

WOMEN'S EVERYDAY LIVES IN WAR AND PEACE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS, EDITED BY ULRIKE ZIEMER. CHAM: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2020. X, 281 PP. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25517-6_8.

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Abstract

This edited volume provides a comparative analysis of the everyday problems of women in the South Caucasus. The authors of this collection pay special attention to the geopolitical analysis in the region in the context of social changes and civilizational challenges of women. The authors discuss the everyday problems of women during periods of transformation of political systems, regimes and conflicts, thereby explaining the various dimensions of these transits of power and institutions of public authority.

The role of women in the South Caucasus is steadily growing even in conditions of instability, neither war nor peace. Women are actively employed in almost all spheres of life: in the economy, politics, culture, public life. However, in the South Caucasus, although the idea of protecting women's rights and gender equality has been enshrined at the constitutional level, the problem of how the actual status of women in society complies with constitutional provisions still persists.

The democratization of the life of the South Caucasian society, the expansion of the information space and the variety of types of communications led to the involvement of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in global processes, in particular, in the implementation of the modernist project to protect the rights and freedoms of women.

Keywords: *the South Caucasus, women, gender studies, war, peace, feminism, political protest, forced displacement.*

The formation of new independent states in the South Caucasus began in the turbulent conditions of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The post-Soviet South Caucasian countries that emerged as a result of these events, literally the day after they gained national sovereignty, faced urgent tasks to ensure their development and security. An

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important role in their solution, along with the mobilization of internal resources, was called upon to play an active foreign policy, while setting, based on national interests, its most important tasks and priorities and creating the necessary mechanisms to achieve them. The post-Soviet South Caucasian countries had to determine their place in international relations, the nature of relations with other countries, both with the largest and most influential, and with immediate neighbors. Taking into account the limited or acute shortage of their own resources for national development, as well as the lack of internationally recognized and equipped external borders, the post-Soviet South Caucasian countries needed to ensure their sovereignty by effective methods and avoid falling into political or economic dependence on more developed and powerful states.

The emergence of new opportunities in educational and scientific activities, intensive internationalization, which contributes to the growth of scientific results due to the exchange of information and the concentration of research efforts on the most complex problems of various branches of scientific knowledge, are changing the parameters of the modern academic environment. Reconstruction of the role of women in the social and cultural space of the South Caucasus is one of the topical areas of modern research (Ziemer 2018). At first glance, this sharpness of perception is associated with political, legal, social and economic transformations in the South Caucasus and, logically, should have softened as life destabilized in this region. However, in reality this does not happen. The everyday problems of women in the South Caucasus have traditionally been studied by many scientists, but a separate and special comparative study of women's activity has been thematized only recently. This new problem in the social sciences turned out to be part of the gender studies of the social past. This direction does not consider gender in itself and not the relationship of the sexes in different cultural contexts, which traditional ethnography was engaged in, but precisely the plurality of social ties in different cultures, not missing the gender factor when considering them and attaching special importance to gender interactions as a model of social relations. Women's rights in the system of constitutional human rights refer to human rights of the third generation, to the so-called collective rights, which are addressed not so much to the individual as to certain social groups that need additional guarantees to protect their rights.

Comparative study of women's history and gender anthropology by modern ethnologists and researchers of the past forces us to pay close attention to the special and separate study of women's daily practices in bygone eras, their features and distinctive features, the mechanisms for transferring the traditional and adapting to the new. Anthropology of women's everyday life is a separate area of research that requires special empirical material, the use of special techniques and methods of analysis. But with all the multiplicity of publications on this topic, anthropology obviously lacks interdisciplinary research on the women's everyday life of the peoples of the South Caucasus. In this regard, the appeal to the political anthropology of everyday life, in the difficult conditions of the social and political crisis of the region, war and reforms, allows the authors to identify the specifics of the everyday life of the female part of the South Caucasian society, outlining the general features and trends in the development of women's communities among the peoples of the South Caucasus, penetrating into social moods half of the population of this ethnic group.

The first part of the collection includes three articles and discusses issues relating to women, tradition and social change. The second part of the collection is devoted to the experience of women who survived wars and displacement. The authors of four articles analyze the experience of women who survived wars and conflicts in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as displacement from Abkhazia and Azerbaijan. The third part of the collection looks at various issues faced by sexual minorities in Georgia and feminist activism in Azerbaijan.

It is important to note that the authors of this collection discuss the following issues: 1) Women as Bearers of Modernity and Tradition (Krebs 2020); 2) ‘Supra Is Not for Women’: Hospitality Practices as a Lens on Gender and Social Change in Georgia (Curro 2020); 3) Women Against Authoritarianism: Agency and Political Protest in Armenia (Ziemer 2020); 4) Between Love, Pain and Identity: Armenian Women After World War I (Aleksanyan 2020); 5) ‘We Are Strangers Among Our Own People’: Displaced Armenian Women (Ghazaryan 2020); 6) Vulnerability and Resilience: Women’s Narratives of Forced Displacement from Abkhazia (Arjevanidze 2020); 7) The Politics of Widowhood in Nagorny Karabakh (Shahnazarian and Ziemer 2020); 8) Invisible Battlefield: How the Politicization of LGBT Issues Affects the Visibility of LBT Women in Georgia (Gvianishvili 2020); 9) Exploring Two Generations of Women Activists in Azerbaijan: Between Feminism and a Post-Soviet Locality (Aliyeva 2020); 10) Feminism in Azerbaijan: Gender, Community and Nation-Building (Walsh 2020).

Obviously, when there are conflicting views on the war itself in the South Caucasus and the Caucasian war, and the transformation processes are interpreted ambiguously in the difficult conditions of the social and political crisis in the region, the past is being rethought. On the one hand, not wanting to dissolve into another culture, the society closed itself in its ethnic group, trying to preserve its traditions, and tightened social norms, especially for women. The second trend inevitably occurred European integration or rapprochement in the post-Soviet space. Such interest of the authors of the collection is justified, since these studies allow us to analyze how, under the influence of the military factor, political and administrative changes, the habits and social behavior, personal and social status of women, the content of their daily life, intra-family and social relations were transformed during and after the wars. Without such an assessment, it is impossible to assess the current processes of changing the way of life of people of different sexes in extreme circumstances, as well as to understand the place and role of the women’s issue in modern public discussions in the South Caucasus.

New labor practices arose, new areas of application of women’s skills and craftsmanship, along with this, exploitation also grew. This collection reveals that, on the one hand, this was facilitated by the traditional patriarchal relations that developed in the traditional South Caucasian society, and on the other hand, it was also caused by the lack of male population due to the war. Under the influence of the military factor, there were changes in the extra-family everyday life and social behavior of South Caucasian women. Social support for women and their families from public and local authorities was also a new phenomenon for the South Caucasus region. The mechanisms of social support for women and their families depended on the political situation and were appointed upon recognition of need.

The study of the gender factor in the South Caucasian wars allows us to conclude that new models of women's behavior appeared, which were expressed in protest behavior against cruelty and humility, child sacrifice, etc. Such qualities of women as patriotism, fearlessness and self-sacrifice, which have evolved over the centuries, remained traditional. The change in women's mentality was due to social and cultural realities. In the realities of everyday military life, contrary to established traditions, women often had to violate moral and ethical norms and cross gender boundaries. Despite the fact that the behavior of women did not correspond to generally accepted patriarchal norms, but, under certain circumstances, it turned out to be very effective. In the specific conditions of wartime, the atypical model of women's behavior did not cause condemnation in society. Attempts to regulate the extra-family life of the population were in conflict with established cultural traditions. It was revealed that the nature of the South Caucasian war contributed to the formation in women of a complex of special mental characteristics, pronounced masculine traits. Examples of the emancipation of women, the participation of disguised and armed women in the defensive battles of the South Caucasian War are revealed.

The principle of equality of men and women underlies the construction of a state of law and civil society, in which the main duty of the state is the recognition, observance and protection of the rights and freedoms of man and citizen, which are the highest value. It is no coincidence that the world community, represented by the UN, considers gender equality as an integral part of the general concept of equality. Modern democratic states consider equality and freedom to be basic social values and provide them with constitutional and legislative guarantees at the national level.

The resilience of the rights and freedoms of women in the South Caucasus can only be ensured by recognizing the value of each person, creating a favorable environment for his development, the fullest realization of his creative potential and creative abilities, the full disclosure of the essential forces and talents, which will allow everyone to make a full contribution to sustainable development. Acting as a kind of indicator of equality in the South Caucasian society, the principle of equality of rights and freedoms of men and women, gender equality, reveals very characteristic gender relationships, which, in the future, may become a determining factor in the development of public authorities and civil society.

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