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Femininity for protection: Tajik women negotiating security in Dushanbe.

Introduction

A woman in Tajik traditional dress is standing by a fence near Ministry of Defense speaking with a policeman in uniform. All of a sudden, the policeman slaps her on the face. The woman seemingly caught by surprise raises her hands in protection and says something. The policeman hits her again, this time harder. The woman looks angry trying to hit the man back, which causes more aggressive attacks from the policeman. The lady looks scared covering her face with hands, while the man apparently losing his temper completely, sends punches all over her body. He continues hitting her, while people are passing by casually and not trying to help the woman until a man stops and starts talking to the policeman. Later two other man join and while the policeman and the three man are talking, the woman uses the situation in her advantage and attacks her abuser from the back. The video stops... It returns showing the woman lying on the ground, while the policeman keeps kicking and hitting her with his police baton extremely violently. The woman stops moving...she stops reacting. The policeman realizes, something happened to her...he stands for several minutes first looking doubtful, then confused, then scared... he tries helping her on her feet from the ground...the woman keeps lying, unconscious.

On March 21, 2019 a video went viral on social media in Dushanbe showing the above scene. Angry comments on Facebook demanded the police department to identify the policeman and take measures. Later, Ozodi news page¹ reported that the policeman was fired from the police forces. The article also reported that the woman was mentally ill and provoked the attack by disobeying the law enforcement. As a

¹ Accessed on April 1, 2019 at: <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/29834289.html>

response to the claim, a question was raised by women in social media: “would the police behave differently if I was instead of the ‘*dushevno-bolnaya*’² lady?’ ‘would my experience be different?’. This article analyzes the everyday experiences of women with the police force on the streets of Dushanbe. It demonstrates methods used to negotiate safety in a male dominant society of Tajikistan.

People coming to Dushanbe from outside of the country consider the city safe and that is partially true. The crime level is low, particularly around the center of the city. People, both locals and non-locals stay outside with their families until late, especially in summer as due to the extreme heat during the day the only time to go outside is after sunset. Tajiks and non-Tajiks walk around the city center, which seems welcoming by the abundance of street lights but most importantly by the over-representation of the police force around the city center. Nevertheless, daily life is far from safe in Dushanbe. Ironically, it is the physical presence of the police that complicates Tajik people’s lives. Overuse of power, threat, harassment, abuse and mockery by the police force is not rare on the streets of Dushanbe. Men and women face various kinds of abuse regularly with women being particularly vulnerable.

Feeling safe, protected and free of harassment on the streets has never been the story of Tajik women. Women told numerous stories of how they have been victims of harassment on a daily basis by Tajik men. Usually it is women below the age of 45 that are target of male harassment in public. The ‘milder’ forms of male harassment, such as staring, commenting, trying to speak, throwing objects is normal for Tajik women, while other ways, such as standing close and rubbing against women in public transport, smelling women’s hair or ‘accidental’ touches were reported for this study as scary and humiliating. Due to normalization of daily harassment, many women in this study do not perceive or recognize most of the signs as harassment. For many such attention is desirable because it is a proof of their physical attractiveness. The severe types of assaults were boldly voiced by several women in the last years in Dushanbe who used social media to finally describe the ‘horror of being a woman on the streets of Dushanbe’ and call the authorities to take measures. Policemen, who is expected to

² ‘*Dushevno-bolnaya*’ Russian word for ‘mentally ill’.

ensure order in Dushanbe and provide protection for women, are not different from regular Tajik men. The constant creation, changes, and additions to the legislation and orders about public life increases the possibility of overusing power by those at the bottom of the law enforcement chain. The police misuses its authority and bothers citizens of the city, including women in an attempt to find faults and make additional income.

The article demonstrates the daily struggle of women and ways of negotiating security in daily interaction with the police on the streets of Dushanbe, the capital city of Tajikistan. I argue that in male dominant society of Tajikistan, where safety is of concern for women, embraced femininity is used as a way out of complicated situations. I use the term 'embodied bargain' to demonstrate women's forced negotiation in male society and the opportunities as well as risks associated with this type of bargain. Although mainly women found attractive to the opposite sex have to deal with daily forced 'interaction' with men and in this case with the police, it is those who fit the local standards of beauty that 'talk' their way out of complex situations. The study aims to contribute to understanding of gender dynamics and women's issues in Tajikistan beyond the family circle. To demonstrate the complexity and depth of the issue at hand, the findings are presented by three case studies. These case studies have been chosen as they contain multiple sides of the stories told by many women as separate cases. It should be noted here that initially the article was about the daily harassment of women in the hands of police in the streets of Dushanbe to demonstrate daily struggles only. However, the stories shared were sensitive in nature, publishing of which could put the freedom/life of the women and the researcher at risk. The case studies selected contain 'simpler' examples and although do not show the experiences of many women in full picture, nevertheless demonstrate the daily life in Dushanbe.

Methodology

The paper is based on 235 interviews with women in Dushanbe over the years of 2017-2018. The study was interested in whether the appearance of women living in Dushanbe makes a difference in negotiating safety with the police forces. Women

interviewed for the study were randomly selected through snowball technique. The only indicator taken into account when identifying sample was age, with the women being between the ages of 19 to 45. Level of education, employment, marriage status and other information was not required. Besides the study did not specifically identify women who by local standards were considered 'beautiful'. Physical features were not taken into account to test whether appearance mattered in the daily negotiations of women.

Literature review

Security in Tajikistan

Security or national threat has been on the display in Tajikistan with the government taking measures to control religious freedom through the discourses and creation of the myth on extremism (Heathershaw, 2014). Safety/security has been discussed in Tajikistan in the light of 'discourse of danger' in Central Asia, which has been displayed by state and media as region endangered by possibility of crisis possibility, which has been used as an excuse for legitimate interventions (Heathershaw and Megoran, 2011). In the study of counter-extremism Edward Lemon and Helene Thibault look into the Tajik government's created dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' Islam and promotes or enforces 'appropriate' behavior of secular Tajiks that would not question the regime (2018) The daily experiences of (in) security in Central Asia in general received less attention from scholars with the exception of few. Day-to-day coping strategies of Uzbeks in Osh following the violence in 2010 has been discussed by Aksana Ismailbekova (2013). Similarly, Marc von Beomcken, Hafiz Boboyorov and Nina Bagdasarova (2018) explore the strategies used by gypsy and LGBT communities in Osh, Kyrgyzstan to ensure personal safety.

Women and negotiation/nation building

Gender dynamics and gender roles have been mostly discussed within families in Tajikistan. Numerous studies focused on the role of women in families and discussed

the issues faced by women, such as importance of marriage for Tajik women, domestic violence by husband and in-laws, migration impact on women, polygamy and etc. The position, role as well as daily lives in Tajik society have been described mostly as associated with the nation-building in Tajikistan.

Theoretical framework

With the anarchy and male dominance, there is little room for women to resist in Dushanbe, particularly when it comes to personal safety. Instead of resisting, women used the well-known weakness of men towards women's physical attractiveness to negotiate safety. Tajiks' negotiating or adjusting to the new rules and regulations is not a new phenomenon and has been discussed before. The literature however does not analyze women's safety and negotiation outside of the house, in a Tajik society. Women, irrelevant of whether they have a male chaperone or not deal with other men regularly. The article will be built upon theories discussing femininity and embodied femininity in particular to argue that women in Dushanbe beautify themselves to live, work and move in the men's society. Using the term 'embodied bargain' I argue that by embracing *zeboi* [attractiveness] women make use of sometimes the only method available to them to ensure protection.

Living with daily (in) security

The anarchy in Tajikistan is known, which mainly has been discussed as a link within corruption in the literature (reference). The anarchy is a common knowledge for Tajik citizens. In fact, it has been normalized and 'tamed' to the level that Tajiks cannot imagine living otherwise. The Tajik society operates under the rule of: *If you know someone who knows someone, you can get away with almost anything*. We have seen many examples of nepotism, patronage in recent events in Tajikistan starting from the higher officials to other people in power. Regular Tajiks also benefit from the anarchy because although the laws and regulations do not provide the expected order and protection, the anarchy helps dealing and living with the non-stop changes and interventions into public lives that cause discomfort. Other studies demonstrated Tajiks' ability to negotiate and find ways out of similar situations (Roche, other references).

Indeed, in Tajikistan many changes occurred in the last years to regulate and control every day practices of Tajiks. Although no reasons or explanations for the enforced changes are provided, general conception is that the state is attempting to create an order, which would go hand in hand with the 'new Dushanbe' that has been re-constructed by replacing old, soviet buildings with new constructions. The interventions into public lives include measures such as, banning any celebrations (birthday celebrations, circumcision parties, celebrating birth of children), controlling expenses on weddings (not inviting more than 200 guests, modest expenses on *kalym*³), controlling expenses on celebrating religious holidays (*dastarkhon*⁴ must not be extravagant and must include only two types of dishes), choosing the 'right' names for children (a list of names was developed that includes 'true' Tajik names, which is enforced) and etc. Changes affect people's comfort, their everyday practice but also security and safety. Irrelevant of the regulation's scale there are always those who are supposed to ensure the law is followed through and are thus automatically in power position, which in Tajikistan is synonym to corruption and 'money-making'. There is a saying in Tajik to demonstrate that, '*qonuni nav – kisai nav*', which translates as '*new legislation-new pocket*'. Similarly, the police standing on the roads in Dushanbe do not attempt to bring order. Their only motivation is to find faults to take money from the drivers. A funny story about a policeman is popular in Dushanbe, relevant to support this argument:

A new policeman is hired to work on the central road in Dushanbe. After a month, his co-workers tell him to go take his salary from the finance office. The policeman, surprised, asks: 'there is also a salary??'

In majority of cases, Tajiks are not perplexed by the different changes introduced to their daily lives. There are examples of course when the anarchy and despair lead people to taking extreme measures. One of such accidents occurred in summer of 2018, when a taxi driver committed suicide by cutting his throat open in front of the mayor's office in Dushanbe in protest against the regulation on removing privately

³ *Kalym* – bride price

⁴ *Dastarkhon* – table cloth, usually spread on the floor

owned taxis around Dushanbe and replacing those with registered taxis and other public transport. For this taxi driver similar to many others, running taxi was the only mean of earning an income and feeding their families. Such single cases of protest are not common. Often taxi drivers and people complain to each other either while driving around the city or in social media. The last method became widely popular in the last years to the extent that it promoted attempts to control the internet in the country through regulating social media and increasing internet price. Nevertheless, to live in Tajikistan and stay sound-minded, it is important to find ways of living with the status quo. People learned to find their own ways, to pay when necessary, to visit influential relative or negotiate through creative methods.

Under such anarchy, women's lives are more complicated. As a male dominant society, most of the decisions are made by men and negotiated between men (Bakhtibekova, forthcoming). That is why, having a male chaperone either father, brother or husband is a must for women. Studies demonstrated the importance of being married for Tajik women in its association with economic and social status. However, having a male chaperone for safety as well as getting by in a Tajik society has not been discussed (forthcoming Bakhtibekova). Women in this study who do not have their male chaperone with them at the time of dealing with police in Dushanbe, used the femininity known and valued by the Tajik men to negotiate their safety, which is what the article demonstrates. Similar to men however, women are also stopped and interrogated by the police on a regular basis if minor rule-breaking happens, which again is difficult to bypass taking into account the number of newly created regulations. While discussions can take place between police and other men followed by paying money or contacting a relative, with a woman this is rarely the case. The assumption among Tajik men is that a man does not go into discussion with a woman. As I demonstrate in a different article (forthcoming), women are generally considered ill-tempered or lacking intellectual ability to make meaningful conversation leading to benefit for both sides. Rarely, Tajik men value the opinion of women unless people of different genders work or live together when a woman is known and respected within her circle. In a day to day basis, women are seen and appreciated only based on their physical appearance.

Tajik women are well aware of men's reaction towards women's physical features. Harassment in public places is common, in public transportation is regular and in working environment is known but less discussed among Tajiks. Any Tajik woman at one point of her life, usually when younger lives with daily verbal harassment, such as being catcalled, getting comments of sexual nature, or being whistled at, as well as being followed and experiencing unwelcomed touching. Apart from the daily 'normal' harassment, some women in this study reported more violent or threatening experiences of sexual assault. For example, rubbing genitals against young girls in public transport or demonstrating genitals to girls on the streets are some of the experiences shared. The harassment increased to the point that, women in Dushanbe wrote an appeal to the mayor of the city Rustam Imomali to make the streets of Dushanbe safe and harassment free for women. At the same time however, the 'milder' form of sexual advances is considered normal for majority of the women in this study. Most did not recognize the daily 'attention' from the opposite sex as type of harassment and believed women deserve to be 'noticed'. According to many if a woman walks in the street and does not hear any comment at all it means she either did not make enough effort with her 'look' that day or it is a sign of ageing. The normalization of women's harassment however seems to be linked with the continuation of the experiences passing from one generation to another. Younger women with exposure to the world outside of the country are becoming aware of the inappropriateness of such cases and are less tolerant.

Nevertheless, in this study, women played the card of 'attractiveness' or 'embodied femininity' through beautifying themselves exactly for the purpose of being 'noticed' and 'approved'. Aware of the men's weakness towards the local standards of women's beauty, ladies fitting the category of 'Tajik beauty' found it easier to negotiate their way out of difficult situations when dealing with the police forces on the streets of Dushanbe. In contrast, those not perceived as 'local beauties' had to go through longer procedures of negotiations at times taking several weeks to months to get the problem solved. The case studies below demonstrate the examples of similar situations. The three stories show how women negotiate safety in daily lives through embodiment of femininity and beauty. I argue that in a society where state does not provide regular

protection for its citizen, women embrace the visual ideals of ladies' attributes to ensure men's protection in a long run (by getting married, becoming second wives of lovers) and men's compassion/sympathy in daily interaction. This particular study focuses on the second type of interaction with men.

The Tajik beauty

The last couple of years Dushanbe changed significantly. As part of the municipal plan for redevelopment of Dushanbe, new buildings are being built, parks are being constructed, bridges designed; the city is home to the second in the world highest flagpole, largest in the region national library and a road with 82 roundabouts. Along with the other changes, the number of beauty centers, salons and 'labs' also increased. Tajik women, although always concerned about physical attractiveness are more concerned about their appearance now as a result of exposure to social media and awareness of beauty 'norms' in the neighboring countries leading to increased demand towards beauty and cosmetic procedures. The race for pretty face is expensive as well as a risky operation in the city as it is difficult to identify real cosmetologist from non-professional. Moreover, because of the anarchy, which I demonstrate in this paper, in cases of the procedures going wrong, women cannot take any actions against the person performing the procedure, claim their money back or have the mistake fixed. Knowing that this is under their own risk and responsibility, women are nevertheless ready to take the risk and pay big amount of money to look prettier and younger. In fact, unnatural or artificial beauty became so popular that ladies share jokes between themselves. According to one interviewee: 'today if you are all natural you are either poor and cannot afford fakery or you are 'old-fashioned'.

From 235 women participating in this study, 62 did not visit beauty salons at all. While the rest of participants had one or two procedures done every month, these women preferred performing regular beauty procedures themselves at home. They nevertheless did not deny the wish for having a procedure or operation if finances are available. Majority did not consider themselves physically attractive and only 86 women saw themselves as 'beautiful' according to the local standards. At the same time

however, majority with only 12 women as an exception are subject to several types of daily harassment. As mentioned earlier only 51 women consider the 'attention' from men as harassment, while for the rest it was natural as well as desired. Interviewees named several reasons for why physical appearance is of high importance. Even though, being attractive was associated with getting married if unmarried and/or keeping one's husband if married, being noticed, accepted and considered was of more importance. Number one reason for majority, was 'for myself', which was explained as impact on self-esteem that further was linked with success in day to day activities and interactions. All of the women agreed that in a Tajik society, physical attractiveness is important to get through if one wants to be noticed, spoken to and respected. Women told stories of how looking certain ways helped them in different situations and the three case studies below⁵ are good demonstration of the statement.

Case studies

Gulnora - taxi driver

Women driving cars is still a new phenomenon in Tajikistan because owning a car is a luxury in general. Although the number is growing it is unusual to see a woman drive. Gulnora, 26 years old woman, drives her mini car around the center of Dushanbe as a taxi to make an income. Gulnora is a single mother with two children aged nine and three. She bought the car using the money she saved during her migration work to Russia two years ago. The road, which Gulnora choose to drive her taxi goes through the center and she charges five somoni per person. However, private taxis are not permitted to drive in the center as public transport. Police is standing in every corner of the road to 'ensure' the order is followed. Gulnora therefore, removes the taxi sign '3' from her rear window and instead holds three fingers to find potential passengers standing on the road. A person wanting the '3' taxi, nods, instead of raising a hand and quickly slides in as Gulnora stops her car. If the police notice her working as a '3' Gulnora has two choices either hide certain amount of cash inside her drivers' liscence for the police to find when they are looking into it; or loose her drivers' license and pay a

⁵ Every effort is made to hide the identity of women, whose cases are demonstrated in the paper, including real names.

fine of 600 somonis (equivalent to 65 USD). The non-verbal communication is created among taxi drivers and passengers but also among taxi-drivers and the police as a result of long experience. For Gulnora, as a woman, there is another option available, where she has a possibility to not pay the police and avoid paying the fine. When the police stop Gulnora's car after noticing her collect another passenger, Gulnora puts on her high heeled shoes she took off to operate the car, checks her image in the mirror, fixes her make-up and hair and steps out of the car smiling to the police officer and letting him take a look at her. According to Gulnora she spends long time in the morning to ensure she looks perfect before stepping out of the house.

G: 'In this job, being *zebo* [pretty] is everything. Although different policemen like different types of women, after several mistakes you learn how to approach each one... I know how to play my looks'.

R: 'Have you ever paid the police?'

G: 'Only once...The policeman was in bad mood already before he stopped me. I realized straight away nothing will work for this one, as soon as I saw him.'

R: 'How do you feel about using your physical appearance in similar situation?'

G: 'I am blessed with good looks and have to make a good use of it while I can. Isn't that the only purpose for *zeboi* [attractiveness]? I do not have good education, or influential father or uncle, or even a husband to help me find another job. If I wouldn't have my looks also then both my children and I would not survive. If you are not *zebo*, you are nothing in Dushanbe.'

R: 'Have you ever had any difficulties with the police while driving your taxi?'

G: 'There once was an older policeman who after stopping me several times, started asking other types of questions. He demanded my phone number, which he said was for registration purposes... after a while he started sending me texts and asking where I was and etc. He said if you ever have any issues, call me and I will help. The truth however, was that I was more scared of him than anything else. I told him I am getting married, but he said he didn't care...I was scared...I knew I was in trouble.'

R: 'What did you do?'

G: 'I do not drive on the road where he works any longer, only I am worried it is only a matter of time before I meet him again. It is a small city after all. If it gets unbearable, I will just have to quit this job'.

Sadbarg – wearing *satr* [headscarf] in Dushanbe

Sadbarg, 23 years old hairstylist moved to Dushanbe a year ago from the Southern region of Tajikistan to work in a beauty salon. Sadbarg is divorced with one daughter. She got married at the age of 19 to a relative through arranged marriage. After living with an abusive husband for 3 years, Sadbarg walked out of her marriage and is now dealing with complicated divorce process. She is well-known and well-recommended hairstylist in the city. However, there is a problem Sadbarg deals with on a daily basis, she is a wearer of *satr* [headscarf]. Headscarf, along with other visual signs of religious extremism, was banned from wearing in public years ago in Tajikistan. Sadbarg started wearing *satr* after she got married, which for her was associated with being a married woman. She did not take it off after her marriage broke up, because according to Sadbarg, *satr* became part of her identity.

S: 'This is how people know me... for me it is a complete change of image, which I am not ready to realize yet. Perhaps there will be a time for me to remove my *satr*, at this moment I cannot imagine walking outside without it. If I take it off, it would mean I have to stay inside and not work.'

Apart from wearing a headscarf, Sadbarg made significant changes in her appearance. She shows an image of her before marriage where she looks as a completely different person. Sadbarg is honest and proud of the cosmetic procedures done on her face – she had nose operation, fillers on her lips and cheeks, fake eyelashes, fake eyebrows. Sadbarg also wears full make up every day.

S: 'When your hair is covered all the attention is on your face, it has to therefore be perfect.'

When Sadbarg walks around the city, she receives constant attention from men, particularly the police.

S: 'When they [police] see a woman in headscarf they immediately stop you and start asking questions. I never encountered any extreme situations though yet when I didn't know what to do. I mean me personally... I have seen of course other women wearing headscarf being called names and humiliated...'

R: 'Why do you think the police does not bother you?'

S: 'It is clear – they react to my looks. I have seen this happen many times. They stop you and then stand there staring at you...it doesn't even matter what you tell them, nobody hears you...'

R: 'Then what happens?'

S: 'The usual – promise to take it off, they tell me. I make the promise and they let me go.'

R: 'How about other women, what about them?'

S: 'Once I was in town with my friend, we were both wearing our *satr*. The police stopped us, and my friend was so scared... she was basically shaking. The policeman approached us, he looked at her first and started yelling. I was looking down all the time until he shouted: 'look at me!' I looked him straight in the eyes... and he changed immediately. He stopped yelling, he didn't talk to me any longer but he was still assaulting my friend and calling her monkey. Then he said pointing at me: 'This one at least knows how to wear it and it looks good on her... but have you seen yourself in the mirror', he asks my friend. He threatened that if he sees us wearing 'that thing' again, he personally will take it off and burn it right there... he let us go of course. My friend stopped wearing her *satr* after that incident, but I am not worried. Perhaps not just yet, maybe once I get older and it will be difficult to predict the policemen reaction I will stop. For now, it is kind of fun.'

Zara – work at the bazaar

Zara is 35 years old, married with three children. She has a small place in one of the biggest markets in Dushanbe, Korvon, where she sells women's underwear. The items she sells do not belong to her, she receives 40 to 50 somonis from each item she sells depending on their price. In comparison to Zara, her sister Manzura is a big business lady, who has several selling points throughout the bazaar. Manzura travels to Dubai to bring ladies' accessories, such as underwear, shoes, bags and cosmetics but does not sit at the bazaar herself. Other people work for her, including her own sister Zara. When one sees Zara, however, for the first time, she doesn't strike one as a financially struggling woman selling small items trying to make ends meet. Zara fits the local standards of beauty, with long artificial eyelashes, penciled eyebrows, big brown eyes, full lips and dark long artificial hair. Zara wears bright make-up and beautifully fashioned traditional clothes. From most of the woman selling similar items, Zara attracts attention of customers immediately as she artfully negotiates the price. It is not only the customers that are affected by Zara's physical attractiveness.

Under the new rules, bazaars do not operate freely in Dushanbe any longer. Bazaars used to stay open until late evenings, operating 7 days a week. Now, they run on a work schedule from 8 am to 5 pm. Sellers are aggressively pushed out of the bazaar every day at exactly 5 pm when the lights around the bazaar are turned off, forcing both sellers and customers to move in the darkness to make their way to exits. Retailers quickly collect their items, pack them back into their bags and lock those in storages. If they do not make it out in one hour after the lights are off, people get locked inside the bazaar until next morning.

Zara however is not worried. She looks at other people rushing to hide their merchandise and nervously run towards the gates. She slowly collects the underwear, scrolling through social media on her phone and regularly checking herself on the small mirror she keeps underneath the merchandise. Once other people are out, and it becomes less crowded, she locks her small stall and goes towards main entrance. On her way she sees several 'privileged' people similar to herself. The main gate goes

open for her and the police at the door asks if she needs any help. She stops by the police for few seconds, makes few jokes with them and lazily exits the bazar.

Z: 'People look at me and think I am a big businesswoman with loads of money, because of the way I behave. When you act this way you believe in it yourself and people start believing too. Here, in bazaar there is only one rule, you have to know how to find common interest with the officials, the police and such. The other day a lady, selling golden items next to me was robbed. Someone stole several golden rings and some gold chains... she was so upset...*bechora* [poor] woman. Nobody bothered to help her, they did not even look at videos recorded to at least see who took it... you will never find a thief here of course, but at least whether it was a man or a woman... – they did nothing. I lost one bra the other day, they went crazy – looked everywhere, asked everyone who was around me. Turned out the bra was inside the bags and I never took it out... - but the fuss they made!'

R: 'Why do you think such different attitude towards people?'

Z: 'Who I am, it is all thanks to my sister, Manzura. She literally created me... she pays for my cosmetic procedures every 6 months. She told me: 'Your face is your success...men will want to impress you and women will want to be friends with you. She is right my sister, she is always right'.

Discussion

The three women in the case studies above, use their bodies and physical attractiveness to impact the policeman in Dushanbe. The body of a woman that has been glorified for its nation building purposes and motherhood in Tajikistan, is also a source of 'embodied bargain'. By 'embodied bargain' I mean creation, beautification or perfection of the body for the purpose of pleasing men's visual image of the women for achieving personal objectives. Men in Tajikistan do not hide their attraction towards women with facial features categorized as pretty within the local standards. Women, as subjects of regular harassment in Dushanbe are well aware of this tendency. Although, unpleasant, humiliating and at times scary experience, harassment is mostly normalized

in the country. For women in Dushanbe, who do not feel protected by the state or police and who are easily targeted by the law due to numerous rules and regulations of public life, creating or using what is available in terms of physical features is the last resource to claim safety.

In Dushanbe, people are left to themselves. Tajiks create jobs for themselves, find their own solutions in cases of difficulties, protect themselves when necessary and find or create ways to make sense and continue living in the country. With discourses about security, safety and protection from extremism in Tajikistan, the state has not taken any measures to ensure order and daily comfort for its citizens. Moreover, changes are introduced regularly to create more chaotic existence on the ground. The anarchy and chaos are normalized, and methods of dealing are created constantly. For women however, it is not only the anarchy and lack of protection they need to think about but also living in male society, where women are valued just for their physical features. In a different environment, in a family or working environment, the dynamics are different and those are not the focus of the study. It is the daily interaction on the streets of Dushanbe, which is described in the paper.

Gulnora, Sadbarg and Zara, similar to many other women interviewed for the study learned to live in Dushanbe through the daily experience. The regulations that complicate their existence and stand between themselves and earning an income to care for their children can be resolved exactly due to the chaos of anarchy and male dominance in society. Spending hours and money earned in the jobs created for themselves, the three women craft their appearances and boldly claim to be treated differently. For them the interaction and most interestingly the reaction of men is predicted and mastered to the level that it becomes a normal tool used to cope with current situation. They skillfully interact with the policeman in Dushanbe, mindful of the risks associated with such bargain. The article demonstrated the gender dynamics in Tajik society, where women use embodied femininity to bargain for safety and protection.