

# Crime and Gender: Violence against Women in the Ukrainian Press in the First Half of the Twentieth Century



Anzhelika Dosenko, Olga Khamedova, Inha Pohrebniak, Viktoria Solomatova

**Abstract:** *This scientific research deals with the actual problem, that is the study of the language of criminal chronicles in the Western Ukrainian media discourse in the 1920-1930s. Object of analysis is news reports on gender violence in popular Western Ukrainian newspapers of the interwar twenty years. The chosen methodology is feminist discourse-analysis which allows us to identify the media representations of gender identity and to find out what ideological discourse has had symbolic hegemony, which gender regime was supported by language.*

*It turns out that the language of criminal news fixes symbolic mechanisms for establishing power regimes. The texts of criminal news show gender stereotypes and prejudices against women, which traditionally functioned and articulated in public discourse. Gender violence was explained (and justified) by personal, religious and social reasons. The problem of domestic violence attracted journalists from the 1920s and 1930s. Victim women who dared to challenge patriarchal customs were appraised extremely subjectively, biasedly, often – in a negative way. Publications about sexual crimes (rape, sexual harassment) were rare, since this topic was banned in the Western Ukrainian public discourse of the 1920s-1930s.*

*In Western Ukrainian popular magazines, the language of criminal news construed a gendered society, deleting power for men and exposing a woman to objectification. Journalists used certain linguistic strategies to support the dominant gender regime: author's intentionality, peculiar journalistic formulation and focus of information, the specifics of structuring material and hidden meanings of the text.*

**Keywords:** *the language of violence, gender violence, discourse, discourse analysis, criminal chronicle, gender regime, linguistic strategies.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The deep connection of the media language with the cultural environment of the society is obvious to both media researchers and linguists, because "language is involved in the

construction of reality" [19]. As discourse analysts emphasize [16], discourse shapes the social world through values. The language of the news is what most attracts the attention of media researchers [2;9;10], because it "generates meaning within the existing rules and regulations, and those that are in line with the interests of the dominant groups" [10], that is, power regimes in society, including gender. D. Matheson argued that "culture constructs meaning in such a way that it reinforces or promotes certain ideologies," and illustrated this with the example of criminal news [10].

Platochnik chose the method of gender-based violence in the media and identified gender-based violence as "those forms of violent acts that have a clear gender group to which the violence is directed or what the violence is doing". gender identities and find out which ideological discourse had symbolic hegemony and which gender regime was supported by language.

Gender researcher J. Nigel advised to study such "explicitly gender based activity as crime ... or violence" in which a woman is a victim of "inadequate masculinity" [12].

T. de Lauretis emphasized that "the representation of violence is inextricably linked to the concept of gender, in other words, I assert that violence is born of representation" [6]. The language of criminal news captures the symbolic mechanisms of establishing power regimes, so the purpose of the article is to investigate the specifics of constructing criminal news texts on gender-based violence in the Western Ukrainian press of the 1920-1930s, to identify the media gender representations of the offender and the victim, to identify gender mechanisms. The subject of our study is news reports about gender-based violence (murder, domestic violence (physical and moral), sexual harassment, rape) in the criminal chronicles of popular Western Ukrainian magazines of the 1920s and 1930s.

## II. METHODS

At the present stage, the most productive for the study of the interaction of language and society in the field of media communication is considered an interdisciplinary method of discourse analysis, because it allows you to answer the following questions: "what form of representation of the social world dominates; what forms of interaction are shaped by media text between people and the world, as well as between those in power and the rest; how the same meaning can change depending on which media text it is used in" [10].

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The methodology chosen is feminist discourse analysis allows one to identify media representations of gender identities and to find out which ideological discourse had symbolic hegemony and which gender regime was supported by language.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to discourse analysts, the media, as a form of cultural practice, actualize different versions of reality at different times. According to historians M. Bajdak and O. Bezruk, even before the First World War, "violence in women was never mentioned in the Galician press" [1].

However, already in the interwar period, the issue of gender-based violence falls from the sphere of private to public discourse. In the sections of the criminal chronicle of popular magazines (Galician Public Voice, Dilo, Novy Chas, Nedelya, Volynsky Ukrayna Niva; Bukovyna Chas; Transcarpathian Svoboda, etc.) violence was reported over women. It should also be noted that the vast majority of the articles in the periodicals were anonymous, as Ukrainian journalism of the interwar period developed under occupation: journalists were subjected to constant harassment, persecution and repression, and the publication was often threatened with confiscation.

Most reported were murders committed by men through unrequited love, jealousy, family strife. The content of centuries-old messages about gender-based violence is almost indistinguishable from that of today's press, which testifies to the urgency and insurmountability of this problem both in Ukraine and in the world. According to the modern statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, "in 9 out of 10 cases, domestic violence is suffered by women, and mainly by men" [11].

In pre-war crime news, journalistic narratives about homicides were similar: men first killed their wives and then committed suicide or attempted it. The victims were both well-known women (mostly artists) and ordinary people.

Let us look at the author's strategies for naming the material: the title avoids the words "murder" and emphasizes the personal relationship of the perpetrator and the victim ("Love", "Love drama", "What love can", "Family tragedy", etc.).

A note from the Drama of Love reported on 22-year-old Peter Klimchuk, from Rohatyn, who "killed his fateful 18-year-old Paranya Gromyak by an arrow from a cross, and therefore committed a hand. The cause of murder and suicide was unhappy love" [3]. Such a strategy reduced the issue of gender-based violence to a personal level and did not allow it to be viewed as a threatening social trend.

At the same time, the topic of crimes committed through unhappy love has always attracted the attention of readers among other news, so such notes have regularly appeared even in the international chronicle. The murder of a well-known German actress was reported in the Novy Chas newspaper in Lviv on September 10, 1930. It is noteworthy that the author called his message "The death of artist Greta Maren", though it was not about a natural death, but a violent one: killing a young woman by jealousy. By submitting such a

headline, the author drew public attention from the issue of gender-based violence.

His attention was drawn not to the killer and his motives, but to the victim's wife. It was she who was charged with the crime, and her fault was that she did not love this man. The actress was characterized by such narrative markers, who described her as a light-hearted and hypocritical woman: "she played with other husbands and did not pay much attention to Dan's love for her" [18].

According to discourse analysts, "a careful analysis of the choice of words in a particular text can demonstrate how social forces are directing the text in one direction or another" [10]. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account both the keywords and the tone of the narrative: the word "slow" indicates the light-heartedness and impermanence of this woman's feelings, her "playfulness", falsehood and insincerity. Thus, in the note it is indirect, and because of the author's intentionality, the narrative marking justified the criminal act of the man and the blame for him was placed on the woman.

Researchers call gender inequality the most significant cause of male violence. Journalists of the interwar period interpreted these events subjectively, in accordance with their own views and dominant public discourse. According to D. Matison, "news that is inherently new and unexpected is aimed at extracting meaning from a vague, problematic reality. And this is done within the existing conservative opinion of the general world" [10]. For example, the note Love [7] refers to a woman who abandoned her husband, a Czech police officer, and made a living by playing in a restaurant orchestra. The man tracked down the woman and tried to kill her and himself. MS Kimmel, a gender researcher, argued that "domestic violence is most likely to occur not when the man feels most empowered but when he feels relatively powerless" [5], that is, the man resorts to violence when a man feels he is losing control of a woman's life. This is exactly what was recorded in the note. It was noted that the wounded government official would be imprisoned for a year and no longer mentioned the fact that the woman had also been injured. The woman was characterized as frivolous, which obviously had to prove to the public her husband's right to punish her. At the end of the note, the journalist made a subjective and biased commentary on the heroine, fantasizing about her fate: "she will continue to bring melancholy arias to the cafes and turn her head to other men," thus finally forming the image of a betrayal woman [7]. Criminal news texts testify to gender stereotypes and prejudices against women who have traditionally functioned and articulated in public discourse. Criminal messages were written in a gender-sensitive language that supported the existing gender mode of dominance of one social group (in this case, men) over another (women).

According to A. Sinchak, "language not only reflects reality but is also part of the symbolic mechanisms that divide the spheres of influence and activity between women and men" [19].

The criminal news on gender-based violence testified to a certain narrative tradition that has emerged in the Ukrainian press since the beginning of the twentieth century - to justify the cruelty of men by the depraved nature of women.

Publications on domestic violence, including physical and moral torture, psychological pressure and intimidation of women, which have led to fatal consequences, have been isolated. Publications of the Sunday newspaper in 1930 covered gender-based violence in Jewish families in Volyn. At that time, the Jewish family remained the center of patriarchal customs, according to which the girl's fate was disposed of by her father and the community. One of the publications mentioned the decision of a 19-year-old Jewish girl, Sura Sayer, to become a Catholic Christian.

The girl felt tremendous pressure, threats of physical violence, intimidation on the part of her family and the community: "Then, at 50, they came under Belinsky's house and shouted at the windows and crushed the premises, moreover - they wanted to set the house on fire. Surah Seyer had to hide in the police commissariat, before which they gathered and shouted against their treacherous Sura" [8]. It is significant that in the publication the author in a playful tone calls the heroine "a Jew".

The diminutive, petulant names of women, the playful tone used in the media texts, testify to the steady tendency to infiltrate and disparage contempt for women. The headline of the article, "Against Betrayal of the Faith of Parents," is emotionally-evaluative and pre-empts readers' prejudice against the victim of the incident. The key word in the publication is the word "betrayal", which is found both in the title and in various variations in the text. Thus, the author gives a negative assessment of the actions of the heroine, condemns her decision. The fact that the girl deliberately made this decision is evidenced by her courageous act, because despite all the threats, she still finished what she had begun: "On the second day she left Vladimir to finally accept Catholicism" [17]. N. Hamitov wrote about the opposition of the individual freedom of the girl to "paganism" of the patriarchal kind: "Paganism, as a sanctification of the family-kind and the natural and social environment inhabited by the spirits of the genus, always treats the girl as family property. A girl must spread the power of kind in the world through birth. Due to this, the pagan race-ethnos is established in being" (Hamitov, 1995: 6). Thus, gender violence was interpreted as a mechanism for establishing a gender regime, restoring the destroyed social hierarchy, "power between gender groups" [11].

However, according to popular Western magazines, in the first third of the twentieth century, girls decided to rebel against the traditional restrictions on personal freedom. The very fact of resistance, albeit with tragic consequences, is also mentioned in a small correspondence, "The Love Tragedy of Volhynia" [8]. Here at the center of the story is the fact of the girl's suicide. The daughter of a Jewish merchant from a Volyn village, "who fell in love with a young man and decided to go to the Orthodox faith to marry" [8]. Appeal to the authoritative patriarchs of the family should have acted on the daughter, who showed disobedience, so the father resorted to tricks: "At night he widowed that he sees his father's grandfather, and he threatens the death of Suri as she changes

faith" [17]. The author noted that the girl had experienced an emotional shock and dared to give up on love: "But within a few days they found her body in the river where she had jumped, unable to bear the pain of separation" [8]. The journalist reproduced the conflict between patriarchal laws and the individual freedom of women. To create a compelling story, the author used graduation and kept the reader in suspense until its culminating end - the suicide of a girl. Thus, popular magazines reported on domestic violence, although women who dared to defy patriarchal customs were highly subjective, biased, and often negative.

Gender violence was explained (and justified) not only by personal or religious reasons. For example, in the Volyn-based newspaper *Ukrainska Niva*, a news item reported a man from Hungary who, after killing his wife and four children, committed suicide. The headline - "The tragedy of unemployment" - revealed the social causes of the crime, on which the journalist wanted to draw the reader's attention. The author emphasized this for the second time in a comment to the event: "The cause of this terrible tragedy was misery, because the worker could not find work for himself for a long time" [20]. Thus, the crime was explained by social problems, the pressure of the environment, and the offender was removed from responsibility, even more so - he was portrayed as a victim of circumstances. At the same time, the male offender was not deprived of the power that the patriarchal environment delegated to him - to decide the fate of his dependent women and children. As MS Kimmel observed, "violence adds strength; it is a way of asserting one's power, which, according to the man, is rightfully his own" [5]. In the Western Ukrainian press during the interwar period, reports of sexual offenses, including sexual harassment and rape, were quite rare, indicating that this topic was concealed and tabooed in public discourse. M. Foucault called "regime" a system of rules that state what can be said and what is not, and modern discourse analysts specify: "What can be said in principle is limited by the historical rules of a particular discourse" [16]. If, however, similar crimes were reported, then by genre, these were small notes that were featured in news blocks. As the gender researchers point out, "the concept of rape as a crime against sexual freedom and sexual invasion, that is, a crime against a person who has been subjected to sexual aggression, only emerged in the twentieth century (Maerchyk & Plahotnik, 2014: 154). In the nineteenth century, in the Western, for example, Anglo-American, the right abuser could only pay a fine to the victim's father or husband, because they saw the girl / woman as the "property" they owned and the rape as "the spoil of property" [11]. In Ukrainian customary law, similar laws were in force: it was possible to settle a "case" with a cash payment. The rapist could not pay if he agreed to marry the victim.

The public opinion about the victim was indicative here and usually the victim was accused of seducing her husband. "If any of the rape cases went to court, then the accused could find or even bribe people who would testify that the raped" led a dissolute life"- such a circumstance softened the sentence or completely removed the guilt of the rapist" [11].

Similar narrative strategies have been used by journalists in the aforementioned material, which sought to justify the murder of women. Historian I. Cherchovich investigated and investigated cases of rape in the Galician courts of the XIX - beginning. Twentieth century.

The researcher noted an important feature of the Ukrainian public discourse of rape, which was also recorded in the information space of the first third of the twentieth century: "Most clearly, public beliefs about women's responsibility / guilt for their own attractiveness were manifested in rape cases. This is the rhetoric inherent in the statements of witnesses, including the wives of the accused: they were more protective of the husband rather than expressing themselves neutrally or favorably about the injured woman. What is interesting in these cases is not so much the sentencing of the defendants as the nature of the controversy surrounding the raped women. The credibility of their testimony was based not on the facts of the physical injuries, but rather on the perceptions of the behavior inherent in this social group, the reputation of such a woman in the eyes of her surroundings, assessments of her morality towards rape, etc." [21] A historical commentary by the researcher explains why rape victims tried to avoid publicity and there were few reports of such incidents in the press at the time. The likelihood of publicity about an event increased if the crime was large-scale. Thus, the Public Voice (February 1, 1930) reported in the news item in a note with the ironic-sarcastic name Pedagogy on Cresses that the sexual harassment of "one of the heads" of the Ostrich Gymnasium in Volyn was reported to have been dismissed by 30 students. The author tried to attract the public's attention to this event, so the key words of the publication are "great sensation", "scandal" [15]. At the same time, the author spoke delicately about the sexual crime, avoiding the outspoken statements: "the reason for the girls' release is the over-free treatment of one of the school heads with the students" [15]. The author also reported on the "punishment" that the offender received - "transferred him to another high school" [15]. Undoubtedly, the very fact of covering the silent topic of sexual crimes in popular magazines of the time, which thus attracted it to public discourse and attracted readers' attention to an important social issue, deserves attention. Sexual harassment has also been discussed in the communist magazine Sel-Rob in the note "This is how they govern!" [13]. Not only was the journalist limited to the dry message of the event, he interpreted it subjectively. A peculiar style, bright imagery - the defining features of his story.

The author's communicative intentions are already noticeable in the sarcastic headline of the note ("That's the way it is governed!"): The journalist was indignant not by the fact of the claims, but by the actions of the official. He conveyed the arrogance and self-efficacy of the official with several expressive features, and his nationality was emphasized in a straightforward language: "For candy, and later for a sausage, he invited them" will you come from me"? [13]. Significant detail about the nationality of the hero: thus modeled a societal patriarchal model (usually characteristic of a military myth), according to which the alien encroaches on "our" women, that is, thus questioning the power positions of "our" men.

In any case, this gives grounds to argue that women are interpreted by the author as the object of action of men, their property. Attention should be paid to the "local interaction of the elements of the text" [20], since the story of harassment against rural girls was not at the center of the narrative of the Polish government's crimes, but was only a peripheral part of it.

The author completed his note with a report of bribery of an official. Thus, the journalist of the magazine Sel-Rob structured the information, set ideological accents in accordance with the prescriptions of the ideological vector of the newspaper: the sexual harassment of the Polish power to Ukrainian peasants became an excuse for exposing the class enemy and communist propaganda.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

The Western Ukrainian criminal media discourse of the 1920s and 1930s was shaped by gender-based language, which provided for the justification of the perpetrator (male) and the indirect accusation of the victim (female) through the author's intentionality, subjective comments, peculiar focusing of information, and structuring of text, covert text. The language of the criminal chronicles captured the symbolic mechanisms of establishing power regimes. Criminal news reports testify to gender stereotypes and prejudices against women who have traditionally functioned and articulated in public discourse. Further study of the language of media texts through the methodology of feminist discourse analysis, in particular in the aspect of interaction between media and society, media and power, is considered a fruitful and promising area of psycholinguistics.

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