

DEMOCRACY AS A PROJECT: PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY WITHIN THE WORLD OF PROJECTS IN FORMER SOVIET KYRGYZSTAN

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Karakol¹, located in the north-eastern corner of Central Asian Kyrgyzstan,² is one of the numerous sites that have been caught up in the vanguard of the 'transition industry' of Western consultants and organizations thriving in the former socialist countries while assisting these states on their 'way to democracy and market economy'. Their efforts usually take the form of 'projects' or 'programs'. The author has studied a number of those projects and will, for the purpose of this article, draw on two of them. The first is implemented by USAID³, the second by DANIDA⁴. Both are located in Karakol and deal with issues of democratization, decentralization and administrative reform.

The present article sets out to explore the particular interpretations of the concept of democracy within the world of democratization projects in Kyrgyzstan. It furthermore draws attention to what happens when democracy is transferred as a project. That is, it investigates the relationship between the mobilized project resources and the actual outcome of the project. Ultimately, it comments on the underlying nature of democracy export as such. Let me begin by quoting some introductory parts of the relevant project documents.

DANIDA states that:

"The overall objective of the support to Karakol is to strengthen the process of democratic decentralization through a targeted support to Karakol city. ... The still existing centralized system of government makes the local government reform process crucial for a continued democratization and development towards good governance. ..." (DANIDA 7/1995).

USAID writes that:

"USAID's Municipal Finance and Management (MFM) project in Karakol seeks to help city administrators improve local government ... The mayor of Karakol understands the mutually reinforcing relationship between a free-market democracy and the ability of wage earners and businesses to pay for municipal services, including a city administration which

functions according to principles of openness, transparency and accountability. ... They [Karakolians] hope that the MFM project will help show the way out of their dilemma, not through handouts but through tools to compete in a market economy in a truly democratic environment which responds to their needs and which instills confidence in its leaders." (RTI/MFM 5/1 995)

These two projects are arguably good examples of how the classical Western concept of democracy, including its key notions of civil society, good governance and human rights, is transformed into a project in order to be exported, donated and implemented in other parts of the world. In this case: to a provincial town in Central Asia.

The notion of democracy has become an important ingredient of one of the most dominant master-narratives of our time, especially after the end of the cold war. The liberalization of the spheres of politics and economy is not something that is solely limited to the former Soviet bloc. 'Transitions to democracy occur across the entire globe, while democratization projects are an equally widespread phenomenon⁵. The case of Kyrgyzstan thus merely provides the window on a truly global phenomenon.

Actors of Democracy

As soon as the revolutions were over, the communist regimes had collapsed and the concept of the 'transition' had been created, the Western development agencies sent their 'missions' in order to identify so-called 'needs and potential areas of cooperation'. Central Asian Kyrgyzstan was among those countries that has attracted special attention among 'development-missionaries', since it quickly gained a reputation of being dedicated to a rapid and energetic transition towards democratic forms of leadership and polity. As one UN official working in Bishkek explained to me:

"Now Kyrgyzstan is on the Western track! If they want to be on the privatization scheme and democratic in the Western sense, they need to be supported. Kyrgyzstan has said from the beginning that it wants to go the

way the UN says: democratic and free election. But if you go from one system to another, you need something in between - the transition."

Today, seven years after independence, the material signs of Western 'transitional assistance' can be found everywhere in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek. Ranging from colorful flags of the United Nations (UN) or the European Union (EU), big white off-road cars with agency-symbols on their front doors, to the illegally sold schoolbooks (donated by DANIDA and UNICEF) and other items of 'aid' in the bazaars and on the streets of Bishkek. A host of donor organizations have set up their offices in the better parts of the town, from where the numerous members of the so-called 'donor-community' aim to assist and manage the transition in the form of projects, programs, privatization auctions, technical assistance etc.

Roughly speaking, the 'transition industry' consists of, first, the UN-system and other multilateral donors, represented by UNDP⁶, UNICEF⁷, UNHCR⁸ and other subdivisions as well as the EU, represented by the TACIS⁹ program. International financial institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF¹⁰, the EBRD¹¹ and the ADB¹² provide the bulk of economic assistance to the Kyrgyz government. Second, there are bilateral donors such as DANIDA, GTZ¹³ and USAID, and Western NGOs such as Save the Children Fund and France Liberté. Other donors include Islamic organizations and various international foundations, most notably the Soros Foundation. As the implementation of development aid has become increasingly privatized within the last years, a growing number of projects are implemented by private consultancy companies, paid by bilateral or multilateral donors. Some of the most visible in Kyrgyzstan are Price Waterhouse, Ernest and Young, Overseas Strategic Consulting and Carl Bro. Major donors actively involved in democratization projects are UNDP, EU, USAID and, less significantly, DANIDA¹⁴. The bulk of foreign assistance to the political transition has been devoted to the area of Governance and Public Sector Reform¹⁵.

The Project-ization of Democracy

The transition, development and 'democracy-export' occur in the form of projects. Generally speaking, projects are efforts to turn ideas and plans into reality. Planning a project therefore means reaching forward and gaining control over the future. All projects have certain objectives, which are supposed to be achieved by the input of

material, personal and symbolic resources. The core idea in the project approach to development is that one is clear about all aspects involved. What Morris has called "projectismo - a symptom of malaise fatal to any development agency (1993: 211)" has been criticized by a number of scholars for its inability to plan, manipulate and control the implied people and resources in space and time of the project (Robertson 1984; Pottier 1993; Garber & Jendani 1993). The project discourse of development in general, and of the transition in specific, attempts not only to define and plan e.g. 'the transition to democracy'. As Robertson (1984), Kostera (1996) and Sampson (1996) have noted, it also obscures, manipulates and mystifies realities. Projects develop their own social life and discourse.

The project approach to democracy in Kyrgyzstan assumes that Western 'democratization-experts' are in a position to influence means and goals of the country's democratization process. This, ideally, has to be understood as two sub-processes: firstly, the deconstruction of the old system, called decentralization, and secondly, the construction of a new system, called democratization. Since both processes are integrated in projects, the transition 'to' and 'from' begins and ends with projects. Projects convert the explaining and academic models of democracy into constitutive and concrete models for democracy, i.e. projects aimed at instituting democracy. Whether models for democracy will ultimately attain their goal, remains to be seen.

Organizational Definitions and Rhetoric of Democracy

Democracy within technical assistance to transitional countries is a concept that has been circumscribed by a discursive field, meaning that 'projectified democracy' has its own definition and language. According to UNDP (1995) and GOSKOMINVEST (1995) the official field of action for democratization activities consists of four main areas: "1. democratic institutions and processes; 2. the rule of law, juridical reform and human rights; 3. governance (the administration and conduct of government); 4. public participation and civil society". Project documents concerning democratization are filled with buzzwords such as participation, empowerment, sustainability, capacity-building, transparency, accountability etc. These terms basically describe how official state discourses in the West define democratic culture.

Democracy is understood by development-officials as a combination of 'hardware' and 'software'. This means a set of institutions necessary in an organized democratic system as well as a certain democratic behavior, value and culture. The 'hardware' consists of election systems, legislation, the constitution and certain institutionalized political procedures. The 'software' of a democratic system is far more difficult to grasp as it contains issues such as participatory behavior, political awareness, democratic decision making processes and political culture in general. Deficiencies within, or the total lack of democratic culture are explained in terms of "Soviet habits", "communist legacies" or "undemocratic traditions". These 'problems', i.e. the lack of a democratic culture, are, in the eyes of Western experts, supposed to be solved through training sessions, seminars, the presence of long-term advisors and study-tours for Kyrgyz politicians and decision-makers¹⁶.

I frequently noticed discrepancies between what representatives of donor organizations say when interviewed on the one hand and what they write in their reports and actually do. This shows that experts can draw on at least two discourses: the discourse of their academic background and the discourse of the agency they work for. In some cases, they chose an academic discourse while talking to me as an anthropologist (some of them were social scientists themselves). Others were 100% sure that they and their organizations were doing an "awful lot of good" (USAID-consultant).

Variations in the way democratic ideas are formulated and communicated during the interviews I conducted also reflect the dominant discourses concerning democracy in my informants' national and organizational background. While officials from the UN often stick to the well-known rhetoric of "awareness, participation, capacity-building, empowerment and community development", representatives from USAID and its contractors stress issues such as "competition, marketing, freedom of the individual, free enterprise and the possibility and willingness to take risks." U.S. citizens underline the importance of a strong and truly independent non-state sector, thereby demonstrating their bias towards American notions of democracy. In contrast, German GTZ stresses that the "transition in Kyrgyzstan goes through the government". Experts' private agendas and attitudes vary a lot. Some of them are devoted, while others are cynical about what they are doing.

Although democratization experts expressed varying ideas concerning the nature of democracy, when it comes to the point of the project or program, organizations as different as USAID and DANIDA are implementing similar types of activities: supporting and strengthening the local government in Karakol and assisting the central election commission. The majority of Western donors and foundations operating in Kyrgyzstan use the very same tools in implementing democracy: technical assistance, institution building and training. As Quigley (1996) has pointed out, there is a considerable overlap of donor activities within the field of governance. Thus democracy in Kyrgyzstan appears to be a 'common Western project'¹⁷, implemented by a variety of democratization projects and programs, and coordinated by GOSKOMINVEST¹⁸ and the UNDP-office in Bishkek.

As Newberg & Carothers (1996) have noted, many donors see themselves having "a unique chance" of helping the former socialist countries. By this they mean that we (the West) are in a state of historical urgency and responsibility¹⁹, if we want to avoid chaos, total economic breakdown, Muslim fundamentalism, return to communism etc. The general assumptions about why "democracy" should be implemented in Kyrgyzstan are, first, that democracy promotes peace and stability in the region; second, that democratic nations will be reliable partners of political and economic cooperation; and third, that political pluralism and the liberalization of the economy have to proceed in parallel.

Democracy as NGOs

A dominant theme in experts' narratives and documents concerns the significance of NGOs and civil society in a democratic system. Generally, NGOs are assumed to play a decisive role in communication processes between government and citizenry. In the Western context, NGOs articulate demands, function as early warning mechanism and a buffer against the state and the market. They can agitate against non-democratic tendencies and at the same time function as agents of political socialization. Civil society is meant to be a society that is integrated through a horizontal network of NGOs. U.S. donors in particular, stress the NGO approach that stems from their ideal of a strong non-state sector. From the donor point of view, NGOs provide channels to allocate funds to beneficiaries without expanding the power of the state (Newberg & Carothers 1996).

Sampson (1996) and Newberg & Carothers (1996) have pointed out that democracy acquired its quantitative connotation when Western advisors - under pressure to provide objective and quantitative results in order to show that projects are worth their costs - started measuring democracy in the amount of NGOs. More NGOs are assumed to improve participation and communication between regime and citizenry, and thus to result in a strong civil society and democracy. Most donors have incorporated the discourse of NGOs into their programs and projects. In the specific case of Kyrgyzstan, however, this approach is still difficult to get off the ground - there are still very few NGOs! As one UN program officer explained to me: "We have so many programs which are supposed to run with NGOs here in Kyrgyzstan, but there aren't any - so we are forced to create them! Grouping, let's say."

The NGO-approach in the former socialist world has been questioned by Wedel (1994). She claims that the "connective tissue of democratic culture" (NGOs) may not be the "building blocks of democracy that donors envision" (ibid: 301). The importance for the transition that is attributed to NGOs, assumes that NGOs in the post-socialist world function in a similar manner to their Western counterparts, despite the very different circumstances under which they emerge and operate (ibid).

Sampson (1996) has shown in a case from Albania that what is implemented in NGO programs is the form rather than the foundation. Western NGOs are integrated in society where they operate effectively due to elements such as public administration, institutionalized government procedures, infrastructure and an open press. Conditions such as these are, however, not present in most of the former socialist countries (ibid), Kyrgyzstan included. Robinson (1996) goes even further in his criticism of NGO-support. He states that aid to NGOs is a sophisticated way to penetrate the political system and civil societies of target countries with the aim of consciously controlling political mobilization from 'below' and 'within,' heading off those who might strive for the unwanted and real change of unjust economic and social structures -.

These above mentioned criticisms are even more relevant in Kyrgyzstan, where - in contrast to parts of Eastern Europe - there has never been any democratic regime, and where the concept of an NGO is entirely unknown notion among the population. The number of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan

thus tells us little about democracy, participation or political life in general²⁰.

The Target of Intervention

"They always say: 'Yes - thank you' to whatsoever we suggest. Every year there is a certain amount of money allocated to Kyrgyzstan from Brussels and this money has to be used. And because the donors have experience from other countries this money is not used in a very bad way. But it could be used much better, if the country had an overall development policy. But here no people are capable of making policies. This government does not help. And when we ask them to be more critical, they say, 'You give us the help for free, so who are we to criticize you'?" (TACIS Program Manager)

The 'beneficiaries' are typically described as "receptive", "willing to change", "cooperative", "open-minded" or "easy to work with". The Kyrgyz government is the "good pupil", who is following the suggestions of Western advisors. Most Western experts have previous experience from development projects in Africa or Asia, and stress the positive side of the Kyrgyz' lack of experience of cooperation with Western donors, compared to third world-countries where the writing of a project proposal long since has become a ritualized tradition. The government is frequently criticized for being "passive", "without initiative and visions", "too uncritical", "not very constructive" and sometimes also as "corrupt and nepotistic" or "deeply entrenched in a conservative power-bloc consisting of officials from the old regime and strong clan-, kinship- and family-ties" (UNDP 1995).

These, somehow contradictory, statements concerning project counterparts and Kyrgyz politicians can be understood in different ways. They are grounded in factual variations among bureaucrats and politicians. Some counterparts are more cooperative than others. They reflect variations among experts' expectations on how 'active' a good counterpart should be.

A "receptive" counterpart makes it easy for experts to implement their program. But this does not necessarily make the project work better. Experts' concern about "passive" counterparts thus reflects the current participatory paradigm in development interventions. On the one hand, experts know how important it is "to involve the patient in its own cure" and are thus frustrated if Kyrgyz politicians don't want to participate in the

way they expect them to participate. On the other hand, and as many of my informants expressed, experts are delighted to see how "open" and "reform-minded" the Kyrgyz politicians are.

The other category relevant to the process of democratization in the minds and documents of experts are "the people", the approximately 4.6 million Kyrgyzstanis consisting of 80 different ethnic groups. Though there are enormous variations along ethnic and tribal, as well as urban and rural lines in Kyrgyzstan, "the people" exists as one sole category in experts' narratives. The following examples shall give the reader an idea of how the population of Kyrgyzstan is depicted in experts' accounts:

"The People are bright, well educated, see the need for changes. But they don't act on their own initiative and don't take risks because of the potential for making mistakes. Ordinary people here can't think about democracy. When you're hungry and cold and you have to care for your family, you just have to survive. But we have a program bringing in 38 video films on democracy and how it works in the U. S. (USAID-consultant)

I often participated in training sessions outside the capital and it's always one individual, who can change the whole audience. Maybe if there are 20 persons, there is one who says: 'hey - this is a great thing!' And that sets the mood. Or he would say: 'This is bullshit! What are you trying to sell me? I don't believe it. And that sets the mood. And I think that's typical for these societies, that they don't think for themselves'. (USAID-consultant)

Most Westerners working for development agencies in Kyrgyzstan describe Kyrgyzstanis as "passive", "without initiative", "unable to think for themselves", "unorganized and reluctant to organize", "tribalistic" and "blind to see what was wrong with the old system". The more positive accounts say that Kyrgyzstanis are "well, but wrongly educated", "able to see the need for changes" and "a proud people who don't want handouts".

Although this brief essay doesn't allow a deeper analysis of how these client categories are constructed, it is clear that Western experts and the Kyrgyz don't know each other very well. Few of them know the other's language. Hardly any Westerners have an in-depth knowledge of the country and few Kyrgyzstanis have had the

opportunity to travel to the West. They communicate with each other through an army of translators and interpreters, and outside of their meetings, seminars and workshops they hardly have any contact with each other. Due to the recent nature of development intervention in Kyrgyzstan, few of the so-called experts have very much experience from Kyrgyzstan²¹. Hence, they are not really acquainted with the mechanisms of the society, which they are supposed to transform, and most of them leave at a point when they have just started acquiring a better understanding of it. Without getting into a detailed ethnography of expert- and expatriate culture' in Kyrgyzstan, the majority of experts stick together in their own restaurants, clubs and leisure trips. The sense of 'Gemeinschaft' among expatriates, due to language barriers and the environment²², is at least as highly developed as it is among the more established expatriate communities in African capitals, for example.

More detailed accounts and analyses of living conditions and social structures in Kyrgyzstan hardly exist, except for some old-fashioned Soviet ethnographic accounts written in Russian. Thus, the variety of social and economic strategies, employed by Kyrgyzstanis during these difficult times, remains hidden to most experts. All this means is that experts' knowledge of Kyrgyzstanis and their life-worlds is a rather superficial one. However, this certainly does not mean that they are not learning. All parties involved have initiated a process of accumulating knowledge on 'the other' and of penetrating each other's life-worlds through interaction within the framework of projects.

The American anthropologist Kathleen Kuehnast, who conducted twenty months of fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, complains of experts' lack of interest in certain features of local culture such as the tribal kinship system (Kuehnast 1996). However, as Escobar (1991) has argued, it is almost impossible to integrate truly anthropological knowledge into development projects. He would claim that even if experts had an intimate knowledge of local Kyrgyz culture, this could not make them change the basic approach of exporting thoroughly Western models to Kyrgyzstan. The reason for the inability to integrate sociocultural studies into projects is that these operate with a different type of knowledge. Long & Long (1992) have put it more bluntly in stating that, basically, there exist two different and independent types of knowledge: 'knowledge for action' and 'knowledge for understanding'.

A picture emerges from the interviews with experts and their documents of the Kyrgyz government and the people of Kyrgyzstan as "helpless and unable to take care of their transition". The theme of 'passivity' is truly a dominating one in experts' accounts. Still worse in the light of democracy: they are depicted as being unable to communicate with each other! Kyrgyzstanis are described as being without initiative and unknowing of how and where to complain for their rights, while Kyrgyz politicians are said to be unable to react to criticism.

By defining Kyrgyzstanis and their government as "passive" and "backward", the country is turned into a subject for intervention and a suitable target for 'democracy-export'. The creation of the 'myth of passivity and helplessness' and its attribution to Kyrgyzstanis and their government is a process which, I suggest, could be described as 'discursive subjectification'. It is a process by which Western experts invent themselves as indispensable actors of democratization and the transition in general.

'Backward' Kyrgyzstan becomes an institutionalized knowledge and scientific truth, resulting in specific forms of transitional practices such as democratization-projects. Ultimately, the discourse of 'backwardness' might also result in specific forms of subjectivity in Kyrgyzstan. In the same way that the entire third world has been defined as 'underdeveloped' by the 'developed' West since the end of World War II (Esteve 1992), Kyrgyzstan and other countries of the former Soviet block are now being depicted as 'transitional' and 'backward'.

A Showpiece of the West?

"Karakol has a very progressive mayor and we want to show other towns what can be done here. Karakol can be a model for Kyrgyzstan - Kyrgyzstan can be a model for Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan is small, but very important as a model. As the most progressive and receptive country it makes great sense to me to pour more money in here (USAID-consultant)."

The idea of 'what can be done here' seems to have certain significance in experts' narratives on the issue of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. What Gerner & Hedlund (1994) have described as a vast experimental laboratory of economic shock therapies for an army of "crusaders" (ibid: 26) in Russia, also holds true for democratization. Kyrgyzstan is a rather small country. It might be

easier to produce results here than it would be in Russia. Kyrgyzstan thus becomes a model for how the 'hardware' of a democratic system can be installed with Western help - a showpiece for 'system export'²³ in the strict sense of the term.

The concept of a 'model' is a frequently heard one within the discourse of 'democracy export'. Karakol is supposed to be a model, i.e. a test for other provincial towns in Kyrgyzstan, while the administrative apparatus of local governance of some particular towns in Denmark and the U.S. should be a model for Karakol municipality²⁴. Most experts know very well that models are not realities. Some of them explained to me that models couldn't be repeated because conditions of receptiveness are different in new contexts. What experts are not always aware of, is that their models are 'remodeled', i.e. that the outcome of an assumed plan of action does not always resemble what was initially planned.

Technical Solutions to Political Problems?

'Government services' are never simply 'services'; instead of conceiving this phrase as a reference simply to a 'government whose purpose is to serve, it may be at least as appropriate to think of 'services', which serve to govern (Ferguson 1990:253)

Donors agree that the Soviet administrative apparatus is ineffective, outdated and too bureaucratic. Therefore, projects such as the ones by DANIDA and USAID are designed and implemented. What is remarkable, however, is that institutions of public administration are viewed as apolitical tools. Public administration turns out to be heavily 'de-politicized' within expert discourse. Democracy, the "peoples' rule and opportunities of influence," is truly an issue of politics and power balances. A democratic society will, according to the two political scientists Perry & Moran (1994), "be one which permits and also encourages every man and woman individually or together with others to choose the course of his/her life" (ibid: 4).

Although these definitions of democracy are no less problematic than many others²⁵, it is nevertheless striking that in donors' documents, democracy is frequently reduced to a technical problem which can be solved by 'technical assistance' within the field of governance and administration. Similarly, the Kyrgyz government appears within 'expert discourse as an apolitical machine for implementing democratization-projects that are ultimately supposed to benefit the

population. And while Western donors have the ready-made democratic systems in their luggage, the government is depicted as "receptive" and "willing to change". Thus, democratization projects take their principal point of departure and primary object not in the people to be empowered, but in the state to be transformed according to an apolitical Western model.

Local government institutions, as introduced by DANIDA and USAID in the town of Karakol, are automatically believed to benefit citizens in terms of better service, conducted by 'civil servants'. Nobody among the interviewed project staff, and none of the written documents I studied, ever mentioned that these institutions might also be abused in order to coerce control and put the population under surveillance. This, I suggest, is the primary 'risk assumption' of these projects, the history of the Soviet Union and Central Asia with its long traditions of authoritarian leadership style taken into account. Administrative systems of central and local bureaucracy are not innocent technical devices, but powerful political instruments to control people. Most experts mention certain 'counter-democratic' and conservative forces within the Kyrgyz government. But these always appear in the form of obstacles and 'Soviet legacies' to be overcome, and not as a foundation on which to be built. It can certainly not be taken for granted that, while new systems are introduced, the old ones will disappear. It remains to be seen to what extent the Soviet political and administrative system will be able to reproduce itself. At present, it is a force which cannot be 'overcome'.

The export of 'democratic' institutions to Kyrgyzstan could thus likely result in the exact opposite of what it was meant to be: not 'empowerment' of the people, but in fact their further 'subjectification' and 'disempowerment'. Kyrgyzstan's - as well as other post-socialist states' - huge economic, political and social problems are usually attributed to the previous system of central planning and control, and to the sudden breakdown of this system. How, then, can the solution to Kyrgyzstan's problems be the strengthening and reinforcing of state-power? Increasing state power is by no means identical with the increased ability of this state to realize its plans and objectives. What might as well be increased is the ruling class' ability - and tendency - to extract surplus from the citizenry.

The new state power, in Kyrgyzstan justified by the notions of democracy as well as transitional

and technical assistance, thus becomes the extended power of the old and new ruling class in this post Soviet 'transitional' state. The old Soviet nomenclature becomes the new 'democratic elite' of Kyrgyzstan. Hence, democratizing initiatives which are implemented through the state, do not by any means guarantee more democracy for the citizens (or rather subjects) of this state.

The Transition to Democracy?

Democracy, as it is exported to Kyrgyzstan by the Western donor-community, is thus a matter of, firstly, creating legitimacy for allocating money to Kyrgyzstan through the discourses of 'passivity and helplessness' and 'reform-mindedness and democracy'. Secondly, it is also an issue of creating a state with a certain set of institutions. This state will, hopefully, be a "good partner" (GTZ-informant), since it is run by rules which are easy to recognize, because the terms of the 'partnership' were suggested by Western governments and organizations, legitimized by the universal notion of 'good governance'. Ultimately, 'democratization' within transitional expert discourse is little more than a facade and a metaphor for the transformation of a political system that is perceived as outdated, and for obtaining 'good partners' in the East. As democracy simply has come to symbolize 'aid', Kyrgyz politicians have successfully manipulated this resource, of which they currently receive more than any other Soviet successor state.

We are now in a position to conclude that certain forms of e.g. Danish democratic model institutions can be - and are - transferred to Kyrgyzstan. Although this remains to be studied thoroughly, it is a fact that Kyrgyz government institutions are transformed in their organizational structures according to Western models. What cannot be transferred to Kyrgyzstan is 'Danish democracy or 'democracy as it works in the U.S.', i.e. the way these democratic institutions function in Denmark or the United States. When political institutions are taken out of their original socio-cultural and political context and transplanted into new localities, they cannot be expected to function the same way as they did in their original context. It is crucial to note that democratic institutions that are imported into Kyrgyzstan do not enter political 'vacuums', but highly complex structures of authority, subjectivity, power and legitimacy. These ruling practices will reproduce themselves - also within new political institutions.

Western democracy is exported - but mainly the form, the terminology, the rhetoric and the

'buzzwords'. Democracy, as we know it in the West, is an idealized reality, which cannot be replicated in other parts of the world, because it has developed under particular political and historical circumstances, and because it can only function in a particular societal context.

Democratization programs have not added significantly to the ability of 'ordinary Kyrgyzstanis' to improve their life situation. The present Kyrgyz government is discredited in the eyes of the population in Kyrgyzstan as a result of the economic and social disaster in the country. It appears that the population of Kyrgyzstan has experienced Soviet domination as politically more legitimate than the present freedom of 'democratic' Kyrgyzstan. In addition to that, the entire Western effort of 'transitional assistance' to Kyrgyzstan has significantly contributed to an effective 'silencing' of the people. The radical restructuring of the economy and the political sphere and the organized disassembling of their former frameworks of society has reduced their lives to sheer survival. The overall tendency is that the 'powers that be' are supported, while 'ordinary people' are neglected and 'disempowered'.

If we perceive democracy as 'the rule of the people', I have to conclude that democratization projects fail to achieve their objectives. If we perceive democracy as elections and the rule of a small elite group, we might conclude that 'democracy-export' works according to its objective. The questions emerge, whether this, is the conscious and intended outcome of a policy, practiced by a global elite under the leadership of the U.S., pursuing transnational hegemony and global neo-liberalism with the help of "consensual" rather than "coercive domination" as Robinson (1996: 616) argues, or whether the reinforcement of existing social structures is an unintended outcome of democratization projects in a Foucaultian sense?

At the moment, Kyrgyzstan is drawn into a global economic system of donors and beneficiaries and has thus become a target of Western 'democracy-promotion' programs. If 'socialist paternalism' (Verdery 1996) is to be replaced by Western 'development paternalism', it remains difficult to see how Kyrgyzstanis, who see themselves as politically powerless and victimized, will develop into consciously participating citizens. After having been part of a 'superpower' for 70 years, being 'underdeveloped', i.e. 'immature' is about to become a new form of self-perception in Kyrgyzstanis' minds. If 'true'

democratization implies the process of turning 'powerless' subjects of state power into participating citizens, I suggest that 'transitional assistance' in general has further 'subjectified' the population of Kyrgyzstan. This might be the true nature of the 'transition' - not from socialism to democracy and market economy - but from the second to the third world, i.e. the making of a new development country.

Notes

1. 'Karakol' means 'Black Hand'. Previously called Przeval'sk, Karakol has approximately 70 000 inhabitants. The Kyrgyz constitute the majority, but there are substantial numbers of Russians, Germans, Jews, Dungans, Uhigur etc.
2. Officially: The Kyrgyz Republic. 'Kyrgyzstan' is still the designation most common.
3. United States Agency for International Development. The project is called 'Karakol Municipal Finance Management Program'. Research Triangle Institute (RTI), a United States contract research corporation, implements it.
4. Danish International Development Agency. The project is named 'Local Government in Karakol' and subcontracted to Carl Pro International A/S and Nordic Consulting Group A/S, two multidisciplinary Danish consulting companies.
5. The U.S. government, for example, promotes democracy through a wide range of activities in 109 countries (Robinson 1996)
6. United Nations Development Program.
7. United Nations Children's Fund.
8. United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees.
9. Technical Assistance to the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States)
10. International Monetary Fund.
11. European Bank of Reconstruction and Development.
12. Asian Development Bank.
13. Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit.
14. However, DANIDA has decided not to extend 'transitional assistance' to Kyrgyzstan. Cooperation between DANIDA and the

- Kyrgyz government therefore phased out by Dec. 1997.
15. The variety of actors within the 'transition industry' re- flects the three dominant spheres existing in Western democratic societies: state, economy and civil society. Bilateral donors represent states. Private consultancy companies represent the economy, while Western NGOs represent civil society. The foreign agents of democratization thus reflect the very structure they seek to implement in Kyrgyzstan.
 16. An informant for USAID stated that: ". . . showing them our department stores and the quality of our goods, and - even more important - the system that is responsible for all that, is worth more than talking yourself blue in the face."
 17. A comparison of programs in different transitional countries reveals that the approach is basically the same in all post- socialist societies, where Western donors implement democracy. Thus, for donors it hardly makes any difference whether the target of intervention is Poland or Kyrgyzstan.
 18. State Commission on Foreign Investment and Economic Assistance.
 19. I often heard people make parallels to the Marshall Plan following World War II.
 20. The abundance of NGOs in development countries of e.g. sub- Saharan Africa has little to do with democracy. Here, it has to be understood as a reaction to Western aid programs and 'funding speculation mentalities'. The number of NGOs in Denmark, for example, does not entirely reflect the 'state of democracy in Denmark' either. 'Funding speculation mentalities' is a phenomenon not unknown in Denmark. Furthermore, when internal problems occur, i.e. when consensus cannot be achieved, there is a tendency towards fractioning, thereby increasing the overall number of NGOs.
 21. Most of them have a background from 'traditional' development countries in the Third. World
 22. There is still a sense of pioneering in the 'Wild East'. Westerners who came to Kyrgyzstan right after independence are especially proud, because they came at a time when, "you couldn't even buy Snickers!" Within the UN- system, Bishkek is classified as 'hardship 1'.
 23. A term used in Denmark for the 'export' of various administrative arrangements such as hospitals, childcare, taxation, municipal administration etc.
 24. The two projects mentioned at the beginning of this article have integrated exchange visits of local politicians to Denmark and the U.S.
 25. In terms of their relevance and applicability in non-Western societies.

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