukaz prezidenta Kyrgyzskoj respubliky O merah po povysheniyu roli narodnyh kurultaev predstavitelej mestnyh soobshchestv Kyrgyzskoj Respubliki v upravlenii delami mestnogo znacheniya. UP 152. Kyrgyzstan, available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/2152>, accessed 02 March 2021; to compare with the soviets of people's deputies of the Soviet Union see Fokin, A. Vybory v SSSR v 1960–1970-e gg.: simulyaciya ili element demokratii? *Soviet History Discussion Papers*, 5, 2014, available at: https://perspectivia.net/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/ploneimport_derivate_00011424/fokin_elections.doc.pdf, accessed 01 March 2021.

the control of the authorities and used to influence public opinion to consolidate a position and to legitimize unpopular policies. It is very notable in this context that during the Tulip revolution of 2005, the kurultais were organized by opposition to create solidary and purposive incentives to unite different groups of protestors [67] – precisely the same role was played by the soviets of people's deputies in the USSR in 1989–1991.

In the Japarov's constitution project the system of local kurultais was headed with the People's Kurultai resembling the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyz SSR. Although the latter had legislative powers, which were not provided for the former, this difference does not seem significant, since in the Soviet political practice the Supreme Soviets of the national republics did not have their own voice and followed the course of the Communist party [68]. The more important is that reform looks like the transition of power from the parliament which symbolizes 'the elite' to the People's Kurultai resembling 'the people's democracy' of the Soviet times with an emphasis on its direct, majority character (it does not matter if it was actually a democracy or not).

b) The people's nationalism. The relation between populism and nationalism is still a subject of active discussion among researchers [23; 25; 69; 70]. And although most scholars agree that these are two separate phenomena, the question remains about the degree of their correlation and the possibility of separating the first from the second, or, in other words, the perspectives to get pure populism without nationalism [25; 70]. In the context of these debates, the case of Kyrgyzstan is an example of the inextricable connection between nationalist and populist discourse and their mutual reinforcement with common symbols and meanings because the concepts of people and nation are widely used in Kyrgyzstan as synonyms, although their meaning is not identical.

Following the Soviet tradition, the Kyrgyz nation has been broadly defined for many decades in ethnic and exclusivist terms as a community of people that differs from others in common culture, language and origin [71]. Notably, that it is precisely the Soviet legacy to understand national culture as a, mainly, traditional culture with special emphasis on its folklore and ethnographic [33, 42, 72]. The latter became the reason why the development of nationalism in Central Asia has little alternatives but to develop by the practices of traditionalisation [73]. As a result, although paradoxical to a certain extent, the invention of national traditions and identification in modern Kyrgyzstan were followed by denying the Soviet heritage as the symbol of modernity, especially regarding gender equality and secularism [74]. This explains why nationalism in Kyrgyzstan was usually presented by its agents in the rhetoric of 'national revival' or return to the original, pure, and unspoiled forms of the national culture of pre-Soviet (and even pre-imperial) times. Thus, the categories of profound spirituality, wisdom, and pure morality became the central for national discourse. At the same time, following the Soviet tradition, the very fact of the existence of the Kyrgyz nation before the Soviet Union has been widely recognized and never contested.

Morality is also a category that is very significant for populist discourse in which the 'pure people' is opposed to the 'corrupted elite' [10]. The combination with the national discourse allows Japarov to construct 'the people' using it as a synonym for the nation. With this technique, he does not need to prove the purity of 'the Kyrgyz people', which is simply borrowed from the national discourse:

The great Kyrgyz people, as evidenced by thousand-year life experience, embodying the true nomadic spirit only then made a conscious conclusion when comprehending what he saw with his heart. The ability to discern the essence of everything, to blur together with nature, to choose a place for a camp, an interest in a pedigree, readiness for self-sacrifice for the Fatherland, self-identification as a nation – all this together formed a national character, a way of life and was embodied in the wisdom of the people ... If we look at wise popular aphorisms, proverbs and folksays, and even on ornaments and patterns, then we discover the deep philosophy hidden in them. Preserving, honouring national traditions, the spiritual heritage of the Kyrgyz people is one of the important components of Sadyr Japarov's position as a leader and statesman¹¹.

Populism is inseparable from nationalism in this citation, and both discourses are united in order to substantiate Japarov's claims to represent both the people and the nation at the same time. And although there is no victimization of the people in this text and nothing is said about 'the corrupt officials' it should be considered as one of the pieces of 'the people' mosaic designed to divide society into two camps, one of which – the people – claims to be a whole [20], i.e. a nation, leaving no social field for the existence of the 'corrupt officials'.

¹¹ Logotip predvybornoj kampanii kandidata v prezidenty KR Sadyra Zhaparova, available at: <https://zhaparov.kg/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Istoriya-logotipa-Kandidata-1.pdf>, accessed 06 March 2021.

c) *The people's leader*. Japarov's behaviour pattern as a populist leader correlates well with Ostiguy's [26] 'low' style of communication, i.e. simplistic and straightforward public image pretending, at the same time, to be frank, credible and also strengthened with vernacular rhetoric. As Moffitt points, in this way, through 'bad manners' populists pursue the goal of separating themselves from other political actors and at the same time emphasizing their closeness to the people [6]. It is the reason why populists valorize common sense and first-hand experience as 'the people's wisdom' over abstract and experience-distant forms of knowledge [11]. Finally, it means that the leader of the people has to break the rules of 'good manners' in the name of the people.

In Kyrgyz politics, Sadyr Japarov is the very kind of politician who exploits the 'low' style. He performs it like the reincarnation of the Soviet myth about a politician from the working class, unprofessional in politics, but possessing 'people's wisdom' due to his contiguity to the people. Of course, new technologies have changed the meaning of the people's lifestyle. Following the recent trends, Japarov distinguished himself by pretending that messages in WhatsApp and posts on Facebook¹² and Instagram¹³ are his main channels of communication with the people.

[I] created groups in Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Instagram. I have collected people's contacts on WhatsApp and created over 50 groups there – one group holds 256 contacts. Through these groups, I spread information [...] about my work. So, in three and a half years I reached all the people [54].

As in the case of other populists, the utilization of social media was intended to achieve two main goals: to separate Japarov from 'the elite' as well as to associate him with 'the people'. To start from the first, Japarov pretends to address the people directly, bypassing mainstream media, which are suspected of conspiring with 'the corrupt officials' and therefore 'trying to hide the truth'. This made it possible to strengthen the opposition between 'the people' and 'the elite' as a similitude of the opposition between 'popular' social media and 'corrupted' mainstream media. Indeed, the rhetoric of mistrust in the media was not an invention of Japarov since it has already been actively used by European and American populists many years before [75-77]. However, Japarov's case is interesting because he directs criticism at journalists accusing them of misrepresenting and denigrating him in their broadcasts and materials 'by order of the West' [78]. In this rhetoric, another vivid example of the close relationship between populist and nationalist discourses can be found. Japarov's critics from among journalists are suspected not only in corruption (as 'other' along the vertical up/bottom axis) but in conspirations with the West (as 'other' along the horizontal nation/outside axis) [25].

What is especially interesting is that the 'other' in national terms does not embrace Russia or other countries from the former USSR with which Kyrgyzstan has intensive relations but 'the West' in the sense of Western Europe and the United States whose presence in Kyrgyzstan is limited, mainly, to the support of NGOs. Therefore, the question arises why Japarov pays so much attention to the West and accuses Western countries of conspiring with corrupt officials and journalists. The answer can be found, again, in the symbolical legacy of the Soviet nationalist discourse. During the Soviet times, the West was the main scapegoat for the Soviet press and officials blamed it for the numerous troubles of the Soviet people like the growth of drug addiction or the failures of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Among other things, this allowed the authorities to turn a blind eye to any criticism portraying it as part of the Western 'anti-Soviet activities'. Since then, the image of the West as a source of the people's troubles has been constantly reproduced in the Kyrgyz political discourse especially towards non-governmental organizations whose criticism of the authorities was usually disavowed by the latter with reciprocal accusations of NGOs in serving as 'foreign agents' of Western states [79]. Japarov's innovation was only in the linking 'the agents of influence' concept and 'the corrupt officials' which allows him to maintain the public image of a politician who is far from everything non-popular whatever it is bureaucracy or the West.

To continue with social media, posts on Facebook and Instagram also aimed to position Japarov as a person who communicates with friends and supporters by phone, who writes messages on Facebook and Instagram along the way as many ordinary Kyrgyz do. Publications often contain photographs taken deliberately unprofessionally on a phone with a bad camera with a blurred background, or with a shaking picture creating the impression of an ordinary person with a simple phone who shares pictures and videos made by himself on the streets. Moreover, Zhaparov's publications contain many grammatical mistakes as well as

¹² Account on Facebook available at: <https://www.facebook.com/japarov.sadyr>, accessed 06 March 2021.

¹³ Account on Instagram available at: https://www.instagram.com/sadyr_japarov/, accessed 06 March 2021.

simplified, emotionally charged vocabulary such as ‘how can you tell such a lie’ or ‘do not shame yourself’ that create the impression that there are no editors and proofreaders between Japarov and the people.

Finally, some words about one more important characteristic of Japarov’s style. It is the intention to present himself as the politician of ‘the people’s origin’ with allusions to the Soviet style of political leadership. As Moffitt stresses, populist leaders utilize not only ‘bad manners’ to emphasize their ordinariness, but also perform extraordinariness in the sense of presenting themselves as the singular figure who can fix ‘the people’s’ problems [6]. Creating this myth populists tend to exaggerate their own professional qualities, masculinity, national identity as well as to deny the inability to solve very complex, sometimes even global problems in a short time in power. However, Japarov's style is characterized by a rather unusual performance of extraordinary. To start with his self-conscious moderateness: he does not wear clothes of bright colours (and never coloured ties), he refused a solemn cortege, a banquet, and festive events on the day of the inauguration, and he does not enter into debates with political opponents suggesting that people should judge him by his deeds only. On the Defender of the Fatherland Day, February 23, celebrated in Kyrgyzstan since the times of the USSR, Japarov posted on Instagram a black and white photo of his compulsory service in the Soviet army (1987-1989), in which he appears in the uniform of a junior sergeant without any orders or medals [80] (which is in great contrast, for example, with many cases of Latin American populists who are boast of their high military ranks and numerous awards).

To continue, Japarov does not claim to be able to change radically the country alone and constantly emphasizes that he needs the assistance of the entire people to implement his socio-economic program, in particular, the development of energetics [81]. Also, despite his strong inclination towards ethnic nationalism, Japarov does not resort to aggressive rhetoric towards ethnic minorities. On the contrary, he constantly emphasizes the intention to preserve the official status of the Russian language and even kindly invites Russian tourists to the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul:

The possibility of recreation and tourism in Kyrgyzstan is not a novelty for Russians since, during the Soviet times, cycling, rock climbing, mountaineering and long-distance hiking in the Kyrgyz SSR was very famous and popular. Soviet guides included mountain routes in our country. For example, the leading Soviet tourist magazine *Tourist* published many articles on the tourist routes of the Kirghiz SSR. Also, in Soviet times, cosmonauts were sent annually to the coast of Issyk-Kul for rehabilitation, treatment and rest [82].

The mention of the Soviet times, magazine, and Kirghiz SSR in this quote, as well as the photograph in the uniform of the Soviet army on Instagram, are not accidental. All these are allusions to the Soviet style of political leadership in which the leader had to be simple and moderate because it was a leader of ‘the people’s origin’. Positioning the Soviet Union as a state of the working class, Soviet propaganda constantly emphasized the working-class or the people’s origin of the Soviet political elite [83, 84]. As a rule, there was nothing extraordinary in their official biographies: birth in a working-class family, conscript service in the army, work in junior positions at a factory (official biographies were usually silent about other sources of career success such as personal networks and patronage). The official biography of Japarov is also built according to Soviet canons. It begins with ‘ordinary’ childhood:

from the cradle, he understood what the responsibility is. The family was large – 11 brothers and sisters. He had to wear clothes and shoes for his older brothers. He, like all children, cleaned the barn, mowed the grass, weeded the beds, looked after the cattle. The father raised the children in severity. He could give a slap on the head. But Sadyr got it the least. Why? He was absolutely honest and very diligent.

Continues with the ‘ordinary’ career start:

After [his] leaving school, the question of choosing a profession arose. He got a job as a worker at the Santash communal farm, and in the same year, he entered the Kyrgyz State Institute of Physical Culture. His teacher and trainer Medetbek Bukuev say that in those years Sadyr Zhaparov had been already distinguished among young people by his humanity and goodness¹⁴.

¹⁴ *Osobyj put' Sadyra Zhaparova*, available at: <https://zhaparov.kg/osobyj-put-sadyra-zhaparova/> (accessed 06 March 2021).

Indeed, Japarov's outstanding personal qualities are emphasized literally in every paragraph of his biography. He is portrayed as the person extraordinary in his ordinariness with allusions to the classics of Soviet literature 'How the Steel Was Tempered' by Nikolay Ostrovsky as well as to the discourse of the official biographies of the Soviet leaders. Following these allusions one who is well acquainted with Soviet literature, propaganda and ideology will easily understand that this is a biography of a leader of 'the people's origin' and therefore, undoubtedly, an extraordinary person.

Conclusion

Among other cases of populism Sadyr Japarov's mobilization excels for its swiftness and efficiency. In just 3 months he managed to make his way from a prisoner to the President of Kyrgyzstan as well as gain widespread support for constitutional reform in a referendum. There are two important reasons for the success. Firstly, his platform did not have strong alternatives since the ethno-nationalist project of the 2000s was completely discredited, but no viable alternative was formulated in the 2010s. In the conditions of prolonged anomie, Japarov's populism gave hope for the emergence of a new social order to all those who were not satisfied with the ontic order of the 1990–2010s. The involvement of the Soviet symbolic legacy upcycled to the new realities promised that the new order would be similar to the Soviet past, rather than the last thirty years of uncertainty. The lack of alternatives at present suggests that Japarov will remain in power at least until the end of his first presidential term (provided that no powerful challenges from outside Kyrgyzstan will play havoc with his plans).

However, the use of populist logic has its cost. During recent months, Japarov has constructed a frontier between the Kyrgyz people and 'the corrupt officials' claiming to represent the will of the people. When he became the president, Japarov de facto crossed this frontier as head of the state apparatus and, accordingly, the state bureaucracy. Such a contradictory situation cannot last long, especially given that the frontier still exists as well as the social demands of the people. Therefore, Japarov has to satisfy at least some of these demands to destroy the frontier. Otherwise, the rise of another populist politician is inevitable who will simply take Japarov's place as the people's leader.

Finally, the symbolic content of Japarov's populist project full of allusions to the Soviet past indicates his intention to break with everything associated with the post-Soviet transition period (except for Soviet ethno-nationalism which was widely used in the 1990–2010s). Especially given that there is no place for representative democracy, parliamentarism and political pluralism in the Soviet legacy. Accordingly, there is no reason to expect that Japarov's political regime will be more liberal and democratic than his predecessors. On the contrary, one should expect the strengthening of the traditionalist and authoritarian tendencies. This can lead to the transformation of Japarov's populism through the rethinking of the categories of the people and the elite as floating designators to reconsolidate the first against new 'enemies of the people' (again, through the upcycling of the Soviet category of 'enemies of the people'). As a result, repressions against political opponents are possible, as well as the violent suppression of any opposition.

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РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ В КЫРГЫЗСТАНЕ 2020 ГОДА И ПОПУЛИСТСКИЙ ПРОЕКТ САДЫРА ЖАПАРОВА

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Данная статья затрагивает две тенденции в современных исследованиях популизма. Первую можно определить как эмпирический западоцентризм. Она выражается в доминировании европейской и американской повестки дня в основных работах о популизме. Хотя некоторые исследователи подчеркивают глобальное значение этого явления, доля трудов, посвященных популистским партиям, движениям и лидерам в остальном мире, значительно уступает количеству работ по западной проблематике. Вторая тенденция – традиция подходить к популизму, главным образом как к проявлению некоего кризиса демократической «нормальности» в контексте избирательных процессов и партийной конкуренции в либерально-демократических политических системах. Соответственно, снова возникает вопрос: означает ли это, что популизм – явление, не выходящее за рамки демократических партийных систем или западного мира? И как тогда быть со случаями, обнаруженными в недемократическом или нелиберальном контексте? Есть ли у них потенциал для развития теории популизма? Поэтому мы намерены в этой статье расширить понимание популизма на примере революции в Кыргызстане в октябре 2020 года и избрания нового президента Кыргызстана Садыра Жапарова в январе 2021 года. Мы считаем, что популизм можно найти за пределами западных левых и правых политических партий и движений и что этот феномен может черпать силу и характерное символическое содержание из альтернативных источников. Поэтому мы собираемся доказать, опираясь на подход Э. Лакло, что политическая логика Жапарова по существу популистская, хотя политическую систему Кыргызстана нельзя назвать либеральной или демократической. Более того, мы убеждены, что случай с Кыргызстаном может способствовать развитию исследований популизма, тогда как, согласно той же теории популизма, ситуация в Кыргызстане будет и дальше развиваться.

Ключевые слова: популизм, национализм, этнонационализм, популистский национализм, Кыргызстан, Садыр Жапаров.

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