

Abstract

Despite Kyrgyzstan's adoption of legislations to promote gender equality, the country remains an unsafe place for women, who are subjected to severe forms of gender based violence and discrimination. Recently, gender based violence propelled women to mobilise in greater numbers to demand better rights and greater equality. In most instances, however, their mobilization was met with further backlash from patriarchal forces and the same state. This research presents a gendered analysis of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, with the goal to assess how the state has incorporated gender in its nation-building process since independence in 1991 until 2020. It seeks to evaluate Kyrgyzstan's efforts to achieve gender equality and address the issue of violence against women. In doing so, the research highlights the gaps and inconsistencies in the state's manifestation and practice of its gender policies. The research demonstrates that Kyrgyzstan has one of the most advanced gender policies in the Central Asian region. However, gender inequality persists in the form of traditional gender norms, the normalization of violence against women, and customary practices embedded in the structures of the society and manifested by the state through the 'tradition and culture' and 'nation-building' narrative. As a result, the state securitizes feminism, women's rights, and women's issues as a threat to its traditional national values, culture, and history, leading to a discrepancy between the state's professed aim to achieve gender equality and the discrimination and violence that women experience in practice. The gender policy of post independent Kyrgyzstan is controversial and paradoxical due to the multilayered identities of its people and the diverse geopolitical influences that have shaped them and the state. In pursuing its new identity, the state is trying to align with Western norms and values, but its traditional heritage makes gender equality difficult to be achieved. The findings of this research represent a significant contribution to a very limited literature that exists on gender in Kyrgyzstan, and particularly on the state's construction of gender in response to gender base violence.

Key words: post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan; gender and nation-building; gender-based violence; violence against women; gender policy; securitization