RESEARCH NOTE

Researching the Chechen diaspora in Europe

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the reflection on the fieldwork conducted in 2014-15. The research analyzed the link and interplay between Chechen demographic dynamics and Russo-Chechen conflict. The question was approached reflexively: the research population consisted only of Chechen refugees in Europe, who provided their opinion concerning the whole nation on the relevant topic. This article justifies the choice of doing reflexive research. The main reasoning is related to inaccessibility of informants in the Chechen Republic. Furthermore, the article describes the pluses and minuses of this approach and presents the methodological choices made during the fieldwork and before. In sum, it intends to turn the gained experience into a transferable skill advising future researchers on the advantages and disadvantages of applied research methods and warns about the traps that they might face during the fieldwork.

KEYWORDS: Chechen; diaspora; conflict; fieldwork; reproduction

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> *"Research – like life – is a contradictory, messy affair"*
> (Plummer 2011, in Denzin and Lincoln eds. 2011, p. 195)

1. Introduction

This article focuses on the steps undertaken while qualitatively researching reproductive motivations and intentions of the Chechens. The research aimed to answer the question why Chechens prefer large families and how this preference is related to the Russo-Chechen conflict.

The main research tool was the semi-structured interview, and the research public consisted of Chechen refugees living in Europe since the beginning of the second Russo-Chechen war of 1999. Despite this specific target group, research focused on the entire Chechen population. In other words, the questions were formulated in a way to prompt the answers concerning the whole Chechen nation.

In justifying this reflexive approach, this article assesses its advantages and disadvantages (i.e. the accessibility of the Chechen population). This article also evaluates the efficacy and applicability of the chosen research methods. In addition, it considers issues a researcher can encounter while working with the Chechen diaspora, the nature of being an insider, and ways to approach the public. Thus, the article presents accumulated knowledge concerning researching the Chechen diaspora.

I begin with analysis of the preparation for fieldwork. This part reviews the process of crafting interview questions. They had to be designed the way that allows circumventing restrictive Chechen cultural taboos. The questions had to be suitable for the various age and gender groups, which would minimize the risk of losing informants due to the culturally inappropriate for them queries.

The article further presents the testing of research methods. It overviews the testing stages, test outcomes, and describes the pilot study. The article also evaluates the success of the chosen methods when applied in the field. It defends methodological changes due to unexpected issues in the field and considers traps that were or could have been encountered during fieldwork. The article advises future researchers on avoiding these traps and thus ensuring success in research.

In sum, the article proposes undergone fieldwork as a transferable skill for the benefit of researchers interested in working with the Chechen diaspora/refugees or similar communities. It also summarises the experience of conducting 110 interviews and eight group interviews (each group was eight to ten people), collecting 43 questionnaires, and using the method of delegated interview/survey.

2. Thinking through the questions

As literature on qualitative methods suggests, a researcher should be well prepared for fieldwork (see Creswell 2003; Creswell 2009; Denzin & Lincoln 1994; Denzin & Lincoln 2011; Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2006; Wood 2006). Besides being familiar with literature on a topic, mapping the field, and contacting gatekeepers, preparation also includes crafting questions for future interviews. In this case, questions had to focus on the reproductive motivations and intentions of the Chechens, which was a daunting task. I had to design them in an acceptable to the public way in order to gather data successfully. Being raised in Chechen culture, I was aware of cultural taboos that restrict conversations on the intimate topics even among the members of the same family or close friends. Therefore, I was afraid that my questions can be interpreted as inappropriate by the future participants. Especially, this fear was relevant to interviewing Chechen women and the elderly, which could have been interpreted as disrespect and cause a refusal to participate in research. The same questions posed to other categories of informants (youth or peers) could have prompt less severe reaction and could have even gained some answers rather succinct (e.g. 'All plans depend on God's will') and of little value. Therefore, circumventing cultural taboos and finding the ways of encouraging discourses on the reproduction were among my primary concerns.

These concerns proved legitimate. During fieldwork I faced polite refusals to elaborate on the topic of reproductive intentions, even though my questions adhered to the logic of the dialogue. For example, the reaction of one of my informants: 'I do not want to compromise our mutual respect by answering this question' (interview N 28). The informant preferred to avoid talking about personal repro-

ductive intentions because such conversation would have violated Chechen etiquette, which establishes distance between younger and older by limiting vocabulary and topics of a conversation.[1] This example demonstrates how easy an unprepared researcher might undermine research.

In order to minimize these risks, I intended to exclude from my pool the most sensitive category of informants - women. It seemed logical because family planning in Chechnya is uncommon – as my experience and existing literature suggested (see Baiev et al. 2004, p. 260; Lieven 2001, p. 131; Mamakayev 1973).[2] Nevertheless, discussions with scholars and colleagues about the project convinced me that it would render this study incomplete. I therefore added gender related considerations to the process of crafting interview questions.

To sum up, the questions about Chechen reproductive motivation had to be formulated using appropriate language acceptable to the public and sensitive to cultural, age, and gender specifications. The considerations over possible interview questions in researching this sensitive topic led to different methodological solutions, which are discussed later.

3. The first tests, pilot study

The process of systematizing research questions led to designing a questionnaire and encouraged the idea of conducting survey to gather data. I presumed that surveying potentially could help to reach a wider pool of informants including those who reside in Chechen Republic, because it does not require a researcher in the field (Lenth 2001). Moreover, surveying would provide freedom for the researcher to ask and for the participants to answer 'inacceptable' questions, thus helping to circumvent cultural taboos.

Another argument for using surveys is related to the feasibility of fieldwork in Chechnya. As it was identified by Albert (2014), the access to the research public

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[1] This was a reaction of a person 10-12 years older than me.
[2] This research revealed that family planning is becoming more common for the Chechens.

in the republic can be disrupted by local or Russian authority.[3] Surveying could overcome the necessity to obtain an official permission, because the questionnaires could have been distributed using social networks such as VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, which are quite popular among Chechens.

Moreover, surveying could have been considered as a less suspicious activity by the potential informants, unlike interviews as the example of the Canadian researcher Ratelle (2013, pp. 219-20) illustrates. Most probably, people avoided sincere answers considering him as not trustworthy and thus dangerous. This is absolutely normal in Chechen Republic, where people are terrified by the current Ramzan Kadyrov[4] regime.

In sum, surveys could be considered as a safer option and, therefore, to my mind, were superior to interviews. However, data collection using surveys from the very beginning raised two issues, one of which appeared to be unsolvable due to my limited funding and time.

Firstly, there was the question of a language. Knowing that majority of Chechens use Russian as a working language, I had prepared questionnaires translated into Russian. The English version of the questionnaire I intended to distribute among the younger generation of the Chechens in Europe, who rarely possess writing skills of Russian or Chechen. I also had the questionnaire translated into Arabic and Georgian, which are the working languages of the Chechens in Jordan and Georgia - two diaspora communities I could have potentially included into my research. Eventually, only Russian version of the questionnaire was used by the 'European Chechens.'

Secondly, the initial idea to distribute questionnaires in the Chechen Republic via social networks appeared to be problematic. Although the vast majority of Chechens have access to the Internet, it is usually limited to mobile phones, which restricts possibility to conduct survey due to technological difficulties. Nonetheless,

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[3] Even Chechen scholars are not willing to contact researchers associated with foreign Universities. I did not receive a reply to my second email from one of the Chechen scholars once she realised that I am not a student who had been delegated to study abroad by Kadyrov government.
[4] The Head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov had been a ruler of the republic *de facto* since 2004, and he was assigned for this post *de jure* in 2007.

this problem also seemed resolvable since my gatekeepers' promised me assistance in distributing hard copies of the questionnaire. However, this strategy failed.

Additional weaknesses of surveying, which appeared during fieldwork, eventually prevented me from using it as the main tool for gathering data. These weaknesses are discussed later, after the presentation of the testing process.[5]

The initial testing of the questionnaire was aimed to evaluate the comprehensiveness of the questions and the time necessary to complete in. Four of my friends volunteered for this. All are of different ethnicities, social statuses, gender, educations, and ages. However, seeking to approach closer to the field, I also tested it on three people of Chechen ethnicity, who were of different social backgrounds, educations, and ages. This last group was excluded from the informant list later. Feedback provided by both groups indicated areas where the re-formulation of questions and re-structuring of the questionnaire in more precise ways were possible. For instance, a note about the variety of primary identities people might have led to a reformulation from: 'Do you consider yourself a Muslim or a Chechen in the first place?' to 'Give several answers to the question of: Who am I?' I also removed some optional answers, clarified the assessment system, and specified terminology. Both tests provided that sufficient time to complete the questionnaire averaged between 40 minutes and one hour.

The questionnaire was also sent to contacts (gatekeepers) in Jordan and Georgia, who were keen to facilitate my research of long-established Chechen communities (150 and over 200 years respectively) in their countries. Their feedback varied: Georgian gatekeeper did not see any necessity to adapt the questionnaire for local consideration; whereas the Jordanian gatekeeper (of Chechen origin) asked me to remove all questions relating to politics, emphasizing the neutral political position of the Chechen diaspora in Jordan. Eventually, I complied with the Jordanian gatekeeper's recommendations and adopted the questionnaire for the final test.

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[5] In spite of my failure, surveying still seems as a good option for this kind of research. Therefore the strengths and weaknesses of the questionnaire are discussed further.

In spring 2014, I was invited to spend several days in the company of my compatriots, who were gathering in Belgium for a social meeting. The three days spent with them were fruitful. I conducted the pilot test interviewing 20 people and collecting 18 completed questionnaires. Two informants promised to return the questionnaire later and never did, which was the first alarm that the questionnaire is too long. This was not immediately apparent during the pilot. Most informants willingly agreed to complete the questionnaire and to be interviewed. To some extent, it was due to the friendly and trusting atmosphere at the gathering. Moreover, most of them knew me personally and those who did not were reassured by my rapport with the others. This also fostered positivity towards me and my work. Some participants even wished to refuse the University's policy of anonymity; however, some others (mostly representatives of Salafi Islam) were concerned about a possible data leak.

Overall, only one person refused to be interviewed, but agreed to complete the questionnaire, which justifies the strategy of having both options available. His refusal also demonstrated that a researcher should be very cautious when using research vocabulary. I realized it later that the word 'interview,' which was the main reason for the refusal, reminds to refugees of their first (often negative) experience after their arrival to a safe country: 'interview' run by immigration officers. Journalistic interviews also proved to be disappointing to Chechens, because the interviewee's words would often be misinterpreted. Moreover, disclosure of the interviewees' identities would happen on a regular basis, which raised security concerns and undermined trust in journalists, whilst simultaneously associating the word 'interview' with negativity. Therefore, I believe, researchers who work with refugees should consider replacing the word 'interview' with the more neutral 'conversation' or 'dialogue,' whilst formulating requests for interviews.

In sum, the pilot was successful. It confirmed that both methods (survey and interview) were effective in gathering data and to some extent compensated for each other's weaknesses – in the interview it was vocabularic misunderstanding, and in the questionnaire, its length. The time required for completing the questionnaire differed from 40 minutes to one hour and this length was too demanding for the

participants. An additional weakness to the questionnaire was too many open questions. The informants tended to skip them or to answer orally, which necessitated recording/writing down their answers after or during the interaction. These weaknesses became very obvious in the field.

Testing the interview method provided opportunities to elaborate on the crafted questions. The initial questions were revised and adjusted in accordance with the participants' reactions, making them comprehensible to a wider range of people. It further provided opportunities to formulate clarifying questions, which were sometimes necessary with less talkative informants.

During the pilot I had the possibility to interview twenty people of different ages (30-65 year olds),[6] educations, social backgrounds, religious denominations, and political views. The underrepresentation of younger cohorts, the supporters of the pro-Moscow Chechen government, and women was not considered problematic. The adaptation of the questionnaire to the needs of these categories of informants seemed unnecessary.

4. New and unexpected issues in the field

After the data-gathering tools were crafted and tested, I was ready to go into the field. Unfortunately, reality is frequently cruel to researchers even if they choreograph situations in advance. Once in the field, researchers can discover that their expectations are not met in practice. Therefore, practical application of research methods often requires adjustments and re-designs. This was exactly the case with my research.

The first engagement with my informants happened in Lithuania – so chosen by my experiences of living there. While working there, I also had contacted my gatekeepers in Chechnya, Jordan, and Georgia, asking them to distribute the questionnaire. The Chechen and Georgian gatekeepers (both university lecturers) planned to employ their students to assist in conducting the survey. The Georgian

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[6] The fieldwork proved that younger informants (20-25 year olds), who were raised (not born) in European countries had different reproductive motivations/intentions than those, whose identity was formed in Chechnya.

gatekeeper formed a research team, which conducted a multiday fieldwork in the Pankisi gorge.[7] I had proposed a different strategy to the Chechen gatekeeper: he could involve his students as assistants, with an aim of 10-15 filled questionnaires for each student in their own neighborhood across the republic. The printing costs of the questionnaires would be covered by me. The Jordanian gatekeeper decided to create a special Facebook group, in which all potential informants (123 members) were included. The questionnaire was uploaded to this group, so everyone was able to download it and to submit the filled form via email or Facebook.

Work began effectively, but the results were disappointing. The Chechen gatekeeper eventually refused to work on the project due to security concerns. 'It's not a good time to do this type of research here,' he stated. The Jordanian group was not very active either. Despite the fact that the questionnaire was translated into Arabic, only ten Facebook group members completed it. Only the Georgian team, who actually went into the field, succeeded in collecting data from 104 informants. This suggested that qualitative surveys (lengthy and with many open questions) can be effective if the researcher supervises data gathering directly. Furthermore, the Georgian team's report stated that people demonstrated both, interest in the research and a willingness to collaborate. This positive outcome was achieved due to the fact that many informants knew me personally (I visited the Pankisi gorge several times in 2011-2013), as my Georgian gatekeeper stated later.

Meanwhile, I contacted my informants in Lithuania. Unfortunately, most of the Chechens in Lithuania I knew had left the country. Over two weeks in Lithuania, I managed to interview only eight people.

The following month I worked in Norway with even more disappointing results. I managed to interview seven people over a month. I compensated for this by carrying out five unplanned interviews with the visitors of my host in London, where I had stopped for three days en route to St Andrews. This gave me the idea that being a guest in a Chechen house can increase a researcher's chances to gather data and to network.

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[7] Pankisi gorge is a Georgian territory mainly populated by the ethnic Chechens.

The inefficiency of my fieldwork shows the importance of another aspect of the preparation. It is always better to have agreements with potential informants in advance. The snowball sampling for personal interviews can fail because potential informants are busy. The researcher should bear in mind the time of day and year (working hours, Ramadan, etc.) as well as the necessity to travel (to the interview point and back home).

All respondents in Lithuania, Norway, and London were not just inter-viewed, but also asked to complete questionnaires. In some cases, I had to read the questions and write down the answers myself due to poor literacy or laziness of my informants. This also underlined the fact that time-consuming questionnaires with many open questions require the presence of the researcher in the field. Moreover, such supervision is needed because sometime informants tend to misinterpret the questions and provide irrelevant answers. As a result, these two separate tools – the interview and the survey – gradually merged into a form of semi-structured inter-view, which became the main tool for research. The questionnaire turned into a set of the questions for interview.

It is notable that the failure of the surveys in Chechnya removed any possi-bility of access public in the republic. Since the region is considered not safe, alter-native ways to access the public there would be by using a phone or Skype.[8] How-ever, these are not safe options for respondents either; as has been demonstrated by several infamous cases in 2013-16. The authors of some critical notes concerning the Chechen government, circulated via Messengers, were tracked down and public-ly humiliated after.[9] People are therefore very cautious about media of communica-

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[8] On the risks and difficulties of conducting research in Chechnya see Ratelle (2013, pp. 200-6). For the researchers of Chechen origin it is even more dangerous, because even being citizens of other countries (like myself) they are more endangered and less protected than those of non-Chechen origin. In the case of abduction or incarceration, the Chechen researchers have fewer chances to receive support from other governments, as it is shown by several cases that I know.

[9] The method of public humiliation for the critique of the government in Chechnya is described in an article published 23 December 2015 on the website "Kavkazskiy Uzel". "Eksperty zayavili o sistemnom priminenii metoda unizheniya zhitelei Chechni za kritiku Kadyrova" ("The experts claim – the inhabitants of Chechnya are being humiliated systematically for the critical notes about the Kadyrov's government"). Available online http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/274817/ Accessed on December 24, 2015.

tions. Thus, by pain of circumstance, the ultimate decision to restrict research to the Chechen diaspora was made.

Three more factors informed this decision. Besides relative ease of access, the Chechens of the diaspora are less concerned with their security and were eager to participate once their anonymity was guaranteed. Participants would have to be advised that all gathered data was stored and coded properly, which guaranteed limited access to it. I also had to reassure them that I was not connected to the Russian or Chechen authorities, or to law enforcement agencies. Snowball sampling guaranteed this assurance, and proved most ideal. Those who recommended an informant to me consequently introduced me to the informant, which served as a credible reference. In some cases, this kind of recommendation was insufficient, and I had to give extensive answers to questions such as: 'Who pays for your research?' 'Why the University is interested in this research?' 'How did you get to Scotland?' Keeping all of the above in mind, I inferred that researchers of a different ethnicity would probably have had an easier time accessing the public, because they are not immediately associated with the possibility of inflicting troubles on an informant or his/her relatives in Chechnya.[10]

The second reason for researching Chechen diaspora was possibility to pursue reflexive research, which was possible due to the technological progress, 'young age,' and large size of the Chechen diaspora in Europe. The young age of the diaspora together with modern means of transportation and communication implies a tight connection that Chechens maintain with the homeland. As was stated by one of my informants (interview N 31), 'The Chechens of the last wave of emigration [1994-…] differ from those who left the homeland earlier (meaning those who left for the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century) by maintaining connections with their relatives and friends in the republic.' These connections allowed my informants to observe and analyze/compare behavioral patterns of Chechen families

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[10] Szczepanikova (2014) presents an example to suggest that Chechens in Europe keep a distance from one another. "For example, since 2009, they have explicitly requested not to have a Chechen translator for their [asylum] interviews, which was not the case before. They worry that their personal information might be misused in some way."

in the republic and Europe. In addition, the young age of the diaspora suggests that both entities follow the same pattern of family size and identity based behavioral models. This assumption was strengthened by the fact that the majority of the interviewees expressed tenacious attachment to ethnic identity, which, as research demonstrates, plays a significant role in shaping Chechen preferences towards family size. In turn, this finding was supported by the previously conducted studies of Abbasi-Shavazi and McDonald (2000), Duncan et al. (1965), Goldberg (1959), Freedman and Slesinger (1961), Little and Rogers (2007), Rosenwaike (1973), and Stephen and Bean (1992).

The numerical size of the diaspora in Europe suggests a wide range of the views that exist in Chechen society, which allows gathering of all necessary information without travelling to the republic. Therefore, my findings have a possibly useful hypothetical extension – I argue that very similar results would occur if the research had been conducted in Chechnya, having security factor eliminated.

Thirdly, issues regarding researching the diaspora were not numerous and were easily solved. Besides the aforementioned security concerns, there was an issue of travelling across a vast territory, which required time and money. The lack of both necessitated a change of tactics in my research by moving fieldwork online. I installed a program on my computer that allowed me to record the conversations with my informants, and enabled me to continue my fieldwork without travelling. Interviewing online proved much more efficient and convenient for both researcher and respondent.

It also opened the possibility of another method: that of the group conversation. Questions posed to my online informants sometimes caused a similar reaction: 'You should talk to…,' directing me to a key figure. Eventually, I managed to gather several of them and some random Chechens (10-12 people in total) of different ages for a Skype group-conversation to discuss the themes of my research. This became a routine meeting that took place every Saturday and lasted for two months. Each conversation was two to three hours long and was recorded, which informants were aware of. Some of the informants (mostly the key figures) attended

every meeting regularly; another half would constantly change. A person of respectful age (and unquestionable reputation) volunteered to moderate the meetings, gather questions for a discussion beforehand and give the opportunity (and sometimes urge) participants to express their opinions. These gatherings, hardly a focus group, nonetheless performed the function of one, confirming the prevalent views in society with regard to Chechen identity and demography.

In summary, by merging the initial tools into a semi-structured interview, I eventually consolidated a research method suitable to my field. At the same time, by moving the field online, I modified this method with additional benefits, such as the possibility to conduct group interviews.

5. Traps and pitfalls in the field

Although I lost the opportunity to observe my informants by moving the field online, the pilot and first interviews conducted during the personal meetings (30 percent of all interviews) gave me an idea what kind of traps I should avoid. I identified three of them.

The first trap I faced was related to the informants' partiality. It is common for members to highlight their own group in a positive way. Therefore, a researcher should have a solid knowledge of the subject before going into the field, so s/he will notice lies or attempts to distort information.

Most of my informants were sincere because it would be difficult to 'improve the image' of the Chechens without me (a person of the same origin) noticing. The probability of deceit would be higher with a less prepared researcher of a different origin. In such cases, a researcher can either confront the lying informant or continue interviewing whilst bearing the deception in mind, as Wood (2006) suggests. Being of the same origin, I had the luxury of indicating the biases of my informants without offending them. There were a few cases when my informants tried to present normative Chechen behavior (the way it is supposed to be) as actual (the way it is). As was explained by one informant after interview, he did not want 'to spoil the image of the Chechens.' The conversation we had off-the-record dif-

fered from the one that I have recorded. I noted that his examples opposed to previous ones. 'The work that you are doing…,' - was his answer, - 'Someone will read it…' He meant that only a positive image of the Chechens was 'permitted to the outsiders.' After that, he reassured me that all his examples were nevertheless truthful, but represented opposite poles of Chechen society. He said: 'Besides those who are trying their best to live according to Chechen ethics, there are always those who will spoil this image because of their unethical behavior' (interview N 5). This was the dominant view held by nearly all my informants, most of whom cited examples of both positive and negative Chechen behaviors throughout the study.

The second trap I tried to avoid was my personal biases. I sought impartiality the way proposed by fieldwork experts. The most common way to do so is to acknowledge own preferences, which prevents from the biased selection of information (see Henn, Weinstein, and Foard 2006, pp. 153-4). Another type of impartiality, which I also faced, is 'becoming/being native' or identifying yourself with research public. In my case, I was native from the very beginning due to my ethnicity. Keeping this aspect in mind, according to Creswell (2009, p. 192), Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 11) is an effective way confronting the possibility of falling into this trap. Moreover, being native may render research deeper, the quality that I sought during my fieldwork.

The third trap I faced was pressure from my respondents. In my case, they expected me to write a 'correct study' of Chechnya. These expectations stemmed from the dissatisfaction with the literature on the Russo-Chechen wars. The dominant view of most participants was that there it is only a small segment literature reflects the Chechen perspective. Therefore, some participants would 'greet' me as one who will 'finally write a correct study' implying concealment of negative or sensitive information, 'because otherwise our enemies will learn about us and will be able to destroy us.' 'The Chechens managed to survive because they kept their identity well hidden. Your research will make us more vulnerable for globalization and Russification' (interview N 6). Similar sentiment was expressed to Lieven (2001, p. 352) by a Chechen in Moscow: 'We Chechens keep our secrets, and none of our

people will talk about them to an outsider.'

Summing up, as my fieldwork proved, a researcher should constantly be aware of his own position in order to avoid the analyzed traps. These traps are usually set by informants; however, a 'native' researcher can also be trapped by the desire to present the investigated group in better colors. Acknowledgement of the personal position helps to avoid this trap and also adds validity to a conducted study.

6. Conclusion

This article observed practical decisions taken in researching Chechen reproductive motivations in relation to the Russo-Chechen conflict. It presented and justified the choices made in methodology and information gathering.

It analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of the considered methods, the interview and survey. The survey proved inefficient. Interviews, despite their limited capacity due to the requirement of a physically present researcher, turned out to be a successful tool in researching Chechen reproductive motivations.

The article also presented the process of crafting and testing these tools and fieldwork. It described the process of applying research methods step by step whilst presenting their advantages and disadvantages. This was considered necessary to achieve two objectives: 1) to illuminate the way of validating the decisions concerning methodology; 2) to inform future researchers of possible traps and pitfalls and by doing this to attain impartiality as far as possible.

The first goal was achieved through detailed description of the process of crafting and testing research tools, as well as the strategy of approaching the field. The designed questionnaire (despite its inefficiency) was useful, as it constituted the background for the interviews. It was also preferred form of participation for some informants which justified the strategy to have the questionnaire as an additional tool.

The experience gained during fieldwork, which was presented as a transferable skill, helped to achieve the second goal. This article was written to provide other researchers with practical advice. It suggested these lessons: 1) to bear in mind

the time and place for interviews, 2) to think through appropriate language for use in terms of vocabulary and communication, and 3) to remove any possible security concerns that informants might have. The latter is especially important for those who would consider conducting research in Chechnya.

The search for impartiality – was pursued as recommended in cited literature (see Creswell 2009, p. 192; Denzin and Lincoln 2011, p. 11; Henn, Weinstein, and Foard 2006, pp. 153-4). The article demonstrated that the acknowledgement of the researcher's place and the discussion of possible biases help to achieve impartiality and to avoid pitfalls that a researcher might face during fieldwork.

In sum, the recommendations provided in this article should not be considered universal; solutions that worked here might be less efficient for others. Therefore, as Creswell (2003, p. 201) suggests, it is best to be flexible and adapt in accordance with the situation.

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