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Truthful Coverage Of Socio-Economic And Political Themes In Saydi Umirov's Publicism

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ABSTRACT

This article contains the opinions of journalist and publicist Saydi Umirov and demonstrates the professional skills of the publicist, his active civic position, the publicist's "self-image", and his bold raising of topics that many lack the courage to mention. In controversial and unexpected situations, as mentioned by the article's author, publicist S. Umirov demonstrates the ability to shape public opinion, call for discussion, and make specific proposals. Such approaches encourage young journalists to be responsive and vigilant in any situation.

Keywords: Journalism, publicist, author's position, public opinion, independent country, unrest, tragic events, opposition, revenge, bloodshed, justice, ruling party, President.

Introduction

A publicist is a professional who cannot remain indifferent to the events and complex processes occurring in the socio-economic and political life of the country, analyzes and researches them based on their worldview, scope of thinking, and professional requirements, expresses their opinion, point of view, evaluates, draws conclusions, and provides suggestions and comments. Saydi Umirov's journalism is no exception, and some of his articles analyzed below clearly demonstrate the journalist's active civic position, his ability to understand the essence of events, grasp their core, and express truthful, objective opinions, conveying his thoughts to the reader in simple words.

METHODS

This study applies a qualitative textual analysis method to examine Saydi Umirov's journalistic response to the tragic events in Tashkent's "Students' Town" on January 16–17, 1992. The main source of data is Umirov's article "If you hit its horn, its hoof will ache" published in *Xalq so'zi*

("People's Word") in February 1992, supplemented by archival and media materials related to the incident.

The research first reconstructs the historical and socio-political context of the early independence period, focusing on public unrest following price liberalization. This contextualization enables a better understanding of the article as both a journalistic report and a civic commentary.

Next, through close reading and discourse analysis, the study identifies Umirov's rhetorical and linguistic techniques—metaphors, evaluative tone, and personal reflection—used to construct his civic stance and moral position. His self-representation ("I-position") is analyzed as an element of ethical journalism, highlighting professional responsibility and empathy toward the victims.

Finally, the findings are interpreted to show how Umirov's work exemplifies the role of publicist journalism as a form of moral witnessing and public dialogue during the formative years of Uzbekistan's independence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On January 16, 1992, unrest broke out in “Students’ Town” in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, a newly independent country (События, 2023). On this day, the government's decision to liberalize prices took effect, and thousands of students were outraged by the rising prices of bread and other food products. Under this pretext, the demonstrators put forward political demands. Police officers opened fire on protesters heading towards government buildings. As a result, two innocent students were killed (Two die, 1992), and dozens of demonstrators were injured. A government commission was formed to investigate the tragic events that occurred on January 16-17, 1992 (BBC arxivi, 2016). It included independent deputies and members of the opposition. However, it remains unknown who gave the order to open fire on the students. Students arriving from the regions are forcibly sent home. The “Student’s Town” was surrounded by iron fences.

Two weeks after these tragic events, Saydi Umirov's article, covering one full page, was published in the “Xalq so‘zi” (“People’s word”) newspaper (1992). It was titled “If you hit its horn, its hoof will ache”, meaning that to strengthen Independence, it is necessary to ensure not revenge, but discipline, unity of generations, and solidarity between citizens and leadership.

“On the sixteenth and seventeenth of January, during the floods in Karakalpakstan, a flood of patience occurred in the “Student’s Town” of Tashkent. Efforts and justified demands to find and buy bread, and dissatisfaction with the sharp increase in prices ended in bloodshed and insults”, wrote the publicist.

A publicist who taught journalism secrets to students at the Faculty of Journalism of Tashkent State University, located in the “Student’s Town”, who was well acquainted with the lifestyle of the town, regularly appeared in the press with articles on relevant topics, witnessed some bloody events and had conversations with their participants – students, took up his pen and described the events as follows: “Sometimes cloudy, sometimes clear, but bitter winter weather. Most likely somebody really wanted thick snow to fall and tracks to be covered then. But even winter seems to be “becoming stubborn” and demanding justice. Empty cartridges, broken windows of shops, stores, and dormitories were collected, and at midnight, special vehicles sprinkled water, swept, and wiped away the traces

of blood and stains. However, is it possible to wash away the stains of pain and scars from hundreds, thousands of hearts?”

Saydi Umirov first provides a brief explanation of himself to argue that he raises serious issues in the article, asserting that he has the moral right to express opinions that may or may not please the head of the republic, while also supporting students, and that he is far from being biased. He wants to express an objective, impartial opinion: “It seems necessary to give some information about myself. I have been working at the university for twenty-four years, first as an associate professor and then as deputy dean of the journalism faculty. Usually in the evenings, together with our students – members of the voluntary people’s detachment – we walked the streets, maintaining calm, to provide all possible assistance to the police officers who chased, beat, and shot them during the unrest. I have been contributing to the training of journalists to the best of my ability. Among our students are many talented poets, writers, publicists, and editors, as well as prominent figures in politics, including several who work in the Presidential Administration. I am a member of two creative unions – one for Writers and one for Journalists. I have written books, which I publish in the press. I am neither a member of “Erk”, nor of “Birlik” parties, nor of the People’s Democratic Party. I was a member of the CPSU for twenty-eight years. Now, I will not claim to be an activist. I will also go without a party. I stand with those who follow the path of justice and truth. I love students with all my heart, and I believe they respect me as well. By the way, being the same age as our President, it has been four years since I crossed the equator (that is, 50 years – Z.F.), and I am right to say that I have also passed the age of flattery and fear” (Umirov, 1992).

Students are a relatively active segment of society. Publicist Saydi Umirov knew this very well, gave a brief, concise description of the students, and at the same time, based on his experience, expressed the following opinion about how communication should be with them: “In this town, thousands of young men and women from our republic, as well as from fraternal, friendly republics and foreign countries, study, public opinion is formed here first, a unique barometer clearly shows the climate and mood. Leaders of various categories and positions should frequently visit this place, not just drive around in cars, enter dormitories, and engage in heartfelt conversations with students. They should also be willing to participate in face-to-face dialogue and debates. If you know them, if you

open your heart to them, they will know you too, they will open their hearts. The greeting is answered according to the greeting, and the stranger is not honored. In short, this is also market relations” (Umirov, 1992).

S.Umirov wrote this article shortly after the incident, even before the Commission announced the results of the investigation of the tragic events of January 16-17, and published it in the Republic’s leading newspaper, showing promptness and calling readers – the republic’s leadership, as well as ordinary people – to debate as a publicist: “Now the time has come to put down our hats, think calmly and steadily, analyze facts and events logically by the scales of reason. Let us not give in to emotions and nervousness; let us not resort to consecutive exclamations and interrogative signs. Let us not whip the horse of anger; let us not be captive to rumors and assumptions. Let us not turn a fly into an elephant, and an elephant into a fly. As one writer wrote, “now we need restraint, restraint, and more restraint. We need clarity and precision” (Umirov, 1992). As is well known, promptness and being among the first to respond to events are of crucial importance in journalism. This requires not only knowledge and experience from the journalist, but also the courage to do so. Indeed, “Curiosity allows journalists to ponder reality and learn, while courage enables them to ask without fear and move outside comfort zones.” (Kimbrough, 2006).

The publicist’s “Me” and the author’s position are clearly visible in the article. To write the following words, it is clear that the author was well aware of the students’ lives, their daily lives:

“As the ‘Turkiston’ newspaper correctly wrote, ‘A tragedy could not have occurred’. If we were to continue this thought, tragedy should not have occurred. What does a student need first? The most essential things: bread, tea, hot food, a warm bed, pension (now with a coupon), a book, a notebook, a pencil, warm and sincere treatment, truthful and honest information. On the evening of January 16, there was a shortage of bread. For some reason, the bread sold in two adjacent shops ran out quickly. Commissions should carefully check whether the sellers stated they would not accept, demanded coupons, or brought in small quantities. The grocery store in dormitory number 89 was also closed prematurely for some reason, and the students’ requests were not taken into account. Some say they did this to sell what was left today at a price several times higher tomorrow, and this needs to be thoroughly investigated” (Umirov, 1992). Apparently, the journalist

urges the Commission to carefully investigate the causes of the tragic events carefully, indicating the need to study their roots more deeply. In this context, O’Connor’s following thoughts help to provide an even clearer picture of the situation: “Investigative journalism involves concealed information that could potentially involve public officials ... due to the nature of this content ... journalists will become adversaries of the powerful, uncovering roots rather than simply reporting surface events.” (2024)

The publicist emphasizes that the bloody events began with seemingly ordinary but straightforward things that could dramatically change the daily lifestyle of the student collective, their, so to speak, “public opinion”, but were overlooked by the leadership, and warns about the tragic consequences of neglecting such issues. The event orientation of news—whether, for example, protests, conferences, or press releases—can also be institutionally out of sync with planetary and crisis temporalities (Bødker & Morris, 2022), such as slow-burning disasters or permanent emergencies (Zelizer, 2017). Moreover, the pragmatic division of journalist labour into ‘news beats’ and specialist correspondents (Porritt, 2020) can further reinforce the cognitive division of the world into separate ‘issues’ (Cottle, 2023).

Considering that avoiding bias is one of the most crucial aspects in providing an impartial assessment of events and relationships, we can observe that S. Umirov has analytically covered the situation at a professional level in this article: “Five people make fifty in an instant, five hundred in five minutes, five thousand in an hour. While acknowledging how foolish it is to have more than twenty thousand students huddled together, we must acknowledge the bitter truth. The bitter truth is that the “Student’s Town” and the pockets of young men and women were not ready for the transition to free pricing on January 16. Although the monthly allowance was said to have doubled, students had not yet received it, and prices had jumped three to four times, or even five to six times. As luck would have it, the coupons had not been distributed to everyone, and the sellers were demanding coupons. Some bought coupons at an excessive price, but by then the bread had run out. There is truth in the statement that explanatory work was not carried out well, but this does not fully reveal the picture. Currently, some absolve themselves of guilt by saying “we have been involved”, “we have taken measures”, “we have informed them”, those who flatter those in positions higher than themselves, and those who rage and threaten those below them. As usual, everyone was engaged in

everything, but no one was seriously engaged in anything specific" (1992).

Publicist S. Umirov, being well aware of the social problems in the Students' Town, writes: "The work in the Students' Town needs to be fundamentally changed and restructured."

Then, through the words of one of his students, A. Pardayev, who lived in a Student's town, studied in the evening, and worked on the radio during the day, the publicist describes how the events actually unfolded, and then shares his own thoughts: "These are some excerpts from what one person saw and knew. However, even this speaks to the scale and horror of the tragedy. How many such bloody tragedies are there that are unbelievable, chilling, and cause rashes on the lips? As the students fled in panic from the gunshot, the police officers frantically pursued them, shooting at people, dormitories, and balconies. Sanjar Borajabov was also shot while fleeing in front of dormitory No. 24. The police officers broke down the doors of dormitory No. 89, beat the girls, and did not even spare a blind man. Philologists who have read about *mankurts* in books and seen them in movies have been beaten by *mankurts* whose eyes are bloodshot, mouths emit foul odors, and humiliated by them" (Umirov, 1992). Here, the publicist openly exposed the violence of the *mankurt*-like "police officers", who understand nothing and are ready to carry out any order.

For the sake of the journalist's objectivity, S.Umirov openly writes that there are students among them who, taking advantage of the critical situation, added fuel to the fire: "There are wounded, injured, hospitalized on both sides, all of this will be investigated. Among students, of course, there are ignorant and militant individuals who are not well-mannered, who fail to consider the consequences of their words and actions, and who readily accept arguments. To articulate these conclusions, the author must be both a skilled psychologist and a specialist who remains undiminished in their commitment to the events unfolding around them. "Empathy occupies a central place in news production, fulfilling multiple roles. It serves to achieve a comprehensive access to information and to news protagonists at the interpersonal level." (Glück, 2016)

Publicist S.Umirov, deeply analyzing the events, warns that the bread incident was just an excuse and that the bloodshed might have been caused by the incitement of certain troublemakers who could not stand our

Independence: "Among the commotion and chaos, there were elderly student-like individuals who shouted 'Hit!' and incited police against the students, spread panic, shouted slogans like 'Let the President come!' and 'Let the President resign!' Among the detainees, there were also those with ammunition-filled weapons. One weapon costs so much money. It is illogical to imagine a student who can barely afford food buying a gun. The recent arrests of those who attempted to smuggle weapons into our republic's borders demonstrate the existence of forces that cannot stand our Independence, who yearn for the old socialistic system and order, and those who intend to muddy the water to catch fish, to make the smallest words appear like camels, and to shift all blame onto the leadership, primarily the President" (1992).

Publicist S.Umirov expresses his impartial attitude towards the events through the following comments, presents objections, puts forward global issues, raises legitimate questions, calls on citizens not only to know their rights but also to fulfill their obligations on time, and finds the courage to boldly say what many cannot say: "I am surprised by one thing. Why, on that evening, when there was a shortage of bread and many did not have coupons, did they immediately demand that the President come first, answer, and resign? It was known that prices would rise. Why didn't they ask the direct officials, the district leadership, the city leadership? They occasionally asked about the city mayor, but why did they mainly insist on the President's arrival? True, the President is a person responsible for the fate of the entire republic and its citizens. He has a thousand worries in his head. Isn't it right now to demand from him to correct our economy, to establish friendly relations with foreign countries on par with the republics that were part of the former USSR, to have our own money and army, to join the UN, to continue putting an end to the cotton monopoly, to boldly raise and solve major, significant problems such as solving environmental problems, and to pave the way for democracy and transparency?" (1992)

Putting forward bold ideas, the publicist does not hesitate to raise harrowing issues: "Who ordered the shooting? Why did the police officers behave so freely? Why did the special forces view humans as flies? These questions are stuck in everyone's throat, waiting for answers. The government commission, the public Commission must first determine this. "In journalism, accountability demands that reporters do more than merely relay facts: they must explain, justify, and respond to public concerns regarding

decision-making, especially in matters involving public harm or state power.” (von Krogh, 2008)

S.Umirov, emphasizing that the use of weapons was a terrible mistake, writes with great anguish: “In any case, there should have been no shots. No decree should have been issued for that. The use of combat weapons cannot be justified by anything. It is bad when cars are crushed, it is bad when windows and doors are broken, and it is painful to get beaten and injured for no reason. The guilty will be punished, the broken thing will be repaired, but what is iron and glass compared to human life! You cannot resurrect a dead person, wash away the stains of grief from parents and loved ones, or restore the broken glass of the heart. There were various ways and stages of suppressing the unrest, including issuing warnings, threats, directing a powerful stream of water, and even using eye-burning gas, as well as driving with a baton. If there are armed, desperate bandits, cutthroats, and they do not listen to warnings, there is nothing else to be done. The last, extraordinary measure, unfortunately, was applied at the very beginning” (1992).

The following sentence serves as an example of S. Umirov's skillful use of similes and metaphors in the article: “That day, when viewed from an airplane or helicopter, ‘Student’s Street’ (former Chimboy) might have resembled the overflowing Amu Darya (Jaykhun). I involuntarily saw the confirmation of Cholpon’s meaningful words: “The people are the sea, the people are the waves, the people are the power”. Someone’s black headscarf fluttered like a black flag, reminding one of a dark day, of mourning”. Indeed, “Journalists can use metaphorical framing to influence thoughts and beliefs and manipulate impressions and evaluations of an issue.” (Komatsubara, 2024)

As a journalist, S.Umirov pays special attention to the powerful weapon of information in connection with these tragic events and also raises the problems associated with the coverage of the events of January 16-17 in the media: “Nature cannot digest emptiness. The clearing is covered with grass. More wild grass, with stinking feather grass. What I mean is that where there is no information, rumors flourish. We do not have any useful rumors. Rumors are only harmful”. The “Central” press exaggerates, TSN panics, our own people remain silent longer.

This is the information age. Information is like a demon that has escaped from a pitcher; you cannot catch and imprison it again. If we hide the illness, the fever will

reveal it. Now everyone knows everything – they read, they hear, they see”.

Publicist S.Umirov cannot comprehend how the media did not react appropriately to the events that took place during such sad days, behaved as if nothing had happened, and how daily broadcasts and entertainment programs continued at a steady pace, and writes about this with anguish: “The morning of January 18 began the ‘Assalomu alaykum’ (Good morning) program with the familiar announcer’s smile radiating light with the words ‘Another clear dawn broke in our independent Republic’, then Khayrulla Lutfullayev sang, and the dancer moved gracefully. At that time, another student, Khayrulla Ubaydullayev, a student of Tashkent State University, along with thirteen comrades, declared a hunger strike in the university square, at the foot of the monument to Ulyanov (Lenin), a student of Kazan University, demanding an end to the unrest, the search for those who ordered the shooting, the immediate release of those imprisoned. On days of mourning, the heart does not want songs or games; instead, sad melodies are played. Let us not forget how painful it was to see songs and dances on our screens during the days of the Osh tragedy, to hear for the second time “As Comrade Gennady Ivanovich Yanayev said” when the fate of the country was being decided near the “White House”! (1992)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that the article demonstrated the professional skills of journalist and publicist S. Umirov, his active civic position, the publicist’s “self-image”, and his bold raising of topics that many lack the courage to mention. In controversial and unexpected situations, as a publicist, he demonstrates the ability to shape public opinion, call for discussion, and make specific proposals. Such approaches encourage young journalists to be responsive and vigilant in any situation.

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