

## Les numéros / Les subalternes, peuvent-elles/ils (parler) être écouté-e-s ?

# « Race and Subalternity in Post-Soviet Space: The Absence of Labor Migrants? Voices in Contemporary Russia »

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### Résumé

Après la fin de l'Union soviétique, beaucoup de migrants en provenance des anciennes républiques soviétiques sont venus en Russie à la recherche de meilleurs salaires pour finalement se retrouver en position de subalternes. L'abus courant de leurs droits s'illustre de manière évidente de par leurs conditions de travail dangereuses, les accidents fatals fréquents et la violence des groupes profascistes prenant pour cibles les nouveaux arrivants, et, quelques femmes migrantes ont été victimes du trafic sexuel. Malgré la diversité religieuse et ethnique des migrants, les médias non-officiels représentent les travailleurs migrants comme une race et des « Autres » qui représentent une menace d'une identité russe. Cette représentation par les médias non-officiels constitue un discours de racialisation, dont le racisme est normalisé dans la conscience publique par un manque de contestation contre la discrimination, ainsi que le silence courant des migrants issu de la peur et de l'intimidation. Néanmoins, les circonstances de la mort d'un bébé de 5 mois, Umarali Nazarov, a mis à jour la violation des droits humains par les autorités russes. Umarali, un bébé nourri au sein de sa mère, a été tiré des mains de ses parents pour être placé dans un hôpital pour orphelins où il est soudainement mort le soir même, le 13 octobre 2015. Sa mort est un symbole des abus endurés par les travailleurs migrants, et a ému beaucoup de membres de la communauté de la diaspora Tadjike à Saint Pétersbourg au point de les conduire à participer aux actions de protestation contre la discrimination, à acquérir une voix, et à lutter pour leur dignité et la reconnaissance de leurs droits humains.

### Abstract

After the end of the Soviet Union, many migrants from former Soviet republics came to work to Russia in search of a better pay to find, however, themselves in the position of subalterns. The widespread abuse of their rights is evident in unsafe working conditions, periodic fatal accidents and violence which pro-fascist groups target at newcomers. Some women migrants had become the victims of sex trafficking. The non-official media represent labor migrants as a race and the 'Others' threatening the Russian identity despite ethnic and religious diversity of the migrants. The discourse of racialization defines their representation by the non-official media. A lack of protest against discrimination normalizes racism in the public consciousness. Due to fear and intimidation, the common reaction of migrants to this was silence. Nonetheless, circumstances surrounding the death of a five-month-old boy Umarali Nazarov has not just revealed the everyday violation of human rights by the Russian authorities. Umarali, a breast milk-fed baby, was taken from the hands of his parents to be placed in a hospital for orphans where he suddenly died on the same evening of October 13, 2015. His death symbolized abuses which labor migrants endure, and it has also stirred many members of the Tajik diaspora in Saint-Petersburg to participate in the actions of protest against discrimination, to acquire their voice, and to struggle for their dignity and the recognition of their human rights.

## Introduction

The problem of labor migrants from Middle Asia is one of the acutest issues in contemporary Russia

(Boltovskaia, Matusевич, 2007 and 2008). <sup>(1)</sup> Labor migrants are essential for the Russian economy because, first, the Russian demographical crisis has resulted in a dwindling number of able-bodied people in the population and, second, labor migrants perform heavy manual jobs that most Russians would not be interested in doing. At the same time, a public interview in August 2013 shows that 65 percent of Russians are cautious toward migrants, and 74 percent of Russians believe that their impact on the Russian economy is negative (Shibanova). <sup>(2)</sup> After the break-up of the U.S.S.R., many migrants from the former republics of Middle Asia came to work to Russia; for such newcomers, working in Russia was the only way to escape abject poverty and unemployment in their motherlands. Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kirgizstan are among the countries that send the largest number of labor migrants to Russia. Labor migrants in Russia receive approximately five times more than they would receive in their countries (Denisenko). <sup>(3)</sup> There is an estimate that approximately 3.5 million labor migrants live in Moscow alone, and up to 7 million work elsewhere in Russia; actual figures could be much larger (Denisenko). Labor migrants produce up to 8 percent of Russian gross national product annually. Approximately 60 percent of migrants from Tajikistan take manual blue-collar jobs, especially in the construction industry, while the approximately fifty percent of migrants from other countries do so. Young men dominate: in 2014, more than 78 percent of migrants who have received permission to work are men (Denisenko). Also, over 40 percent of migrants from Tajikistan are men between the ages of 18 and 29 years (in Russia, only 17 percent of the Russian population are men in this age group.) (Denisenko)

Scholars argue about the ease of assimilation of such labor migrants to Russia. Some scholars argue that in the 2000s, the labor market in Russia integrated these newcomers rather easily due to several factors: common 'Soviet' heritage, the needs of growing labor market, and the fact that about 90 percent of migrants came from former Soviet republics (Lazareva). However, a research study undertaken in 2011 among labor migrants from Middle Asia demonstrated that 20 percent of labor migrants do not speak Russian (Denisenko). <sup>(4)</sup> Migrants often have to work illegally under the most appalling conditions, and they are sometimes subjected to extreme abuse from their employers. They often do not get vacation and sick days and, moreover, often work at construction sites or factories lacking appropriate safety measures. Some contemporary observers argue that labor migrants are treated as slaves, and have no more rights than slaves. In addition to the extreme exploitation from their employers, labor migrants from Middle Asia are targeted by Russian pro-fascist groups and the anti-immigrant movement. And, of course, they deal with racism. There are representatives of many ethnic groups who migrated to Russia. Nonetheless, they are often characterized by condescending and insulting terms 'churki.' If one enters a word 'churki' in a Russian search website (similar to google), dozens of website will pop up; many websites will be using extremist language and the most degrading and racist insults. In fact, several websites refer to migrants as 'race.'

In this paper, I shall reflect on a context in which labor migrants acquire their voice and become visible in the contemporary Russian public sphere. I will use the theoretical approaches from Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Gayatri Spivak, Walter Mignolo, and other scholars to analyze the emergence of the voice of labor migrants from Middle Asia. Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* argued that since the epoch of the Enlightenment and, especially, the Napoleonic campaign to Egypt and the Middle East, the discourse of the 'Orient' became a way to define the character of numerous ethnic groups: the people in this (imagined) region, the 'Orient,' were represented as lazy, corrupted, morally weak, and prone to betrayal (Said). By accepting Orientalist discourses, scholars remained blind to the voices of natives (subalterns) and justified the imperial expansion and paternalist, condescending, and unequal relationships with the peoples. Michel Foucault wrote about the importance of cultural discourses in shaping state policies and public opinion and emphasized that the ways how subalterns groups are treated by the 'mainstream' society define such a society (Foucault). Gayatri Spivak calls for the attention to the voices of subalterns and emphasizes the presence of authentic voices in research (Spivak 1988, 2005, 2013). Spivak writes:

'Subalternity is a position without identity. It is somewhat like the strict understanding of class. [?] Subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognisable basis of action. The early subalternists looked at examples where subalternity was brought to crisis, as a basis for militancy was formed. Even then colonial and nationalist historiography did not recognise it as such. Could the subaltern speak, then? Could it have its insurgency recognised by the official historians? Even when, strictly speaking, they had burst the outlines of subalternity? This last is important. Neither the groups celebrated by the early subalternists [?], in so far as they had burst their bonds into resistance, were in the position of subalternity. No one can say 'I am a subaltern?' in whatever language. (Spivak, 2005, 476.)

Walter Mignolo emphasizes decolonizing not just institutions, but the mind itself from the colonial matrix of power and being committed to a political and intellectual project of decoloniality (Mignolo, 2011). In the context of Russia, research by Nathaniel Knight, Maxim Matusевич, and other scholars show the significance of race for defining a Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet identity (Knight 2000, 2013,

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Matusevich 2008, 2009, Boltovskai). <sup>(5)</sup>

## Causes for Labor Migration from the Middle Asia

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, several changes happened in Middle Asia. During the existence of the Soviet Union, many Russians resided in the republics of the Middle Asia. There was an emphasis on internationalism in the years of the Soviet Union, and the citizens of the U.S.S.R. were encouraged to think of themselves as brothers who all shared 'Soviet' heritage and 'Soviet' identity (Slezkine). However, after 1991, many Russians left the republics of the Middle Asia. Moreover, conflicts, sometimes military conflicts among ethnic groups, pushed many to leave the countries of Middle Asia. In the aftermath of the U.S.S.R.'s break-up, there were hopes that obtaining independence would drastically contribute to the economic prosperity of these republics, and would curb the reputation of corruption these republics had acquired during the Soviet epoch. In reality, however, corruption did not disappear, and the economics of these countries did not take off. Political opposition in these countries has been brutally suppressed. For example, the late President of Uzbekistan Rustan Karimov was responsible for the Andijan massacre on 13 May 2005 where 187 were killed (some estimate, though, that more than 1500 people were killed). There is an extremely limited opportunity for social mobility in many countries and very low salaries. A number of reasons, including a lack of political freedom, staggering economy, and so on, pushed many people to come to Russia (Denisenko). Russian scholars estimate that in 2014, there were seven million labor migrants in Russia, including three million illegal immigrants (Denisenko). Among labor permits given to the people, most were given to people from Uzbekistan (42 percent), Tajikistan (15 percent), and Ukraine (11 percent) (Denisenko.)

Well, migrating to Russia did not resolve many problems that these migrants faced. (According to the definition from the General Assembly of the United Nations, a temporary labor migrant is defined as a person who earns money in a country in which s/he is not a citizen.) <sup>(6)</sup> Contemporary Russian laws require that a labor migrant receive permission to reside and to work in Russia for one year. After that they need to renew their permit to stay. In Russia, they often find themselves residents with very little rights, and, moreover, even these rights are often not respected. Recent laws have limited the occupation that migrants can have: they cannot sell pharmaceutical production, for instance (Denisenko). In many cases, labor migrants have a job that requires much less skill and education than the job they had before coming to Russia. There are many difficulties with obtaining proper documentation and work permission: there is not a sufficient number of clerks to process paperwork, and the offices processing documents are characterized by long queues. In recent years, the Russian authorities made it more difficult to obtain proper documentation and have introduced severe penalties for violating immigration laws, including forced deportation and a ban to stay out Russia for up to ten years. Labor migrants also must pay a hefty fee to obtain proper registration. If they are successful, they obtain jobs, mostly in the construction, transportation, or service industry (general laborers, janitors, maintenance crew, dishwashers, waiters in inexpensive fast food restaurants, drivers of taxis, and so on).

The public discourse on labor migrants from Middle Asia is characterized by selected memories: there is a contradiction between their immense contribution to the growth of the Russian economy, and their representations as intellectually, socially, and culturally inferior people (Ablazhey, Varganova, Gabdrakhmanova, Kovaliashkina, Mal'kova, Skrebtsova, Titov, Shibanova, Titov, Yakimova). Russian internet search website, an equivalent of google or yahoo, contains many photos of labor migrants. An excellent set and analysis of photos of labor migrants can be found in the analysis of photos of labor migrants in the article by a group of scholars from Russia (Nam, 178, 179, 180). In general, many newspapers and internet sites contain the images of labor migrants: for instance, one of the articles informing about illegal labor migrants arrested in Krasnoïarsk clearly dehumanize labor migrants representing them as unwashed laboring mass ([www.sibnovosti.ru](http://www.sibnovosti.ru)). They are represented as the (unvaccinated) carriers of deadly viruses, as a dangerous mass of people who are sexually deviant criminals, drug-dealers, and as potential recruiters to radical Islam organizations. Labor migrants from Asia are painted as the 'Others,' as 'race,' whose lifestyle threatens the Russian cultural heritage and whose presence and appearance 'pollute' Russia. They are described as stupid, lazy, and dishonest. Their poverty is portrayed as a sign of their cultural inferiority and a lack of basic hygiene. The media has publicized statistics stating one third of rapes in Moscow allegedly are done by labor migrants.

A recent research investigation undertaken by sociologists in Tomsk show that the representations of labor migrants in official media take away any individuality (Nam). What emerges is a faceless representation of a labor migrant, a representation dehumanize labor migrants (Nam, 178, 179, 180). It is particularly interesting to look at photos of labor migrants in mass media; a reader who will not read an

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article is likely to create an image of an immigrant looking at photos (Shibanova, 191). Migrants are shown, as a rule, as a part of a group, not smiling, looking isolated from the local population (Shibanova, 188). Migrants are represented as a source of trouble; he does not have any personality, and he is often represented as a strong man likely to be performing physical labor. (7)

To a larger degree, the relationship between the Russians and migrants is defined by the portrayal of this group and their image in the collective imagination (Shibanova). Many Russian scholars argue that the image of labor migrants is negative and distorted (Shibanova, Nam, Skrebtsova, 2007). Scholars argue that mass media do not talk about humans; instead, they use terms "migratory flow," "labor force," "migration explosion" (Skrebtsova, 116.) Moreover, as the analysis of mass media in Tomsk shows, only 2 percent of information about migration is actually supplied by migrants themselves (Nam, 171). Furthermore, in the analysis of mass media presented by scholars from Tomsk, 20 percent of information about migrants contained information about illegal activities; even though the tone of these messages was neutral, the very proportion of news about illegal activities is telling (Nam, 172). In addition, commentaries to articles about migrants are often characterized by extreme hatred, extremism, and pure racism (Nam, 177).

Two scholars from Saint-Petersburg analyzed the representation of labor migrants in Russian media and used the framework of racism to define how the media portray migrants (Kugay and Kovaleva). Kugay and Kovaleva argue that there are two important trends to represent ethnic conflicts in contemporary Russia. The official media often select not to focus on ethnic aspects of conflicts, and instead emphasize other reasons that brought about the conflict. However, unofficial media tend to emphasize an ethnic component of any conflict in which minorities are involved. This emphasis on only the negative aspects connected with migrants creates the stereotypical approach to migrants and leads to the fact that the majority begin to consider migrants through the lenses of racist discourse. The media has implicitly adapted racist language when they talk about migrants: instead of talking about many problems that migrants face, the media will only express concerns with (imagined) threats from labor migrants. The media often selectively describe suspects as "people of non-Slavic appearance," "descendants from Caucasus," "migrants," thus, as Kugay and Kovaleva state, the racialization of social relationships happen: "[the authors of such terms] objectively aid to consider social interactions through the prism of racism and to give the racist meaning to relations which originally did not have racist connotations" ((Kugay and Kovaleva, 88). It is common place that media selectively focus on cultural and religious differences between the locals and migrants, which Kugay and Kovaleva describe as the conscious segregation between the locals and migrants and the increase of ethnic tensions between the two groups. These two scholars argue that the media should instead try to find a common cultural ground between the locals and migrants, and work to integrate differences between the two groups. In conclusion, these two authors argue that the local media inspire local conflicts and represent them as ethical conflicts and, thus, construct the racial discourse on migrants in the public imagination.

Indeed, many articles about labor migrants emphasize them as "others," as people who are unwilling to respect the Russian culture and religion. Religion is another factor that often alienates migrants from Russians. Many migrants are Muslims. On the state level, the Russian authorities promote religious tolerance; an observer can even say that there is an odd tolerance of some quite outrageous practices?polygamy, especially, in Chechnya which the Russian authorities explain by cultural heritage. Though the Russian authorities are willing to close their eyes to such religious practices in Chechnya, they are not applying the same efforts to promote religious tolerance in Russia. The celebration of Muslim holidays such as Kurban-Bayran (Eid al-Adh), for instance, inspires public outcry in Russia (Anonymous, "Idesh?"). An important part of this "Sacrifice Feast" is the sacrifice of a halal domestic animal (usually, a sheep). In Saint-Petersburg, some migrants slaughter a halal animal in a public space, sometimes right next to a playground, which causes many Russian parents to be concerned about the psychological effect of killing of animals in front of children (8) (Anonymous, "Mama," and Granina). At the same time, when many newspapers write about this celebration or crimes committed by migrants, newspapers are silent about the everyday struggles and very difficult survivals of the labor migrants.

Certainly, a negative discourse on labor migrants in contemporary Russia portraying labor migrants as stupid, lazy, backward, etc. has nothing to do with the realities of their life (Smirnova). A sociologist who studied migrants from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan in the cleaning industry in Moscow argued that workers are characterized by their responsibility and hard work, and that many migrants often stay overnight to finish their tasks (Smirnova). There are many women-migrants in the cleaning industry, and gender dynamics define, to an extent, the findings of Smirnova: many cleaning workers in Smirnova's study are women. In general, in order to survive as a migrant, one needs to develop entrepreneurial skills, dynamism, independence, a capacity to adjust one's behavior, to learn new skills, and to be ready for the unexpected. Many labor migrants take pride in their work; according to this survey, an opportunity to do



their job well is one of the key factors for obtaining their satisfaction from a job, not just their salary alone (for 75 percent of Tadjiks and 50 percent Uzbeks, the very process of work is important) (Smirnova, 96). At the same time, 22.7 percent of Kirgizs and 25 percent of Tadjiks periodically feel threatened by the local population (Smirnova, 97). The life of female migrants from Tajikistan is especially difficult; women, many of whom are mothers and have many kids, leave their families and homes to sell fruits, and earning about three dollars a day is considered to be a good profit (Zotova). Zotova argues that, in general, the topic of gender in the analysis of migration from Middle Asia still needs a further research (Zotova, 72).

## Labor Migrants as Subalterns: Silence and Fear

Legislative obstacles cause many migrants to seek illegal employment in Russia. Illegal workers on construction sites became a cliché in contemporary Russia, and their life is exceptionally difficult (Savvina and Ian Matusевич). They are at the mercy of their employers who pay them very little, often underpay them their promised amount, and make them stay longer at construction sites by not paying them on time. Safety is, as a rule, non-existent on these constructions sites. It is often a case that people who are killed due to accidents are buried on the construction sites where they work. According to the existing guidelines, the bodies of dead migrants need to be either buried at a Muslim cemetery (and there are not that many places in Saint-Petersburg where a Muslim could be buried according to proper religious traditions) or to be transported to a country of their origin (and this would cost 70,000-80,000 rubles, or over 1,000 euros). Muslim rules prescribe that the body needs to be buried no later than two days after death. Because of the high cost of burying the body, some employers secretly bury the bodies of the victims of accidents on construction sites by putting them in concrete (Savvina). Savvina states that it is not uncommon to have several bodies of such illegal workers buried in the foundation of buildings. (9) Moreover, Savvina also states that labor migrants, as a rule, are not going to report such as barbaric way of burring a victim of accident because many of them are illegal and try to avoid dealing with the authorities. Very often workers sleep at the constructions sites. Sanitary conditions are appalling. (For instance, during the construction of the expensive stadium in Saint-Petersburg, construction workers were not provided restrooms and toilets, so they turned the stadium into one giant toilet.)

Another serious issue that many labor migrants face is a language barrier. Many migrants have only a very basic knowledge of Russian that limits their possibilities of finding a good job in Russia. Moreover, a state policy toward educating children for whom Russian is not a native language is confusing. The state does not provide resources for children who are non-native speakers and, the children's success in their studies is jeopardized by their weak Russian and a lack of proper resources to ensure children's linguistic accommodation. It is often a case that only volunteer organizations seek to educate and to integrate migrant children into Russian educational system (Anonymous, ?V Peterburge?).

The lack of safety precautions leads to a number of tragic accidents. On January 30, 2016, a fire began at the sewing workshop (specializing on making pillows) located on 25-1 Street Stromynka in Moscow (ulitsa Stromynka, building 25-1) (Anonymous, ?Astakhov?). Twelve bodies of workers from Middle Asia were discovered, including the body of an infant. Police investigation revealed that eight victims of the fire were workers from Kirgizstan, two people from Uzbekistan, and two citizens of Russia (also ethnic Kyrgyzs) (Anonymous, ?Vosem?). Although there was a proper documentation to run a workshop at this site, migrants were not supposed to live there. A survivor of fire implied that arson was the main cause of fire (Anonymous, ?Nazvana, ? Vorob?ev). On February 1, a journalist revealed that there were some odd details concerning this tragedy: a day before fire, the workshop was put up for sale, and, possibly, competitors started the fire to decrease the value of property (Vorob?ev.) Migrants who lived in this workshop had no chance to escape: ?According to eyewitnesses, those who were in the building had practically no chance to escape: the building does not have a fire or emergency exit, and the main exit was cluttered with bags with products that caught fire at the very beginning of the tragedy? (Vorob?ev). In the immediate aftermath of the fire, many journalists quoted firefighters who said that the building was set on fire from several places. Moreover, several journalists mentioned that some victims of the fire were actually killed or wounded before the fire. A security guard mentioned that a truck came to the building and forty minutes later the fire began. However, despite the obvious indications of a crime, the investigation was not pursued further and no more information about the causes of the fire are located on the Russian internet.

Russian newspapers often contain shocking stories of migrants who are treated as slaves by their employers. Their documents and passports are taken by their employers and, if migrants dare to think about complaining to the police about their slave-like existence, they are threatened with being beaten and

even killed. Regrettably, considering the corruption of the Russian police, their fear could be well founded. Clandestine prostitution is thriving in Russian cities, and many prostitutes are women from Middle Asia. In an article "Slave fornication," an activist of a volunteer organization against human trafficking, Oleg Mel'nikov described the appalling lack of state support against trafficking in Russia (Steynert). (Mel'nikov and his colleagues-volunteers released four hundred women from trafficking in last four years.) Women from Middle Asia are one of the most common targets for such crimes. They are exploited in clandestine brothels in Russian cities, including North Ossetia, as well as taken to brothels abroad and in the Middle East. Women from Middle Asia are especially attractive victims because they do not know Russian and, because of that, are easier to be intimidated into submission. The shocking statistical report of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) states that approximately 92 percent of sexual slaves will never be released. To break the will of the victims, they are often turned to drug addicts. It is exceptionally difficult to release women from such brothels in Russia because of the corruption of the police (Steynert; Ermakov). For instance, on May 27<sup>th</sup>, a resident of Saint-Petersburg Andrey Grigor'ev made a call to police to inform them of a brothel in Saint-Petersburg and requested to arrest the owner of the brothel (Ermakov). Grigor'ev said that he would wait for a police car and would show exactly where the brothel was located. The dispatcher replied that police would not come. As it turned out, in April, at the very same location, policemen arrested eight prostitutes, including two women from Middle Asia. However, in all these stories, women's voices are not heard, and that is the example of subalternity. As Oleg Mel'nikov explains, women who managed to escape from sexual slavery, rarely go to police and try to seek justice.

## The Death of the Baby of the Labor Migrants: Abuse and Lies

One of the most appalling stories happened in Saint-Petersburg. On October 13 2015 in Saint-Petersburg, Russia, Umarali Nazarov, a 5-month infant was taken away from his mother, an illegal immigrant from Tajikistan, 21-year old Zarina Yusupova. <sup>(10)</sup> Zarina was arrested for not having her proper immigration documents. Police broke into her apartment and Zarina and her baby were taken to a local police station. Despite the pleas that the infant was on breast milk and should not be separated from his mother, he was put in Center for Medical and Social Rehabilitation named after Tsymbalin, a medical center where children without parental supervision are put. A police official has written two contradictory documents that, first Zarina agreed to transfer her son to the authorities and, second, that the child was found without parents and needed to be given away to a proper authority. Zarina does not know Russian, and a translator from Tajik to Russian was not present at the police station. Police did not allow Zarina to put proper warm clothing on the infant despite of cold weather. This infant died in the evening of the same day, and the father could not see the child's body, on which an autopsy was done, for several days. The story raised an immense public response, and there were concerns that the Tajikistan's diaspora in Saint-Petersburg would take the punishment of the perpetrators in their own hands. Although the mother of the infant was devastated by this tragedy, she was quickly deported to Tajikistan because of the violation of the Russian migration law; she cannot return to Russia for five years. Russian public opinion became deeply divided about this tragedy. Although many had found the circumstances of the infant's death shocking, there were many that produced hateful remarks about migrants from Middle Asia and Zarina, in particular. Many commentators accused her of child neglect.

There were many odd pieces to this story. After the child was taken from his mother, the child's grandmother rushed to a local police department and showed a birth certificate for this child (his birth certificate). One of the reasons why the child was taken from mother is that his mother was not able to show the documents for the child. The grandmother of the child worked as a dish washer in a local café nearby. (One year ago, skinheads, a pro-fascist group in Russia that promotes racism and extreme violence toward migrants and non-Russians, killed her son.) So, coming back to the last day in the life of the infant, Umarali, his grandmother begged to get her grandson back, but she was laughed at in her face. In the meantime, Umarali's mother spent a day at the court. For her failure to ensure the proper documentation, she was fined 5,000 rubles (approximately, 70 euros in the currency of those days) and was ordered to leave Russia in fifteen days. In the evening, she and her husband tried to go to the Center to get their son, but they were told that it was closed for the day and they should return tomorrow. The next day, they received a call from the Center that Umarali had died. His father and an uncle of Umarali, a person whose knowledge of Russian was good, tried to obtain the body for four days. The uncle was shocked to find bruises on the body of his son and shared that the entire upper part of his body was blue. Also, his uncle said that brain was removed from Umarali's body. Immediate assumptions were made that the child's internal organs were removed and sold to a client who was specifically hunting for organs for a five-month old boy.

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The death of Umarali raised an immense public outcry. Many labor migrants came to the Tajikistan's embassy in Saint-Petersburg, and such migrants threatened to begin public disturbances. Here are words from an article about Umarali:

The death of a five-month-old child shocked the Tajik diaspora in St. Petersburg. Since October 14, every day at the First Police Department (*otdel politzii No. 1*) people gathered - approximately 50-80 people - told Uktam Ahmadov to a [correspondent of] *Novaia Gazeta*. The largest meeting happened on October 17 near the consulate of Tajikistan. Approximately 100 people came. They demanded justice and punishment of the perpetrators. The people boiled over. We could hardly restrain people ... Vice Consul Manuchehr Hamzaev had come to talk to the people. [He] asked not to provoke further conflicts. He promised to inform about the development of the events. On October 18, the Tajik diaspora sent official inquiries to Russian ombudsman Ella Pamfilova and St. Petersburg governor Georgy Poltavchenko. On October 19, Pavel Astakhov responded to the incident in the northern capital - and in addition to a tweet record (the five-month-old kid suddenly died?), he asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Prosecutor General's Office to conduct a thorough investigation of the actions of the FMS [Federal Migration Service] and the police. On October 20, the Main Investigation Administration of the Investigative Committee [Glavnoe Sledstvennoe Upravlenie Sledstvennogo Komiteta] of the Russian Federation filed a criminal case under art. 109, part 2 of the Criminal Code causing death by negligence because of improper performance of professional duties. (Petlyanova, 23.20.2015, Umarali.)

Several days after the death of Umarali, Dmitry Peskov, the Press Secretary for the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, said that the President is aware of situation (Anonymous, Peskov). Many events happened in the days following the death of Umarali. The Russian police released a video clip that shows an official taking care of the boy when he was in custody (it was a lady who was nursing Umarali with a bottle of milk) (Ferhgana, The Video). An immediate reaction to this video clip was that the clip was very short, and could not give a comprehensive representation of what exactly happened in the police station. Speculations were made that the baby was dropped and that was a reason for his premature death. At the same time, most disturbing rumors were those assuming that the internal organs of Umarali were removed. It was implicitly suggested by some speakers at the meeting: because it is so difficult to find donors for babies, Umarali being in a place where children with no parents are put appeared to be an invitation to do whatever one wished to do (ANONYMOUS, Miting).

In the meantime, Russian police actively sought to shift blame for what happened on the family of the child. Police had emphasized that the family did not take proper care of the child. The family lived in a basement of an apartment building that was to be demolished and that was not supposed to be used as a living space. As it turned out, the family paid about 25,000 roubles per month to a local official, unofficially, as bribery. Several searches were performed in a room where the family lived. Also, the photos of a room where the family lived were printed in several internet editions and commentaries were made that the room was not equipped for a baby: the baby's crib was located right below a TV set. Police also emphasized that the mother neglected to take Umarali to a pediatrician on a regular basis and that the child did not have proper vaccination. Eventually, an autopsy was performed, and several pathologists signed the verdict that the child died because of Cytomegalovirus infection. Immediately, doubts were raised that this chronic disease, which could be in a latent state for years, could kill the child in such a short period of time. Many speculations were made that pathologists were threatened to sign the verdict about Cytomegalovirus infection and to hide the true cause of Umarali's death. The critics of this conspiracy theory argued that pathologists would not risk their reputation by signing a fake verdict.

During the investigation, the voice of Umarali's mother was absent: in fact, one of the articles about Umarali's case was titled She is Silent, referring to the fact that Zarina did not say a word to journalists or social activists about her tragedy (Petlyanova, Ona). It was explained by the fact that she did not know any Russian although many activists of Tajik movement expressed their shock with the story, and their language skills did not prevent them from speaking up. Several days after the death of her child, she was deported from Russia. In the aftermath of her deportation, a small group of activists organized a remembrance day during which they called for proper and in-depth investigation of Umarali's death on November 14, 2015, in Saint-Petersburg (Anonymous, Miting). Despite the calls from the diaspora to conduct the independent autopsy of Umarali's body, the couple was pressured to quickly proceed with the burial of Umarali. Only Umarali's father was given an interview in which he expressed his shock with the death of his son and the way in which the Russian police treated him and his family. Many observers argued that the Tajikistan officials themselves were reluctant to organize a proper investigation because the death of Umarali happened just on the verge of renewing several treaties of political and economic cooperation between Russia and Tajikistan, and that the ambassador of Tajikistan put much effort into impeding a proper investigation.

## Speaking Up in the Aftermath of the Tragedy

Subalterns did gain their voice in the aftermath of the tragedy. The tragedy of Umarali was so moving that labor migrants who, as a rule, avoid being involved in any political actions expressed their collective protest. In the immediate aftermath of the death of Umarali, Tajik labor migrants were coming to the doors of the police department. The death of Umarali had led many people to express their anger and frustration with the way how labor migrants are treated in contemporary Russia. On November 14, 2015, a meeting in Saint Petersburg gathered over a hundred people (Kozlov). The meeting was organized by civil initiative *Rights for All* (*Prava dlia vsekh*) and was supported by the Russian socialist movement. Among speakers was Karimdjon Erov (????????? È????), the president of the Russian non-commercial alliance *ETMOS* (the Ethnic Tajiks for the Ethical Responsibility of Compatriots). <sup>(11)</sup> Erov held the photos of Tajiks who were killed in Russia as the outcomes of hate crimes in a recent past. Erov stated that a lot of questions exist to the law enforcement agencies and to the medical center where Umarali died. The first question is why a police official has produced a fake act falsely stating that he [Umarali] was a foundling even though he had parents. Second, Erov asked why the investigating authorities do not recognize the father as a victim, but only Umarali's mother. Moreover, he questioned the fact that the only video recording that was shown to the public is the one during which the police officer cuddled the child. However, no other recordings, including the recording of the moment when the child was taken from the parents, was accessible. In addition, if Umarali's mother did not understand Russian, how could the authorities claim that the child was taken voluntarily?? (Anonymous, ?Miting.?)

Erov also expressed his concern with the multiple violation of rules and protocol when Umarali was put to the hospital: the medical center must have had a permission from the parents to hospitalize the child; moreover, taking away a child was done without a police order. After the death of Umarali, the autopsy on his body was taken at 3 am in the morning. In the aftermath of Umarali's death, Umarali's parents were made to take a blood test even though no illegal substances were discovered in the blood of the deceased child. While expressing his gratitude to people who came, Erov also stated that on the morning of the event, social organizations representing Tajiks in Russia were categorically prohibited to participate in this meeting. Moreover, there was no representative of the Honorary Consulate nor the representatives of the Republic of Tajikistan. Erov had mentioned that the children of another labor migrant from Uzbekistan were separated from a mother; she was deported from Saint-Petersburg in September and she was still waiting for her children to reunite with her. Erov brought the history of the siege of Leningrad and the fact that Tajiks, then the citizens of the Soviet Union, gave up their lives defending Leningrad. Erov also requested that the proper investigation would be carried out. Moreover, Erov emphasized the Russian media are biased on the portrayal of labor migrants and only emphasize the negative aspects in their life.

In addition to the voice of Erov, other activists participated in the meeting. Ivan Ovsyannikov, a political activist and one of the leaders of the Russian Socialist Party, has expressed his deepest concern with the systematic exploitation of labor migrants in contemporary Russia. Ovsyannikov compared the conditions of labor migrants with slavery and argued that the death of Umarali had resulted in anticolonial, antiimperialist, and even anti-Russian protest. Ovsyannikov also argued that this protest is likely to push some labor migrants to extremist and radical organizations, even to terrorist ones. There were other speakers at the meeting. The meeting concluded with statement that labor migrants do not know their rights and that it is necessary to educate the labor migrants?and the Russians too?about their rights.

Other social activists expressed their fury with the death of Umarali. The Tajik opposition activist Nuriddin Rizoi (????????? ?????) expressed his personal protest against the indifference of the Tajik state authority to the death of the five-month Tajik baby Umarali Nazarov, as well as against the methods of conducting investigations by Russian security forces (Anonymous, ?Nuriddin?). As the protest, Rizoi has burn the portrait of the current political leader of Tajikistan. Also, Rizo stated that if instead of Umarali, there would be a child of a highly-ranking official from Tajikistan, the investigation would have taken a very different turn, and the Russian authorities would not succeed in deporting Umarali's mother from the country and blaming Umarali's parents for the tragedy.

## Conclusion

One year later, the investigation of the case was closed. It was stated that the medical personnel of the Center did not properly take Umarali's temperature and did not take his blood test upon his arrival to the Center (Ferghana, ?Obnarodovano?). Nonetheless, no acts of negligence sufficient for criminal charges were found in the actions of the personnel. The investigation has confirmed the initial diagnosis that, allegedly, had become the direct cause of Umarali's death. Cytomegalovirus infection, in addition to



parainfluenza which led to the development of acute cardiopulmonary insufficiency. The verdict also stated that no actions of the Federal Service of Migration caused Umarali's death. At the same time, the Center where Umarali died no longer accepts infants younger than four year old and, according to a source, will soon be closed (Anonymous, ?Posle?). This tragedy had given a voice to people from Tajik diaspora and mobilized people for the collective action. Moreover, many Russians who were indifferent to the lives of labor migrants from Middle Asia became radicalized and took part in a meeting of solidarity with Umarali's parents. The death of Umarali even entered a poetic imagination. Bovar Abdurakhmonov, a poet from Tajikistan, created a poem in which he states ?They kill our children, // Then they accuse us.// We relied on the state, // But it is also silent.? (12) Umarali's death raised the public awareness of abuse which labor migrants could suffer from migration officials. One can assume that the Russian authorities have made important adjustments in their protocol because several months later no tragedies like that happened in Russia, so, hopefully, no infants on breast milk were separated from their migrant mothers.

Labor migrants from Middle Asia face very challenging circumstances in contemporary Russia. Racism, difficult working conditions, a lack of support from the Russian state are only few of the everyday obstacles and practices they encounter. Media often racialize the public discourse about the migrants. The voices of migrants are too often silent. Several tragedies in which migrants died were not properly investigated in Russia. However, the tragedy with a 5-month baby Umarali in Saint-Petersburg in October 2015 radicalized the Tajik diaspora in Saint-Petersburg and, in the essence, gave the voice to labor migrants.

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## Notes :

1. According to website <http://migrant.ru/migraciya-v-rossii-2017/> which represents International civil movement for helping migrants and their unions (????????????? ?????????????? ?????????? ?????????? ?????????? ? ? ? ??????????????), there is over 2 million people from Uzbekistan, over 2 million from

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Ukraine, approximately one million from Tajikistan, 45,000 from Kazakhstan, and 30-35 thousands from Armenia. <http://migrant.ru/migraciya-v-rossii-2017/>. A variety of interesting and important information on labor migrants can be found here : <http://migrant.ferghana.ru/newslaw/%20chronicle/>. Both websites are accessed on May 10, 2017.

2. According to a poll conducted by the organization "Public Opinion" in August 2013, 65 % of the polled Russians have an apprehensive and suspicious attitude towards migrant workers. Another poll conducted by All-Russia Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) at the same time has revealed that 74 % of respondents are certain that migrants have a negative impact on the country.
3. ?Working in Russia, they get about five times more than they could earn at home.? Quoted in Lokshin, Chernina, 2013.
4. As a part of the project of the Basic Research Program of the Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2011, AHO Center for Ethnopolitical and Regional Studies" (CEPRI) conducted a sociological study to analyze the migration profile, problems of adaptation and social and cultural integration of migrants. A survey conducted in November 2011 among nearly 9,000 migrants shows that more than 20 % of the largest group of migrants - citizens of Central Asian states - do not speak Russian.
5. Nathaniel Knight, ?On Russian Orientalism : A Response to Adeeb Khalid,? *Kritika* 1, no. 4 (2000) : 701-715 ; *idem.*, "Vocabularies of Difference : Ethnicity and Race in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia," *Kritika* 13, no. 3 (2013) : 667-684 ; Maxim Matusевич, "Probing the Limits of Internationalism : African Students Confront Soviet Ritual," *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27, no. 2 (2009). Accessed at : <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/aeer/article/view/166/259> on 29 June 2017 ; Svetlana Boltovskaya,.
6. International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. No. 45/158. Approved at 69th plenary meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations on 18 December 1990.
7. Shibanova writes : ?On photographs [...], the labor migrant appears as a temporary labor resource. He is a man of 25-40 years old, comes from Central Asia, less often from the Caucasus, who most often mentioned in the context of breaking the law (migration legislation, drug trafficking, etc.), is less likely to be photographed during lessons in Russian language courses or obtaining documents related to employment, obtaining a patent, etc. He is a man of average build, strong enough to carry out heavy physical labor, dressed in special or loose athletic clothing, suitable for dirty work related to construction, repair of premises, cleaning of the territory. In photos, the migrant is not portrayed with his family, his wife, children - this aspect of the life of labor migrants, like the adaptation issues in a new place, remains unaddressed in the media. In publications, an emphasis is made on representing migrants through the opposition of ?newcomers - local.?? (Shibanova, 188.)
8. See a commentary : "Gentlemen, we are doomed in the face of amateurs to cut rams published at <http://blog.fontanka.ru/posts/204947/>.
9. Vice-President of the Regional Social Organization *Vzgliad v Budushchee* [A look into the future], Gleb Panfilov, states : ""Nobody knows about this, of course, but the migrants told me what happens : when a labor migrant dies [as a result of an accident] at a construction site, he is rolled up there in concrete, and that?s it. If the migrant is illegal, it is unprofitable for the employer to let the relevant authorities know about his existence at all?" [?] However, the average labor migrant has been increasingly opposed to the employer?s arbitrariness in recent times, so the tendency to conceal migrant deaths and to "bury" them in the "workplace" is gradually dwindling, but ten years ago "a complete mess was going on" (Savvina.)
10. There are many publications which tells the story of Umarali on [www.fontanka.ru](http://www.fontanka.ru), [www.kp.ru](http://www.kp.ru), and many other websites. Over 38 articles on [www.fontanka.ru](http://www.fontanka.ru) discuss Umarali?s death and its investigation. There are especially many publications on this story on [www.fontanka.ru](http://www.fontanka.ru), this one, for instance, Aleksandr Ermakov, ?Umarali umer bez postoronney pomoshchi? [Umarali died without assistance,] <http://www.fontanka.ru/2016/10/20/110/>. Published on October 20, 2016. Accessed on June 10, 2017. Also, there are many publications in *Novaya Gazeta*, such as, for instance, Nina Petlyanova, ?Umarali

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Nazarov (20.05.2015-14.10.2015) ?Otkuda takaya nenavist? ?? ? ne ponimayut roditeli pogibshogo v Sankt-Peterburge mladentsa? [Umarali Nazarov (20.05.2015-14.10.2015) ?Why such hatred ??- the parents of the deceased the baby in St. Petersburg do not understand,] *Novaya Gazeta*, no. 117, Oct. 23, 2015 <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2015/10/23/66095-umarali-nazarov-20-05-2015-8212-14-10-2015>.

11. Erov has a page on the Russian social media, vk.com (the Russian equivalent of facebook) (Erov?s <https://vk.com/id82229522>). Erov has an interesting profile : he was born on 4 February, 1975. He characterizes his political views as Communist and moderate Islamic. In addition to being the President of NGO "ETMOS" (a non-governmental organization *Ethnic Tajiks for Migrationary Responsibility of Compatriots*), Erov is also the head coach and captain of the football team of the Union of Tajiks of Russia (????????? ?????????????? ?????????????? ?? <?????> ?????????? ??????? ?? ?????????????? ?????????????????? ?????????????????? ? ??????? ?????? ? ??????? ?????????? ??????? ??? ?????????? ???????.) Erov has 424 followers on [www.vk.com](http://www.vk.com). He is committed to the support for the rights of Tajiks and sometimes appears on the Russian TV where he talks about the abuse of labor migrants and migrants in contemporary Russia.

12. The poem states ?We studied, studied, struggled for a long time, // Were prepared well, // Now a diploma in the trunk. // We migrated to migration. // Nobody needs our knowledge, // Neither our bright heads. // We are in the garden of knowledge // Remained, like a tree without fruit. // From the history teacher // We heard about the society of slaves, // Now he himself became a slave. // Diploma in the oven, like firewood. // They kill our children, // Then they accuse very us. // We relied on the state, // But it is also silent.? Quoted in Kalandarov, p. 108. Also, the research is discussed in Ivashchenko in whose article is an interview with Tokhir Kalandarov, a Russian scholar from Moscow, who analyze the poetry of labor migrants from Tajikistan.

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