

THE “MORAL CODEX” OF A RESEARCHER AS A BEARER OF CULTURE

TATIANA MINNIYAKHMETOVA

All researchers have their own methods of conducting fieldwork and making available information on the culture they have studied. However, a researcher that is simultaneously a bearer of culture must follow at least three principal ethic rules: First, there is knowledge or information that could be available to anyone. Second, there is knowledge or information that the researcher is initiated into, but the researcher is not allowed by the informant to make it available to anyone. Third, there are prohibitions against sharing certain knowledge or information. My research object is a diaspora group and it therefore requires a special approach to fieldwork.

Keywords: *researcher, fieldwork, ethic codes, diaspora.*

Raziskovalci na številne načine in z različnimi metodami opravljajo terensko delo in omogočajo informacije o raziskovani kulturi. V vsakem primeru pa mora raziskovalec, ki je tudi sam nosilec kulture, slediti vsaj trem osnovnim etičnim pravilom: nekatere informacije so lahko dostopne komurkoli; določena znanja ali informacije lahko raziskovalec le selektivno objavi; nekaterih znanj ali informacij pa ni dovoljeno širiti. Avtorica raziskuje diasporo, ki zahteva poseben terenski pristop.

Ključne besede: *raziskovalec, terensko delo, etični kod, Diaspora*

The object of research is the primary and most basic starting point for any researcher. An object being studied with a close relationship to the conceptual framework demands a complex of knowledge and activities from an anthropologist that fall within the interests of the object. This object is an ethnos.

The main object of my scholarship is one of the diaspora groups of the Udmurts living outside of Udmurtia (in Russia); that is, outside of the main ethnic group. The fact that it is a diaspora must always be borne in mind; it must be treated as a diaspora, as another structure and system representing a bordering zone and possessing its own liminality. In this case, the diaspora under consideration is a group of Udmurt migrants from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries that left the main group and settled in forest belonging to Bashkir landowners on the left bank of the Kama River next to the Urals in the Russian Empire. In the new lands, they found themselves among Muslims and Orthodox Christians, “in the context-generating dimension of neighborhood” (Appadurai 1996: 184). Over time, this context influenced the regional and ethnic formation of this group. This diaspora group, referred to as Trans-Kama Udmurts, was not absolutely isolated from the main group. Since the twentieth century it has maintained a close relation with the main ethnic group. Nevertheless, “a diaspora, like a water drop, does not simply reflect in itself what is going on in the main ethnos. In the entire ethnic process a diaspora has its own special role, which is connected with accentuating certain value dominants, which correlate with an ethnic

culture” (Lur’e 1998: 382). Such a phenomenon is possible because of the diaspora’s liminal status. Liminality “means a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal Liminality is full of potency and potentiality” (Turner 1979: 465–466). Liminality favors processes, advancement, and progress; here, in the bordering zones, it is happening more than in the center. Notwithstanding, diasporas “should not be seen as islands isolated from one another but in relation to one another and to the main culture” (Siikala & Ulyashev 2011: 18). The borderline position of ethnic groups allows the researcher to consider them as specific communities (Shabayev & Sharapov 2011: 101) whose differences can be seen at a social and cultural level. In the process of exploring diasporas, it is necessary to choose the correct or right method of approach to research, at both the complex and individual level.

The fieldwork experiences of prominent anthropologists and educators are well known, and so it is not necessary to discuss them here. I would like to discuss my own field-based research experiences among the Udmurt people, mostly among the Trans-Kama diaspora group, in the region where I was born and grew up. I therefore consider myself to belong to this tradition and culture.

In my preliminary research, I found that there were no systematically collected archival materials about this ethnic group. I could only find some short notes and publications from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Soviet period. Hence, it was necessary to undertake regular and methodical efforts to organize effective field research. In my opinion, one of the most complicated issues in anthropological studies is field research, which includes all preparation activities, the actual investigative work, analysis and interpretation of the material collected, and transferring this knowledge to others. From the beginning and in each case, we have to consider the research findings for the researcher and for the people examined.

All researchers have their own methods and ways to make available the information of the culture they have studied. However, a researcher that is also a bearer of the culture has to follow at least three codes of ethical principles: First, there is knowledge or information that could be available to anyone. Second, there is knowledge or information that the researcher is initiated into, but the researcher is not allowed by the informant to make it available to anyone. Third, there are prohibitions against sharing certain of the informant’s knowledge or information.

In the 1980s, at the beginning of my own ethnographic study of the Udmurts, I visited all of my relatives and almost all of the local groups within this diaspora. Because of this familiarity, this initial fieldwork was more or less comfortable and effective at the same time. I could “interview” people that I knew; furthermore, they supported me and accompanied me to their neighbors and villagers. They helped me greatly because they were introduced to my research goals and interests. They were thankful that I paid them the honor of visiting them, and they were very glad that my parents advised me and referred me to them, and so on. I was content with the success of my connections and research experience during this period. Nevertheless, I could not note all of the information about private or family life, past and present.

There were a lot of settlements where I did not have any relatives and I also planned to research and explore them. I continued to expand my ongoing "geography of exploration" and conduct new journeys and new fieldwork. In these subsequent travels it was not easy for me to gain my informants' confidence. People were afraid of my interests and aims and frightened about why they were being questioned and what kind of consequences could follow. It is not without reason that my questions resulted in such a reaction and behavior of the informants; it was not long ago that these people were subject to Stalin's regime and suffered various needless punishments, imprisonments, and so on. I had to apply to the local intelligentsia, if any such person had ever existed there. I accepted help from everybody and I never chose my helpers. Furthermore, I never was refused an interview and I also never demanded any information. Every time, I first declared what I was doing, why I was there, and I tried to explain that I was interested in their life in the past. The females that were older than me referred to me as "my daughter" and the males called me "young sister." In each case regarding my questions about their lives in the past I received the same answer: "It was very hard." I could not get any more information. I tried to tell them what my grandparents and people from the same village had done in the past, so they could join the conversation more easily. In this way I could collect ethnographic material in general, but I still could not note their names as I had with my own relatives, and in some cases I was restricted to recording musical folklore and not verbal lore. However, in due course I met numerous people and made the acquaintance of both old and young people. Often I was surprised at somebody's willingness to talk, especially if they told their life stories. They used these interviews as opportunities to speak about private life and very confidential matters. It is true, a "researcher is often the only person interested in the informants' lives" (Fikfak 2004: 77). At the same time I also had a chance to know more; those stories revealed different aspects of life. Some of my informants were interested in my private life, and we "exchanged" information. Sometimes they asked me to provide them with recent laws and rules concerning human or social rights, pensions, inheritance, and so on. Many of the elderly females that became closer and more intimate asked me to think of them after their departure in commemoration rituals.

The political situation in Russia changed dramatically in the 1990s. After perestroika, some researchers, ethnographers, and folklore specialists from Udmurtia and other academic institutions of Russia conducted expeditions in this region. Furthermore, foreign Finno-Ugric scholars from Estonia, Finland, Hungary, and other non-Finno-Ugric countries carried out fieldwork among this diaspora and collected materials. In this period people became more open and frank; they wanted to talk. However, if someone wanted to guard private secrets and not disclose confidential information or hidden forms of rituals, he or she would say: "You did not hear it, you did not see it" or "I did not see it and you did not see it." If it was absolutely forbidden to talk about some things, the informant said, "You do not know it." In this way I could learn more clearly and comprehend the informants' wishes.

Today some collections of myths, folk-poetry, and religious, ritual, and everyday life have been published as a result of those field studies by Udmurt, Russian, and foreign researchers.

Over time I also published some articles about my field research, and I participated in various local TV and radio programs. The role that my field research played there is stated 1999 in the Udmurt newspaper *Oshmes*. Most reports were given in the local dialect of this Udmurt diaspora, and this newspaper was devoted to this ethnic group. The editorial staff of this newspaper asked me to write articles on my subject, which I did. As a result, I became increasingly welcome in the villages, and my name was known by almost every family.

Next let me briefly consider some behavioral problems of scholars in the course of field research, and the problems that may arise during fieldwork. While I was observing people, I found that I should look and behave very carefully according to each new situation. The outward appearance of a researcher has great significance, especially when the researcher is observing religious ceremonies and rituals, but also in everyday situations. Here I describe one example of this from my fieldwork. In 1989, I participated in a fieldwork expedition organized by the National Museum of Udmurtia. Some colleagues were accompanied by their children. Usually those children stayed near their parents, but sometimes they were left on a street, waiting for the end of the interview. One day, two girls about ten years old stayed out without their parents and discovered a boat on the river not far from the village. Of course the children wanted to row, so they sat in the boat and the boat took them downstream. They tried to draw the boat up to the river bank, and one of the girls fell into the water. Fortunately, nothing serious happened to them. The girl was wet and she had to change clothes, but there were not any clothes for her to change into. However, I had my ritual costume in our bus. I used it when our group performed in Udmurt folk costumes for the villagers in the clubs. So, very quickly I took my clothes off, put on the ritual costume, and gave my dry everyday clothes to the girl. Soon an old woman passed by us and she said, "Look at this, all dressed up. Now the weather will become worse!" I realized what it could mean and the villagers could be hurt because of my ritual costume, which did not correspond to everyday life. I decided to stay in the bus and not stick my head out. Through my action, we discovered that something wrong had been done. It is true what a Russian scholar said about field research: "Even a gesture can be risky!" (Chesnov 1999: 3). Researchers need to be aware of their own behavior as well as their colleagues' behavior, especially if there is a need for the research to continue with trust and cooperation. "Research in the field can never follow a set of rigidly defined procedures; it must always remain flexible" (Brickhouse 1989: 7).

Any researcher has to learn to catch the meaning of a moment. This is not easy, and anybody can be in a good or a bad mood or state during the researcher's visit. So, we have to learn to thoughtfully probe feelings and to adapt to the conditions of each situation. However, each effort made to not destroy a moment is ineffectual because the presence of a researcher changes everything in the familiar and habitual atmosphere of a family or the entire village. Hence, we never can observe the real and genuine situation; in some sense everything is playing and performing in the life of the society observed. A researcher will never experience the natural course of things. Even in my village, where I belong to the

same religious group, I cannot observe the natural course of rituals. As a researcher, I am now the outsider, and my presence changes the usual atmosphere. The most that I can do is treat all cultures with respect as viable religions and spiritualities in their own right.

The researcher's next task is to analyze and interpret the authentic information and to publish it—to bring to light meanings and content that can be understood for others and will not hurt the informants. After it is published, it is important to consider the reaction of the people being studied. I experienced various cases when I conducted fieldwork with my colleagues or accompanied those that asked me to help make a trip to the Udmurts. Except for genuine scholars, some of them were just searching for the seamy and negative side of life, and others were trying to discover some sensational events and cases. It also was interesting for me to look through their publications. For my own publications, when I visited my informants after my articles were published, I asked them, "Did I write this correctly? Should I do it another way?" People also talked about publications by others, and sometimes remarked that one or another visitor had understood them in a different way, but they did not say that it was not correct or that it was false; they were discreet and brief. People are also very interested in what foreign visitors think of and write about them. I told them that the foreigners thanked them for the hospitality; the hospitality of the ordinary people is great and invaluable.

Today scholarly publications are readily available worldwide. This means that for any researcher the results of their activities will be appreciated positively or could result in a low opinion. An anthropologist should "glance back" while doing his or her own work, both fieldwork and analysis of collected materials. In any case, it is not easy to predict what will happen.

There are many instructions and publications on the importance of ethical considerations in field research. I agree that "a radically different approach to ethics that focuses on particular human relationships may be more useful than general principles in making ethical decisions in research" (Brickhouse 1989: 4). The researcher is dependent on his or her informants' reactions to the research; this plays a role in both fieldwork and publication of the collected findings.

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“MORALNI KODEKS” RAZISKOVALCA, NOSILCA KULTURE

O pomenu etičnih vidikov pri terenskem delu so napisane številne razprave, prav tako je objavljenih veliko smernic. Pri tem se je mogoče strinjati s trditvijo, da »je lahko radikalno drugačen pristop k etiki, ki se osredotoča na določena človeška razmerja, pri etičnih odločitvah v raziskavi uporabnejši od splošnih načel« (Brickhouse 1989: 4). Raziskovalec je odvisen od informatorjevih ali informatorkinih reakcij na raziskavo; tako pri terenskem delu kot pri izdaji zbranih odkritij imajo zelo pomembno vlogo Avtorica, raziskovalka, hkrati nosilka kulture, na primeru domačega, izvornega okolja premišlja o tem, kako je mogoče slediti osnovnim etičnim pravilom, katera znanja ali informacije lahko objavi, da so dostopne komurkoli; katere informacije, ki so mu kot nosilcu kulture dostopne, naj selektivno zadrži in za katere informacije so tabu in velja zanje prepoved objave, saj so namenjene izključno skupnosti, iz katere izhajajo.

Assoc. Prof. Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, Institut für
Geschichtswissenschaften und Europäische Ethnologie,
Universität Innsbruck, minnijah@hotmail.com