



Qualitative research and fieldwork in a foreign culture: Comparing Russia and Cambodia

Advanced Training in Research Methods Conference

University of Glasgow

30.11.2012

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How context affects your research plan?

- History of fear & foreigners – two different approaches
 - Russia: foreigners as external threat; foreign agent, spy
 - Cambodia: foreigners as an aide of an other clan; *Khmer Rouge* or government
- Social order and power hierarchy – many similarities
 - Patriarchal – male dominance
 - Patrimonial & communitarian – social control & cohesion (Vorkuta coal mono-town ; Tonle Sap Vietnamese floating & Cambodian nomad village)
 - Power of clans: professional (*shahtery*, Gazprom) & spatial (village clan)

Avoiding biased information

- Several ways to acquire your research data: observations, interviews, documents & media
- Main issues concerning data collection
 - *Pavement bias*: avoiding the easiest & obvious
 - *Gatekeepers*: often necessary, but “dangerous”
 - Risks related to *snowballing*: enforcement of hegemonic narrative
 - *Geo-governmentality*: ask how (use of) space / resources / livelihoods are intertwined with local ways of knowing and doing

Valuable research from a foreign context

- *Confirmability* (justification of choices & logics) central, not so much *validity* (study what you claim) & *reliability* (repeatability of research)
 - "Thick" description of your observations & steps taken
 - Researcher's position: topic-wise & data-wise
- Position and avoiding biases
 - Language,
 - Nationality & ethnicity,
 - Gender,

 - Political stand, religion & worldview,
 - Appearance & clothing

Conducting research in your context

- **CONTEXT:** Familiarise with the social order, power and how these are linked to the geographic context (space, resources & livelihoods)
- **YOU vs. THEM:** Think of possible biasing issues
- **FIELD-WORK STRATEGY:** How to avoid the biases and take the context into account?
- **REPORTING:** Thick description & your positions