

Gendered Nationalism: The Roles and Identities of Kyrgyz Women In The Private Realm

Aisha Manasova

1

Context

- Kyrgyzstan has faced a number of challenges since obtaining its independence in 1991
- Nation-building process and its nationalist orientations have influenced discourses and social norms
- The position of women shifted in both traditional and modern directions
- This study explores how these nationalist narratives are influencing and shaping women's identities

2

Introduction to gendered nationalism

- The studies of nationalism were criticized for disregarding gender (Yuval-Davis 1997)
- Gendered nationalism supports social inequality and portray a nation, in which women are responsible for moral and internal values of the nation
- In Kyrgyzstan women act as mothers and “priveleged custodians of values” (Kandiyoti 2007) - socially expected roles of women

3

Literature Review

- Discovered four key variables, which influence women’s socially expected roles

Schools of thought	Traditionalization	The rise of Islam	Retraditionalization
Main variables			
Traditional values	Ismailbekova (2015), Beyer and Finke (2019), Cleuziou (20119)		Akischeva (2022), Suyarkulova (2016), Beyer and Kojobekova (2019)
Religion		Handrahan (2001), Peyrouse (2007), Omelicheva (2016), Artman (2019)	Commerico (2014), Zhussipbek, Achilov, and Nagayeva (2020)
Patriarchy	Handrahan (2001), Ismailbekova (2015), Suyarkulova (2016)	Urbaeva (2019), Suyarkulova (2016)	Blakkisrud and Abdykapar (2017)
Gender discrimination	Mueller (2022)	Handrahan (2001)	Kabylova (2022)

Research gaps: Public domain; how people interact with discourses, bottom-up

4

Research question

Using a **non-positivist** research approach - not attempting to establish causality.

Instead, it tries to **understand**:

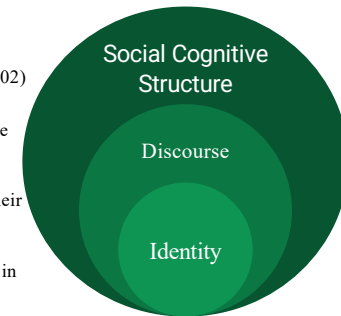
How do traditional and religious values, patriarchy, and gender-based discrimination shape the socially expected roles of women in the private realm, and thus their Kyrgyz identity?

5

Theoretical Framework

Ted Hopf's **Social Constructivist** approach (1998, 2002)

- State does not have the full control over discourse but it can promote or reject a certain social order
- Individuals actively participate in constructing their identities; Yet, their actions and behaviors are limited by the broader social cognitive structure, in which particular social standards and attitudes predominate



6

Methods and methodology

- Employs a **qualitative research** design as it explores how women's perspectives are **formed, understood, and valued**
- Uses semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and discussion of a primary and secondary data such as journal articles, news, governmental policies to validate findings
- The purpose of interview questions was to **understand** how participants perceive research variables and their impact on their Kyrgyz identity

7

Methods and methodology

Selection criteria

Women aged 18 and over, living in the Kyrgyz Republic, classified by: age, religion, level of education. **Snowball sampling, personal networks, and social media** used

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews with 15 women. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, taking into account all ethical considerations

Data analysis

Using **thematic analysis**, coded and themed data based on patterns, and then categorized using the software QDA Miner Lite

Limitations: Time constraints, a relatively small sample size, and potential for selection bias

8

Findings

- Results and Discussion:
3 expectations obtained from the literature review
- Research Prospects

9

Finding #1 confirms EXP #1

EXP #1: Traditional values and specific interpretations of Islam in Kyrgyz society reinforce the continuation of socially expected roles of women in the private sphere.

- Multiple discourses existing in society
- Women who diverge are viewed as unfulfilling their duty, less “Kyrgyz”
- The “rules” are constructed through governmental texts and make gender roles natural and correct
- This upholds gendered nationalist narrative and a certain social order

```

graph LR
    A["The role of traditional values on women's expected roles"] --- B["As a source of oppression"]
    A --- C["As a source of empowerment"]
    D["The role of religion on women's expected roles"] --- E["Source of oppression"]
    D --- F["Source of empowerment"]
    
```

10

Finding #2 supports EXP #2

EXP #2: The socially expected roles of women in the private sphere are influenced by the state's construction and renegotiation of the meaning of religion, which impacts national identity and how the population perceives religion

2 themes: *Misinterpretation of Islam, Hybrid of Kyrgyz traditional values and Islam*

- The state uses religion and traditional values in discourse interchangeably to reconstruct its meaning and societal norms
- Marginalizes those who do not abide by these roles
- Reinforces a sense of national identity that is linked to gendered expectations and maintains particular gendered powered dynamics

11

Finding #3 refutes EXP #3

EXP #3: As Kyrgyz society has experienced an increase in patriarchy, the role of women has been marginalized in the private realm.

The majority of respondents refuted this expectation. 2 themes: *Weakening of patriarchy, Evolving patriarchy*

Puzzle: Women who believed in the decline of patriarchy (of all ages) still viewed the shift from traditional roles as improper and weird. Why?

12

- Patriarchy often is explained as a system of male dominance and female subordination or “in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” by Sylvia Walby (Walby 1990, 20)
- Women portrayed as lacking agency and passive
- Not just oppression vs progressivism
- Sultanalieva argues postcolonial lens cannot be applied to Central Asia (2023)
- Applying Hopf’s approach, Kyrgyz women have their own understanding of patriarchy, which is not static or fixed
- It is a social construct that is evolving, a consequence of women’s changing experiences, cultural context, selective adaptation of Western ideas of patriarchy and gender equality

13

Limitations and Future Research Prospects

- A more intersectional standpoint with more respondents is needed
- Further research since gender discrimination is not found to be a prominent variable
- The agency of women must be explored further
- How Kyrgyz women understand patriarchy; this topic could not have been explored more as this was not the main focus of the study

14

Conclusions

1. Traditional and religious values were strongly correlated with Kyrgyz women's identities through constructing and reproducing societal norms that are promoted as central to the state's national identity: mothers and guardians of cultural and national values, which women are expected to adhere to; otherwise, they are isolated or ostracized, leading to a sense of detachment from their national identity.
2. The research challenges the discourse surrounding gendered nationalism and increased patriarchy along with the marginalization of women's roles. The findings revealed that women are active participants in shaping of their identities and the ways they interact with discourses.
3. Since gender discrimination did not seem to be a major factor in shaping one's identity, and considering newer forms of patriarchy which imply a shift from traditional gender roles, there is a need for further research on the topic

15

Thank you for
your attention!

Aisha Manasova

16