

**The Media Portrayal of Migrant Women's Lives in the Russian Federation:  
Control of Women's Sexuality by "Kyrgyz Patriots"**

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*Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of Gender Studies*

*In partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies*

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Budapest, Hungary  
2015

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## **ABSTRACT**

The discourse on mobility and migration being solely a male activity has controlled women's movement for a relatively long time. It has also influenced the media's representation of migrants' lives in receiving countries, where women migrants are either underrepresented or misrepresented. In this paper, I explore the representation of Kyrgyz women migrants in the media of Kyrgyzstan, which is one of the major suppliers of skilled and low-skilled workers to the Russian Federation. Focusing specifically on the violent movement Kyrgyz "patriots", the top news of Kyrgyzstani news agencies throughout 2012 and 2013, I examine how the media represent women migrant workers in the Russian Federation through the lens of sexuality.

For the purpose of the current thesis, the analysis of the media discourses on Kyrgyz migrant women's lives in the Russian Federation is done based on news articles from three major Kyrgyzstani online news agencies. These are VB.kg (private) Azattyk.kg (private, international) and kloop.kg (independent). By critically analyzing discourses in newspapers of Kyrgyzstan, I trace the "power" of the media to influence the public perception. I argue that the media of Kyrgyzstan being the first in opening the violent and abusive activities of "Kyrgyz patriots" to the public discussion, presented them in patriotic and nationalist frames. This misrepresentation of the movement, as the result, portrayed sexual lives of Kyrgyz woman migrants as "immoral", "degrading" and "illegal".

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I want to express my special gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Erzsébet Barát for her support, guidance, invaluable assistance and dedicated involvement in all steps of my writing process. This thesis paper would not be accomplished without you.

I also want to thank my Academic Writing instructor Andrea Kirchknopf who helped with the structure, organization and style of my thesis.

Over the past year, I have received knowledge and support from a great number of professors. I am grateful to Elissa Helms, Andrea Peto, Eva Fodor, Vera Eliasova and Hadley Z. Renkin for the knowledge given during their seminar classes.

I would like to express my gratitude to my parents and sisters for their endless love, care and support.

## INTRODUCTION

For a long time, human mobility has been considered as a solely male activity. Men could easily move within private and public as well as local and global spaces. The notion of *flaneur* examined by Charles Baudelaire is a good example, which illustrates men's privilege to freely access a city space, observe its crowd, and examine the street life. Unlike a *flaneur* man, who was associated with an educated, wealthy, and free person (Wolff, 1990; 2007), a woman has been relegated into the private and domestic sphere. Her movement in a public space has been strictly controlled by state regulations. Solnit (2000) writes that "Merely walking about in the wrong time or place could put a woman under suspicion, and the law allowed any woman so accused or suspected to be arrested" (p.233). This illustrates that women's movement in public places have had negative connotations. Indeed, Solnit writes that it has been equated with their sexual accessibility.

If to examine the case of migration, it has been too for a long time associated mainly with the mobility of young, single and white men (Sharpe, 2001, p.11). However, feminist theorists, who work on reframing the history of migration, claim that many young women were also independently travelling around the world in the pursuit of "prosperity", "freedom" and job opportunities (Sharpe, 2001, p.4). Social scientists, who have done historical analysis of migrant women's lives, illustrate that women "were active participants in the migration process and engaged subjects of their own lives" (Friedman-Kasaba, p.178 as quoted in Sharpe, 2001, p.11), thus deconstructing the common myth about the association of mobility and migration with a man. Yet, if we look at the media, there is still a narrow coverage of migrant women's lives.

According to Terry Threadgold (2009), the print and broadcast media represent the life stories of migrants in a specific "template" (p.1). This "template", as she claims, unites the

diverse experiences of migrants into one pattern, where they are shown as “victims”, “invaders” and/or “criminals” (p.2). She argues that the media fail to accurately present the stories of different categories of migrants, focusing only on the stories of asylum seekers, refugees, illegal immigrants and migrant workers. The other problem with the media representation of migrants’ lives, states Threadgold, is the absence of the life stories of women and children (p.11). Hence, Threadgold claims that the one-dimensional frame that the media uses for representing the lives of migrants influences the public attitudes towards migration and migration policies in unfavorable ways – especially in relation to women migrants.

Like Terry Threadgold, Mary Nash (2004) also argues that the media shapes public opinion, values, attitudes and judgments in regard to the social and political environment (p.57). In addition, she also claims that as an effect of an “invisibilizing discourse” (p.58), the media excludes the presence of women migrants. Nash argues that migrant women are highlighted only in relation to such problems as “abuse, violence or prostitution” (p.59). These images then become, as she argues, “the point of reference” of all women migrants, who are then represented as economically dependent and immature beings.

Following this line of thoughts on media representation of migrant women, in my master paper, I want to explore the media portrayal of migrant women’s sexuality. Focusing specifically on the movement Kyrgyz “patriots”, the top news of Kyrgyzstani news agencies throughout 2012 and 2013, I want to examine how the media represent women migrant workers in the Russian Federation<sup>1</sup> through the lens of sexuality. As there is a lack of studies on revision of media discourses on migrant women, as well as a lack of migrant women’s representation in the media (Threadgold, 2009), the news articles about the movement Kyrgyz “patriots” is an appropriate data for the analysis of the representation of migrant women’s lives. In fact, the violent activities of

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<sup>1</sup> The major destination country for migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

the members of Kyrgyz “patriots” is one of the first cases when the mass media of Kyrgyzstan have opened the topic of migrant women’s life for the public discussion.

Kyrgyz “patriots” is a movement organized in the Russian Federation by migrant men from Kyrgyzstan. This is the group of men who literally follow and harass Kyrgyz migrant women on streets, catch them and brutally assault them for their relationships with the representatives of other Central Asian migrant men, namely Tajiks and Uzbeks. These ‘patriots’, according to the media coverage, apparently organized the movement in order to ‘reeducate’ Kyrgyz migrant women for their ‘sexual’ relationships with ‘other’ men, that they consider ‘betrayal’ of the nation (Botoeva, 2012). They claim that through their “conduct”, Kyrgyz women “publically dishonored them and made Kyrgyz men feel the loss of self-respect in the eyes of others” (Botoeva, 2012). The disturbing violent videos, uploaded by the representatives of the movement Kyrgyz “patriots” onto the Internet and circulated in different social networks, show how these men ‘educate’ migrant women through the acts of beating, raping and threatening to kill them – all recorded (sic).

The scholars who are researching the violent activities of members of Kyrgyz “patriots” state that its formation is the consequence of the 2010 revolution and inter-ethnic conflicts between Kyrgyz and Uzbek people in the southern region of Kyrgyzstan (Ibraeva, Ablezova and Moldosheva, n.d.). In April 2010, there was a national protest against the increase of the prices for electricity and heating in the country and for withdrawal of presidential relatives from the governmental positions of Kyrgyzstan. As the result of the uprising, more than 80 protesters (mainly young men) were killed and over 1000 were injured (Nichol, 2010). The so-called revolution was then followed by the inter-ethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek people that erupted in June of the same year by “couple of scuffles” between supposedly Kyrgyz and Uzbek men (HRW, 2010). The number of people killed and injured during this event is difficult to

establish, but according to the Government of Kyrgyzstan, overall 446 people were killed and more than 1930 were injured (Salmorbekova, 2010).

The observers of the 2010 events claim that the protestors of these events were mainly unemployed or underemployed youth, who were either discontent with the authoritarian regime of the presidency of Kurmanbek Bakiev or were paid by the opposition leaders for creating the mass (Nichol, 2010 pp.5-6). In any case, the interim government awarded the official title of National Hero to the protesters killed in the April events and pronounced all participants of the inter-ethnic conflict as ‘protectors of the nation’. Thus, scholars argue that the violent movement Kyrgyz “patriots” is the consequence of this process of social myth making by the interim government and its creation of the symbolic image of men as ‘protectors’ and ‘heroes’ of the nation (Ibraeva, Moldosheva, Ablezova, n.d.). Yet, after the 2010 upheavals and ethnic conflicts were over, the perceived masculinities of Kyrgyz men was seen to be threatened by the fact that they are now “useless” either for the nation or for their families (Mayer, 2000), which forced many of them into migration.

The situation of Kyrgyz “patriots” illustrates the “gender crisis” that Bracewell (2000) points out in his study “Rape in Kosovo: Masculinity and Serbian Nationalism”. Based on his analysis of the popular press of Kosovo (2000), Bracewell identifies three aspects of “masculinity crisis”, which are “the economy, the low birthrate, and women’s emancipation” (p.577). He states that the cases of unemployment, poverty, low birth rate and women’s engagement in public works are contrasted to an ideal image of masculinity, which is based on “power, dominance and economic self-sufficiency” (p.578). Thus, argues Bracewell, in situations of uncertainty, men find themselves threatened and in need of re-asserting their ‘true’ masculinity. So, if we look at the case of Kyrgyz migrant men in wake of the 2010 events, we can argue that they faced two of these aspects. First, they faced the rise of unemployment and poverty in Kyrgyzstan, then



problems with finding a job in Russia as well. Second, they faced some emancipation of Kyrgyz migrant women from strict expectations of normative Kyrgyz femininity and their engagement in public works. All these things in combination then was seen as threat to the migrants' masculine identities, and resulted in the emergence of the violent movement Kyrgyz "patriots.

Finally, in the light of the latest events in Kyrgyzstan, one can state that the sense of 'patriotism' emerging after the 2010 events has become the instrument not only for Kyrgyz migrant men in the Russian Federation but also for newly organized nationalist groups in Kyrgyzstan, who control women's sexual relationships with Chinese migrants. These men, similarly to Kyrgyz migrants in Russia vindicated themselves the rights to judge, punish and discipline Kyrgyz women for their "Westernized" (read: dirty, immoral) "non-Kyrgyz" behaviors. Although, the latter developments are not in the focus of my current analysis but can indirectly legitimize the relevance of my study and indicate a legitimate direction for my research in the future.

Based on online news articles about these Kyrgyz "patriots", my aim in this paper is to explore the following questions:

1. How is the migrant women's sexuality constructed in the media representation of the movement? Is it critical of the 'patriots's' violence or does it reinforce the legitimacy of the violent shaming?
2. What is the relationship of the media discourse with the discourse of nationalism?

The importance of the current research paper lies in filling the gap in academia by exploring the topic of mobility and women in general and in the context of Central Asia in particular. The majority of the studies on Central Asian migrants in the Russian Federation focus mainly on topics such as migration and remittances (Canagarajah, 2012; Brownbridge and Canagarajah, 2010), migration policies (Schenk, 2010; Kumo, 2011; Thieme, 2011), impact of

migration on elderly people (Ablezova, Nasritdinov and Rakhimov, 2008) and children (Ablezova et al. 2005), and legal protection of migrant workers in the Russian Federation (Kulaeva, 2011; FIDH, 2012). Although these studies have made the life experiences of Central Asian migrants more visible, they are re-articulations of what Nash (2004) calls the invisibilizing discourse of Central Asian migrant women's lives in the Russian Federation. In addition, the thesis also makes up for the lack in the existing studies about media discourses on migrant women's lives in that the current study does not focus on the media of a receiving country, in this case that of the Russian Federation. There is no study that would analyze the media of the sending countries (in my case Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan). Thus, addressing these two gaps, I am exploring the discourses on migrant women's sexuality as represented in the (electronic) media of the sending country in response to a violent right wing group's activities against Kyrgyzstani women migrants in their Russian diaspora.

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 1 provides the review of literatures related to the media representation of migrants in international and Central Asian contexts. It also outlines the theories upon which my analysis will be based, specifically the theory of intersectionality as developed by Kimberle Crenshaw and theories of the relationship between gender and nationalism by George Mosse, Floya Anthias, Nira-Yuval Davis, Joane Nagel and Mike Peterson. Chapter 2 gives an account of the history of Kyrgyz migration from the fall of the Soviet Union to 2010s. This chapter addresses the major migration trends in the country and the lives of women migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan in Russian Federation. Chapter 3 briefly presents the methods of data collection and the three dimensions of analysis based on Foucault's concept of discourse. Chapter 4 is the actual analysis of the data, which is then followed with the discussion of the findings (Chapter 5) and the Conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 1: Women migrants in international and Central Asian contexts**

In this study, I employ a discourse analysis for investigating the portrayal of Kyrgyz migrant women's sexual lives in the Russian Federation as presented in the (electronic) media of Kyrgyzstan. To that end, in this chapter I am going to review the relevant literatures on the media representation of sexual violence against migrant women in international and Central Asian contexts from an intersectional approach so that I can establish the explanatory context for the actual analysis of the multiple and complex relationships of the particular media discourses on migrant women's sexuality.

Although there are many studies on media debates over migration in Western contexts or in the contexts of other receiving countries like the Russian Federation, there is a noticeable lack of scholarly attention to migrants' lives in the media of the sending countries. Nevertheless, there are a couple of studies on media representation of sexual violence against migrant women, including the study by Familara (2013) and the ongoing study by Ibraeva, Moldosheva and Ablezova (n.d.).

In the context of Central Asia, the topic of migration has been studied from different perspectives, yet the majority of the studies focus on the economic benefits and impact of migration on elderly people and children. They explore the economic benefits that migration brings to Central Asian countries, exemplifying the point that migration is the one and – in most of the cases – the only way for many families in Kyrgyzstan (as well as in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) to increase their household income and thus to survive and avoid extreme poverty (Nasritdinov, n.d.; Canagarajah, 2012; Brownbridge and Canagarajah, 2010). The other studies that focus on effects of migration discuss the negative impacts of migration on elderly people's health and on children's education (Nasritdinov and Shekkan, 2012; Ablezova, Nasritdinov and

Rakhimov, 2008). These studies usually question the migration processes where both parents (husband and wife) leave their families in order to work in Russia and earn money. They explore the issues that the families left behind should face, yet at the same time they seem judgmental concerning only women's decision to migrate and financially help her family, and thus for leaving their children, whom they 'should' take care of.

Hence we can argue that the attention of scholars in the Central Asian context is mainly given either to positive effects that migration brings to countries with low economy and poor life conditions or to its negative impacts on the well-being of left behind children and elderly people – especially when discussed in relation to mother, who are then implicated as 'in-house' caretakers in the family. Yet, with regard to the issues that Central Asian migrant women and men experience while living in the Russian Federation, the literature is noticeably silent. Therefore, below I will narrow my attention and present the few studies on media representation of sexual violence against migrant women in the media of receiving countries - Filipino women (Familara, 2013) - and then an overview of the only existing study I am aware of, namely the currently ongoing media study about violent acts towards women migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan in the Russian Federation (Ibraeva, Moldosheva and Ablezova, n.d.).

Familara's study "Talking of Abuse: Critical Discourse Analysis of Migrant Women Workers in the News" (2013) analyzes four news articles about sexual violence against Filipino migrant women workers in Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong. Her study illustrates that the migrant women are differently illustrated in media concerning their agency, rights and legal protection. Yet, she states that the media lacks international legal discourse and rights-based discourse, but is full of "stereotypical representations" of women migrant workers that portray them as "immature", and thus as cultural and gender minority group (p.1). This supports Nash's (2004) statement that the media discourse characterizes a migrant woman as "dependent [and]

economically inactive person” (p.58). In addition, the study shows “a symbiosis between media and policy” (Threadgold, 2009, p.1). Familara claims that news articles, which she analyzed in her study, expressed violence against migrant women as an issue “to be addressed by policy” both from the sending and receiving countries (p.11). Generally, she argues that the media of receiving countries, despite trying to write “in the interest of women migrant workers”, still represent them as “immature” beings incapable “to speak and find legal recourse” on their own (p.11).

Having said that, Familara focuses too much on the content of the newspaper texts, thus leaving a little space for actual analysis and explanation of the discourses, which are present or absent in her sample of news articles. Indeed, in her study, the question of why certain discourses but not others come to be present in the media is left open for further discussions.

In order to cover the representation of migrant women’s lives in the media of sending countries, I can now refer to the study by the researchers from Kyrgyzstan. In their study “We will kill you and we will be acquitted!” – Critical discourse analysis of a media case of violence against female migrant from Kyrgyzstan”, Gulnara Ibraeva, Anara Moldosheva and Mehrigiul Ablezova (n.d.) examines the case of violent acts of Kyrgyz “patriots”. The materials for their analysis include the “reports in print media, items posted by information agencies [and] video pieces from television channels accompanied by text material on TV websites” (p.3). The sample of media materials for their analysis is collected from the media space of both Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation, and includes overall 35 units. Although, their study analyzes the media coverage of the same event as I am studying in my project, the focus of their study is “the main point of the perpetrators’ video “message”, “the dominant images of masculinity and femininity constructed in the media representation of cases of violence” and “analysis of social conditions that allowed usage of the language of patriotism in the media discourse on violence” (p.2). The

study, thus, focuses more on the analysis of “patriotic” language that the media uses in covering the violent acts of Kyrgyz migrant men. Although, in the beginning the authors claim that their aim is to study “the dominant images of masculinity and femininity” in the media coverage of the event, they mostly discuss the contested identities of Kyrgyz migrant men in the Russian Federation and the processes of re-claiming the hegemonic masculinity through the use of violence against their female fellow citizens. Thus, in my study I am focusing specifically on this gap, which is the representation of migrant women’s sexual lives as represented in the news articles of Kyrgyzstan.

In this section, I have reviewed the studies on representation of woman migrants’ sexual lives in the media of receiving and sending countries. These studies, although coincide with my thesis work, helped me to frame the focus of my study as well as its methodological and theoretical frameworks. Critically approaching the reviewed literature, I understood that using only discourse analysis without the use of other theories, as it is done both in the study by Familara and the study by Ibraeva, Moldosheva and Ablezova, leaves the explored discourses without explanation why these discourses but not others come to be present in the media. Hence, in addition to discourse analysis, which I employ mainly as my methodological frame, I am going to review the intersectionality theory and the theories of gender and nationalism. The Intersectionality theory by Kimberley Crenshaw (1991) is used as the basis for the analysis of relations between the media’s discourses and the discourse of nationalism. As for the theories of gender and nationalism, I focus on the concept “respectability” discussed by George Mosse (1985) and women’s role in the nation explained by Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1989).

### 1.1. Women migrants and an intersectional approach to oppression

Migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan in the Russian Federation face multiple ways of oppression based on their gender, class, language and ethnicity (Central Asian migrants in general are named “churki” or “black” by Russian people). Having said that, women migrant workers experience the forms of oppression based on their gender and ethnicity in much harsher and violent ways than male migrant workers. In this sense, my analysis of the representation of the sexual lives of Kyrgyz women migrant workers in the media of Kyrgyzstan will require the analysis of various discourses that intersect with one another.

The oppression of women, who experience multiple forms of discrimination at the intersection of racism and sexism (as well as other dimensions of an identity), as Crenshaw (1991) argues, is often left unnoticed and ineffectively addressed by feminist and antiracist politics (p.1253-1258). Focusing on violence against women of color in the American context, Crenshaw argues that “race and culture contribute to the suppression of violence against women” (p.1257), that is, to making gendered violence invisible or non-existent. Thus, arguing for a more effective approach in addressing the oppression that women experience, Crenshaw discusses the importance of analyzing the dynamic interaction of different structures of violence. When discussing the intertwined relation of racism and sexism in her paper, Crenshaw also claims that “the sexualized images of race intersect with norms of women’s sexuality, norms that are used to distinguish good women from bad, the madonnas from the whores” (p.1271), effectively producing and reproducing ideologies of nationalism where the first figure of woman must be elevated and placed above sexuality and the second can easily – and in a way should be – raped.

In order to address the intersection of women’s sexuality, gender and nationalism, in the rest of this Section, I shall discuss the theories by George Mosse (1985), Floya Anthias and Nira

Yuval-Davis (1989). I am going to draw on these theories in order to understand the intersection of various discourses that eventually come to be focused on the migrant women's sexuality as the ultimate perspective from where the readers are invited to make sense of those women's life in the media of Kyrgyzstan. My ultimate aim is to expose the relationships between the (various) media discourses with the discourse of nationalism.

## **1.2. Gender and Nationalism**

In his book "Nationalism and Sexuality", George Mosse (1985) examines the relationship of "nationalism" and "respectability" and their control over sexuality in England, Germany, France and Italy. He claims that, in the nineteenth century, "respectability" - bourgeoisie's morals, manners, and attitudes to sexuality – came to be absorbed by nationalism. In fact, he states that nationalism and middle class respectability became the best "alliance" in articulating and spreading the distinctions between "normal" and "abnormal" sexual behaviors, and thus in controlling sexual roles of men and women in distinctly hierarchical manners. Mosse argues that this alliance has fixed women in the family and thereby in the nation. Woman, he claims, is "idealized as the guardian of morality, and of public and private order" (p.17); she is imagined as the symbol of the nation, who is alone responsible for the continuation of the nation and the ideal values pertaining to that ideal community. In other words, Mosse argues, women come to embody the notions of respectability and nationalism.

In addition, the theories on nationalism routinely present five ethnic and national processes into which women have been included. These processes are mainly based on the 1989 work of Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, who claim that women according to the nationalist discourse are presented:

- (1) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities;
- (2) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups;



- (3) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture;
- (4) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences - as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction, and transformation of ethnic/national categories;
- (5) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles. (p.7)

These practices indicate that the discourse of nationalism present women more as a static symbol of the nation and less as its active social and political participant (p.10). Furthermore, it can also be inferred that the nation is “naturally” implicated to control women’s reproductive and sexual behaviors. They encourage the growth of the “right” and “proper” population, and discourage “undesirable” ones (p.8). In addition, because women serve as “signifiers” of difference between one ethnic group and another (p.10), the nation comes to prohibit ‘its’ women to have sexual relationships with men of ‘other’ ethnicities. Moreover, in all of these roles, argue Anthias and Yuval-Davis, woman’s life and particularly her sexual life will always stay under the control of men and the state because she, or rather her maternal body, is the one who is equated with the nation, the one whose ‘honor’ consists in bearing the honor of men, and the one who then gives birth to ‘pure’ members of the nation. However, the theorists also claim that the “differences of class, status and ethnicity exert varying influences upon discrete categories of women” (Wilford, 1998). Indeed, if according to the discourse of nationalism, women are categorized as “respectable” women and “prostitutes”, argue Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989), this takes place at the intersection of sexism and racism as well as other dimensions of their identity, exposing differently situated groups of women. Consequently, inside and outside of the nation’s boundaries, it is the ethnic minority women, and especially female migrant workers, that face the harshest control by the state and its men – even if living outside of its actual national borders.

Joane Nagel (1998) illustrates that the state power and nationalism “are all best understood as masculinist projects, involving masculine institutions, masculine processes and masculine activities” (p.243). It implies that, according to the discourse of nationalism, women are mere possession of men, who have to ‘defend’ them not much for the sake of women’s interest but for the sake of ‘accomplishing’ their masculinities (p.251). Ironically then, we can argue that women’s honor consists in the ‘trust’ men confer on them. Spike Peterson (1999) also claims that nationalism is closely interconnected with the understanding and practices of hegemonic masculinity that legitimizes male entitlement not only to dominance and power but also to women’s sexuality, body and labor. Hegemonic sexuality, she argues, “normalizes the subordination of women and naturalizes rape as an expression of male power against women” (p.40). In this sense, the bodies of women become the ‘battleground’ for men’s struggles at the national level (p.45).

The theories discussed above cover mostly European context, yet the discourse of nationalism in the ex-Soviet Central Asian countries does not differ so much. Rosalind Marsh claims that the post-Soviet countries “have inherited the Soviet view that only women, and not men, are associated with families, children and reproduction” (p.92). She claims that the Soviet policies (specifically of Gorbachev and Yeltsin) were mainly concerned with a national interest for population growth. Women have been symbolized as “mother”, whose “reproductive and nurturing roles” were important for continuation of not specific ethnic groups but of the whole nation (p.92). However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the revival of nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia have brought an even more conservative approach to women’s position in the society (p.93). Although women in Kyrgyzstan are relatively free from Islamic laws, they are still controlled by unwritten customary laws of Kyrgyz people and by the violent practices such as bride kidnapping, early marriage and the obedience to parents, elders

and their husbands. At the same time, lately, nationalists movements in Kyrgyzstan, such as “Kyrk Choro” or “Kalys” have started integrating Islamic laws into the notion of ‘Kyrgyzness’ (the concept of being a “true” and “pure” Kyrgyz) and revitalized the concept of “Kyrgyz family”, where a woman occupy the lowest position and have no autonomy over her own life at all. In my reading the Kyrgyz “patriots” activities as presented in their documentary videos and their media representation back in Kyrgyztan is part of this recent violent movement.

The next chapter will more thoroughly illustrate that the roles of a Kyrgyz woman do not change even if she lives far away from her country, family and relatives. In fact, I will discuss how women migrants from Kyrgyzstan in the Russian Federation are constrained by the traditional image of a “respectable” Kyrgyz woman and controlled by violent activities of such movements as Kyrgyz “patriots”.

## **CHAPTER 2: Kyrgyz migration from the fall of the Soviet Union till 2010s**

Before discussing Kyrgyz women migrants' lives in the Russian Federation and the challenges and constraints that they face in their jobs and ethnic communities in Russia, I will first shortly describe the history of migration in Kyrgyzstan.

### **2.1. History of Migration in Kyrgyzstan**

Migration in Kyrgyzstan is usually divided into three waves: 1) migration of Slavic and European ethnic groups; 2) small-scale trade migration of Kyrgyz people; and 3) labor migration (Nasritdinov, n.d.a).

Characterized as “ethnic migration” (Abashin, 2014, p.10), the first wave of migration is related to the movement of Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Tatars and Jews to their “historical homelands”. Their movement is said to be caused partly by economic and political instability in Kyrgyzstan, and partly by the increase of Kyrgyz nationalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This wave of migration can be characterized as ‘brain drain migration’. It is the period of an outflow of professional, well-educated, highly qualified workers from urban areas of Kyrgyzstan mainly to the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan (Abashin, 2014, p.10).

The second wave of migration is known as “chelnok” or petty trade migration, where Kyrgyz people travel to and back from China and/or Turkey and engage “in buying, transporting and re-selling” (Nasritdinov, n.d.a, p.1-2) of the clothes and other small-scale products in the local market and/or in the markets of Kazakhstan and Russia. Yet, because of the change in the custom policies and policies on cross-border trade, this wave is now less widespread as it used to be during the first decade of independent Kyrgyzstan.

The third and most widespread wave of migration is characterized as labor migration. Starting from 2000s and on, when the socio-political situation in Kyrgyzstan has worsened, a huge flow of young and uneducated people started to migrate from rural areas to the capital city of Kyrgyzstan. Yet, high rate of unemployment in the city force them to migrate to the Russian Federation (Abashin, 2014, p.12). Labor migration is thus mainly driven by economic factors and related to the migrants' search for a better life.

These three waves of migration, as the experts claim, are interconnected with one another. According to Sergei Abashin (2014), the first wave of migration in 1990s became a supporting space for the second and third waves of migration from Kyrgyzstan. He states that “the first migrants from ‘titular’ ethnic groups (Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Uzbeks) made use of ties of friendships - and, in many cases, kinship - that they had maintained with members of “nontitular” communities (Russian and other Slavic and European people who have migrated from Central Asian countries to Russia and other countries of their origin) who had migrated earlier” (p.11). Thus, as the result of the first wave of migration, “practices for crossing borders, dissemination of information and exchange of experience, support networks in the new environment” were created (p.11). This “supporting infrastructure” was at first maintained by “nontitular” communities who migrated from Kyrgyzstan in 1990s, and later by Kyrgyz migrants and Kyrgyz ethnic communities in Russia.

The local experts on migration claim that “Today, public discourse on migration in Kyrgyzstan uses one broad category - “Kyrgyz labor migrants in Russia” (Nasritdinov, n.d.b, p.4). They argue that such a broad category limits the analysis and makes it difficult for researchers to present the full picture of migrant's life experiences in different parts of the Russian Federation (p.4). Indeed, the homogenization of migrants, in most of the cases with the reference to male migrants only, limit their diverse experiences into one-dimensional pattern.

Yet, based on their gender, class, nationality, age and religion, people experience migration in different ways. In the following section, I will discuss the lives of women migrant workers and the challenges that they face while living in the Russian Federation.

## **2.2. The lives of women migrant workers in the Russian Federation**

According to the data from the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, there are currently 544 956 Kyrgyz migrants, 220 400 are women and 324 554 are men. However, according to unofficial estimates, there are about one million Kyrgyz migrants living in the Russian Federation (Abashin, 2014, p.). In either case, the proportion of Kyrgyz women migrants is growing.

Tyuryukanova, the author of the book *Migrant women from CIS countries in Russia* (2011) states that despite feminization of migration, women migrants are still invisible because of their involvement mainly in the informal sector of the economy (p.5). Without legal permission to work, they are employed in canteens and cafes as waitresses, dishwashers or toilet cleaners, in the housekeeping business and in the streets as sweepers (Thieme, 2008). Based on the research conducted among migrant women in four regions of the Russian Federation, Tyuryukanova claims that the average age of women migrants from Kyrgyzstan is 31, which is the youngest age in comparison to other migrant women from Central Asia (p.8). More than 40% of Kyrgyz migrant women had unstable employment in agricultural or social sectors such as health and education, or were unemployed before migrating to the Russian Federation. The research also shows that almost half of Kyrgyz women migrants have secondary education (48,5%) and almost one third have incomplete higher or higher education (12,5% and 16,5%, respectively) (p.10-12).

The International Federation for Human Rights' report (2009) states that the majority of Kyrgyz women migrate alone. This observation questions the myth of women travelling only

with their male partners, husbands, or other family members. According to the study by UNIFEM (2009, cited in Alymkulova and Dosalieva, 2010, pp.28-29), 86 % of women from Kyrgyzstan migrate alone (this figure for Tajikistan is 44% and for Uzbekistan 66%), 11 % migrate with their husbands, 0% with children and only 3 % with husbands and children.

The statistical data presented above are mainly from international organizations. This shows the absence of updated data on migration and migrant women specifically in the databases of the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Youth of Kyrgyz Republic. Emil Nasritdinov (n.d.b) calls Kyrgyzstan the “Impotent Interested State”, the state that cannot provide its people with “employment, social security or future prospects at home” (p.25). He argues that Kyrgyzstan has its interest in migration “as it creates more political stability (no people - no problem), ensures the populations’ survival minimum (nobody dies from hunger), increases consumption and growing service sectors (most of which is in the hands of the political elite), and produces remittances flows (coming through the banks, which also used to belong to the “family”)” that constitute 30% of the country’s GDP (p.25). Consequently, the reason for the absence of the data on migration in the Kyrgyzstani government may be due to this political and economic dependency on the Russian Federation. Migration, a sensitive topic for the government of Kyrgyzstan when assessing the effectiveness and success of governance of the state, plays a huge and ideologically crucial role in the economy of the country and in maintaining its relations with Russia (Abazov, 1999, p.237).

Yet, regardless economic and political agenda of the government, the lives of male and female migrants in the Russian Federation are left overlooked. Living and working illegally, migrants face constant checks, violence and discrimination from the state administration and employers not to mention the nationalist and racist claims from the public of the Russian Federation. In addition to different kinds of discrimination and violence from the majority

population of the ‘host’ country, migrants from Central Asia are often abusively called as ‘blacks’ or ‘churki’” (Shnirelmann, 2008). The feelings evoked by their perception as ‘second-rate’ person together with the problems with finding a stable job undermine the perceived status of female as well as male migrants.

Moreover, the study “Transnational and National Identities of Kyrgyz Labor Migrants in Kazan, Yekaterinburg and Moscow” conducted by Emil Nasritdinov (n.d.b) exposes the hierarchy among Central Asian migrants, where Kyrgyz migrants “occupy one of the lowest position in the society” (p.2). In Nasritdinov’s view, Kyrgyz migrants come to be ranked this low in the Russian Federation because of the low number of migrants from Kyrgyzstan (in comparison with the numbers of migrants from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and because of the Kyrgyz migrants’ loose connections with one another. Regarding the latter point, the author claims that the importance of regional/tribal identities rather than their sense of national belonging makes it difficult for Kyrgyz migrants in Russia to transcend these ties and unite and support their compatriots on arrival in the Kyrgyz Diaspora (p.12): “diaspora leaders...use their position to make money on their compatriots” (p.9). The study presents cases when Kyrgyz migrants with higher class status exploit their fellow citizens, who are newcomers as illegal workers and belong to lower classes back at home (pp.9-11). Thus, the low position of migrants from Kyrgyzstan among Central Asian migrants and their internal division based on regional/tribal and class positions as well as the emergent presence of exploitation of one another are readily available for Kyrgyz migrant men to legitimate their violent activities against their female compatriots.

The process of migration and the life in transition make Kyrgyz women migrants face multiple forms of oppression. In addition to discrimination and violence from the law administrations, the police, their employers, and to the difficulties caused by women’s low status



both among their ethnic communities and in the ‘host’ society of the Russian Federation, migrant women from Kyrgyzstan are excessively constrained by the traditional image of the “respectable” Kyrgyz woman. In her study “Living in Transition: How Kyrgyz Women Juggle Their Different Roles in a Multi-local Setting” (2008), Susan Thieme argues that “even if they are away from home, young unmarried women are still supposed to fulfill the traditional dual responsibility of maintaining the house and supporting the family financially” (p.333). In other words, she claims that migrant women are under great pressure to perform the conflictual positions of traditional mother, wife, daughter-in-law, on the one hand, and migrant workers on the other (p.342).

Indeed, despite some experts’ claim about migrant women’s emancipation from traditions of Kyrgyz people such as bride kidnapping, early marriage and the obedience to parents and elders (Ibraeva, 2014), migrant women are said to be constrained by traditional unwritten customary law of Kyrgyz people, known as *adat* (a set of rules of customary law). *Adat* means the social control of people based on strict discipline of children by parents and women by their male partners and *aksakals* (elderly men of a tribe community) (Temirkulov, 2004, p.96). The control is maintained through punishment by shame and exclusion from the society. In fact, according to *adat* the decision making role is given to *aksakals* (literal translation: a white bearded man), who gather and make decisions over social as well as personal issues of a family in their community (p.97).

In addition to *adat*, which is now presented as the core of the nation by new nationalist movements in Kyrgyzstan, the concept of family plays a huge role in regulating women’s behavior, movement and lives in general. In most of the cases, Kyrgyz “women move directly from living with their parents in homes dominated by their fathers, to living with their husbands [and parents in-law], who similarly dominate family life (HRW, 2006, p.8). In homes of their in-laws, women occupy the lowest position and perform all household chores, “participating in

agriculture, caring for livestock or contributing to other family business, and raising children” (p.9). The majority of them are not allowed by their husbands to work outside the household and thus have little autonomy over their own lives. The questions related to sex, reproduction and child rearing of a woman are also controlled by their parents-in-law, husbands and relatives from the husband’s kin. Hence, an ideal image of a Kyrgyz woman is the one who is obedient to her parents and elders, submissive to her husband and his kin, maintains the household, raises children and cares for her in-laws.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the history of migration in Kyrgyzstan and the challenges that Kyrgyzstani women migrants in the Russian Federation face in their everyday lives. I provided a short socio-demographic picture of Kyrgyz migrant women, the major discrimination and violence that they face in the Russian society, and the constraints by the traditional image of a “respectable” Kyrgyz woman.

## CHAPTER 3: Methodological frame

### 3.1. The rationale of data collection

The main data for the analysis were Kyrgyzstani online news articles about the movement Kyrgyz “patriots”. The analysis of the media discourses on Kyrgyz migrant women’s lives in Russian Federation is done based on news articles from three major Kyrgyzstani online news agencies. These are VB.kg (private) Azattyk.kg (private, international) and kloop.kg (independent), which were chosen because of their popularity among the Internet users of Kyrgyzstan. Other than that, there were not any specific criteria for selecting news agencies.

*VB.kg* is the online version of print newspaper “Vechernii Bishkek” established in 1974 by the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan. This paper is the most popular and influential daily private newspaper, published in Russian language. *Azattyk.kg* is part of the Kyrgyz service of the international private radio station “Radio Svobodnaya Evropa” [Radio Free Europe] that broadcasts in Kyrgyzstan. In 2002, Azattyk opened its online news platform in Kyrgyz and Russian languages. *Kloop.kg* is an independent daily online newspaper established in 2007. It is part of the media portal “Kloop Media”, which, according to its self-description, teaches young people, students and school children the basics of journalism and mass communication.

From the chosen sample of the three online newspapers, I have selected the articles published/uploaded between March 2012 and March 2013. Within the given period I was able to collect 25 articles altogether (8 from vb.kg, 10 from azattyk.kg, and 7 from kloop.kg). The key terms for my search on the basis of which I selected the actual news articles were “migration”, Kyrgyz “patriots” and “Sapargul” (one of the victims, whose case was widely circulated on social networks and discussed by the public).

The collected data is analyzed in the framework of discourse analysis, the tool to analyze the patterns of language, thoughts and meanings within oral and written sets of data as defined by Foucault (1972, p.228). Specifically, I will use discourse analysis in order to explore the discourses around migrant women's sexuality presented in the media of Kyrgyzstan, and to analyze the relationships between the discourses of media and the discourses of nationalism. In addition, discourse analysis is used to question the "media myths" about migrant women's sexual lives, and to re-discover the "silent" or alternative stories about the topic in question (Foucault, 1972; Threadgold, 2009). As for the ultimate objective of the textual analysis, particular attention will be paid to the articulation of the meaning of the terms "femininity", "masculinity", "sexuality", "sexual relationships", "nationalism", and "migration".

The major limitation of the study is inaccessibility of Kyrgyz women migrants, who survived the violence from the members of the so-called Kyrgyz "patriots". The narration of the story from only one of them would add great value to the research. In addition, there is also no access to the videos of "patriots", since almost all of them were deleted from the Internet space after their activities got the attention of the human rights organizations. Thus, the only data that my study relies on are the online newspaper articles.

### **3.2. Categories of analysis**

In order to analyze the data, I shall draw on the tools provided by Foucaultian discourse theory (1972). According to Foucault, there are "manifest discourses", presented as natural, immediate and universal, and "not-said" or "silent" discourses, which must be reconstituted, rediscovered and re-established (p.27). He argues that "manifest discourses", "the repressive presence of what it does not say" must always be in the center of the analysis as they are not natural but are always articulated by certain power structures and as such are the indispensable

source of the actual practices of meaning making. In all societies, Foucault states, “the production of discourses is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures” (p.216), which are based on principles of exclusion and rejection of some discourses while presenting others as “true” and “obvious” knowledge.

Thus, in order to explore what meanings of “Kyrgyz woman migrant” come to be articulated in my data through the excessive sexualization and shaming of women migrant workers, I shall explore what the media foregrounds and make visible and what patterns it repress or naturalizes by employing the following three procedures as suggested by Foucault’s (1972) approach to discourse:

### **The formation of the violent acts towards Kyrgyz migrant women**

1. Mapping the first surfaces of the emergence: The emergence of the so-called movement Kyrgyz “patriots” and migrant women’s sexual lives in Russian Federation
2. Discussing the authorities of delimitation: the major authorities in the society of Kyrgyzstan that named and established Kyrgyz migrant men’s violent acts towards their female compatriots as a “patriotic” movement organized for “education” of women, who betrayed their nation
3. Analyzing the grids of specification – the systems according to which different kinds of migrant women’s sexuality are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified, derived from one another as objects of media’s discourse (respectable women, prostitutes/sex workers, shame for their nation’s honor) (pp.40-49)

**The formation of a relation in media discourse** “between a number of distinct elements, some which concerned the status of [speakers], others the institutional and technical site from which they spoke [the actual websites], others their position as subjects perceiving, observing, describing, teaching, etc.” (p.53).

### **Procedures of intervention: The media’s intervention regarding migrant men’s violent activities**

1. The techniques of rewriting complex forms of violent and abusive activities of migrant men into one pattern
2. Methods of translating statements according to a more or less formalized and artificial language (videos with the violent acts of migrant men into a coherent text)

3. The means of argumentation used to increase the approximation of statements and to refine their exactitude
4. The way in which one delimits once again – by extension or restriction – the domain of validity of statements
5. The way in which one transfers a type of statement from one field of application to another (instead of presenting the Kyrgyz migrant men's act as sexual violence towards women, the media presents them as a "patriotic movement" organized for the "protection of national identity")
6. The methods of systematizing propositions that already exist. (pp. 58-9)

### 3.3. Reflections on the videos

Before moving to the Analysis, using the above-mentioned tools for the procedures of intervention, I would like to reflect on the videos of the so-called Kyrgyz "patriots"<sup>2</sup> movement. Methodologically speaking, I need to do this in order to ground my analysis of the media representation of the Kyrgyz "patriots" violent acts. However, after the activities of the movement got the attention of the Human Rights organizations ("Kylm Shamy", "Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society – all based in Kyrgyzstan) the videos were deleted from the Internet space. I could download only one of their videos from the Russian social network mail.ru. Yet, the news articles I have collected agree that the majority of the videos of "patriots" had the same scenario: a naked woman stands on a street and is interrogated in Kyrgyz about her full name, exact address in Kyrgyzstan and Russia, and her affairs with Tajik or Uzbek men in a cafe or other public places all recorded on a close-up camera in the women's face. This aggressive interrogation is then followed by beatings, threats and rape. The media also claim that in the videos the men state that they are 'educating' Kyrgyz woman migrants for their 'betrayal' of the nation.

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<sup>2</sup> The important thing to note is that there was no specific website that would contain all the videos of "patriots"; instead they circulated in different social networks. Yet, the majority of the videos were mainly shared from the users of the Russian social network called mail.ru, which is popular among young people in Kyrgyzstan as well as other Central Asian countries. Therefore, it is difficult to describe the history of the "movement" as it is difficult to give any exact information about the videos (the number of videos, size, location, etc.).

Nevertheless, based on the ethnographic study by Ibraeva, Moldosheva and Ablezova (n.d.) and the single video I could trace down, I still can state that the media did influence the video makers' self-perception in problematic ways. The researchers claim that in the first videos the Kyrgyz migrant men did not use any patriotic statements but started doing so only after the media presented their activities in a nationalist frame (p.2). Indeed, if I refer to the video that I have found, the men there do not make any patriotic statements. Instead, using mainly swear words, they blame a Kyrgyz woman migrant for ignoring a Kyrgyz man (who is also present in the video, but stays invisible), who approached her and kissed her, when she was sitting in a cafe with a girlfriend and two Tajik men. For me, their activities seem more like a violent revenge for 'rejection' rather than an act to 'protect' the national honor. I would rather state that the body of a naked woman, in the video, surrounded by a group of Kyrgyz migrant men, has become the battleground not for national struggles but more for identity struggles of those migrant men, whose masculinity is seen 'discredited' in favor of their Tajik 'rivals'. Although, the video is not edited (there is no lead to, and closure of the video), it seems that the main purpose of the men was to force the woman to admit her 'guilt' and feel sorry for the mere act of sitting in café that day with Tajik instead of Kyrgyz men.

It is the woman, who is being abused and interrogated in the video, that makes national and religious statements in order to construct a common origin between herself and perpetrators and thus appealing to their mercy. ("We are all Kyrgyz", "being Kyrgyz is very important for me", "when someone says bad things about Kyrgyz people, I always want to prove he is wrong", "last time when I was fasting, I was there with my school friend"). Her perpetrators however reject this invitation to shared national belonging. Responding to the woman's use of the word "ake" (meaning brother – a dialect term used in the southern parts of Kyrgyzstan), they say:

“Your ake is in Osh, and your baike (meaning brother – a dialect term used in the northern parts of Kyrgyzstan) is in Bishkek, Do you understand? But we are now in Russia, bitch”.

In my reading the Kyrgyz migrant men, when explicitly refusing the women’s appeal to shared national identity, are trying to reclaim and ‘repair’ their hegemonic masculinity by using the nationalist binary “us” – the Kyrgyz men and “them” – the Tajik men – to repair this damage that in fact has been shaken elsewhere, i.e. by their low economic status. Hence, I can argue that perpetrators started justifying their violence and rape explicitly as their ‘patriotic obligation’ to save the alleged honor of the nation only after the media’s construction of Kyrgyz migrant men’s abusive activities of sexual crime in a patriotic and nationalist frame.

Contrary to the media’s claim, Gulnara Ibraeva, Anara Moldosheva and Mehriyul Ablezova (n.d.) also contend that the videos did not follow one and the same scenario. They claim that the videos have different contents and forms (p.1). They identify three scenarios: (1) videos with low sound quality, where several men beat women inside of some living space and threaten to kill them; (2) the videos with good sound quality that have less physical torture, where a naked woman is held by force in a forest, park or street; (3) one video without any words that shows a group of men stoning a young woman to death in the street (p.1).

However, the single scenario that the newspaper articles argue to structure all the videos very much resembles the process of “honor killing” practiced in Islamic states for punishing women for their ‘misbehavior’. Thus, I argue that the coverage presented by the chosen media of Kyrgyzstan simplified the complex forms of videos and represented the atrocities of Kyrgyz migrant men more in terms of a moralizing discourse focused on ‘patriotism’, i.e. as ‘punishment’ of their female fellow citizens for their “immoral” sexual behaviors in the name of a hetero-masculinist ‘honor’ that is ultimately meant to ‘protect’ the ‘nation’. Instead of presenting the Kyrgyz migrant men’s act as brutal sexual violence against women that is to



reclaim their sense of ‘manhood’, the media construct them more like a ‘patriotic movement’ organized for the ‘protection of national identity’ – and this shift of the discourses ‘elevates’ the act, reiterating the women’s violence in the symbolic domain – undermining their own disagreement with the activities.

## **CHAPTER 4: The formation of the media's discourses on women migrant's lives**

My analysis of media representation of Kyrgyz woman migrants' sexual lives in the Russian Federation is based on articles from the three main online news agencies, "Azattyk", "Vechernii Bishkek" and "Kloop". At first glance, the articles in the three online newspapers seem to cover the topic in the same way, giving the same story, the same facts and expert opinions. However, a detailed analysis can reveal that Azattyk, the international independent site has the highest number of news articles on Kyrgyz "patriots". More to the point, it covers the topic in different genre formats: (1) articles which narrate the story, thus introducing violent acts toward Kyrgyz women migrants to the public; (2) articles in the genre of crime news, the purpose of which is to show that the government of Kyrgyzstan takes steps in addressing the issue; (3) articles victimizing women in order to make readers sympathize with the migrant women's situations in Russian Federation; (4) one article framed in a right-based and advocacy genre, which is written not by Azattyk's journalists but by the representative of the youth organization "Youth Peer Education Network Y-PEER"; (5) and 'happy end' articles in the genre of investigation that report the identification, detainment and punishment of 'criminals' according to the customary laws of the Kyrgyz.

In regard to Kloop, the independent and Vechernii Bishkek, the pro-state site, they both cover the topic mainly in the genre of crime news. Although they try to make readers sympathize with the 'victims' situation, the news articles both from Kloop and Vechernii Bishkek are presented to support the law enforcement authorities of Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation. Their major objective is to tell their readers that the governments of both countries are working on the issue, they are in control and that the violators will be punished.

That said, in regard to the Kyrgyz women migrants' sexual lives in the Russian Federation Azattyk, Kloop and Vechernii Bishkek are overall dominated by the same discourses. Although these news agencies have different political orientation, in the coverage of the news about the “patriots” I did not find any systemic difference among the presentation of the events in the independent (Kloop), private (Azattyk) and independent pro-state (Vechernii Bishkek) news agencies. Therefore, I am going to use the general term, media representation in the rest of the thesis and provide each time a quote from each of the three sources to demonstrate this similarity.<sup>3</sup>

The findings section will outline the major topics and themes in online news articles regarding Kyrgyz women migrants' sexuality. Specifically, using the Foucaultian discourse analysis tools, it will present (1) statements about sexuality, allowing us to see what kind of knowledge of Kyrgyz women migrants' lives in the Russian Federation is articulated in the media; (2) manifest discourses in the media about sexuality of women migrants; (3) the major authorities that named and established the knowledge about women migrant workers' sexuality in the texts; (4) the practices within institutions for dealing with the “subjects”; (5) and finally, ‘subjects’ who in some ways embody the discourse. These statements represent the shortened versions of the three dimensions of Foucaultian discourse analysis (that I discussed in the methodology chapter). I shortened and edited them in order to frame my analysis in a more coherent order.

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<sup>3</sup> In order not to distract readers therefore from now on I will use the common term “media” or “newspapers”; however, it will not mean the whole media space of Kyrgyzstan but only the analyzed articles from Azattyk, Kloop and Vechernii Bishkek

#### 4.1. Statements about Kyrgyz women migrants' sexuality

In covering the news about the movement Kyrgyz “patriots”, the media of Kyrgyzstan present sexual lives of women migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan to the Russian Federation mainly in one pattern. It presents the violent acts toward women migrants as violence to and interrogation of Kyrgyz women for their “improper” sexual behavior:

*In the Internet space, national-patriots are spreading the videos, where they threaten and judge Kyrgyz women for their “close relationships” with the representatives of other nationalities (Azattyk)*

*In their videos, “patriots” depicted their violence acts toward Kyrgyz women migrant workers in Russia, accusing them of improper behavior and of their relationships with men from other nationalities (Vechernii Bishkek)*

*The members of so called movement “Patriots”, migrant men from Kyrgyzstan are suspected in the acts of lynching and punishment of those female patriots, who had relationships with men from other countries (Kloop)<sup>4</sup>*

These descriptions of the case are inserted in all 25 news articles that I have collected either in their beginning, middle or end. The articles, thus, constantly remind readers about the reasons of the Kyrgyz migrant men's violent and abusive acts, which according to the media is ‘improper’ behavior of certain group of Kyrgyz migrant women – the ones who have sexual relationships with non-Kyrgyz men.

It is interesting to note the choice of terminology in all three on-line sources: “close relationships” (Azattyk); “improper ...relationships with men” (VB); and “relationships with men” (Kloop). The terms “sex”, “sexual” and “sexuality” are tabooed in the society of Kyrgyzstan, which is why I presume the media replace “sexual relationships” with indirect terms, “relationships” or “close relationships”. This kind of mitigation seems systematic in the three media. There are other statements in relation to sexual lives of Kyrgyz women migrant workers

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<sup>4</sup> All translations (from Kyrgyz and Russian languages) of excerpts from newspapers are mine

presented equally implicit ways. For example, even if the topic of new born children left by Kyrgyz migrant women workers in the orphanages of Russia is not related to the case of “patriots”, the newspapers insert it at the end of articles, which I analyze, thus inviting the reader to infer the ‘important’ link about the possible consequences of women migrants’ ‘improper’ sexual relationships that the members of Kyrgyz “patriots” are trying to stop:

*According to the Kyrgyz parliament, in the orphanages of Moscow, there are minimum 230 children left by Kyrgyz migrants (read: Kyrgyz women migrant workers) (Azattyk)*

*19-year-old Ainagul was arrested by policemen for throwing her newborn child to Moscow River (Azattyk)*

*According to the data, only in specialized institutions of Moscow, there are 25 abandoned children. Yet, there are even worse cases, when young mothers kill their out-of-wedlock children. Making such a grievous sin, they [Kyrgyz women migrant workers] also destroy their own lives: such cases, usually, are investigated, prosecuted and are charged with harsh punishments (Vechernii Bishkek)*

Connecting the case of violence against Kyrgyz women migrant workers and the case of abandoned children and drawing a relationship between these cases, the media can easily imply that Kyrgyz women migrant workers probably got what they deserve. Silencing the reasons for such a desperate decision, i.e. the routine practice of “violence against women” and verbalizing instead “violence against children” implicates these women as evil, heartless creatures oriented towards mindless sex only. They overemphasize the issue of abandoned children and diminish the significance of violence against women migrant workers, thus giving the message that Kyrgyz women migrant workers are ‘criminals’ of their own immoral choosing and that – without any reference to their rape - is much worse than the violent acts of ‘patriots’ (or any other perpetrator for that matter).

The connection of these two cases also make readers presume that Kyrgyz migrant women workers, if employed, are mainly involved in sex industry, i.e. work as ‘prostitutes’, whereas the abandoned children might be the consequence of sexual violence that migrant

women face from their fellow citizens as well as other migrant men and their male employers.

Such implications are written in almost all news articles:

*Last time, guys brought out a [Kyrgyz] girl from one of the apartments here. She was enjoying her time with Tajik men. The girl was drunk and was the only woman among 7-8 Tajiks, and she did not remember anything, she was lying there like a “dead” person. Do you think it is normal? In the institutions, where they do abortions, there are always many Kyrgyz women. Who often leave newborn children? Kyrgyz women, and we are ashamed for this. Strangers reproach us saying that our women are so-and-so, and shame us (an interview with Kyrgyz migrant men aged 48 in Azattyk)*

*Kyrgyz men are tolerant. What could happen if Chechens or Dagestans did these abusive things? Telling the truth, [Kyrgyz] girls have become light-minded. They come here, before finishing high schools, and cannot find jobs. Of course, it is the fault of parents, who send them here...May be their parents think that their children have a good job and earn good money here, but in fact it is not so: they smoke, drink alcohol, party with Uzbeks and Tajiks. This is abnormal (interview with Kyrgyz migrant women in Azattyk)*

*Girls from Kyrgyzstan in Russia are mainly involved in prostitution...I am ashamed for these girls. Zarema, whether we want it or not, we [women] give birth to a nation. Men do not!... In the history of the Kyrgyz, bodies have never been sold for food. Yes, they sold young girls for bride price, but it was for marriage, not body, not prostitution. If a girl was a prostitute then it could bring bad consequences for all relatives, it was shame, her sisters could then never get married (interview with MP Yrgal Kadyralieva in Kloop)*

*It is the fault of parents who allow their young girls to work abroad. Without the control of elder people, girls quickly start leading an immoral life. And then we hear either the cases about abortion or the cases when negligent mothers leave newborn children in orphanages (Vechernii Bishkek)*

In addition to the implications about the ‘immoral’ behavior of Kyrgyz women migrants in the Russian Federation, the above excerpts from the three online sources illustrate how the media of Kyrgyzstan implicitly blame women migrant workers for the violent acts, the sex crimes of migrant men against them. They give the message that if immature women migrants behaved themselves in a morally ‘proper’ way and were under the control of parents and other elderly people, they would not face violence from their male fellow citizens. Or even worse, by further implication, if their parents, who should read here as ‘their mothers’, should educate them ‘properly’ this ‘shame’ could not have happened. These accusations are presented in the frames

of ethics and morality within the overall discourse of nationalism, which can most explicitly be noticed in the interview with the MP Yrgal Kadyralieva. She presents women as reproducers of the nation, who should stay within the nation and under the control of the state, parents and other male relatives. The other thing to note is that the sexual lives of Kyrgyz women migrants are presented as ‘immoral’ on a scale of ‘propriety’. As the MP’s words above attest to it, their sexual relationships are allegedly said to happen with non-Kyrgyz men (if they happen at all) and out of the marriage contract. Apparently, if Kyrgyz women migrants had sexual relationships even if with men from other ethnicities for marriage purposes, that would count as a lesser degree of shame.

Hence, the media coverage of violent acts towards Kyrgyz women migrant workers in the Russian Federation represents sexual lives of women as ‘immoral’, ‘degrading’ and ‘illegal’ washing away in a persuasive discourse of moralizing all actual pains and shame migrant women must face and endure (if they can). Although the news articles state that the violent and abusive acts of “patriots” should be investigated by law enforcement institutions, this is a lot less present relative to the emphasis on the ‘criminal’ acts and ‘immoral’ behaviors of Kyrgyz women migrants, leaving readers with the impression that migrant women only ‘deserve’ their ‘punishment’. The media when including the topics about abortion, prostitution, and newborn children left/killed by Kyrgyz women migrants present these women as if there were a direct relationship between these cases and the violent acts of Kyrgyz “patriots” toward women migrants, reversing the cause-effect relationship at the women’s expense. Thereby the media tries to diminish the violent criminal acts committed by migrant men and present them rather as punishment for ‘immoral’ sexual behaviors of women migrants – as if executing justice on behalf (or rather instead of) the state.

## 4.2. Manifest discourses in the media of Kyrgyzstan

In this section, based on above presented findings from the media coverage of the violent acts of “patriots”, I will discuss the discourses on women migrants’ sexuality. As the previous section illustrates the common discourse on women migrants’ sexuality presented in the media of Kyrgyzstan is a discourse of moral in a nationalist frame. The quotes from various Members of Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic in the newspapers illustrate this as well:

*During the meeting with the victim and other migrant workers, Deputies [of the Kyrgyz Republic] pointed out the importance of moral education for the youth (Vechernii Bishkek)*

*Meantime in Kyrgyzstan, which is still experiencing ideological, spiritual, and moral torn, a new generation with its own moral principles has grown; and their principles are far from socially acceptable principles of a civilized society (Vechernii Bishkek)*

When some MPs propose the development of a moral education at a national level, others, including the MP Urmat Amanbaeva and the Doctor of Philosophy Mariyam Edilova, think that the case of violent acts towards Kyrgyz women migrants *complies with the philosophy of Kyrgyz people, according to which every woman has to behave in a righteous way* (Azattyk). The interesting thing is that Mariyam Edilova’s opinion is presented toward the end of an article under the heading “Who is to blame? Who will decide?” (Azattyk). Thus, the newspapers again structure their articles in a way so that to make women migrants themselves accountable for the violent acts of migrant men.

Except moralizing discourse in the nationalist frame, right-based discourse is also present in the media, yet it is too accompanied by morality and nationalist discourses:

*If these guys call themselves patriots of Kyrgyz people, could not they help these girls rather than abusing, humiliating and beating them? They could find them jobs, a place to live, thus showing them a righteous way. All their abuses – are not patriotic. According to human rights, these abuses are crimes against a person* (interview with a sociologist Topchugul Shaidullaev in Azattyk)



Thus, the major discourses on women's sexual lives in the media of Kyrgyzstan are moralizing discourses and discourses of nationalism, which restrict and blur the presence of any right-based or human rights and feminist discourses. Despite trying to discredit the violent acts of “patriots” and make readers sympathize with the situation of Kyrgyz women migrants, the media keep covering the sexual lives of women migrants in the Russian Federation in nationalist frame. Instead of presenting the Kyrgyz migrant men's act as sexual violence towards women, the media portrays them as a ‘patriotic movement’ organized for the ‘protection’ of national identity.

#### **4.3. The State – as the major authority over the women migrant workers’ sexuality**

The moralizing discourse of nationalism that the media presents in relation to women migrants' sexual lives acquires the authority by its over-representation of the sources (the state representatives, the representatives of law enforcement agencies, sociologist, philosophers and lay migrant men and women) that support the ‘patriotic’ acts of Kyrgyz migrant men, and under-representation and exclusion of the ones with human rights/feminist framework. The major sources that the media use are the representatives of government and of law enforcement agencies. Additionally, in most of the news articles, there are only the voices of experts and lay Kyrgyz migrant men and women, who support the violent acts of ‘patriots’ and moralize the behaviors of migrant women. As far as the sources from human rights organizations are concerned, they are either non-existent or given little space. Moreover, in one of the news articles from Azattyk, the journalist criticizes human right activists for their lack of interest in the issue:

It is sad that activists from civil society, who protect the human rights in Kyrgyzstan, do not support our citizens living in a foreign land (Azattyk)

Hence, even if the media do not explicitly support the “patriots”, by presenting the voices only of selected groups of so called experts, it constructs the distorted ‘truth’ about Kyrgyz women migrants who are presented as leading ‘immoral’ sexual lives in the Russian

Federation. This moralistic discourse circulated in the Kyrgyzstani media as the consequence has created a new space, where the state has actively started controlling women's movement. For example, a bill proposed by MP Yrgal Kadyralieva that is said to be for the protection of young women and thus of the Kyrgyz nation, was actually focused on limitation of women's movement:

*The Deputy from SDPK Yrgal Kadyralieva proposed a bill, according to which women under the age of 23 will not be allowed to travel outside the country without the permission of their parents (Kloop)*

To the question about the right to free movement, she replied:

*Here, in the article 20 [of the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan] it is stated that for the protection of health, security and morality of the population, the right to movement can be limited. I will say it again, that the bill is not about prohibition, no, we do not prohibit the movement. But there is a condition – someone [parents] has to take responsibilities [for migration of young women], so that we cannot prohibit.*

Yet, the limitation of women's movement is also discussed in other news articles. Azattyk, which presents mostly the voices of migrant men and women who support the activities of “patriots” and the voices of experts, who make statements about ‘immoral’ lifestyles of women migrants, shows how hard it is for women to live in a ‘foreign land’. In several news articles, it cites the following quote:

*I support the activities of these guys. But the beatings were not necessary, they could just gather them all [Kyrgyz women migrants] and expel from the country, so that they could never come back to Russia. They could call the police and report them about their immoral lives, which would then become the reason for their deportation to Kyrgyzstan (interview with Kyrgyz migrant men living in Russia for several years in Azattyk)*

The same message about the limitation of women's movement and deportation of Kyrgyz women migrants back to Kyrgyzstan is also illustrated in the description of one of the victims' migration story:

*The victim has lived in Moscow for a short time. She is only 20 years old. Three years ago, she was forced to marry a man, who she did not love, so after few weeks in marriage, she left him.*

*After [she had experienced violence from Kyrgyz migrant men in Russia], she returned to Kyrgyzstan, where she was persuaded to report the case...*

These excerpts show that leaving a family, a husband and a married life could destroy the entire life of a woman, whose place, according to the discourse of nationalism, is within the nation, within a heterosexual marriage and under the ‘protection’ of the state and a husband. Hence, it is not surprising that the ‘best solution’ for the violent acts of Kyrgyz migrant men, known as “patriots”, the media illustrate not the activities of human rights or feminist organizations, but the solutions provided by so called “opponents of the patriots”.

#### **4.4. Practices for dealing with women migrant’s “immoral” sexual lives**

Except the long-term ‘solutions’ proposed by the Members of Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic, described in previous sections, the media present the solution of the movement “Kyrgyz Yntymagy” (Kyrgyz harmony), whose members present themselves as opponents of “patriots”. The members of this movement, as presented in Azattyk, claim that they caught the migrant men from Kyrgyz “patriots” and are punishing them in a ‘Kyrgyz way’:

*All Kyrgyz people are relatives to each other. So, we need to fix our mistakes all together, we need to befriend one another. We need to guide each other into the right direction...What will we get if we take them [‘patriots’] to the police? Now, one of them is going to marry to that girl (Editor’s note: the girl who was abused by young men). Everything can be solved according to our rules, in a “Kyrgyz way”...*

*Relatives also agree, they told us that they are going to solve everything on their own. They are not going to report it to the police (interview with the representatives of “Kyrgyz Yntymagy” in Azattyk).*

Thus, according to the movement “Kyrgyz Yntymagy” the marriage between perpetrators and victims come to be the solution for the violent acts against Kyrgyz women migrant workers in the Russian Federation. Indeed, marriage becomes the way to ‘easily’ re-enter the society of Kyrgyz people.

In the history of the Kyrgyz people there have been such cases when parents forced their daughters to marry a rapist in order to avoid a family shame. These cases are linked to the practice of “bride kidnapping”, which is the act of abducting a woman (under the age 25) to marry her. Usually, an abducted woman goes through a range of violent actions, including physical violence during and after kidnapping, psychological violence, rape and involuntary servitude. Thus, out of fear of social pressure and a family shame that an abducted girl can bring, parents either force their daughter to marry an abductor or refuse to accept her back (HRW, 2006). Although this practice is the matter of criminal court, the majority people in Kyrgyzstan, including government representatives, believe that it is one of the traditions of the Kyrgyz. As the result, the nationalist movement “Kyrgyz yntymagy”, as many newly organized movements in Kyrgyzstan, solves the issues related to the violence against women in a ‘traditional’ Kyrgyz way.

#### **4.5. ‘Fallen women’ – the embodiment of the presented discourses in the media**

In the above sections, I have stated that the media presents predominantly the voices of state officials and law enforcement agencies but not of human rights organizations. As far as the migrant men and women are concerned, their voices, although exist in the media, exemplify a one-sided view, which support the violent acts of “patriots” and moralize Kyrgyz women migrants’ lives in the Russian Federation. Hence, here is the question: does this story represent one of the cases when “the subaltern cannot speak”? (Chakravorty Spivak). The interviews with two of the victims illustrate that “the subaltern can speak” but their “speech” are deformed and presented by the media in the most ‘desirable’ way for them.

In fact, the interviews with Sapargul and Aina are used to draw distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ sexual lives of women, between ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’. The case of

Sapargul implies that ‘dishonorable’ sexual behaviors of women “lead to disfigurement or death”

(Mosse, 1985, p.135):

*Sapargul: I was a very happy person...I was strong. My life was full of happiness. I always worked and always sent money to my parents, I dressed and I loved eating. I loved my life very much. But what did they do with me?*

*Now, I do not feel myself good. I do not know whether I live or not (crying). I do not how I will continue my life. I cannot understand what is going on...*

*Even if those guys are punished, who will return me my life? That 13-minute-video wiped me off the face of the earth. I do not exist. My body does, but my soul has died.*

*How will I return to Kyrgyzstan?...My relatives outcasted me...I know what hell is, because I am living in it*

*I am expelled from the society – this is the worst thing that can happen to a person (Azattyk)*

Thereby, Sapargul has become to embody contradictory notions of a ‘fallen woman’ and the survival of violence, who asks for sympathy and understanding. In her interview, she claims that she is rejected by her family and relatives, yet she tries to present herself as an ‘insider’ of the Kyrgyz culture:

*Sapargul: I was saved by jainamaz<sup>5</sup> - a rug for worship...when the only thought that I had was death I used to put the picture of Mosque instinctively to my heart, I cried and I scream but every time survived*

*I have one Kyrgyz song in my phone, I listened to it the whole winter, it is on replay. I was saved by that song and jainamaz (Azattyk)*

In addition to begging sympathy and understanding, Sapargul’s words one more time indicate that women without honor are left all alone - without a thing that would keep them alive in this world.

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<sup>5</sup> prayer mat – a small rug used by Muslims during the worship time <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Jainamaz>

The description of the other case suggests that victims can reclaim their honor and return to Kyrgyzstan only if they keep in secret and conceal their stories from the public, that is they have to remember beatings, rape and threats to kill in order to forget them (Mookherjee, 2006):

*After [she had experienced violence from Kyrgyz migrant men in Russia], Aina returned to Kyrgyzstan but out of fear of being rejected she did not tell about the case to her family (Azattyk)*

*There were rumors that some of the victims committed suicide. To find the truth [about the cases of violence acts towards women migrants] were not easy, because young women, for the reasons known to all of us, were hiding away from the public and preferred not to report the case to the law enforcement agencies (Vechernii Bishkek).*

Hence, using the authority of female MPs and experts the media silences the voice of victims and based on their opinions presents for women two scenarios: 1) women are guilty and deserve punishment in the form of death, rejection and outcast; 2) women are guilty but if they conceal their story, they can escape punishment and reclaim their “honor”.

This chapter provided the general findings of the current research study about the media representation of Kyrgyz women migrant’s sexual lives in the Russian Federation. Using the Foucaultian Discourse Analysis tools provided, I analyzed the main statements about women migrants’ sexuality in the media. I reviewed the manifest and latent discourses articulated in the selected newspapers and the experts’ opinion on the issue. In addition, I pointed out the practices that the state and other institutions have offered in dealing with women migrants’ sexual lives abroad.

## CHAPTER 5: Intersection of the discourses

### 5.1. To save the national honor at the cost of women migrants' lives

The analysis of the media demonstrates that the major media's discourse on women migrant's sexual lives is moralizing discourse in a nationalist frame. The use of this particular discourse in covering the news about Kyrgyz migrant men's violent and abusive acts shows the intersectional oppression that Kyrgyz woman migrants face in the Russian Federation. Crenshaw states that violence against women of color (in the context of the USA) is covered either in the frame of racism or in the frame of feminism, but rarely at the intersection of these two politics. The violence faced by Kyrgyz women migrants in the Russian Federation, where they are labeled as "blacks" and "churki", is also covered only by a single political agenda, which is the politics of nationalism that involves "masculine institutions, masculine processes and masculine activities" (Nagel, 1998, p.243). Therefore, in order to save the image of the nation and its protectors, the media of Kyrgyzstan together with the state devalue Kyrgyz migrant women and marginalize the sexual violence that they face from their male compatriots. Yet, unlike Crenshaw's statement about "the plight of Black women being relegated to a secondary importance" (p.1269), the plight of Kyrgyz migrant women is represented as the 'punishment' for their 'immoral' sexual lifestyles. Indeed, the media represents Kyrgyz women migrants as responsible for the violence that they face – the readers view them either as fallen or victimized women.

On behalf of "patriots", the media imply that Kyrgyz migrant women, having sexual relationships with non-Kyrgyz men, betray the nation, and therefore they should be 'punished'. The 'punishment', which includes the acts of beating and raping a naked woman on a street, is aimed to control women's movement, behaviors, and relationships with 'others'. The 'punishment' however can also be interpreted as the process of othering. The Kyrgyz migrant

women are put, as Nagel points out, “in contrast to the images of acceptable female sexuality... [and are portrayed]...as unpatriotic, weakening the nation, and dishonoring the nation’s men” (p.255). The media also try to draw a distinct line between what Crenshaw names “good women from bad, the madonnas from the whores”, where the latter, embodied by Kyrgyz migrant women in sexual relationships with Uzbeks and Tajiks, are removed from the nation. The newspaper articles try to erase the stories of migrant women - the hardship through which they earn money - by portraying them as ‘prostitutes’. Indeed, Kyrgyz migrant women in this case are constructed as ‘others’, since they do not fit the ‘standards’ of a “respectable” (Moss, 1985) woman. Kyrgyz woman migrants are “prepackaged as bad women within cultural narratives about good women” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1271) since they 1) live outside of the nation and outside of the state control, 2) outside of a married life, 3) lead sexually autonomous life and 4) are involved in a public space defined as ‘masculine’.

Thus, the media’s over-representation of the discourse of nationalism has undermined the status of Kyrgyz woman migrants and marginalized the violence that they face from their male compatriots in the Russian Federation. In fact, the discourse of nationalism has supported the violent acts of “patriots” and strengthened the patriarchal values and morals. Even in the absence of violators’ voice in the media, their position is expressed by almost all the sources that the newspapers quote in their coverage of the news. Specifically, if we look at the position of the state, as it is illustrated by the media, it mainly represents the interests of Kyrgyz migrant men, thus normalizing the violence against women migrants and naturalizing the atrocities by migrant men as a response to a ‘threat’ from ‘alien’ men – threat to loose ‘their’ women, culture, nation and the land. In fact, similarly to Kyrgyz migrant men, the state tries to accomplish its “masculinity” by confining its ‘respectable’ women within the private, domestic patriarchal community and by controlling women migrants’ rights, labor and sexuality outside of its borders.



## 5.2. Kyrgyz women migrants: prostitutes in the frame of ‘respectability’

The theorists argue that in the discourse of nationalism women are portrayed either as ‘symbols of nationhood’ - who should be protected - or as ‘prostitutes’ - who are to be humiliated and othered (Nagel, 1998; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989). Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis claim that the discourse of nationalism present women more as the icons of the nation and less as its social, economic and political participant. Hence, as my analysis illustrate, the media’s utilization of nationalist discourse in the coverage of news about ‘patriots’ represent Kyrgyz women migrants as ‘traitors’ of the nation, who unlike to ‘respectable’ women, can easily be punished, since the punishment is justified by the nation-state. Moreover, the media’s emphasis on Kyrgyz women migrants’ ‘immoral’ sexual behavior, specifically on news about children born out-of-wedlock outside of national boundaries, increase the severity of punishment and the state’s control of women’s reproductive and sexual behaviors. Although, the discourse of nationalism encourages the growth of the ‘right’ and ‘proper’ population, and discourages ‘undesirable’ ones (p.8), in the case of Kyrgyz women migrants, my analysis illustrates that ‘undesirable’ children, who are situated in-between two states, are used by the media as an instrument to diminish the significance of violence against women migrant workers and instead strengthen their criminal acts.

In the previous chapter I have noted that the media provided several scenarios for the victims: 1) women accept their guilt and get punishment in the form of death, rejection and outcast; 2) women accept their guilt but conceal their stories from the public, and thus escape punishment; 3) women marry violators, and as the result reclaim their honor and save their families and the nation from shame. Yet, these scenarios too do not leave the nationalist framework. The solutions offered by the state representatives and nationalist movements, as the

media illustrate, represent Kyrgyz women migrants as accountable for the acts of “patriots” and guilty for non-marital sex with the representatives of other ethnicities outside of the national boundaries. Kyrgyz woman migrants are thus offered the ‘solutions’, which in fact control, discipline and punish them for their ‘abnormal’ sexual lives.

Hence, rewriting the complex form of violent activities of Kyrgyz migrant men into one nationalist pattern with coherent beginning and end, the media of Kyrgyzstan presents the violent acts of Kyrgyz migrant men as a ‘patriotic’ movement organized for the protection of national identity. Moreover, it presents the solutions that best fit the national interest rather than the interest of Kyrgyz women migrants. As the result, the media’s discourse, which complies with the discourse of nationalism on sexual lives of Kyrgyz women migrants in the Russian Federation, has strengthened the moods of nationalist movements, which try to revitalize the ‘traditions’ of Kyrgyz people, where a woman, as the symbol of harmony and hearth, as biological and cultural reproducer, as the mother of the nation, should stay in private, domestic family life, i.e. be restricted to heterosexual and patriarchal roles, whereas a man, in addition to defending the family and the nation, can be involved in all activities he is willing to.

Yet, using the nationalist discourse the media not only have opened a way for the emergence of nationalist movements in the country but also actively engendered the role of the state in resolving the issue. The question of violent acts of “patriots” come to be defined by the media as a state responsibility, which should define the identity of perpetrators – whether they are “patriots” or “violators” – and the identities of victims - whether they are “respectable” women or “prostitutes”. The analysis shows that the state resolved the issue at two levels – local/national and international. At the local level, directed to the “insiders”, i.e. to the majority population of Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz women migrants were “othered” in order to show the boundaries between a “respectable” woman and a “fallen” woman and to illustrate the consequences a woman can face

if she transgresses the norms of respectability. In this case, the sexual lives of Kyrgyz migrant women are represented as ‘immoral’ and ‘degrading’, whereas the status of perpetrators is close to patriots rather than to violators. However, at the international level, directed to “outside” readers, i.e. readers from international right-based context, Kyrgyz women migrants are represented as victims of violent acts, who needs sympathy and understanding. Yet, despite identification of migrant women as victims, Kyrgyz migrant men in this case still are not defined as violators but more as men who just overdo the punishment and who are sorry and ready to restore women’s honor by marrying them.

### **5.3. Intersection of media discourses and discourses of nationalism**

The analysis illustrates that the media’s discourse on Kyrgyz woman migrants complies with moralizing discourse of nationalism. In an attempt to save the national honor, the media define the movement as patriotic rather than as the violent movement against women. The study of this phenomenon by Kyrgyz researchers Gulnara Ibraeva, Anara Moldosheva and Mehrigiul Ablezova (n.d.) and my analysis of the video demonstrate that in the first videos of the so-called “patriots”, Kyrgyz migrant men did not use any patriotic statements. The symbolic image of “defenders of the nation” presented by the media was later employed by migrant men in order to justify their practices, get the support of the nationalist movements of Kyrgyzstan, and thus to ensure the continuation of their movement. Hence, in the same way as the discourse of nationalism the media of Kyrgyzstan take a step to protect its ‘defenders’ and "patriots" and to shame migrant women.

Indeed, the image of a Kyrgyz woman migrant comes to be defined by the media in terms of her sexuality. In other words, a woman with immoral sexual life becomes the major frame in making meaning of a Kyrgyz woman migrant. Although it could have mean many other things,

like hard working woman, woman struggling with prejudices, woman facing sexual violence, the media use neither of them as an option to challenge and disagree with the activities of the so-called patriots. Instead, utilizing only moralizing discourse of nationalism, it represent Kyrgyz woman migrants as ‘fallen’ women, who transgressed all the roles they need to perform according to the nationalist discourse (Anthias and Yuval-Davis). The media imply that they do not reproduce ‘pure’ members of Kyrgyz ethnicity, do not reproduce the boundaries between Kyrgyz and other ethnicities (specifically Uzbek and Tajik), do not reproduce the ‘true’ culture of the Kyrgyz, and do not participate in the development of their nation in a ‘civilized’ way. Thus, the media of Kyrgyzstan represent Kyrgyz women migrants mainly as ‘prostitutes’ – the image which has indeed become the point of reference to all Kyrgyz migrant women in the Russian Federation.

The interconnection of media’s discourses and the discourse of nationalism on Kyrgyz woman migrants sexual lives in the Russian Federation thus does not leave a room to other discourses. Although the right-based discourse is loosely present in the media, in the overall representation of sexual lives of Kyrgyz woman migrants in the nationalist frame, it becomes blurred and invisible. As far as the human rights and feminist discourses are concerned, they do not exist in the media coverage of violent acts of “patriots” at all. Hence the overlay of nationalist discourse by the media excluded the rights-based and feminist discourses, which would challenge the activities of members of the so-called movement “patriots” and offer solutions in legal and gender-specific frameworks. Indeed, it is easier for the media to represent the lives of migrants in one pattern, as it is better for the state, which cannot provide its people with basic needs, employment and social security, to remove its ‘fallen’ women outside of the boundaries of a ‘civilized’ society.

Hence, the study illustrates the power of the media to define the public opinion, values, attitudes in regard to the social and political environment, and woman migrants' lives in particular. The nationalist discourse, which got its dominance over other discourses in the media of Kyrgyzstan, at the same time, reflects the overall situation in the society of Kyrgyzstan. For the last 5 years, the state as well as the general public is focusing on the establishment of the national ideology with a great employment of empty meanings such as *Kyrgyzness* and the 'traditions' of the Kyrgyz people. In this sense, the media reproduced the existing hierarchy of discourses in the society of Kyrgyzstan, where the nationalist discourse is at the top and human rights discourse followed by feminist discourses are at the bottom of the hierarchy.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have examined the representation of sexual lives of Kyrgyz woman migrants in the media coverage of the news about violent acts of the so-called movement “patriots”, which is comprised of Kyrgyz migrant men in the Russian Federation. My analysis of the news articles in the online news agencies of Kyrgyzstan shows that the sexuality of women migrants was the major dimension in creating the meaning of ‘Kyrgyz woman migrant’. Based on the image of a ‘respectable woman’, whose sexual relationships should be used only for reproduction in a monogamous marital life, the media shames Kyrgyz migrant women for their ‘immoral’ sexual relationships with Tajik and Uzbek men outside of the state boundaries and outside of a marriage contract. Thereby, my analysis revealed that the media represent sexual lives of Kyrgyz woman migrants as ‘immoral’, ‘degrading’ and ‘illegal’.

Although the news articles stated that the violent and abusive acts of ‘patriots’ should be investigated by law enforcement agencies, they put emphasis on ‘criminal’ acts and ‘immoral’ behaviors of Kyrgyz women migrants, thus leaving readers with the impression that migrant women deserve punishment. Including the topics not related to the violent activities of “patriots”, such as abortion and prostitution, the media presented these cases as if there were a direct relationship between them and the abusive acts of Kyrgyz “patriots”. Thus, I argue that the coverage presented by the chosen media of Kyrgyzstan simplified the complex forms of videos and represented the atrocities of Kyrgyz migrant men more in terms of a moralizing discourse focused on ‘patriotism’, i.e. as ‘punishment’ of their female fellow citizens for their “immoral” sexual behaviors in the name of a hetero-masculinist ‘honor’ that is ultimately meant to ‘protect’ the ‘nation’. Instead of presenting the Kyrgyz migrant men’s act as brutal sexual violence against women, the media construct them more like a ‘patriotic movement’ organized for the ‘protection

of national identity’ – and this shift of the discourses ‘elevates’ the act and undermining their own disagreement with the activities.

In order to analyze the existing media’s discourses on sexual lives of Kyrgyz woman migrants, I used the Foucaultian discourse analysis tools. The analysis revealed that the media’s discourses comply with the discourse of nationalism, i.e. the media over-represent the nationalist discourse, while excluding human rights and feminist discourses at all. Despite trying to discredit the violent acts of “patriots” and make readers sympathize with the situation of Kyrgyz women migrants, the media keep covering the sexual lives of women migrants in the Russian Federation in a nationalist framework. Thus, rewriting complex forms of violent and abusive activities of migrant men into patriotic and nationalist frame, the media engendered the state’s control of women’s movement and opened a way for the emergence of new nationalist movements in the country. Moreover, it also became the source for the continuation of violent and abusive activities of Kyrgyz migrant men who after the media’s representation of their videos in a patriotic way started employing them to justify their practices. The coverage of the violent and abusive activities of Kyrgyz migrant men, thus, has been presented as the story with coherent beginning, development and end, which although stated about legal investigation of the case in the beginning, developed and culminated in the nationalist frame, moralizing sexual behaviors of Kyrgyz woman migrants and as the consequence legitimating the violence of migrant men.

### **Suggestions for further research**

For the further inquiry of women migrants’ lives I would suggest to conduct an in-depth interviews with the representatives of the Kyrgyz migrant women in the Russian Federation. It would be important to study the narration of women migrants themselves so that to understand how **they** construct and explain their lives in in-between situations in terms of their location, movement, gender, ethnicity, culture and work.

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