

## The affective politics of sovereignty: reflecting on the 2010 conflict in Kyrgyzstan

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This article examines the concept of sovereignty in elite and popular affection during the violent and turbulent events from April to October 2010 in the Kyrgyz Republic. Nationalist leaders promoted Kyrgyz ethnic values and ideals as the center of sovereignty held by some to be under threat. These events exemplify what we describe as the *affective politics of sovereignty*. We explore how emotion, in particular, serves as an important component of the constitution of sovereignty as both an international and popular institution. We explore how Kyrgyz identity has become intertwined with the sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan and clashes with Western multi-ethnic conceptions and practices.

**Keywords:** affective politics; sovereignty; ethnogenesis; ethnicity; conflict; Kyrgyzstan; Kyrgyz

### Introduction

State sovereignty is often viewed as the legal recognition of full control over a given territory by government. What happens when the state is viewed as representative of ethno-linguistic identity, where popular sovereignty is inextricably bound to that identity, and the quest to establish authority within the country becomes a matter of personhood? The 2010 events in the Kyrgyz Republic<sup>1</sup> are such as case. In what we call the affective politics of sovereignty, we examine the period from April to October 2010, a period marked by political instability and violence. Fear, one of the most prevalent emotions during this period, was fueled by the idea of Kyrgyz control over the state slipping away. It underlines how identity has been constructed as intricately linked with the ethno-nationally defined state to the extent that some argue that there would be no state without it being under the control of the ethnic Kyrgyz.

We elaborate several ethnographic accounts during this period that highlight anxieties and fears about the place of the Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan. Together with this, we explore Western views on sovereignty to argue that their misrecognition of affective politics prohibits a closer understanding of some issues at the heart of the 2010 events. We examine how a Western internationalist conception of sovereignty, as something which is contingent on certain standards of civilization and can be built with external assistance, clashes with local sentiments in the dispassionate analyzes of the conflict by foreign organizations. Further,

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we explore the different understandings and ramifications this has within the country during this time.

This article considers merely a sample of the many different issues and events where sovereignty came into question in elite and popular politics in Kyrgyzstan during the 2010 crisis. We do not make a claim about the frequency or instrumental effects of these contentions of sovereignty, but only that they are part of a broader nationalizing trend in post-Soviet Kyrgyz society. From various disciplinary perspectives social scientists have begun to make comparable assessments about the power of nationalism in modern Kyrgyzstan: whether it is neighboring countries/ethnic groups “eating” away at Kyrgyzstan’s borders (Megoran 2004), the “creeping migration” from Tajikistan (Reeves 2009), or as “imperiled sovereignty” through efforts from abroad to control the country and attempts to deal with “aggressive minorities” at home (Laruelle 2012). This work seeks to contribute to these discussions and, in light of them, critically interrogate the alternative and, from the perspective of many in Kyrgyzstan, alien conception of sovereignty found in the rationalist articulations of international actors. In short, sovereignty became a key signifier for nationalists and a matter of affective politics.

The article proceeds in seven short sections. Sections one and two introduce the social and political context of the 2010 political crisis of the Kyrgyz Republic. It demonstrates the centrality of sovereignty to the crisis and how it became an emotive matter which shaped crisis management. Sections three and four consider conceptions of sovereignty found in the literatures of international relations (IR) and political anthropology, showing how sovereignty is a central but fragile institution of international legal and political order but one which must be considered in terms of its affects as well as its effects. Sections five, six, and seven consider how sovereignty featured in the crisis in terms of the exclusion of Uzbeks from social and political life, popular resistance to international intervention and assistance proposals, and in activities of publicly mourning the Kyrgyz dead. Each section provides a brief overview to highlight the complexities of the situation and how it exacerbated widespread discontent. However, this paper is not able to explore the social and economic complexities of Kyrgyzstan that also contributed to the events.<sup>2</sup> Although significant, these are beyond the scope of the paper.

It should be noted that this paper was based on the experiences of the authors in Kyrgyzstan throughout this period. Many of the observations made in this paper are based on our experiences of living and working in the country. Gullette lived in Bishkek in 2000–2001 and 2002–2003 conducting research. Since 2007, he has lived and worked in the city. He witnessed many events in the capital firsthand during 2010. He was able to see these issues develop by viewing the reactions of friends and informants throughout the country and the integration of sovereignty into the narrative of the political elite in numerous contexts. Heathershaw lived and worked in Bishkek from 2001 to 2003, 2005, and 2011, observing the Tulip revolution of 2005 and the increasing political strength of Kyrgyz nationalism since that time.

### **Exception of the state of exception**

Southern Kyrgyzstan is economically poorer than other parts of the country. Borders and high population density mean that there are few resources available to people making livelihoods, particularly in rural areas, more difficult. The struggle for many living in poverty to secure access to resources and employment has led to a deep sense of frustration (Reeves 2009). At the beginning of 2010, the resident population of Jalalabat and Osh Oblasts and Osh City accounted for 44% of the entire population of the entire country, but lived on less

than one-third of the republic's territory. In both oblasts, the ethnic Kyrgyz population makes up over two-thirds of the resident population, while Uzbeks, the second largest ethnic group, makes up roughly a quarter of the resident population. In Osh City, however, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks make up 48% and 44% of the resident population, respectively (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2010a). Thus the Uzbek community represents a sizeable group and together with Kyrgyz are the main consumers of resources. At this time, both Jalalabat and Osh Oblasts had around 15 and 20% registered unemployment among the working population, respectively (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2010b, 153). These are some of the highest unemployment rates in the country and indicate the economic difficulties for people in those areas. These few indicators provide an insight into the everyday challenges that people faced. Our focus in the article is the political events of 2010 and the proximate effects on sovereignty that emerged from them. The political *and* social situation in the Kyrgyz Republic from April 2010 was tense. Rumors abounded and new political incidents were frequent and unpredictable. The ousting of President Kurmanbek Bakiy on 7 April prompted the rushed assembly of former opposition leaders to establish a new government. On 8 April, while thousands of people assembled in Bishkek's Ala-Too Square to witness the destruction, mourn lost friends and family members, and rally people to take political action, politicians and their factions wrangled over the form of new leadership of the interim government.

The interim government feared interference by Bakiy supporters from the Ak-Jol (Bright Path) party possibly destabilizing the situation further. Thus, one of the first acts of the interim government was to dissolve parliament and disband the Constitutional Court. This was illegal according to the constitution, but was an assertion of the state of exception introduced by the interim government. Soon after, squabbling among members of the interim government precluded a controlled transition of power and rendered the government largely ineffective in conflict management. The interim government was aided by others, as former Bakiy supporter the Mayor of Osh Melis Myrzakmatov gave the new administration his support. This was an important move in preventing Bakiy and his remaining supporters from asserting themselves on 15 April when they attempted to interrupt a rally organized by Myrzakmatov in Osh City.

However, renewed efforts by remnants of the former regime saw them capture all three southern oblast government administrations on 13 May, where the interim government struggled to assert its authority. In Batken and Osh Oblasts, the power grab ended quickly; but in Jalalabat Oblast, there was a more entrenched struggle. The interim government turned to influential Uzbek diaspora leader Kadyrjan Batyrov and one of the co-founding interim government parties, Ata-Meken (Fatherland), to restore order and reassert the authority of new administration. On 14 May, the two groups fought with Bakiy supporters, during which time two people were killed and 65 people injured (AKI-press 2011a). That night, the Bakiy family home in the nearby village of Teyit (Suzak District) was burned to the ground. State officials and local residents pointed the finger of blame at Uzbeks, and Batyrov was implicated in the charges. The interim government had temporarily regained order, but at a significant cost to its authority and local stability.

Batyrov was an active prominent figure in Jalalabat who had promoted Uzbek language and cultural rights on a number of occasions and founded the People's Friendship University in Jalalabat City. On 8 April, the day after the ousting of Bakiy, Batyrov rallied 5,000 Uzbeks and told the gathered that they should take a more active role in creating the country (International Crisis Group 2010). The National Commission for the Investigation into the June 2010 events noted that from 12 to 15 May, Batyrov gathered Uzbeks in the square of

the People's Friendship University and similarly encouraged them to play a larger role in civic and political life in the country (AKIpress 2011a).<sup>3</sup>

On 15 May, the day after the burning of the Bakiev's family home, Batyrov gave an interview which was shown on Uzbek-language channels Mezon-TV and Osh-TV in which he is reported to have said,

the time when the Uzbeks sat still at home and did not participate in state building has passed. We [Uzbeks] actively supported the provisional government and must actively participate in all civil processes ... If there were not Uzbeks, the Kyrgyz and members of the provisional government would not be able to resist Bakiev in Jalalabat when he tried to conduct his activity against the provisional government. (Arynov 2010)

This was also followed by rumors that Uzbeks had burned Kyrgyz yurts and the state flag (Myrzakmatov 2011, 34). As news spread about the burning of the Bakiev home, the contents of the interview and rumors about the desecration of national symbols, some Kyrgyz understood this as a call for Uzbeks to rise up and assert themselves in society and politics, something which appeared more as a challenge to the ethnic Kyrgyz and their position in the government and society. Either directly from Batyrov's speeches or inferred from his words, there was a widespread belief in the country that he promoted separatist ideals and stated that without the Uzbeks the Kyrgyz would not have been able to resist Bakiev supporters in Jalalabat.

This situation of an exception to the state of exception was the prelude to the violent conflict in June 2010. The interim government dissolved the old government structure and took over the reins of power until new elections could be held, signaling a state of exception whereby the purported ethno-national sovereigns suspended laws and placed themselves beyond the law in a time when greater security was deemed necessary (Agamben 1998). Internal divisions prevented the government from asserting and maintaining control. When they turned to Batyrov and his followers to restore order in Jalalabat Oblast, it served as an exception of their own exception. The new sovereigns had given over authority to Batyrov to regain control. While this was perhaps a necessary move at the time, the burning of the Bakievs' home, whether done by Uzbeks or not, and the calls for greater Uzbek participation in civil life resembled a move to assert an Uzbek political agenda. For some this proved a "Rubicon" in the deterioration of ethnic relations (International Crisis Group 2010). Although there was widespread hatred for the Bakiev family, the former president still had supporters in parts of the south. The perception among some Kyrgyz was as if the Uzbeks had begun to set their own agenda and had overstepped an imaginary but oft-stated boundary within which ethnic Uzbeks were confined to a secondary place in national affairs. Sovereignty – as an imagined ethno-national and popular institution – was perceived to have been violated.

### **Osh – the front lines of sovereignty**

In the wake of these events, on the night of 10 June, a street fight between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths turned into an ethnic conflict, which produced nearly a week of bloodshed. It was clear that atrocities were committed on both sides, but it was systemic denial of rights to Uzbek citizens, and the fact that their casualties numbered far greater than the Kyrgyz, that caused international organizations to portray the events as pogroms against Uzbeks (Human Rights Watch 2010; International Crisis Group 2010). There were numerous investigations into the violence, known as the "June events," and criminal proceedings.<sup>4</sup> The government reports widely apportioned blame, but singled out the Uzbeks as being

instigators and the main protagonists despite that the Uzbek community suffered greater numbers of dead and heavy destruction of property.

President Roza Otunbaeva, who headed the interim government (7 April 2010–1 December 2011), invited an independent review through which the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC) was established. The KIC was mandated to investigate the root causes and events in June 2010. Despite lacking the explicit sanction of an international organization, the Commission was to review the events in regard to international law and make recommendations on how to resolve conflict issues in the country. The report was notable for stating specific events that contradicted the reports of national and parliamentary commissions in Kyrgyzstan and making recommendations that were interpreted in Kyrgyzstan as a violation of sovereignty. For example, the KIC report (2011, 14) stated that in an interview Batyrov claimed that he was in regular contact with the interim government during the summer. In response to the KIC report, the Government (2011) refused to corroborate this claim. Furthermore, KIC report recommendations that dealt with ways to promote a sense of pluralism and a shared civic engagement were rejected by the government. For example, the KIC report suggested,

Kyrgyzstan should take a strong public stand against extreme nationalism and ethnic exclusivity. The restoration of the name “Republic of Kyrgyzstan” would be a concrete example of how this may be achieved. The Uzbek language should be given special status at municipal and regional levels in southern Kyrgyzstan. (KIC 2011, iv)

The Government responded by stating that in European countries where the main ethnic group’s name was used (e.g. the Czech Republic) there has never been a question about the country’s “democratic or multiethnic character” (Government of Kyrgyzstan 2011, 28). As for promoting the Uzbek language, the Government detailed how it had supported Uzbek language in schools, but that experts in Uzbek affairs have not participated in curriculum development (Government of Kyrgyzstan 2011, 6).<sup>5</sup> The Government largely refuted suggestions that it was not doing enough to support pluralism, at the same time implicating minority groups at the center of obstacles to further development. Its rejection of the report was so strong that, Kimmo Kiljunen, the head of the KIC, was voted as *persona non grata* by parliament.

Given the KIC’s lack of international sanction by a major international organization and the non-binding nature of its recommendations, its report, by any rational measure, represents the most meager of challenges to the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz Republic. Yet the report was not received that way in the young republic. This is partly a matter of the emotions and recriminations that necessarily follow such political violence. The Government’s response reflected the feelings of many Kyrgyz people at the time of the June 2010 events: it was a war and we are also victims. Many of our national colleagues in Bishkek were shocked at the violence, but were dismayed at the greater attention being given to Uzbeks, especially in international media. Undoubtedly, crimes were committed on both sides. The KIC report, however, noted that a majority of people that were killed were Uzbeks, and most of the property destroyed belonged to members of the Uzbek community. This, the KIC report noted, is consistent with the definition of a “crime against humanity,” a claim which was not only refuted by the Government but also was incomprehensible to most of its leading members and the new nationalist leaders that emerged after April 2010.

These nationalist leaders, particularly those of the Ata-Jurt party, often hailed from the south of the country in the districts close to the cities of Osh and Jalalabat. In Osh City, Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov, after thwarting attempts by Bishkek to force his resignation,

emerged as a dominant figure alongside other nationalist leaders as a defender of the Kyrgyz people. He spoke of himself as the people's – rather than the government's – representative. Myrzakmatov traced his genealogy to the land and declared that his ancestors have always been prominent in the Fergana Valley. Thus, he presented himself as protecting the “sovereignty” of the Kyrgyz people against intervention by separatists from minority ethnic groups. Shortly after the events, speaking to a correspondent from a Russian daily paper, Myrzakmatov echoed these sentiments, stating that “Uzbeks had encroached on Kyrgyzstan’s sovereignty. But, we repulsed them” (Karabekov 2010).

These emotive defenses of the violence were primarily addressed to regional constituencies. Myrzakmatov published an account of the June events and his role in them. The reason for the June events of 2010 and 1990 were, in his view, separatists attempting to declare autonomy from what is ostensibly Kyrgyz land. Myrzakmatov (2011, 11) described, “I have one truth, which I cherish in my heart and which I always repeat: ‘Osh is the core of Kyrgyz statehood.’” He recounts that during the events on 13 May he received information that 5,000 selected Uzbek troops were planning to destroy the local government and military defenses of the city. In his preparations, he readied the local guard and prayed to the spirit of Manas to protect them (Myrzakmatov 2011, 63–65). There was no Uzbek attack on the city and some have suggested that the story is fabricated (International Crisis Group 2012). Rather, Myrzakmatov’s statements are significant as examples of the ethno-nationalist discourse circulating in Osh and how it – as a border region and place of multi-ethnic struggles – represents an arena where the republic’s sovereignty is a battleground.

In the confusion and fear that gripped the city and the country at this time, it is hard to understand how Myrzakmatov’s statements were intended to be uniting rather than inflammatory. The Osh Mayor wanted to demonstrate the resilience of the Kyrgyz in the face of international criticism and calls for shared sovereignty with Uzbeks. To his mind such moves would in fact jeopardize the sovereignty of the country. It was the idea that the Kyrgyz had defended themselves, that they, as the bearers of the country’s identity handed down from their ancestors and Manas, needed to defend the sovereignty that touched on long-held fears that the country is under threat (cf. Megoran 2004). This “working ideology” of Kyrgyz national identity and its embodiment in state sovereignty provides Myrzakmatov’s rhetoric and actions with much greater force. As Taussig (1984, 494) argues: “Surely it is in the coils of rumor, gossip, story, and chit-chat where ideology and ideas become emotionally powerful and enter into active social circulation and meaningful existence.” Myrzakmatov and others who made references to the endangerment of Kyrgyz sovereignty touched on emotions and concepts – fear, anger, defense, ownership, and heritage – to promote the leadership role of the ethnic Kyrgyz in the republic and therefore self-legitimize their own claim to be the personal embodiment of sovereignty.

Myrzakmatov’s view is one version of the city’s history and its ethnic identity. This, however, turned the city into a discursive and physical field to divide “Kyrgyz” and “Uzbek.” This is contrary to many residents’ lived experiences. As Megoran (2013, 904) notes, “It is more helpful to consider ethnicity as a complex social process that has long been woven into the warp and weft of urban life in cities and towns like Osh.” The imprint of a sovereign Kyrgyz identity on the city by officials obfuscated the differing views of the past and the shared history in the city’s development (Liu 2012). The discourse of sovereignty established a distilled vision of history into an ethnic identity of the present.

### The logic of sovereignty

The above analysis indicates contention between national and international accounts of the 2010 crisis. What explains the wide gap between these narratives of crisis and ethnic violence? What explains the polar opposition of the proposed solutions? Most international statements and reports (International Crisis Group 2010; KIC 2011) interpreted local anger and resistance to their proposals in terms of ethno-nationalism which was understood as a project to gain power – a means to an end – and an aberration from civic and democratic politics. Megoran (2012) has shown how this approach to nationalism is wrong-headed, as it fails to see how nationalism is an integral feature of popular and democratic politics in newly independent and post-colonial states. Far from being an exceptional or an indication of primordial hatred, nationalism is a normal companion of the modern ordering of a world of states. World politics, by extension, has emotional as well as material and symbolic aspects. While largely concurring with this analysis, we take a different approach which focuses on sovereignty, an institution which unlike nationalism has explicit national and international dimensions. It is therefore of some considerable importance in explaining the contentions with external actors that emerged by 2010. We begin here by surveying the political science literature on state sovereignty before addressing sovereignty as an ethno-national and affective discourse of power.

State sovereignty is the primary discursive institution of the modern international political order. Decolonization and the creation of newly independent states out of former European empires were based on the universalization of the European state and the popularization of sovereignty. Sovereignty transferred from being embodied by a small number of aristocratic families to being the representation of all people. The emerging norms of state sovereignty and self-determination were the primary logics of decolonization which produced several cohorts of newly sovereign states, the last of which are the post-socialist states, which emerged from 1989 to 1991. International relations theory, a body of political thought developed over the twentieth century, has ironically been slow to comprehend this dramatic shift in political order from an early modern international society characterized by European imperialism to a late modern international system of a universal sovereignty. James (1986, 8) argues that shift has caused a “quagmire” for scholarship in that it demands that we study shifting sands: “how, nowadays, sovereign states give meaning to the word ‘sovereignty’ when they refer to that which makes them eligible for international life.” On a very basic level, sovereignty is understood to refer to, “the claim by states to exercise legitimate power within strictly delimited territorial boundaries” (Walker 1992, 165). In this sense it is the antonym of intervention: “a political entity’s externally recognized right to exercise final authority over its own affairs” (Biersteker and Weber 1996, 2). However, these basic outlines of a definition of state sovereignty tell us very little about how sovereignty becomes politicized and, specifically, how the internal and external faces of sovereignty are constituted.

Three broad schools of thought in international relations theory can be identified which (partially) tackle this puzzle. First, political realism casts adherence to or violation of sovereignty as a matter instrumental action. In Krasner’s (1999) classic account, sovereignty is a system of “organized hypocrisy,” where the logic of appropriateness (sovereign statehood) is routinely superseded by a logic of consequence (international intervention and pressure) but where these violations “have not generated alternative logics of appropriateness” (new institutions of sovereignty). Krasner identifies four dimensions of sovereignty: international legal, Westphalian, interdependence, and domestic sovereignty. While international legal sovereignty is possessed or not by individual states this status is based on the principal

of Westphalian sovereignty which is a property of the system itself. As a normative international institution in this sense, sovereignty is caricatured as a product of the Westphalian international system since the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648.<sup>6</sup> International legal and Westphalian sovereignty are either present or absent. However, in Krasner's third and fourth dimensions, sovereignty is a matter of degree. Interdependence sovereignty refers to the ability to control and limit the freedom of foreign actors to violate a state's sovereignty – from physical incursion to flows of goods and people to false representation in international institutions. Domestic sovereignty refers to the ability of the state to retain the monopoly of legitimate violence over its territory in the classical Weberian sense. Post-colonial states such as Kyrgyzstan are often weak in interdependence and domestic sovereignty; therefore the first and second dimensions of sovereignty may become increasingly important to their claims to legitimate statehood. Thus, from the realist perspective, the experience of Kyrgyzstan in 2010 is a normal rather than exceptional part of international politics and the role of affect in conditioning the politics of sovereignty is seen as incidental.

The problem with this perspective is that it provides a static account of the causes and effects of the violation of sovereignty. As the discursive institution of sovereignty is held to be uniform and unchanging, this approach is unable to explain why certain violations of sovereignty are normalized and non-controversial (e.g. the role of powerful donors in nationwide governance in Kyrgyzstan) while others are securitized and highly controversial (e.g. the non-binding recommendations of a poorly resourced and unsanctioned inquiry commission). An approach to sovereignty that does not explain how and why it becomes a controversial matter of international and domestic politics is of little use to us in the present study.

Second, social constructivism, from idealist, interpretivist, and historicist traditions, considers sovereignty as constitutive of the symbolic order of international politics. Jackson (1990) – from a perspective known as the English School – explores how the right of sovereignty was bequeathed to all states as a pluralist “international society” emerged. Decolonization in the post-World War II period reflected a normative shift toward the illegitimacy of empire but elicited a move from a discourse of positive sovereignty (where sovereignty was possessed by those who met a European “standard of civilization”) to negative sovereignty (where it was possessed by all). In this view, these states lack much if any interdependence and domestic sovereignty and can be considered “quasi-states.” Zaum (2007), in a similar tradition, argues that in the post-Cold war period there was a further shift where a positive discourse of sovereignty posited that sovereignty is a responsibility. This is paradigmatically represented by the emerging norm of the “responsibility to protect,” which was incorporated by the United Nations and its recasting of peace operations during its internal reform process of 2004–2005. In light of this symbolic and normative order of sovereignty, it is not unexpected that international actors might target Kyrgyzstan as ripe for intervention given its failure to protect its ethnic Uzbek minority in the south and the perception that the state provided the means for ethnic violence against the Uzbeks.

This approach is useful at capturing how and why sovereignty becomes politicized in international politics, but is less helpful in explaining how and why this international politicization becomes controversial in domestic spheres. Indeed, this is not a question with which most constructivist international relations scholars are concerned. Moreover, this remains a rationalist account of diplomatic negotiations where the meaning and salience of sovereignty emerges progressively and normatively, rather than contentiously and discursively. The experience of Kyrgyzstan seems to suggest that sovereignty's politicization may be inconsistent, fleeting, and traumatic – constituted performatively in events.



A third group of scholars in international relations have begun to explore sovereignty in these terms. For Weber (1995), “sovereignty” is a simulation which is used interchangeably with intervention – a discourse which inevitably confronts nationalist backlash. Biersteker and Weber (1996, 9) support F. H. Hinsley’s claim that sovereignty is “no more than an assertion” whose usage in political discourse is often oxymoronic as interveners invoke sovereignty to justify intervention. In this sense, the discursive institution indicates less of a shift away from imperialism than either realists or constructivists imagine. This is an account of sovereignty as disorder – a traumatic condition where weaker states stand at the mercy of the more powerful not simply because they can intervene, but also because they can *justifiably* intervene. The sovereign lives of citizens and the bare lives of refugees, stateless, and persons subjected to rendition or internment can be understood in these terms. Yet international relations scholars do not tend to conduct either fieldwork or ethnographic research. Therefore these post-structuralist studies have tended to focus on the bare lives of Guantanamo prisoners and the traumatic politics of remembrance rather than popular emotional responses to less exceptional diplomatic relations in post-colonial states, such as Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, they pay less attention to the importance of ethnicity and nationalism in international politics.

### **Affective politics of sovereignty**

In short, international relations while recognizing the durability of the institution of sovereignty has only just begun to recognize the affective politics of sovereignty. In light of this lacuna, we highlight the affective attachments between personal identity and national sovereignty, and how these feelings produce the state through its discourse of popular sovereignty and the make-believing of state space (Reeves 2011; Navaro-Yashin 2012). We use “affective politics” here to describe the emotions generated through the linkage of personal identity and state sovereignty. Such politics is semiotic and contingent as well as instrumental and deliberate. We do not distinguish between emotions and bodily feelings. Following John Leavitt (1996), we hold that emotions are pragmatic acts combining meanings and bodily feelings. Emotions attached to the issue of sovereignty are not just about meanings, but something felt, as the attachment stretches beyond bureaucratic forms of citizenship, through to attachment to the land, state icons, and a sense of hereditary entitlement. At least in the case of Kyrgyzstan, we argue that the state is a personal extension of people’s identities and their feeling of security in their own land. To this extent, these affections through attachments and resonances highlight what Anderson (2006, 735, original emphasis) described as “being affected – affected,” in other words, it is a “transpersonal *capacity* which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications).” Perhaps the most powerful form of affect, and one which comes to the fore during times of political crisis, is that of fear.

Constructions of major current and past events connect national identity to the security of the state and thus evoke emotive reactions. In his examination of the “affective management of history,” Serguei Oushakine discusses how the representation of the past is not done to clarify the veracity of past events, but to elicit emotional reactions to support specific viewpoints. “Tangible traces of the past are used as material pretexts to produce an affective cartography of history that was not experienced firsthand” (Oushakine 2013, 274). For those that have experienced events that are subject to public examination, the facts are contestable. Even for those that have experienced certain events or were caught up in violent conflict, events can still be ordered to create certain perceptions about why events took place and what they mean. This is what we examine here: the way discourses

create emotive reactions to both remembered and lived experiences, specifically regarding people's sense of nationalism. Yet, as Latour has argued (see Navaro-Yashin 2012, 23), to render the event, and the whole material world as being "outside" the subject is to fetishize human agency. Navaro-Yashin, with Latour, proposes studying state-space in terms of "what exteriorities, outer spaces, environments, and objects, may offer for interpretation." In summary, she offers a political anthropology that "would study affect and subjectivity in tandem" (Navaro-Yashin 2012, 23–24). To study the affective politics of sovereignty is to study the emotive, psychological, and embodied discourses of state politics in its full social context, symbolic, and material.

In post-Soviet newly independent states, the lives and bodies of citizens are particularly affected by the recent past of becoming sovereign, which itself is a distinctive legacy of the development of the national question. During the Soviet era, the terminology of identity was associated with the recognition of greater levels of autonomy. Stalin had declared "*A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture*" (Stalin 1973, 60, original emphasis). The nation was the highest form of identity, including the formal recognition of a territory, based on a recognized ethnic nationality (Russian, *natsional'nost'*). Nation was and remains equated to ethnic nationality; during perestroika and after 1991 it became attached to state sovereignty – thus shifting the politics of nationalism to incorporate the politics of sovereignty. In Central Asia, the Fergana Valley became the center of an artificial demarcation of nations. In independence, historical claims, resources, and affective attachments to the territory have been used to argue for the return of lands, but official delineation has not been completed, prolonging and deepening arguments and frustrations.

This linkage of nationalism and sovereignty is made all the more politically charged for the purported scientific basis for the new sovereign nations. This "scientific" support is based on the idea of ethnogenesis, a historical approach aimed at demonstrating the establishment and stable development of people, often culminating in their formation as a nation. In Kyrgyzstan, former President Askar Akaev, himself a noted physicist, adopted the particular approach by Lev Gumilev, a leading figure from the 1960s in the use of ethnogenesis, to describe the change within societies and the formation of new nations (Gullette 2010a). In this approach, Gumilev explored the welling up of passion with which new nations were started. Akaev adopted these ideas to claim that Kyrgyz ancestors had strived and fought for statehood and how it was maintained, even when the Kyrgyz were under the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. The tactic was to link the sovereign state, as a reflection of the nation, to people today, as people can trace their ancestry back through *sanjyra* (Kyrgyz, genealogy) and directly link them to the continual process of state-building. It was an attempt to publicly create the nation's historical memory.<sup>7</sup> The formulation of statehood was one clearly linked to and led by ethnic Kyrgyz, reinforced by the construction of the past. This ethno-nationalism was apparently balanced with a politically motivated civic nationalism reflected in the slogan "Kyrgyzstan is our common home" and manifested in the 2000 decision to make Russian an official language. Yet, while the slogan was seen as sign of Akaev's internationalism, Megoran (2012, 31) argues that it catalyzed the very ethnic nationalism it claimed to contain by accentuating the insecurity of Kyrgyz nationalism.

Via the anthropological literature on affective politics we suggest that sovereignty is a very personal matter of political relations. The ethnic Kyrgyz, who for the years since independence had been told that they and their kind were sovereign in the new state (see Karagulova and Megoran 2011), were faced in 2010 with an apparent challenge to this state. This crisis was in turn a challenge to the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz, and therefore to

their own identities. The emotive force of fear also indicates that disordered governance, and the lack of strong leaders that people can believe in, “produces the effect of statelessness” (Kivland 2012, 252). As Kivland (2012, 250) argues, statelessness is the “need for a normal or proper ‘state’ of public life and the inability to locate a sovereign authority that is responsible for providing this life.” The turbulent events in April and June 2010 left many feeling that there was a lack of control with no real or accepted authority that could guarantee the return of the state that represented them and reflected aspects of their identity, making them feel that their interests are protected. In this light, the emotional, bodily, and material responses of the ethnic Kyrgyz to the challenges to *their* sovereignty during the crisis year of 2010 – some of which we will discuss in the following – become intelligible.

### “Kyrgyzstan for the Kyrgyz”

Kyrgyzstan’s crisis in 2010 was many years in gestation. Akaev’s authority was dwindling by the early-2000s and two years after the government promotion of “2200 years of Kyrgyz statehood” in 2003, he was ousted by protestors during the “Tulip Revolution” of 2005. Many of these represented their grievances in explicitly nationalist terms and invoked popular sovereignty, such as the often heard refrain of “we are with the people” (Kyrgyz, *biz el menen*).<sup>8</sup> Following the 2010 political upheaval and violence in the south, nationalist leaders gained significant influence with nationalist parties gaining success in the parliamentary elections of late-2010.<sup>9</sup> These leaders called for policies and practices that promote Kyrgyz language and nationalization of businesses for the benefit of the state. Their discourse included the identification of both internal and external threats to sovereignty. Osh Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov’s statement that the Kyrgyz “repulsed” the Uzbeks has become a popular imagination of the events, drawing images of the fight over control of the land that was originally in Kyrgyz hands. In discussions that we have had with people in Kyrgyzstan, this is embedded in a larger argument by some Kyrgyz who feel that the Uzbeks were rich, and, as a corollary, the Kyrgyz in the south had limited economic opportunities in their own country (cf. Megoran 2013). Many of those supporting nationalist views with regard to inter-ethnic relations have also reacted against external assistance from international organizations. The reaction against the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) proposed Police Advisory Group is one such instance (see below), where external influence would undermine the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz over their own territory. The common referent in these nationalist claims is that of sovereignty.

That post-Soviet nationalisms speak in the language of mutually inclusive ethnic and state sovereignty should not surprise us as ethnicity was woven into the political status of Soviet republics. As Brubaker (1994, 53) points out, the ethnic nationality has two distinctive qualities in this regard. First, it was a statistical category, allowing for censuses and demographic studies. Second, it was a legal category. It was referred to as the “third line” of passports. Independence brought with it sovereignty that was now attached to ethnic identity rather than the multinational empire-state of the Soviet Union. In the wake of the June 2010 violence, politicians discussed the notion of “titular nation” in this distinctly ethnized conception of sovereignty Kamchybek Tashiev, leader of the nationalist Ata-Jurt (Fatherland) Party, stated,

The titular nation must be titular; it cannot stand below other nations living in the country. They should respect our traditions, language and history, only then will people live peacefully. However, if some nation in our country – Russian, Uzbek, Turks or Chinese – says that

they are on a par with Kyrgyz or higher than the Kyrgyz, then the state will collapse. (Ivashchenko 2010)

Nationalist statements such as this helped to circulate fear between bodies in 2010, resonating with personal experiences of how the sovereignty of the country is under threat and thus personally affects them (Vukov 2003).

Such an affective wedding of ethnicity and sovereignty is not merely the preserve of nationalist leaders but was also attended to by moderate and intelligentsia figures who took on positions of authority after the ouster of Bakiev in April 2010. Interim President Roza Otunbaeva (2010–2011) also asserted the position of the Kyrgyz as the titular nation and leaders of the country, calling their position as “a big work” and that as the founding ethnos (or ethnic group) it is their responsibility to protect other ethnic nationalities in the country (Pavlova 2010). In this vein, Topchubek Turgunaliyev, a veteran Kyrgyz politician not in the new government but close to Otunbaeva, planned to submit two draft laws in November 2010, “On the titular nation” and “On national diasporas” (Mazykina 2010; Osmongazieva 2010). The move to enshrine the position of Kyrgyz as the titular nation in law reflects an increasing tendency to shore up power through limiting laws. Comaroff and Comaroff (2009, 38–39, emphasis added) note:

In the process of becoming ever more legalistic, communities of all kinds ... appear increasingly to evince *a will to sovereignty*; by “sovereignty”, we mean the exercise of control over the lives, deaths and conditions of existence of those who fall within its purview – and the extension over them of the jurisdiction of some kind of law ... In sum, to transform itself into sovereign authority, power demands an architecture of legalities or their simulacra.

Turgunaliyev’s draft law project sought to underline the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz people, generated out of fear of losing control over the state. Turgunaliyev never submitted the draft laws for review, but the move toward a formal definition of Kyrgyz as the titular nation reasserted the qualities for the existence of the state. Since then, ethnic titles have been replaced by the demarcation for citizenship “Kyrgyzstani” in people’s passports. Nonetheless, the feelings remain that “Kyrgyzstan” is very much the country of the Kyrgyz people. It is the affective politics of the proposal rather than the final legal outcome which more accurately reflects the position of minorities vis-à-vis other groups. While proposals such as Turgunaliyev’s are reflections of popular sentiments, they also serve as ways to maintain control over the population through their own desires. In line with Foucault’s (1991) discourse on governmentality, Vukov (2003, 338) argued that “dramatization of threats to the population serve a strategic role in ... biopolitical interventions.” It is the affective politics of sovereignty which enables this strategic role. In this case it was an exacerbating factor for legislation focused on controlling the population by limiting expressions and knowledge in an attempt to protect Kyrgyz control over the territory (e.g. the position of minority languages).

### “No to a Kyrgyz Kosovo”

International actors who viewed the popularity of nationalism, such as that articulated by Tashiev and Turgunaliyev, as an aberration from modern democratic politics typically supported proposals for intervention to protect minorities from this upsurge in jingoism. However, street protests against such proposals demonstrated public anger at the prospect of the violation of Kyrgyzstan’s sovereignty in the manner understood by Krasner (1999). In this context of post-Soviet nationalism and underlying ideas of ethnogenesis, this attempt to limit sovereignty was more than a matter of inappropriateness but a much more personal violation.

On 22 July 2010, demonstrations were held in Bishkek and Osh against the proposal to send an unarmed police force supported by the OSCE to monitor the situation in the country.<sup>10</sup> The traffic thinned out, unusual during a weekday morning, and then the protesters marched by. They took up their positions outside the OSCE office with banners, some of which read: "OSCE police is an external threat!," "We will not allow the division of Kyrgyzstan!," "Say 'NO' to Kyrgyz Kosovo!"<sup>11</sup>

The reference to Kosovo was to highlight the similarity of divisions between Kyrgyz and Uzbek in southern Kyrgyzstan with that of the Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo in the 1990s – a case which had been portrayed as an imperialistic Western intervention against the sovereignty of Slavic people by the Russian media which is widely consumed in Kyrgyzstan (cf. Reeves 2009). The underlying fear which such analogies evoked was that it was not just that there might be further violence, but that Kosovo eventually became its own state in 2008. The concern was palpable among the demonstrators on the street in Bishkek, who represented several youth groups.<sup>12</sup> Gullette asked some demonstrators what they wanted to do instead of having the OSCE Police Advisory Group deployed in the country. One man heatedly said, "We can handle this ourselves. We don't need to be told what to do." When asked about their plans to deal with the situation in the south, the protesters did not disclose any plans or activities. It was clear that citizens wanted national sovereignty over internal issues, but lacked a clear plan to manage inter-ethnic relations in southern Kyrgyzstan other than the imposition of order by the sovereign ethnic group. Furthermore, the possibility of a foreign organization helping to maintain peace in southern Kyrgyzstan equaled an infringement on this right to national, and hence ethnic sovereignty. It also underscored the possibility of "statelessness," in Kivland's terms, through the lack of an authority that could be trusted, especially when the interim government considered allowing foreign police observers into the country, people wanted to assume authority for themselves, and retain the ability to make decisions on their own behalf. Graffiti further indicated the danger of international organizations. On aluminum sidings in front of a vacant lot across the street from the main OSCE office, there was a web address, which contained information on the psychotronic weapons of the United Nations and OSCE used on the people of Central Asia.<sup>13</sup> The fear of being brain-washed by international organizations to hand over authority to external agents and allowing for further conflict and disruption to their sovereignty contributed to the resistance of the foreign police observers and interventions.

Several months later, in an interview with the news agency Fergana.ru, Kamchibek Tashiev noted that he thought the OSCE police mission of 52 unarmed police officers was both ill-conceived and would be ineffective. He noted that these foreigners did not speak the language, did not know the customs and traditions of Kyrgyzstan, and claimed that the Kyrgyz state has sufficient strength to prevent crises (Ivashchenko 2010). While to internationals it was the failure of the interim government to maintain security and ensure fair treatment for all citizens that drove insecurities and pushed frustrations underground, for Tashiev the government had simply not been sufficiently sovereign.

### **Spectral sovereignty**

The fear of encroachments on Kyrgyz sovereignty were not just directed at minorities within the country and external organizations, but also manifested themselves as retributive acts by the deceased. On 10 October 2010, Kyrgyzstan held parliamentary elections, representing a shift from a presidential system to a parliamentary system with many parties registered. It was a period fraught with anxieties as people wondered whether the election results

would lead to another period of fighting between politicians that may spill out onto the streets. The elections and results were questioned by many, including the public association “Meken-Sheyitteri” (“Martyrs of the Motherland”), a group comprising family members of victims who died in the April 2010 violence.

Meken-Sheyitteri contested the elections results, particularly as it allowed some pro-Bakiev supporters back into parliament. They distributed flyers in Kyrgyz and Russian warning people that the “enemy is standing at the gate.” The flyers also stated

We all thought that after the 7 April revolution everything would change and that ahead of us a just government was waiting, but it turns out not [to] be like that. Bakiev henchmen have taken a majority of the votes in the election through graft, threats and fraud, and today are striving for power. Was it not enough blood for them which they drank all these years, or was it not enough for them that it was their fault that on 7 April our brothers, fathers and children died. Today, they are laughing at us and saying “Sheep your shepherd will come soon.”

They stood outside the White House asking people to sign a petition to annul the results and adopt a law on lustration to expunge the government of representatives of the state law enforcement bodies or those who committed crimes during the Bakiev period. Lustration is considered “purification by sacrifice.” It was a call to sacrifice those in government who were guilty of crimes, so as to purify government.

All around the small table where Meken-Sheyitteri were gathering signatures were banners decrying Bakiev’s supporters and statements to purify the government for the memory of the deceased. One banner read: “Glory to the Heroes of the People’s April Revolution. Bakiev’s henchmen – do not disturb the souls of the deceased.” In this banner, the word “soul” was “*arbak*,” a Kyrgyz term that roughly translates as the spirit of a deceased person. Its evocation is a call for the Kyrgyz people to honor the memory of the people who died to bring about a better government in the country. It was also a warning. The souls of the dead could come and seek vengeance upon Bakiev’s supporters. It was a haunting reminder that the dead continue to play a role in the sovereignty of the state, and that their efforts must be honored. The state is partly conceived as the vision of the ancestors that helped form it. In this case, if the government was unable to resolve the instability in the country then the souls of the ancestors, particularly those that died in the April violence, may curse those in power.<sup>14</sup> The evoking of *arbak* also posits the souls of the ancestors and martyrs of the state as the de facto authority of the state on which all other (earthly) power structures must ensure the state’s survival. It ties people to the state at once through their genealogies as the recipients and vessels of the state. This is affective politics at work, make-believing the state as a spectral presence.

## Conclusion

An examination of the affective politics of sovereignty expands our understanding of how the emotional, the physical, and the psychological shape inter-ethnic relations, the elite politics of nationalism, and debates about international intervention. Such affects are constitutive of people’s relation to and imagination of the state, and instrumental in that they can be exploited by others to mobilize action. The events examined in this article provide an additional dimension to our understanding of the politics of nationalism and sovereignty in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. We argue that fear – felt in the mind and body, and even inscribed on the dead – played an important role in make-believing the state and its sovereignty in a time of crisis. What become visible in the vignettes mentioned are forms of elite and popular politics which rest on an imagined but intimate connection between the state and Kyrgyz identity. Such forms are not, first and foremost, traditional, but those of

modern nationalism. As in most modern nations, this is an identity which is constructed as being that of the dead as well as the living. Exploring sovereignty through emotions is important for understanding how national and international politics develop everyday lives. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, we see that the Kyrgyz – while portrayed as the perpetrators by outsiders – feel their rightful and inherited sovereignty impinged on all sides, by the Uzbeks in the south, and by the foreign organizations across the country and overseas. To utilize Beyer's (2013) concept of "constitutional faith," the affective politics of sovereignty touch on a kind of faith in the state based on an emotive connection produced by the state's intimate connection to ethnic identity. Our understanding of the state can be furthered through multiple lenses, beyond the strict legalistic and narrow political boundaries of sovereignty, to its affective politics of fear and hope.

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### Notes

1. Throughout this article we use Kyrgyz Republic (the official name of the state) and Kyrgyzstan (the popular name) interchangeably. However, the name of the state has become an object of political dispute with nationalists often favoring Kyrgyz Republic (for its clear denotation of the ethnic character of the state) while many who are hostile to modern political nationalism prefer Kyrgyzstan (sometimes using the Russian 'Kyrgyzstankii' to denote the people of the country of all and any ethnicity). Others counter that the suffix –stan has negative connotations of conflict and extremism and therefore seek to defer its popular usage. Normatively and descriptively, we prefer the ambiguity which is present in the interchangeable use of the two names.
2. See Gullette (2010b) for an overview of social challenges that sparked protests that resulted in the ousting of President Bakiev.
3. Uzbeks had played a small role in state administration bodies, but the issues that contributed to their limited involvement are beyond the scope of this paper. For more information, see Liu (2012).
4. There have been three national commissions, an international commission, and two reports by international organizations into the June Events. In mid-January 2011, the Ombudsman Akun (2011) published his account of the events. The National Commission, which was convened by the President, presented its findings later the same month (AKIpress 2011a). Then in May 2011, a parliamentary commission presented its findings. Three reports were prepared by Tokon Mamytov, Ismail Isakov, and Jyldyzkan Joldosheva (AKIpress 2011b). Also in May, the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (2011) presented its findings on the June events, which was criticized by the Government of Kyrgyzstan (2011). In addition, Human Rights Watch (2010), International Crisis Group (2010) and Freedom House, Memorial Human Rights Center and Norwegian Helsinki Committee (2012) have presented findings on the June events.
5. In its most recent strategy for school curricula until 2020, the Ministry of Education and Science is reducing the number of course hours, which includes reductions in Russian and Uzbek language tuition. The Minister argued that this was necessary to help minority ethnic group schoolchildren to improve their Kyrgyz language skills so that they may enter university and find employment after graduation.
6. Some scholars of the Marxist tradition criticized this simplistic and misleading historical account, arguing that the principle of state sovereignty emerged over a much longer period as an organizing tenet of the capitalist economy. Nevertheless, these scholars agree with the realist position that

- the principal is frequently violated by the instrumental actions of states (representing bourgeois commercial interests).
7. As Holy (1996, 125) notes, “A historical memory is not something a nation has because it has a history; it is something created through a nation’s reminding itself that it has a history.”
  8. See Reeves’ (2006) discussion of this. The phrase *biz el menen* was often used in 2005 and 2010 by business people to demonstrate support for the popular movement in order to avoid attacks on their assets.
  9. The *Ata Jurt* (Fatherland) party under the leadership of the outspoken Kamchybek Tashiev and Akhmet Keldibekov became the largest nationalist party in parliament.
  10. Gullette’s office was across the street from the main OSCE office in Bishkek, allowing him to observe events.
  11. The banners were written in English, Kyrgyz, and Russian. In the order above, these were written: “*Politsiia OBSE – eto opasnost’ izvne!*,” “*Kyrgyzstandy böliip jaruuga jol berbeybiz!*,” The banner referring to Kosovo was written in English.
  12. According to AKIpress (2010), a news agency in Kyrgyzstan, there were three youth groups in Bishkek demonstrating: Youth Association “Akshumkar-kut” (“The Blessing of the White Falcon”), Movement of Youth Architects, and the People’s Youth Movement “Kyraandar” (“Brave Men”). These may have been the youth wings of some political parties.
  13. The Kazakh-domain web address was: <http://murl.kz/ahl> (accessed 22 July 2010). Murl is a service which shortens web addresses. This web address is no longer active.
  14. It is in this context that the slaughter of sheep in April 2011 to rid Parliament of “evil spirits,” or those that seek to destabilize the state, can be understood (Parfitt 2011).

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