“We will kill you and we will be acquitted!” – Critical discourse analysis of a media case of violence against female migrants from Kyrgyzstan.

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This article is the result of a study on media representations of cases of violence against Kyrgyz women at the hands of their fellow countrymen in the migrant sphere on the territory of the Russian Federation. The main goal of the study was to analyse the mechanisms of construction of a media discourse that did not exceed the bounds of patriotism and national honour concepts in discussions of the acts of violence. By using critical discourse analysis the arguments are put forward: 1) male migrants experience a less of a normative role for a traditional society model of masculinity and are compelled to adapt to the image of a second-rate person – migrant from Central Asia – formed from the outside; 2) under these circumstances strengthening individual identity through collective ethnic identity is a rational strategy; 3) dense and highly integrated living in ethnic groups stimulates men to violent acts against fellow countrymen; 4) victimization of women in the name of national honour becomes instrumental in achieving unity of marginalized men’s group identity, allowing them to retain male hegemony and power by force and fear; 5) media discourse through constructing violence against female labour migrants as patriotic, genuinely masculine and ethnic becomes a mechanism of legitimation of the violators’ right who act in the role of renderers of justice in relation to gender, ethnic, confessional, regional “deviants.”

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, contested identity, othering, critical discourse analysis

Introduction

At the end of 2011 and in the beginning of 2012, several amateur videos depicting scenes of violence and torture of Kyrgyz female migrants in Russia appeared on the internet. The perpetrators who almost never appear in front of the mobile phone camera lens, worked in a group, presumably coming from among male Kyrgyz labour migrants in Russia, and described themselves as “patriots” of the Kyrgyz nation. These “patriots” vested in themselves the right to judge and punish – as they deem fit – women they determined to be morally loose, “traitors” of the nation, accusing them of having relations with men of other ethnicities (most often Tajiks). The uploaded videos\textsuperscript{1} vary by content and form:

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In some of the videos women are methodically beaten by several men in some living space; the sound quality of these videos is very low which makes the dialogue between the perpetrators and the victim almost indecipherable, the video sequences show scenes of beating and death threats towards women.

Other videos contain less physical torture, naked victims are held by force in a forest or park location; in these cases the sound is as important as the visual representation. In these series the internal relation between video and the “voiceover” is especially important: in one of the episodes the violators refer to a previous video, mentioning the victim’s name – a woman named Sapargul, which became a synonym of similar generalized women representing “traitors of the nation”.

One of the videos shows a group of men stoning a victim – a young woman – to death in the street; this video contains no words, it is accompanied by music and is called “a Kyrgyz girl.”

The general public in Kyrgyzstan got acquainted with these videos after the appearance of material on «Azattyk” radio in March, 2012. For almost a year the media in Kyrgyzstan and Russia periodically addressed the issue of violence against women in the migrant environment in Russia, giving it a variety of assessments and interpretations.

In the video, identified by the journalists as the first one in the series of videos, in the dialogue of perpetrators and the victim (the case of Sapargul) the word “patriot” was not even once pronounced. It was only later that the perpetrators began to declare their patriotic identity, explaining to their victims that they were fighting for the honour of the nation and hence supported by the whole Kyrgyz people.

In media publications on violent videos one question was dominating: could men committing violent acts against fellow countrywomen be considered true patriots of the nations, protecting their honour? Ignoring the criminal aspect of these acts and stigmatizing the female victims as the main component of the media publications on the subject surreptitiously strengthened the positions of perpetrators.

The main goal of this study is an attempt to analyse the mechanisms of construction of media images of men and women, in particular to give answers to the question why media discourse does not leave the frameworks of patriotism and national honour concepts in discussing violent acts in mass media publications.

Critical discourse analysis of texts/videos in mass media was determined as the theoretical basis of this study.

The following questions were posed in order to conduct the analysis:

- What is the main point of the perpetrators’ video “message” and whom does it address?
- How are dominant images of masculinity and femininity constructed in the media representations of cases of violence?
- What social conditions allowed usage of the language of patriotism in the media discourse on violence? Why and how were positive assessments of perpetrators’ perverted justice possible in terms of appealing to ethnic moral?
Methodology

In this article we use the method of critical discourse analysis of media materials, related to the cases of violence against female migrants in Russia. Critical discourse analysis is defined as “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk 2008).

This empirical study is based on three dimensions of analysis:

- videos containing violence towards female migrants, which represent a part of a discursive practice on female migrants;
- analysis of mass media texts representing a discourse on violence for the general public;
- of social practice that allows to produce a discourse on violence using a certain language and meanings.

Within the frameworks of the analysis we use elements of semantic, conversation and pragmatic text analysis, as well as analysis of structure peculiarities and genre of the texts.

The sample of the study included 35 original materials – reports in print media, items posted by information agencies as well as video pieces from television channels accompanied by text material on TV websites. This range was selected from original texts in various media in Kyrgyzstan and Russia, published since the time of appearance of the topic of violence against women in the migrant sphere, and is available on the internet search today.

Among the original publications and video materials considered in our analysis, 23 publications belong to Russian-language media in Kyrgyzstan – the information website of “Azattyk” radio is prevalent, there are also reports of a number of print media outlets – Vecherniy Bishkek, information agencies “Akipress” and “24kg.” Three articles in Kyrgyz are accessible on the internet, including those published in Super-info, Kyrgyz Tuusu and Alibi. In addition, the sample for analysis included video pieces from OTRK, Vesti FM and Moskva 24 television and radio channels.

The criteria for selection of materials for analysis were the following:

- Publication in traditional mass media (thus, materials in blogs, forums, social networking websites were not taken into consideration).
- Authorship of the material was a necessity in order to confirm originality of the material.
- Language of materials – the search was conducted in Russian, which is why translations of several publications from English and Kyrgyz were included in the sample.

The size and the genre of materials were not significant. The period analysed was exactly one year – from March 2012 to March 2013.

Conceptualization of key terms

*Hegemonic (normative) masculinity*, in accordance with R. Connell and J. Messerschmidt’s understanding, is a “normative model, norm of practice, allowing a man to
continue dominating over a woman. Hegemonic masculinity differs from other types of masculinity, particularly subordinated, only few men may possess it. Although hegemonic masculinity may be maintained by force it does not always mean violence, ascendency and domination is achieved through culture, institutions and persuasion” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The impossibility of reaching the hegemonic masculinity ideal, in Connell and Messerschmidt’s terminological understanding, by subordinated men leads to the appearance of a compensatory model of domination by a man over a woman.

**Contested identities** – destabilization of men’s and women’s identities, declaration of discordance or expression of doubt in conformity with the normative model of masculinity, femininity, ethnic and other identities. In the social sciences, the term has received wide popularity in the literature devoted to studying ethnic, confessional, and gender conflicts. In this article the term is considered as a process of formation of equivocal, conflicted identity of a woman in the context of violence through the mechanism of “othering” of a woman, denial of the right to represent (perform) normative identities.

**Othering** – a mechanism of construction of an “other,” “equivocal” identity, “exclusion” from the symbolic borders of the society – ethnic, confessional, regional, gender. The term was introduced to feminist studies by S. de Beauvoir and was interpreted in various ways in works of L. Irigaray, J. Butler, B. Friedan, and others. In this article the term implies a process achieved by accusing somebody of losing his or her honour by dealing with enemies of the community, or by sexually belonging to enemies. Through the mechanism of othering, the construction of contested identity or shaping of an enemy image takes place.

**Patriotism of desperation: between resistance and admitting the guilt**

In this article one of the video pieces, which was given the most publicity, is named by the name of one of the female victims, “Sapargul”, since in various internet sources the piece carried various titles, including numerical symbols. The video piece has a genre-specificity: the conversation of aggressors with the victim is structured as an “inquisitor’s” interrogation, the main purpose of which is not to reveal the truth, but a confession by the victim. In rhetoric, the violators appropriated a status of saviours of the nation’s honour performing an act of justice.

The visual imagery of the video piece represents a focused glance on a naked body of a woman, who is unavailingly trying to cover her nudity with her arms, turning away from the camera. The body of the woman, shown close-up, is shaking from the cold (the event is taking place at a time when snow has not completely melted), fear and pain – later the victim testified to being tortured with an electric shocker. It seems that it is of crucial importance to the violators, who are intentionally avoiding getting into the shot, for the woman to stand straight and look at the camera lens. The aggressors repeatedly ordered the woman to stand still, threatened every time she turned away from the camera and the directed beam of light (the car headlight). Invisibility of men in the shot apparently serves several purposes: on the one hand, this adds anonymity to the criminal act of violence against the woman and the opportunity to avoid punishment; on the other hand, violators were symbolically representing a de-personified category of “defenders of the fatherland, patriots.”
The video uploaded to the internet does not have a beginning and an end, but such a structural “incompleteness” is of no importance due to the genre of confession, the only important thing is that the victim admits her guilt. Semantic analysis of the dialogue reveals that the striking, at first glance, lack of dialogue, incoherence of the conversation is merely an external form. Although it seems like the victim and the violators are talking about different things and not hearing each other, the conversation consists of two monologues (of the violator and the victim), placement of structural elements of the verbatim in a dialogue form clearly reveals a high degree of coherence of the content and rationality of the conversation.

Figure 1

As it is seen from the scheme, the victim is playing an active role in the dialogue: she initiates the attempts to establish understanding, emphasizes common ground (ethnic, regional, confessional) with the violators, tries to avoid the othering, admitting herself guilty of being a traitoress of the nation. In her despair, the woman is hoping for “recognition,” acknowledgement of their mistake by the renderers of justice. At first she emphasizes her ethnic affiliation with the same group as the violators.

She: We are all Kyrgyz. I have a friend named Chinara. She is seeing a guy from Alai.
He: Tell us everything.
He (second man): Stay put!
She: To be honest, I only came over here recently. It has been about one and a half months.
He: One and a half months, and already going around with Tajiks!

In response to the appeal of the woman to acknowledge her as Kyrgyz, the violators deny her the right for the identity. After that the woman tries to appeal to common religious identity:

She: I, ezhe⁵, last time, around orozo⁶, my school friends here were sitting, and drinking, but we were just dancing... Then when it was time to break our fast I told ezhe that I needed to eat something.
He: So you fasted before... And being what you are!
She: I...
He: Up to now you kept fast? Don’t lie, tell us the truth.
He: Did you go on Eid? You closed your fast (mouth and nose)... with four or five Tajiks... You were with the Tajiks.

Questioning the religious (Islamic) identity of the woman, violators are doubting and ridiculing her words using the stylistic devices of sarcasm, breaching lexical compatibility. At that, lexical compatibility is breached in a phrase that has a meaning of a religious ritual (“shutting the mouth” means finishing fasting), which could be considered as blasphemy, but being addressed to a woman declaring her godliness it is most likely serves a functional purpose – breaching a performative image. Finally, the victim appeals to a shared regional identity; she mentions regions, villages, which, as it is inferred from the dialogue, are familiar to the violators. However, on each occasion they do not react to the woman’s attempts to identify herself as an in-
sider of their culture, join their identity, and on one occasion they explicitly deny their own regional status, thus, destabilizing their own identity.
She: Ake?, I told you...
He: Ake is for Osh, Baike is for Bishkek. Do you understand?
She: No, it’s just...
He (second man): You’re in Russia now, so call me Uke...

The tenacity with which the woman continues to insist on commonness angers the violators and compels them to turn to “stronger” stylistic device – swear words, as well as direct physical violence.

Over the course of the 13-minute video the swear words are used seven times:

(1) Initially a swear word in Russian is used in response to the argument about men breaking the ethnic tradition of respecting an older person, the rule of avoidance of flirting with the younger (men). This is what she uses as a justification in response to accusations in an “ignoring attitude towards Kyrgyz men.” As an argument she uses comparison of the men with her son.
She: I told you when you, Kyrgyz man, who is about the same age as my son, you were trying to kiss me ...
He: He kissed you on the cheek, bitch...
She: It wasn’t on the cheek, it was on the mouth
He: He kissed you on the mouth! He is 28 years old already!

(2) On the second occasion that they used a swear word in Kyrgyz, the aggressors responded to the attempt by their victim to move out of the car headlights and focus of the mobile phone camera. In this the men suppressed her attempt to “set” the rules, or rather change them.

(3) The next attack with swear words represents the men’s opposition to the woman’s version about her religious devotion, about her observing pillars of Islam like fasting.

(4) The woman’s attempt to insist on her innocence, on the genuineness of the version of her passing time in a café with a Kyrgyzstani girlfriend, enraged the aggressors, who began threatening her with physical violence and used Russian swear words.

(5) Insults and foul language were used (“faggot”) when once again the violator turned to accusations of betrayal and abomination because of her relationships with people of different nationality (Tajiks).

(6) The strongest cascading and affective swear words combining Kyrgyz and Russian languages was used as an overwhelming counterargument against the attempt of the woman to present herself as a Kyrgyz ethnic patriot.

(7) An attempt by the victim to cover her nudity with her hands, demonstrating traditional female shyness was suppressed with another swear word, this time in Kyrgyz language.

Thus, swearing appears as “heavy artillery” in arguments with a woman who is persistently hindering her aggressors’ attempt to construct the image of a fallen woman, allegedly having lost her “authentic” normative qualities as a symbol and property of the nation.
At the same time, the use of swear words reveals the inability of the violators to correspond to their desired image as just fighters for the nation’s honour, patriots.
Another strategically important aspect of textual analysis is consideration of the peculiarities and gender differences in usage of ethnonyms by actors of the video. It seems like there are no ethnic categories other than Kyrgyz and Tajik. This is more than strange given that the interaction is taking place outside of Kyrgyzstan, in Russia. Overall in the video they use the word “Kyrgyz” 16 times (9 times by the men, 7 times by the woman), and the word “Tajik” is used 24 times (19 times by the men, 5 times by the woman). The number difference in using ethnonyms by men and women is not the only difference: there is also a difference in functional meaning of ethnonym usage by the men and the woman.

Men use the ethnonym “Kyrgyz” in terms of someone who is vulnerable and in need of protection against such amoral representatives of the nation, as they are constructing the image of a victim. They emphasize that, by protecting the honour of the Kyrgyz, they are compelled to “punish” loose Kyrgyz women, rendering justice in the name of the nation. However, the monologues of the “accusers” are not consistent: from political pathos they go down to personal grievances and one of the violators getting even for an insult due to a long-time refusal of a woman to keep company in a restaurant. The word “Tajik” as used by the aggressors has various meanings: a specific Tajik person – a man – that the woman is acquainted with, also as a collective noun meaning enemies of the Kyrgyz, and even on some occasions meaning a penis entering a woman’s vagina. (“Let’s shock her with the electric shocker, let’s insert a Tajik”). The ethnonym “Tajik” helps the aggressors to other the woman in order to take her out of the frame of her own ethnic identity by accusing her of her body belonging to the Tajiks.

He: To hell with you! And ask your Tajiks to forgive you!

The woman uses the ethnonym “Tajik” only together with the negative particle “not” or with connective words implying conditions “if..., then...”: I did not ever kiss a Tajik; you will not ever see me with Tajiks again; let..., if I ever slept with Tajiks...; I never received money from Tajiks – I earned through honest labour...

Commonality in usage of the ethnonym “Tajik” by the woman and the violators is found in the acknowledgement, by default, that Tajiks are absolutely different. Here religious commonness is in a way downplayed. Thus, even hypothetical businesslike interactions with them are considered filthy, and illegitimate.

Having understood that the violators will insist on her confession by any means possible, the woman actively tries to reach a compromise with the violators: without acknowledging being a fallen woman who has broken the ethnic code of honour, she several times words her speech in the form of a “confession” (“To be honest, let me tell you the truth”). However, these “conditional” confessions are not acceptable to the violators.

The culmination point of the dialogue is the threat from the violators to drown her in the nearest pond for trampling the national honour. The woman feels deepest fear and acknowledges the violators’ right to her life and destiny, she expresses submission to the will of this group of men, but asks for a chance to prove her “purity” and innocence.

She: Ake, you’ll never see me with someone again. Do what you want with me.

The men, who were striving for a symbolic acknowledgement of the legitimate right to perform violent justice, at once, very much cousinly express willingness to take “care”
of the woman, and drive her all the way home. The ending of the video represents the only episode in which the address is related to a response: the violators are asking the woman where she lives, she explains and they express readiness to drive her to the front door and she agrees. Up to that moment the whole plot is essentially a double monologue, which conveys the suggestion about complete incompatibility of thoughts and feelings of the speakers. The content analysis of the woman’s and men’s monologues, on the one hand, reveals similarity of positions of the violators and the victim in relation to idea of nationality (Kyrgyzness), patriotism and the possibility of using violence against those who break national ethics and moral. On the other hand, the fact that the victim turns to the militia (police) upon release could mean that all her attempts of agreeing and confessions are no more than a mechanism used to avoid violence and save her life.

**Look who’s talking!**

One may not say that the event of circulation of the video containing violence was considered by media outlets as “top-rated”, scandalous in comparison with other resonant cases; one could characterize the attention of the mass media to this issue as more than “calm”⁹. A version of chronology of the issue being placed on the mass media’s “agenda” and its further development was laid out by the media expert, A. Ismanov, in the following fashion: “The outrageous video first appeared on Russian social networking websites, later it began to be actively distributed in Kyrgyzstan itself through mobile phones, through local video portals and social networking sites. After indignation expressed by civic organizations these videos disappeared from some portals but stayed in active search on other websites and mobile phones... The first such video appeared on a social networking website at the end of 2011 and received wide publicity in 2012. In 2012, several similar videos with shocking details were posted. But some respondents from among Kyrgyz migrants said that they have come across similar videos and actions of unknown people earlier” (Ismanov 2013). Studying temporal and frequency aspects of coverage of the topic of violence against female migrants from Kyrgyzstan demonstrated the irregularity in the distribution of the publications over almost one year – from the “launch” of the topic to its “decline.”

**Figure 2**

The frequency spectrum, as is seen from the histogram, divides the whole period of media coverage of violent acts against female migrants into four main periods:

1. The opening of video pieces for public discourse and attempts to understand what has taken place. Having started rather actively (5 cases of media coverage) in March 2012, the issue of violence against female migrants effectively lost significance in April 2012 (1 message from Azattyk radio with an assessment of the lack of action on the part of state authorities).

2. Initiation of criminal cases by law enforcement in Russia and Kyrgyzstan and information regarding tracing the course of the investigation. Information about initiation of criminal cases and launch of investigations also caused renewed interest toward the issue, which was distributed throughout May-July 2012. Reports about the arrest of a criminal from Kyrgyzstan who kidnapped a person with the purpose of getting a ransom gave the coverage of the topic of
violence against female migrants a new tone as a crime against a person, which has not been accentuated in the mass media prior to or after that.

(3) Informational grounds for the next series of publications were initiatives of civil institutions – launching their own investigations and an advocacy campaign. The period of publication of such information was September 2012 through February 2013.

(4) The initiative by a member of parliament, Yrgal Kadyralieva, in March 2013 to prevent young women under 23 from going abroad on their own also notably resonated in the media sphere. Media messages connected this initiative with the video pieces of violence against female migrants in Russia, in a way justifying the rationality of the MP’s initiative.

The proportion of sets of publications on the topic of violence against female migrants in Russia represents a limited number of themes.

Figure 3

As it is seen in the diagram, among the opinions and reactions of politicians, including law enforcement authorities, civil society organizations, the voices of female migrants are almost unheard in the flow of information. If one of the victims, Sapargul, had not initiated an interview in a number of Kyrgyz-language mass media in order to tell her side of the story and her needs in access to justice, this story most likely would have remained another instance where the “subaltern cannot speak” (Chakravorty Spivak 1988).

At first glance the articles under investigation create the impression that the whole range of media publications shuffles the same facts and expert opinions. However, a more detailed investigation reveals something else. In the development of the “event” specific topics or aspects clearly come to light: radical nationalism and terrorism, the reaction of state authorities in Kyrgyzstan to the problems of migrants and the fate of women in migration, the growth of crime and investigations into crimes in Russia and in Kyrgyzstan, issues of ethics and morals of women (especially young women) in the modern generation of the Kyrgyz, civil society initiatives in human rights protection, etc.

The non-probability sampling of publications and the mass media in this study alone with the disproportion in representation of Kyrgyzstani and foreign publications does not allow us to make systematic comparisons of materials published in Kyrgyzstan and Russia. Nevertheless, one certainly may speak of the presence of “trends” and “patterns” in each of the media publications. Thus, Russian sources of information (both media and materials of human rights organizations) presented the following messages to their readers:

(1) A ten-line information of “SOVA” centre, specializing in monitoring facts of xenophobia and radical nationals, does not require any investigations: “based” on a publication by “Azattyk” radio, it states that a “Kirgiz gang” in their criminal actions against fellow countrywomen “is motivated by national hatred towards descendants from Tajikistan” (SOVA, March 7, 2012)

(2) In the extended information of “SOVA” centre it is stated that: “In Kirgizia, a criminal case was initiated regarding abuse of fellow countrywomen by members of a Kyrgyz gang... The investigation will take place
by locale of the crime. A year earlier in Russia a criminal case was initiated for “robbery” in one of similar cases of violence and three criminals have been arrested, including the head of the gang, who turned out to be a 25 year old “half-Uzbek.”

(3) On the internet page of Radio Vesti FM there was information containing facts from unknown sources that “over almost six years 15 Kyrgyz Gastarbeiters who came to Russia were beating, robbing and raping fellow countrywomen, who in the opinion of the bandits have “betrayed” the interests of the nation” (Vesti FM, July 18, 2012). The radio informs that the gang of “Kyrgyz patriots” is “rather a steady criminal group living on some other criminal deals. While the wrangles with fellow countrywomen are just a side business, something what are done for fun, and for the purposes of intimidation of the whole diaspora.” The victims of violence – Kyrgyz female migrants – kept silent about what they endured “because of fear that their illegal status would be revealed.”

(4) The article in “Komsomolskaya Pravda” poses a task of understanding to what the “witch hunt” could lead. There are several main messages, at that:
- Law-enforcement officers of both countries are working on the case of “patriots” together.
- Not everybody can adapt to a life in a metropolis, young women from a traditional society fall into debauchery, and men – into criminality.
- The gang poses a threat not only to Kyrgyz young women, but to the whole Russian society (for example: their example may also infect Russian citizens with “everyday nationalism”).

(5) The piece in the “Moskva 24” (m24.ru, July 26, 2012) news block informs:
- Based on the facts of violence criminal cases were initiated on robbery charges” (!)
- Fellow countrymen support the acts of violence on social networking websites because violence is directed at women from Kyrgyzstan, who are involved in prostitution, as an “educational” measure.
- “Communication” with foreigners (as it is defined in the announcement of the story on the website) that is a “sign of a western way of life” (thus, “moral support” of violators by fellow countrymen on social networking websites) is the reason for the confrontation between “regressive” Asians

(6) “Novye izvestiya” inform through their staff reporter – a Kyrgyz journalist:
- Kyrgyz authorities are forming a community council on protection of labour migrants’ rights in order to put a stop to violence within the migrant sphere.
- The movement “patriot” is threatening girls and women – labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan – for relationships with men of other ethnicities.
- A criminal case initiated by Russian law enforcement authorities was terminated, and violence against women like Sapargul daring to fight for their rights did not reach the courts.

(7) On the website of “Pravye novosti” a reprint of a rather neutral article from “Azattyk” was posted, only adding at the end of the publication a more
“expressive” title for the video piece with an “execution” of one of the young women: “Video interrogation of a naked Kirgiz slut.”
Thus, despite the seeming difference in positions of the information channels of Russian publications on the subject, the main point of the messages boils down to three postulates: 1) Asian migrants hate each other, 2) they are incapable of adapting to life in big cities (which means, in civilization), and therefore they are fated to criminalization or prostitution, 3) Asian migrants pose a risk for the Russian society.
Due to the multitude of analysis sources, messages of the Kyrgyzstani media had to be classified in advance taking into consideration only the titles of the articles as they reflect the key messages for the reader.
Among the 28 Kyrgyzstani articles, 6 clusters were identified:

(1) Titles “narrating facts,” describing actions and actors. Seven publications fell into this category.
  • “‘Patriots’ abuse young women”;
  • “In Russia, they are catching ‘patriots’ and making them ask for forgiveness”;
  • “Human rights activists are looking for the ‘patriots’ who abused Kyrgyz young women in Russia”;
  • “Kyrgyzstani deputies are dealing with attacks of ‘patriots’ in Russia”;
  • “Opponents of ‘patriots’ are solving the problem a ‘Kyrgyz way’”;
  • “Women-migrants from Kyrgyzstan to Russia were brutally abused by fellow countrymen – ‘patriots’”;
  • “A video of physical violence caused a storm of protest in Kyrgyzstan”.
Publications belonging to this category are built on generalized notions – Kyrgyz deputies, human rights activists, etc. Incidentally, the actors mentioned in the nominative case are always men or persons who can be assumed to be men (“patriots” or opponents of “patriots,” deputies, fellow countrymen). Women-actors are used in the accusative case, which points to their passiveness, dependency, instrumentality.

(2) Titles formulated without a stated connection with acts of violence.
  This category included two materials:
  • “The dark side of migration”;
  • “Every year approximately 500,000 Kyrgyz migrants go to Russia for income generation”.
Both materials appeal to economic rationality and attempt to estimate to what degree migration strategies bring costs for a country that loses half a million citizens annually or for the citizens who encounter problems during migration. Essentially the publications are objectifying and to a certain degree justifying violence against female migrants.

(3) Titles performing substitution of notions with the aim of lessening the significance of criminal violence, “substitute” those who are guilty. This category includes five publications:
  • “‘Nationalists’ condemn Kyrgyz young women”;
  • “‘Patriots’ tricks continue”;
  • “Teach women to love themselves”;
  • “Will the violence in Moscow cease?”;
Female migrants from Kyrgyzstan become objects of excessive jealousy of their fellow countrymen in Russia. Instead of torture – condemnation, instead of crime – prankish tricks or jealousy of lovers, and if victims of violence like Sapargul could love themselves, this terrible misfortune would not have happened – such are the implicit messages in the titles of media materials, similar to media viruses that destroy the construction of a fact. The material “Teach women to love themselves” is the most contradictory in this category: the title implies that somebody (if in binary opposition to women, this could only be men!) should teach women to love themselves, since they are not able to learn the “main” skill in life on their own. Furthermore, the form of the title is similar to titles in fashion and beauty magazines promising a miraculous transformation to those who would adhere to the algorithms of losing weight, using make-up, etc. Against the background of serious violence (and presumably death of some affected by this violence) this recipe from the series “Just add water” has a cynical character and conveys a clear message: it is the woman’s fault. Moreover, the title does not address women, it objectifies women.

The article of a Kyrgyz-language newspaper “Kyrgyz Tuusu” “Will the violence in Moscow cease?” contains a completely different message (as such it is a “rhetorical rage without a recipient”) from the rest of the materials in this category. Moreover, it has the same functional effect – substitution of notions. The rhetorical question in the title is a legacy of the Soviet era, when the press aspired to the role of fourth estate and the main criterion for mass media activity was actuality/reality. Newspapers, magazines and electronic mass media were full of cries like: “How long..?” The construction of the sentence – an impersonal sentence – creates the impression that violence takes place on its own, and that there are no bad guys committing it.

Titles formulated in the genre of crime news. In this category there are seven materials:

- “The sadist-‘patriots’ have been identified”;
- “No criminal proceedings have been initiated on the case of patriots in Kyrgyzstan”;
- “Suspects in abuses of young women from Kyrgyzstan were caught in Yekaterinburg”;
- “Kyrgyz OPG became active in Yekaterinburg”;
- “‘Sapargul’ operation started”;
- “Consul general in Yekaterinburg: A large part of the ‘Patriots’ group has gone back to Kyrgyzstan”;
- “Several members of the ‘Patriots’ criminal group were detained”.

Mundane chronicles of criminal incidents blur the events of violence against women and turn them into the category of usual crimes, which are numerous in any society. Some titles may use a more correct language, following the presumption of innocence principle – “those suspected of abuse,” others are less delicate, they know for sure – Kyrgyz OPG, sadists-patriots... The main message: law enforcement authorities are working on this case, and this means that the criminals will be punished.

Titles victimizing women. This category includes four articles that are titled in a way that victimizes women, and two articles in which victimization is the refrain of the content.

- “Fate of women-migrants – a national tragedy”;

(4)
• “Sapargul: I am not living. I am afraid of talking to people”;
• “Sapargul’s monologue”;
• “Sapargul sobbing in search of truth: ‘I want to whiten my name, my honour’”;
• “A. Kuluyeva: There is a group of jigits that calls themselves patriots of Kyrgyz migrants in Moscow”;
• “Interview: Why a deputy wants to limit the departure of young female Kyrgyzstanis abroad”

A female victim in publications in this cluster is read in a variety of ways – from morally unstable and unable to be accountable of her actions to a creature with a desolate soul, who without honour has nothing to live for. In the majority of the materials the proper name Sapargul is used as a common noun implying contradictory meanings of a fallen woman-victim and a woman who survived violence and is vindicating honour.

Mass media uses a traditional trick: the unmasking, judging of women should be performed by other women. And so judgements are given. The majority of publications contain a verdict: guilty, deserves punishment, or: she is guilty, but excites pity and thus should not be punished so harshly.

(6) Titles defining the situation in terms of rights and human rights. This category includes one article:
• Vigilante justice on young women in Russia and reaction of state authorities

The title clearly defines the essence of violent acts in legal terms and determines the stakeholders – those who are able to deal with the breach of law. The circle of key persons making decisions includes neither the victims of violence, nor their violators.

Thus, the study of the messages contained in the titles of Kyrgyzstani media reports allows to once more note that journalists are not interested in the victims. There is a hidden function in the titles of publications: to solidify the stereotypical perceptions of normative models of femininity and masculinity, and these are unfolded in the content of publications.

Thus, one of the key and symptomatic characteristics of the whole informational array collected during this study is the identification of the violators and victims of violence. The scheme below represents the palette of definitions used in texts of publications in relation to men and women:

Figure 4

Figure 5

As can be seen from both graphs, images of men and women changed over time, but the trends of changes were different depending on the gender of the hero. Thus, images of female migrants affected by violence over a year of coverage in the media have undergone changes with a general trend – movement from negative characterization and rather negative to positive and sympathetic. Their characteristics – “bogeyman” stories about female migrants, mothers-childkillers abandoning their children, immoral persons, miserable victims, gradually began to be replaced by the characteristics of a female citizen, fellow countrywoman and even a respected woman – ayyym. Overall there is much less number of characterizations of women than men in the coverage of this issue, and the attitude of journalists in their articles is much more specific towards women than men.

The characterization of men over the course of this media story underwent changes,
but with contradictory tendencies: at the first stage with dominating positive and rather sympathetic characterizations; it was only at the second stage that men’s images became mostly negative, only to decrease at the next stage; and at the last stage, following the initiative of a Parliamentary deputy on limiting the freedom of movement for young women, again neutral or positive definitions and attitudes began to dominate. The whole range of men’s images seen in the media reports includes mutually exclusive elements – from bandit to patriot, from nationalist to citizen, from Kyrgyz-migrant to Kyrgyz young man, and the level of organization of the actors undergoes metamorphoses: from group to gang, band and even to patriotic movements and organizations. The attitude of journalists towards male violators, heroes of the publications, could be defined as problematic, debatable. It seems that the authors of the publications wanted to answer the main question about the men: who are they – patriots or criminals?

**New legitimation of violence and perverted justice**

The discourse analysis of media publications made two questions turned out: Why did it become possible in the media discourse to assess perverted justice of violators as patriotism and acts of national honour protection? Why were violators placed at the centre of attention in media publications, but never received the “right of voice”?

The search for answer to these questions needs understanding the following aspects of today’s reality:

1. Male migrants find themselves in a situation of identity destabilization. They experience a loss of normative role for a traditional society model of masculinity; they are compelled to adapt to externally formed images of an inadequate, second-rate person – a migrant from Central Asia, who in Russia are often described abusively as “blacks”, “black ...ss,” or churki (Schnirelmann 2008).

   Men also cannot confirm their traditional normative masculinity in the local ethnic community of migrants because the increased economic autonomy of female migrants and widening of their opportunities and borders of matrimonial and sexual strategies even further undermines the status of male migrants. In such a situation the most rational strategy is (and is realized in practice) grouping of men, an attempt to strengthen individual identities through collective ethnic identity.

2. Living conditions of male migrants who live in Russia in high density housing (Peshkova 2013) and are highly integrated in ethnic groups are causing violent conflicts (Brubaker 2002). These conflicts are created by male criminalized groups against fellow countrymen regardless of their gender, but most often and “effective” for men is violence against women. Shifting a woman into a situation of a victim, “scapegoating” strengthens the unity of men’s group identity (Girard in Zherebkina 2002), allowing them to retain male hegemony and power by force and fear.

The strategy of constructing hegemonic masculinity through violence is by no means an example of unique Kyrgyz culture. As research on hegemonic masculinity by R.Connell and J.Messerschmidt (2005) notes, “There exists considerable evidence that hegemonic masculinity is not a self-reproducing form, whether through habitus or any other mechanism.” To sustain a given pattern of hegemony requires the policing of
men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women. Evidence of such mechanisms ranges from the discrediting of “soft” option in the “hard” world of international relations, security threats, and war (Hooper 2001), to homophobic assaults and murders (Tomsen 2002), all the way teasing to boys in school for “sissiness” (Kimmel and Mahler 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Attempts of legitimation of violence took place in political events in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 (Girard in Zherebkina, 2002), when murders and other crimes against person committed by male groups of ethnic Kyrgyz received the status of patriotism and heroism in the name of the nation on the official political level. We may hypothesize that exactly this “successful,” in terms of reinforcement of traditional masculinity, experience inspired the criminals to perform violence against female migrants, and the videos of acts of violence, as our analysis revealed, in a way served as a trigger for formation of a “new hegemony” for a male migrant.

Media discourse attached significance, framed violence as patriotic, truly male and ethnic. Male violators who found themselves in a desperate, critical situation in terms of group and personal identity took up this meaning, appropriating the right for the role of renderers of justice in relation to gender, ethnic, confessional, regional “deviants.”

A collective figure of “renderers of justice” or, rather, vigilante justice was presented by them as a symbolic figure, anonymous and powerful. The violators genuinely believed when they told their victims: “We will kill you and we will be acquitted!”

Media discourses on the topic of violence against female migrants became the backbone for a new legitimation of violence.

Notes

1. Despite the fact that after media-hype the videos were deleted, or banned, several videos are still available for the public.
2. Under media materials here we mean both mass media materials and the videos of violence against female migrants in Russia
3. The search algorithm was entered by us as follows: “Сапаргуль видео патриот”, “крыгызские патриоты в России” [“Sapargul video patriot,” “Kyrgyz patriots in Russia” in Russian]. Overall the search engine provided 673 results for “Sapargul video patriot”, among which majority are repeats and reprints of articles, as well as discussion forums
4. The name Sapargul, who was the second victim of the violators group calling themselves “patriots” turning to justice, effectively became an appellative. In the subsequent reprisals the aggressors asked the women subjected to torture and violence whether they know about Sapargul, to all appearances imparting the reprisal against her the meaning of an exemplary act of their vigilance justice.
5. Ezhe is a traditional address to a woman who is older. In this case Sapargul is talking about the female owner of the café, where she was captured by the violators.
6. Muslim month of fasting (Ramadan).
7. Ake is an address to a man who is older, used in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan. In the northern regions bayke is used. Uke is an address to a man who is younger, it is also used in the south of the county.
8. The choice of the ethnonym Tajik may be explained without a special study of the issue. Since presumably in their country of origin the groups of violators and the victims did not routinely interact with Tajiks (coming from areas bordering on Uzbekistan, not Tajikistan) the assumption of nationalists about women’s relations with Tajiks does not have an apparent explanation. We hypothesize that accusations in relations with Tajiks, and not Uzbeks for instance, is conditioned by the very low
social status of Tajiks even within the marginal migrant sphere in Russia. Thus, Gayane Hachatryan, research fellow of the Center of problem analysis in her article “On “Tajiks” as a social and language phenomenon” states: Tajik, unlike a Caucasian or Chinese, is not associated with power, physical or numeric, in mass consciousness this is a person who finds themselves on a position of a slave, socially unprotected, possessing low moral and cultural qualities…” The author of the article agrees with a historian and diaspora researcher V. Dyatlov, who suggests that “Tajik” in mass consciousness finds themselves not even at the bottom of the social ladder, by outside of it.”


9. To compare: the event of early release of “crowned thief” Batukaev and his hasty departure for Russia in 2013 in the course of couple of months resulted in at least 15.5 thousand “links” of information; on top of that, majority of them were original articles in Kyrgyzstani and foreign mass media.

References


