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## GEORGIAN MEDIA AGAINST VIOLENCE IN PRISON

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of our research is to demonstrate the editorial policy of our studied publications regarding the "prison scandal", that is, to show how the contemporary Georgian print media fights against violence in prison.

Prisoners' torture case was opened several days before the October 2012 parliamentary elections and the torture facts were also publicized. This political scandal played a decisive role in changing the government via elections by the way since 1991 on the history of independent Georgia it was firstly that the power has been peacefully changed. That way for us it was very interesting to study the role of media played by visualization of the most scandalous story by using different nonverbal codes to enrich the verbal text.

The empirical basis of our study include the Georgian press in 2012-2014, in particular, the following magazines and newspapers: "24 Hours", "Resonance", "Kviris Palitra", "Prime Time", "Asaval-Dasavali", "Tabula" and "Liberal".

Based on content analysis and the semiotic analysis of the visuals of the studied magazines and newspapers clearly demonstrate the points of view of the author of the article as well as the publication's position about the "prison scandal" and in general about the fight against violence.

**Keywords:** Political scandal, Georgia, Media research.

### INTRODUCTION

Every subject of the universe can move from a closed, mute existence to a verbal state to be opened in the public (Barthes, 2011, 183)

Roland Barthes, who is considered one of the most visible representative of the popular visual culture research, wrote this epigraph's phrase in the first work "Myth Today" dedicated to semiotic dismantling of Mass Cultural Language. In the verbal state, the French semiotician considered the mythic meaning of the subject. Because when they ask him:

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- What is the myth today?

Barthes answers:

- Myth is the word. I would like to see that myth has a lot of other definitions. But I'm trying to define the subject and not the word.

He is author of the scheme of decoding mythic meaning, which is called "secondary decoding", which means decoding the connotative, associated meaning of the subject. Of course, we will conduct the research according to this scheme. The author argues that during the secondary decoding produces the meaning what he calls "myth". In this, Barthes embraces ideology as the axis of ideas and methods that strengthen and actively contribute to the values and interests of dominant groups in society (Story, 2007).

Description and explanation of visual of Magazine and newspapers as a mass culture, are the objective of semiotic analysis, because it is, as Barthes describes, "Decorative Exhibition of Contemplation of Nature and History" where the subjects are acquired by connotative meaning.

The aim of our research is to demonstrate the "decorative exhibition" of the most scandalous story through editorial policy of our studied publications regarding the "prison scandal", that is, to show how the contemporary Georgian print media fights against violence in prison.

Why did we choose this theme for our research? Because it was very important event in the nowadays political life of Georgia. Prisoners' torture case was opened several days before the October 2012 parliamentary elections and the torture facts were also publicized. This political scandal played a decisive role in changing the government via elections by the way since 1991 on the history of Georgia's independence it was firstly that the power has been peacefully changed. That way for us it was very interesting to study the role of media played by visualization of the most scandalous story by using different nonverbal codes to enrich the verbal text.

## **SCANDAL AS A COMPONENT OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

"The scandal is a necessary attribute of modern political life," writes E. Scheigal in "Political Discourse Semiotics" (Scheigal, 2000). As the author notes in politics, the term "scandal" reflects two types of events:

- When it becomes known that the politician is secretly pursuing personal goals in violation of laws, public trust and political norms;
- When such norms are openly violated.

But sometimes the scandal comes from absolutely "harmless" material, which means that a specific, defamatory interpretation is given to the politician's absolutely legal and moral action.

Now what about the characteristics of political scandal.

- Source of information is official- In Georgia the Ministry of Internal Affairs made an official announcement about the opening of the case of prisoners' torture in Gldani prison and about the detention of three employees.

- Scandalous facts are published publicly - Georgian TV channels transmit video recording depicting the beating and raping of prisoners in several penitentiary establishment.

- The motivation of the scandal in general is personal because it is driven by personal interests – “Videos were publicized while it was a real opportunity and the necessary environmental conditions created “- said the author of the video, V. Bedoukadze.

- The political scandal is accompanied by protests, civil disobedience...- In Georgia it caused a lot of stir in the society and started protest rallies in the capital city, in Tbilisi.

- The result of political scandal is some changes in political life- As a result, in the 2012 parliamentary elections M. Saakashvili's (the third President of Georgia for two consecutive terms from 25 January 2004 to 17 November 2013) party "United National Movement" was defeated and in power arrives coalition “Georgian Dream" founded and led by B. Ivanishvili (Prime Minister of Georgia from 25 October 2012 to 20 November 2013). "Prison Scandal" played a decisive role in the change of power in Georgia, confirming the statement of the head of the NDI office of Georgia, Luis Navarro, on October 29, 2012: "The prison scandal" played a decisive role in the elections. The voters who did not know before the elections for him vote the prison scandal push them to take decision and these people took up the political center. "

Obviously, if without the case of prisoner's torture, it might be a different result. It is interesting to see how the printed media covers such a pressing fact for the society, which methods of visualization were chosen by Georgian newspapers and magazines.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

Considering the political, social and cultural contexts, based on semiotic analysis, we studied 5 newspapers and 2 magazines.

We selected these publications by several criteria:

- High and stabilized circulation of these editions;
- Different purpose and functions of communication;
- Different degree of editorial independence;
- The abundance of expressive means, in particular, a variety of photographs.

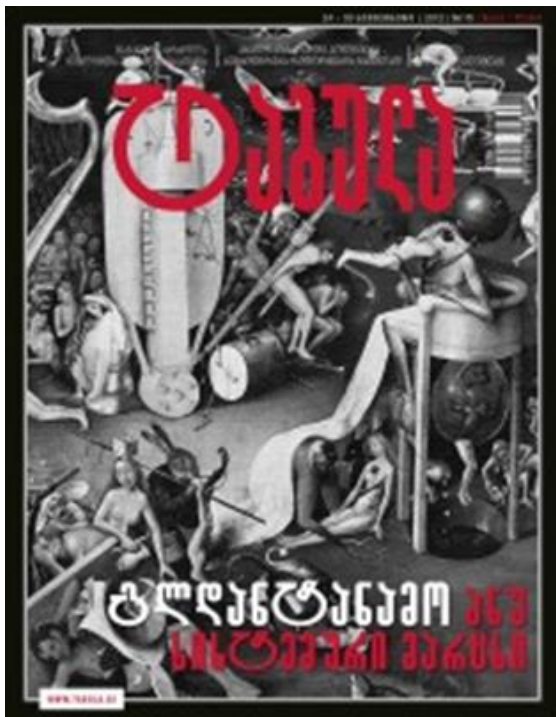
Semiotic analysis was used as analytical approach, namely, myths analysis and contents analysis as research techniques.

We try to find out the answers of this questions:

- How the Georgian print media cover the political scandal, which mediums of communication were used?
- In which context?
- How the author's and the editorial positions were reflected in the visual component of the articles?

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on content analysis we can conclude that among the nonverbal codes Georgian print media privilege photos, especially technical, situational and personal photos to cover the political scandal.



*“Tabula” 24-30 September, 2012*

**“Gldantanamo so the systemic failure”**

This is homepage illustration of “Tabula” magazine. It is one part of the Hieronymus Boss Triptych “The Garden of Earthly Delights”. This part presents the hell. In the original it is colorful but this magazine prints it as black and white, which adds emotional impression. In inscription on the homepage: "Gldantanamo so systemic failure" "Gldantanamo" is composed by Gldani and Guantanamo. Gldani refers to the geographical location of the prison where torture of prisoners was taken secretly and Guantanamo you know is a fortress in US, military base on the territory of Cuba where are arrested prisoners accused for terrorism and espionage. "Systemic failure" applies to a similar case in the history of United States when the prisoners' torture in the Guantanamo prison was transmitted before the 2008 presidential election. In United States, systemic failure followed the publication of prisoners' torture facts and the Republican leadership was defeated. Democrats have gained a majority of votes, and as a result, Barack Obama defeated Republican rival John McCain and became president of United States.

By the visual code, the hell's part Triptych is denoted the facts of the prisoner's torture and is connoted journalist's assessment of the fact that what is happening in Gldani prison is genuine hell and hence it's reprimand. By the verbal code is denoted that like Guantanamo's scandal the facts of the Gldani prison will change the political life in Georgia, and the connotation indicates to reader that the sensational, whose analogy does not exist in the world, has not happened. It reduces the assessment of “prison scandal” connoted by the non-verbal code.

The myth that is created with interconnection of verbal and visual codes reveals a double standard of the editorial policy of the magazine: at first glance, assess the fact that it is a hellfire, and in the end, it does not see anything that has no analogues.

Contrary to “Liberali” the newspaper “Kviris Palitra” (Week Palette) demonstrates clearly its position. This publication creates the meanings by interconnection verbal and non-verbal text in a way to drive readers to act against the current government.





*“Kviris Palitra”, 23-29 January 2012*

**„This is the hidden genocide of the Georgian nation“.**

The picture and the word “hidden” interact. The meaning denotes reality and the reader psychologically influenced believes that behind the cage the prisoners are in the unbearable situation. Also the word “genocide” refers to the prisoner’s number. So, this publication trays to create the myth that Georgian prison is the place where Georgian nation is destroyed and this is intentional act made by government. This act needs to be prohibited.

We founded the same photo in two different newspapers.

**“Scandalous Exclusive”** - written in red on top of the photo.



*“Prime Time”, 24 June, 2013*

**“The well-known police officer tried to rape the 18-year-old boy”**



*“Kviris Palitra”, 17-23 June, 2013*

Title of this article is „**Such sadist is unpunished today**”, on top of the photo was written “**Butliashvili was the most brutal butcher**” and on the right the reader can see the portrait of Mr. Butliashvili.

Both are used to illustrate the same story, but according to their editorial policy the newspapers focus on different aspects. The newspaper "Prime Time" uses scandalous information to create its own image. He tries to convince the reader that he has exclusive rights. Thus, sometimes the newspaper tries to reveal that he has exclusive photo but before the publication he has to review other newspapers and magazines to be sure that the photo is really exclusive. “Kviris palitra” remains faithful to his position, with interconnection of verbal and non-verbal texts, this newspaper tries to convince readers that the sadists have to be punished.

The weekly newspaper “Asaval-dasavali” is only one which covers “prison scandal” with the personal photo.



“Asaval-dasavali”, 24-30 September, 2012

Title of this article is “**I am ready to spay out each butcher!**” In the photo there are Khatuna Kalmahkelidze, Minister of Corrections and Legal Assistance, and in the text that accompanies the photo is written: “...this boy told me that drunk Khatuna Kalmakhelidze with her paramour watched his torture. Yes. Kalmakhelidze and her paramour were drinking champagne and have watched with pleasure the prisoner’s torture!” So, the personal photo and the text are interconnected as such manner that psychological impact will affect the reader. It pushes the receiver of this message to act against this power.

The main page of newspaper "Resonansi" is dedicated to the "Prison Scandal".





“Resonansi” September 19, 2012

Headline: “**National**” torture footage.

First photo is portrait of Bedukadze who is author of this footage and at the moment he was in Brussels. Three photos show the torture in prison. This four photos was presented in a syntactic way as Barthes calls it. Using such methods the newspaper created the myth, as if it is Bedukadze who relate the facts of this horrible story. At the same time it gives more objectivity to newspaper which fixes his position against the “National” government (In this context “national” means political party "United National Movement").

The newspaper “24hours” uses only situational photo to illustrate the prison scandal. The goal of this publication is to cover the public anxiety like an ordinary fact.



“24hours”, 19 september, 2012

This is a newsworthiness photo which title is “**Violence in Gldani prison**”. On the photo there is not Gldani prison, there is Philharmonic place where were some people who protested the prisoner’s torture.

As we see, the coding unites were analyzed according to the semiotic analysis, especially myth analysis. After, to demonstrate how this interconnection of verbal and visual components express the author’s position as well the editorial policy, the results of myths analysis were applied in the following categories: 1) for this attribution “*fight for the defense of human rights*” **code 1** was applied for the

visual codes which express contextually peaceful forms of fight; **code 2** was applied for the visual codes which express contextually aggressive forms of fight. For this attribution were coded 5 unites; 2) for this attribution "*Attitude towards the current government*": **code 1** was applied for the visual codes which express contextually loyal attitude towards the current government; **code 2** was applied for the visual codes which express contextually more negative attitude. For this attribution were coded 5 unites; 3) for this attribution "*Call to Reader's Involvement*": **code 1** was applied for the visual codes which express contextually that the media is engaged; **code 2** was applied for the visual codes which express contextually that the media is less engaged to say otherwise that media only finds the facts. For this attribution were coded 9 unites.

## CONCLUSION

Thereby, based on semiotic analysis, we studied the myths created with interconnection of verbal and visual codes by our studied newspapers and journals to illustrate "the prison scandal". We analyzed the implicit meanings revealed by semiotic analysis using content analysis coding system. It was revealed that by visual text the newspapers and the magazines illustrate more the peaceful forms of "*fight for the defense of human rights*" than aggressive forms. Concerning the "*attitude towards the current government*" (governance of National Movement) expressed by connotative meanings obviously is mostly negative then loyal. It was important to study how the newspapers and magazines try implicitly by visual information to involve their readers in protest. This research shows that symbolized information of non-verbal component illustrates engaged image of media.

In the end we have to remark that the Georgian newspapers and magazines use different type of photos as technic photos conceptually related to the information, situational and personal photos. Right here we have to note that especially with technic photos except the cultural and social codes were activated intertextual meanings which interfere in creation of connotations and in this way strengthens implicit meanings.

The study revealed that information presented by the visual component of our newspapers and magazines clearly reveals not only the position of the author of the article but the editorial policy. Finally we can conclude that in print media the non-verbal codes used for visualization of political scandal participate actively in making the myth. If we compare the daily publications "24 Hours" and "Rezonansi", we will clearly see them in a completely different approach: "24 hours"

cover the scandal that only limited to the facts and the Rezonansi tries to influence the reader. The newspaper "Prime Time" uses scandalous information to create its own image. He tries to convince the reader that he has exclusive rights. "Kviris Palitra" and "Asaval-Dasavali" address the forms of visualization (technic and personal photos), which will psychologically influence the reader and extinguish the existing reality.

As for the magazine, "Liberal" privileges situational photos to cover the political scandal, "Tabula" - a technic photos which give more in-depth access to the issue and loads the visual code with many implicit meanings.

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