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WOMEN FROM AN UNKNOWN LAND: THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE

(The university course from student's and instructor's point of view)

ЖЕНЩИНЫ НЕЗАВИСИМОЙ СТРАНЫ: БОРЬБА ЗА НЕЗАВИСИМОСТЬ

(Учебный курс с точки зрения студента и преподавателя)

Abstract:

This article is about a new and unique course that was introduced to students at the University of Iowa (USA) in spring 2020 and focused on the current global and international issues in the North Caucasus, life, and wellbeing of women. The North Caucasus through the centuries represents the women right violations in War and in Peace. Jihad of the new millennium looking at the world through female eyes. Early marriages, abductions for marriage, polygamy, honor killings, domestic violence are common in recent years.

The course introduced students to today's reality of the situation in The North Caucasus. With the help born in Dagestan and having a strong connection with this region, with help of young people from the Caucasus it was possible to build a partnership, understanding, and friendship. This course provides a unique opportunity for students to be in direct contact with people from the Caucasus via SKYPE and WhatsApp.

Global Curriculum Development An award was granted for the proposal of this course.

Keywords: prevention, terrorism, right violations, discrimination, arranged marriages, revenge, female genital mutilation

Аннотация:

Данная статья посвящена новому уникальному курсу, который был включен в программу Айовского университета весной 2020 года и посвящен современным глобальным проблемам Северного Кавказа и положению женщин.

Северный Кавказ в течение многих веков известен нарушением прав человека.

В настоящее время Джихад (борьба за веру) продолжает распространяться не только на инакомыслящих, но и местных женщин-мусульманок.

Ранние браки, воровство невест, полигамия, кровная месть, домашнее насилие были и остаются здесь обычными явлениями.

Курс: «Женщины неизвестной земли: борьба за независимость» дает возможность студентам понять и почувствовать сложное положение женщин в этом регионе.

С помощью тех, кто родился и по сей день имеет связь с Кавказом, с помощью молодых людей, живущих там, стало возможным выстроить сотрудничество, взаимопонимание, контакт и дружбу между дагестанской и американской молодежью.

Студенты общались с представителями Кавказского региона через скайп и систему What's App.

Университет Айовы (США) отметил наградой работу профессора И. Костиной за создание этого курса.

Ключевые слова: предупреждение, терроризм, нарушение прав человека, дискриминация, браки по договоренности, месть, увечье женских половых органов

Introduction

The North Caucasus is a mountainous region located where Europe, The Middle East and Asia meet. The area borders the South Caucasus states of Georgia and Azerbaijan. It is close to Turkey. Situated between the Black and Caspian seas, Iran, and the southern Russian steppe, it includes the Russian republics Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Adygea.

Unbelievably beautiful and at the same time very dangerous region.

1. Terrorism. From the late 2000s, international attention was on the North Caucasus and the global jihadist movement in this part of our globe. The place became the epicenter of jihadist violence. The groups of the Caucasus Emirate have carried out attacks in the heart of Russia: Moscow and St. Petersburg.

The main destabilizing link began the rise of the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” in 2013. The fighters from Russia (North Caucasus) have joined the ranks of IS and other militant Islamist groups.

The IS or the “Caliphate” is a radical Islamist state, the “promised land” for all Muslims.

The export of the North Caucasus jihad to the Middle East has transformed the problem from a national one to a global one.

More than 30% of all terrorist acts in the world were carried out by women. Half of the terrorists wanted by Interpol are female.

2. Women rights violations.

Many women were brought to Syria by their husbands against their own will to become terrorists.

Even on their own land many women and girls of many republics of the North Caucasus are subject to honor killings, domestic violence, abductions for marriage and early marriages.

Honor killings appear to have become more common in recent years. In some Dagestani villages (like in some countries globally – in Africa, Southeast Asia, Middle East), they also suffer genital mutilation.

In Chechnya and Ingushetia many are deprived of their children after divorce – with reference to “tradition” which prescribes children to be raised in their father’s family. Women are often denied visiting rights and have been struggling to see their children for years.

In Chechnya, sexual violence by close relatives, is hardly ever prosecuted; if such a crime becomes public knowledge, the victim may be killed to “purge the family shame”.

Maternity wards in the region are below acceptable standards, resulting in preventable maternal deaths and injuries.

Women consider as a husband’s property with one main role - to bear children.

Theoretical background. Data and methods

The course “Women from an Unknown Land: The Fight for Independence” is expanding of the students’ knowledge of global topics.

1. International relations. During two last decades the North Caucasus’ conflict has been among Europe’s deadliest. Students learned about the roots of the geopolitical problems in this region. During the zoom meetings with modern Dagestani writer Alisa Ganieva, interviews, surveys, and discussions with the local people of the North Caucasus students tried to find the possible ways to prevent terrorism: build partnership with the international and neighboring community; win the war of ideas; defend and protect citizens.

2. Religion studies. The Caucasus was historically the place where 3 main religions existed: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Caucasus was the cradle of the Old Testament (The Noah Ark), the center of one of the oldest Eastern Catholic Church (Armenia), and the cradle of Islam on Russian territory (city Derbent, Dagestan).

In the beginning of the 1990s Russian-Islamic resistance began. Knowledge of Arabic and the teaching of Islam are more widespread here. It brought Jihad, violence, movement of black widows to the region. Several Islamic Republics here best known as a “trouble spot”. These changes transformed the ideas of War and Peace in the region, stressed Islamic orientation and worsen life of women from liberation after October revolution in 1917 back to segregation.

3. Gender studies is one of the fastest growing field in contemporary linguistic. Gender stereotypes must be explained and analyzed with help of communication and interaction.

Understanding helps to prevent women rights violations: knowledge of the laws that protect from discrimination and violence; establishing women’s ability to learn skills and earn money;

explaining the disadvantages of forced early marriages and the value of women education, participation in economic development and in political process.

4. Different pedagogical approaches were used during this course to achieve main goals of studying. Here are the examples of some of them.

Interview.

<u>Organizational rubric</u>	<u>Points</u>
1. Greeting	10
The interviewer greets and addresses.	
The interviewee politely in very effective way.	
2. Introduction	30
The interviewer fully introduces the topic of	
The interview and provides all the necessary information.	
3. Questions made	50
The questions made perfectly match the various	
Aspect of the interview.	
4. Interviewer's attitude	10
During the interview, the interviewer looks at the camera,	
and the interviewee, speaks soundly, with good pronunciation and in friendly manner.	

Opinion essays.

An opinion essay is a formal piece of writing. It requires your opinion on a topic, which must be stated clearly, giving various viewpoints on the topic supported by reasons and/or examples. You should include the opposing viewpoint in another paragraph.

A successful opinion essay should have the rubrics:

- a) an introductory paragraph in which you state the topic and your opinion.
- b) A main body, which consists of several paragraphs, each presenting a separate viewpoint supported by reasons. You also include a paragraph presenting the opposing viewpoint and reason why you think it is an unconvincing viewpoint.
- c) Conclusion in which you restate your opinion using different words.

Points for grading:

An introductory paragraph. 20

Your opinion about the importance of the topic,
and your agreement or disagreement with it.

Main part:

1) Start each paragraph with a topic sentence 15

which summarizes what the paragraph is about.

2) List your viewpoints and reasons clearly. 20

3) Present the opposing viewpoints and your 15

opinion about them.

4) Join the sentences with appropriate linking words 5

and phrases.

5) Use linking words and phrases to join 5

one paragraph with the other.

Conclusion. 20

Pro and con discussion chart.

Name:

Date:

Topic:

Instructions:

1) Look at two sides of an issue. Opposite every Pro, you should be able to list a Con. It prepares you for discussion and debating.

Pro	Con
1.	
2.	
3.	

- 2) Pick out the strongest pros, list them. How many do you have?
- 3) What practice, idea is the best? What will you argue? If you are not comfortable arguing, what does that tell you?

Many **video-interviews and photos** were recorded in Dagestan and were used in this course.

Results and Solutions

The course included many interesting discussions via zoom, WhatsApp, and surveys:

- 1) The ethnic groups in Dagestan and proportion between men and women.
- 2) Comparison between the characters of Dagestani man and woman.
- 3) Women rights and Islam and Islamic Education for women.
- 4) The stages of a woman's life: female genital mutilation, the stealing of bride, "arranged marriage", polygamy, violence, divorce, and revenge: honor killing.
- 5) Woman in society: The zone of war and the zone of peace.
- 6) Comparison of the women rights in the US and Dagestan.
- 7) Final group presentation: Life and Status of Women in Dagestan. Survey. Results. Summary.

Conclusion

Students showed a huge interest to the main topics.

They created and published their own article about our work together.

<https://dailyowan.com/2021/03/31/guest-opinion-reflections-on-course-women-unknown-fight-for-independence/>

Here are some students' reflections:

1. The women there, however, are faced with a lot of violations that women in America do not really have to think twice about.

Throughout the semester, we covered several topics that Dagestani women experience, some that are still very much practiced today. These topics included "abductions for marriage", "early and arranged marriages", "polygamy", "domestic violence", "honor killings", "women becoming instruments of war", "blood feuds" and "suicide terrorist". A few of these topics were sensitive to discuss but were very much needed to be addressed to raise awareness for these women in Dagestan. (*Ekaterina Boucher*)

2. Before I decided to join Women Unknown: Fight for Independence, I was initially caught by the name of the class. It did not seem like just any women's studies class; "Women Unknown" struck me as a course with a far more unique perspective.

As a woman who is lived in America my entire life, I thought that I knew what women have gone through in the history of this country. But my knowledge was limited to women's history in the U.S. I had no insight whatsoever to the past and present obstacles that women of the Caucasus region face.

We learned about many topics regarding women's status in modernized areas of Dagestan through interviews with young men and women from the area. I easily empathized with these people since we were so close in age.

Having been given the opportunity to speak with young Dagestani women and watch Kostina's interviews, I recall it being easy to identify with these women — their opinions on social issues within their society were progressive and non-traditional. When asked about their views on polygamy, a now rare practice in western society, these women said they have seen this occurrence or know someone who has been affected by it. They held nothing back, sharing that they felt if a man feels the need to have more than one wife for any reason, he must be able to support them all equally. However, they said they do not feel as if the modern practice is right. (*Cassie Moeller*)

3. The largest differentiating factor between this course and others I have taken at the University of Iowa is the ability to interact throughout the semester with students from another country. We talked to them at three different points during the semester, and they were all honest and generous with their return messages about their lives.

This class gave the opportunity to ask tough questions about the way the Caucasus culture and society treat women. Students from Dagestan could tell us about what they liked and disliked about their country, their daily lives, as well as how they felt about certain traditions. Hearing their thoughts and opinions was an invaluable learning experience.

We also had the opportunity to interview an author who lived in Dagestan as well as participated in the University of Iowa's International Program. Alisa Ganieva wrote a realistic fiction novel about what Dagestan looks like today. In the original release of the book, it was published under a male pseudonym, Gulla Khirachev! Her detailed writing, the care she puts into creating her characters, and the realistic picture she insisted on portraying, made her work celebrated internationally but not in Dagestan. Talking to an author of this caliber not only about the work itself, but about her writing process, and her own life, was my personal favorite part of this course. (*Grace Merritt*)

4. In an interview with, Alisa Ganieva, a famous writer from Dagestan, discusses her book *Bride and Groom* and its depiction of Dagestan.

In the article, Ganieva explores the mix of influences present in Dagestan and says that, despite Dagestan being primarily Muslim country, women wearing hijabs was, "only recently introduced to the area." Ganieva notes, "Women in Dagestan are accustomed to be the heads of their family and many older women smokes and have tattoos (Cruise and Albuquerque, 2017)."

According to Khabib Ismailiov, an ethnographer, the act of female tattooing swept through Dagestan long before the Muslim religion. These tattoos carry meaning. Ismailiov gives the example of tattooed dots, saying: "If an unmarried girl puts a dot on each finger that would mean: 'I am a rich girl, poor men—stay away (RT World News, 2007).'" Indeed, Dagestani tattoos carry meaning which can tell others about the wearer's status or intentions.

In the areas practicing traditional tattoos in Dagestan, while both girls and boys can be tattooed during childhood, only women can be tattooed into adulthood.

These tattoos are laden with meaning, and that they can empower the women wearing the tattoos. This rich tradition reflects Dagestan's storied history and its connection with nature. In Dagestan, tattooing has served as an opportunity for women to regain the autonomy of their own

bodies by choosing what goes on them. Yet it can also be a way to reaffirm the woman's status. (*Mack Cross*)

In conclusion, I would like to add that 48 students communicated with each other during semester: 35 American students, 13 from Dagestan (8 – men and 5 -women).

Course material extends beyond individual countries or area studies and could be attractive to many departments of the American Universities as: International Studies, Global Studies, Global Health, Anthropology, Political Science, History, Comparative Literature, and Women Studies, Diversity, and Inclusion because it stresses on global competence problems that make all of us involved.

After visiting Dagestan in 2019, I understood that there is hope. We can change the world. We can be friends and we should be friends.

Everyone there is interested in the United States.

Dagestani people dream about friendly relations between our countries. They say: "Bring people here to show who we are."

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Information about the author:

Irina Kostina, Professor, Ph.D., Director of the Russian Program of the University of Iowa (USA), author of more than 30 publications on the method of teaching Russian language to foreigners, organizer, and participant of 15 grants (**Fulbright-Hays, FIPSE, STARTALK**). Kostina's work is recognized by the President of the University of Iowa for quality teaching (**2011 The President and Provost Award for Teaching Excellence, The University of Iowa**) and the Prizes for the creation of courses on the Caucasus (**2019-2020 Global Development Curriculum Award, International**

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