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WHAT FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR PROGRAM MAY GRANT TO THE KYRGYZ SCHOLARS: HOW TO TEACH GENDER ISSUES AND LINGUISTICS IN KYRGYZ UNIVERSITIES

This paper presentation will concern my experience in the United States as a Fulbright visiting scholar at University of Washington, Seattle, USA during August 2012- May 2013.

Key words: Fulbright program, Gender issues, academic curriculum, global context, new approaches, network of research, current theories.

Эта презентация о моем опыте, полученном в Соединенных Штатах в качестве стипендиантки программы Фулбрайт в Вашингтонском университете в Сиэтле, с августа 2012 по май 2013.

Ключевые слова: Программа Фулбрайт, гендерные вопросы, учебный план, глобальный контекст, новые подходы, сетевые исследования, современные теории.

INTRODUCTION

It is something special to be a Fulbright scholar. It wants us to feel at home in the United States and get experience from US University. We become ambassadors between home country and the USA. Being alumni of Fulbright program will provide me a lot of opportunities to develop my academic career. Academic independence in choosing host university and research area is the best quality of Fulbright post-doctoral scholarship.

My research “Women of Kyrgyzstan. Gender Issues across Sociology and Linguistics” has been conducted at the crossroads of Gender Issues and Linguistics.

My goal is to explore women’s equity and inequity to education, health care, and political life and natural and financial resources(land, food, water, sanitation and hygiene) in the USA and South Kyrgyzstan. Factors that contribute to equity or inequity to education, health care, political life and resources are explored by comparative learning of Gender Issues in Sociology and Linguistics throughout national policy, local policy and civic society of two countries.

FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR PROGRAM AS THE INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL DIALOGUE AND NETWORK OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

When I arrived in Seattle in August 24, 2012 it was a night. My host professor Diana May Pearce and her husband George Wright met me at SEA-TAC airport. The lights were on that August night

and some fresh and unknown pleasant atmosphere welcomed me to the ever green city Seattle....

When we reached their house at 4515 Latona Avenue NE, Seattle I found myself entirely at home. Because every piece of décor reminded me Central Asia, the ornaments of pillows, curtains, carpets, cups, teapots, hats, souvenirs reflected my homeland of Ancient Silk Road: My host professor Diana May Pearce and her husband George Wright were Fulbright scholars in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and Tashkent, Uzbekistan. One can be easily aware of how Fulbright scholarship unites people from all parts of the world. These remarkable couple made their home Central Asian East.

So, Seattle received me gladly with greenery, intelligence of people and hospitality.

University of Washington, where I was affiliated with, provided me with all opportunities of academic independence. My Fulbright experience was rich and fruitful in terms of research and gaining academic background in Gender Issues and Linguistics. I admired professor Ilse Cirtautas, who teaches Turkic languages with delicate feeling for culture, and her deep knowledge and love for Central Asian culture and society, make Central Asian people feel at home at University of Washington. UW libraries are fun for researches, I was reading books even my native Kyrgyz in the Suzzallo library. I tried to get much professor Ilse Cirtautas, from her life and academic experience.

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conducted at the crossroads of Gender Issues and Linguistics.

In order to conduct research I needed academic background at University of Washington. I audited lectures on Introduction to Women Studies (GWSS 200; professor Rebecca Aanerud). I found out how the course examines the cultural construction and maintenance of gender inequalities in a range of social and political contexts, emphasizing the interrelation between race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality. After this course I came to the conclusion that women in Kyrgyzstan also face the challenging issues which women of any developing country come across.

I audited course (ANTH 203 (503)/LING 203) Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology (Prof. Laada Bilaniuk) where I could develop the idea that language is both as a universal human trait, and its diversity across cultures; Language is not just a means of communication, but as a means of creating and transforming identities, social relationships, and values. A bit different but interesting approaches in American post modernistic linguistics from post-Soviet linguistics provided me new ideas of research in Kyrgyz linguistics.

I audited the course SOC W 594 Gender and Inequalities in the Global Context (prof. Diana May Pearce) where I could study issues of gender, globalization, and inequality through a gender lens. Topics included global movements of capital (the global factory) and labor (migration, trafficking, etc.), disruption/creation of family forms and gender roles (domestic violence), social welfare, private/public polices, international frames (human rights), resistance, and response.

Another course I audited was ANTH 560 Discourse & Culture (prof. Laada Bilaniuk) where I am still learning analytic approaches that attempt to bridge the gap between the individual instances of language—spoken, written, or otherwise mediated—and the larger cultural patterns or relationships that they constitute. A goal of this course is to familiarize us with some of the theories and methods that are most useful to the analysis of discourse and its role in constructing individuals, social identities, and power relations. This course is very useful for my future research on Gender Discourse in Kyrgyz, as it has never been analyzed in Turkic languages.

Besides these courses I always attended seminars and open lectures on Gender Issues in

the USA, Social Work in the Global Context and Sociology at School of Social Work and open lectures and seminars on language, culture, history and ethnicity at Ellison center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies. Twice I attended Ph.D. thesis defense at Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at University of Washington. I was an active presenter at the Inner Asian Seminar events where Central Asian Issues were discussed.

I enormously enjoyed the Suzallo, Allen, and Odegard libraries of University of Washington. The catalog system of books and readings were enormously fruitful in my academic pursuits. I have begun writing a book “Introduction to gender issues” (Gender taanuuga kirishuu) in Kyrgyz for universities and colleges on the basis of experience gained from the University of Washington. This books also describes the history of gender issues in Western and Muslim communities, marriage issues in Global context, feminization of poverty and migration, women’s equality in all spheres of life, women’s labor, and the books will also analyze from the prospective how to solve challenges in Gender Issues in Modern Kyrgyz society (bride kidnapping, spread of veil among women in South Kyrgyzstan, polygamy, early marriages, etc).

On- line library and books scanning stations, media and audio materials made a big academic improvement on me. I got huge research potential from the books on Gender Issues, Feminist Linguistics, History of Gender Issues, Gender Equality in Education, Healthcare, Political life and Resources, Sociology of Gender, Children’s issues, Masculine Studies, Inclusive Education, Critical thinking, English language, German, Altaic linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Linguistic Anthropology, Translation Studies. I was deeply surprised reading books in my native Kyrgyz and other Turkic languages I speak, in the libraries of University of Washington. I read and downloaded articles, book reviews from e-library of the University for my own catalogue. I found many other links to other prestigious libraries of the world. I registered myself at the journal “Language and Society” for the future plans. I could have access to some reports of UN agencies on equality of women to education, healthcare, recourses. I also registered myself for the publishing issues of UNICEF.

The last stage of my research was to consider how gender is expressed in the language, how to

distinguish gender bias in the language. I analyzed the classical literature on Gender and language written by R.Lakoff, D.Tannen, D. Cameron, J.Coates and many others. I am analyzing their works for my future book “Gender and Language in Kyrgyz”(Kyrgyz tili jana gender). The theoretical background I learned here will be very much useful in analyzing discourse of women in Kyrgyz, I learned the methodologies of researching discourse, which will be quite new for Kyrgyz sociolinguistics. I made sketch of 7 papers in Comparative Gender Issues and Comparative Gender Linguistics.

As a visiting scholar I gave 6 lecture – presentations at University of Washington, 4 lecture presentations were held officially at New Eastern Languages Department of Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies (Ellison center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies Seminar) and 2 presentations at School of Social Work.

The first public lecture was held on October 25, 2012 “What One Needs to Know about Kyrgyzstan at Denny Hall 123, 12:30-1:30/1:40 p.m at the Central Asian Seminar. This public lecture made historical review to the nomadic and soviet past of Kyrgyzstan. My speech also concerned Kyrgyzstan’s rich culture and historical nomadic democracy and ongoing reformations in the current time.

The second lecture public lecture was about Kyrgyz National Epic “Manas” on October 26,2012 at Denny Hall 123, 12:30-1:40 p.m. at the Central Asian Inner Seminar. You can find information at the link below <http://www.acasinfo.org/>. The main heritage of the nomadic Kyrgyz left to world culture is the national epic “Manas”. I talked about how epic “Manas” contains all national feelings for freedom and justice, it is the source of all traditions, believes, philosophical thoughts and national identity.

The third lecture was entitled as “The Description of Women in the Works of Chingiz Aitmatov:Poetic Language Issues in Modern Kyrgyz”.

The fifth lecture presentation was held for the graduate students of School of Social Work on March 8, 2013. The speech was on Gender Issues in modern Kyrgyzstan. I talked about the Gender empowerment in Kyrgyzstan and some challenging issues as bride kidnapping, early marriages, feminization of migration,

feminization poverty, human trafficking and gender selective abortions in Kyrgyzstan and how Kyrgyz government works in solving these issues.

The sixth public lecture was also for graduate students of School of Social Work. I talked about the post-conflict social work of local NGOs, International Agencies and USAID in Osh and my personal contribution to it working a translator for UNICEF, Medicines sans Frontiers and some local NGOs and Gender Resource Center at Osh State University.

Approximately about 30-40 people listened to my speech at each presentation. Undergraduate students, graduate students, professors and all people who are interested in Central Asia took part.

Being as a Fulbright scholar I found lots of friends –other Fulbright scholar nearly from all parts of the world. University of Washington provided social gatherings between Fulbright community of different ethnic and academic background.

Local culture is diverse in Seattle. You can see American, Asian, Native American, African, Middle Eastern and European cuisine and cultural life. One can enjoy authentic sea food in Seattle, as it is surrounded by the water. People are very intelligent and polite, you will meet numerous people reading in the buses, metros, gardens and everywhere else. People love to go hike, picnics during sunny days as the Sun shines not so often in Seattle. You can visit theaters, cinemas, museums, art galleries where real American northwest culture and life surround you by the diversity. Fashion is casual, high wheels are very rare exhibition, it was a bit difficult for me to switch into casual style from my classic dress-code style. If you come in winter, do not take so much coats and boots, because winter is mild, but it is a “foggy Seattle”, so I recommend you to take your umbrella. You will adore the seashores, Alki beach, Seattle Space Needle tower. Ferry ships will take you to islands of the Pacific Ocean. If you come to Seattle, you should see Olympic Peninsula with authentic museum, the Crescent lake and Indian reservations, you will enjoy the sunset at the coasts of the Pacific Ocean. I also travelled to the states on the North West, and Mid states and some East Coast cities.

HOW TO TEACH GENDER ISSUES AND LINGUISTICS IN KYRGYZ UNIVERSITIES

Coming back home I felt that still Kyrgyz education system needs changes in terms of

academic curriculum and teaching philosophy. Gender Issues seem still unimportant in the society we live, therefore there are very few courses relating Gender Equity in the Kyrgyz academic curriculum. The lack of gender studies in Kyrgyz universities, are one of the reasons of challenging issues in the Kyrgyz society (bride kidnapping, domestic violence, polygamy). If we compare academic curriculum between Kyrgyz university with the University of Washington, there are great differences and wide range of courses in terms of gender issues are offered at the host university. Even nearly every public university has department of Women studies, and there may be courses as Introduction into Women's Studies, Philosophy of Feminism, Introduction to Gender and Popular Culture, Masculinities: Contestation, Circulation, and Transformation; Gender, Race, and Class in Social Stratification; Research Methods in Women Studies; Women and the Law; Women in Politics; Gender and Globalization: Theory and Process; Native Women in the Americas; Women and International Economic Development; Women in Law and Literature; Men and Masculinity; Psychobiology of Women; Language and Gender and others¹⁹

But a Kyrgyz university may have only some optional courses on Gender issues, and usually those courses are lack of any academic significance. Therefore students do not know the methods of research: questionnaires, interviews, field work. Gender Studies do not concern the academic community. Problems of women and men in Kyrgyz communities can be just discussed at the projects of local NGOs, International Humanitarian Organizations, and social branch of the Governmental organizations. So, the amount of the courses should be increased if possible, and not only women's issues, but also masculine studies should be taught at the universities. Gender Issues in Kyrgyzstan can be taught in the four stages:

1. History of Gender Issues in Kyrgyzstan (The following issues should be discussed: pre-soviet history of Gender issues: influence of nomadism and Islam on Gender stereotypes in the Kyrgyz societies; polygamy, tribal laws and women's status in nomad pastures; renowned Kyrgyz women; Soviet history: impact of collectivization on Kyrgyz families, education of women and men; soviet family stereotypes; violation of nomad and tribal stereotypes; social

welfare for women; women's manual labor and work for Soviet country; post-soviet history; transit period; women's role in social and economic degradation; role of women in small and medium business etc.).

2. Gender and Empowerment in post-soviet Central Asia: (the following topics should be discussed: decrease of Family stereotypes: civil unions; polygamy, divorces. Feminization of migration and feminization of poverty; Early marriages; Bride kidnapping; Selective Abortions; Domestic violence and family. Women in Business; Women and Social equity; renaissance of traditions and customs, influence of Islam; physiological and psychological events of puberty; menopause; sexuality; contraception, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation; role of culture in determining psychological response to physiological events).

3. Masculine Studies: (Men's health issues; Migration and Unemployment; Drug and Alcohol and their impact on men. Mental health of men, men's rights).

4. Gender issues across the Globe: (Themes may include family and community formation, social activism, education, paid and unpaid labor patterns, war, migration, and changing conceptions of womanhood and femininity in the last century. Cultural meanings and social uses of popular culture by various communities in local and global contexts can be explored. The intersection of race, class, and gender in the lives of women across the globe should be analyzed.

Also, research papers and graduate courses should focus on Gender Issues in the Central Asian context.

Current trends in Linguistics also varies in content and research in the United States. Kyrgyz linguistic thoughts and trends are based on the functional character of Soviet linguistics. Teaching philosophy of Linguistics also is quite different from our perspectives. University courses in Linguistics can be comprise as following in Kyrgyzstan: Introduction into Linguistics, History of Linguistic studies, General Linguistics; Current Linguistic and Language processes; Lexicology, Stylistics, Grammar, Comparative Linguistics and etc. But in the courses in Linguistics at US universities, students learn the Linguistic, Philosophical, and Political Thought of Noam Chomsky in Grammar study, many American scholars consider his theory as the best way to learn a language.

CONCLUSION

Mutual understanding coupled with academic freedom and excellence during my Fulbright visit granted me enormous academic guide. So, I was so lucky to be a visiting Fulbright scholar at University of Washington, so I express my sincere and enormous gratitude for my host professor, Dr. Diana May Pearce, and her husband George Wright for all their care and help in my orientation into American life and their concern during grant period. I want to thank University of Washington staff for all possibilities provided for me during my Fulbright grant. I want to thank School of Social work for providing me office (Research Commons Hall staff) and warmly welcome to me. I thank professor Ilse Cirtaustas, who ensured me chance to share my academic interests

with US academic community, her deep knowledge and love for Central Asian culture and society, make Central Asian people feel at home at University of Washington. I want to thank University Faculty Housing Service to find me a wonderful house at 1320 NE 63rd street, Seattle, WA, special thanks for my landlady Michelle Badion, for her hospitality. I also thank all academic professionals (prof. Laada Bilanuik, Rebecca Aanerud, Nancy Farwell and others) for assistance in my research. I also want to express my special gratitude for Dianne Price, Program Officer for South and Central Asia, CIES for her competent and on time assistance. I want to thank Guljan Tolbaeva, US embassy coordinator for her care and support for Fulbright scholars.

¹⁹Website of University of Washington: <http://www.washington.edu/students/crscat/gwss.html> retrieved on April 26, 2014.

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