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From the village to the city

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2011

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Caro, E. (2011). *From the village to the city: the adjustment process of internal migrants in Albania*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. [s.n.].

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4

METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK

To do qualitative research means to go past the known and to see the world with the eyes of participants.

(Corbin and Strauss, 2008)

4.1 Introduction

In this section, I will discuss the methodology and the fieldwork conducted for this study. First, I will justify my choice of an ethnographic approach based on a qualitative methodology. Then I will proceed to discuss the data collection techniques, in depth interviews, participant observation, informal interviews, group discussion and visual methods. This is followed by an explanation of the data analyses and the software used. Next, I will introduce the research sites and the reason why they were chosen. I conclude with some lessons learned and ethical considerations.

4.2 Methodological choice – Ethnographic approach

The goal and the objectives of a given research project determine the choice of the methodological approach. As such, a researcher can choose to test a given theory through empirical data, opting for a deductive approach, or to build a theoretical understanding of a phenomenon from an inductive data-driven approach. A combination of both approaches is often also used.

This study concerns people's behaviour and perceptions and as such requires close engagement with the study population. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008:16) to do qualitative research means to go past the known and to see the world with the eyes of participants, to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomena from the perspective of the people. Observing their behaviour in the context in which it occurs is a characteristic of the ethnographic approach (Nurani, 2008). Qualitative research gives the researcher the possibility to get at the "inner experience of the study participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; 12). According to Nurani (2008), when applying an ethnographic approach, the researcher interprets the phenomenon or population under observation using the voices of the study participants. Wiersma (1986) maintains that through an ethnographic approach, the researcher can reach people and interact with them, see how they behave and learn what their concerns, points of views and perceptions are.

Qualitative research has become a useful tool through which to uncover the experiences of people undergoing change in the context of development (Tinker, 1990). It provides more in-depth understanding that helps to better explain migrant livelihoods. Moreover, when complex and contemporary phenomena are being investigated over which the researcher has no control, case studies are particularly useful. One of the strengths of this particular strategy is that it allows for a holistic and real-life picture of the phenomena being researched to be developed (Yin 1991) – in this research the adjustment of internal migrants in a suburban area of Tirana. By choosing an ethnographic approach based on qualitative methods and a case study, we can explore at depth the realities, experiences and trajectories of rural-to-urban migrants in Albania.

The primary interest of this research was to find out how was the migration process happening and what other processes were taking place in the destination choice (chapter 1). The aim was to make the voices of migrants heard and to understand their perceptions. To explore how rural migrants took the decision to move to the city, the strategies they used to settle in their destination and the ways they cope with everyday life, there is a need to understand and to shed light on the migrant's point of view, behaviour and social context (Blumer, 1969). The focus is especially on the individual migrants and their thoughts, feelings and perceptions. The aim is to reveal the experiences of individual migrants and ground them in their socio-physical context. To gain insight of the migrant's perceptions, a combination of several methods was used, such as in-depth interviews, participant observations, visual methods and field diaries.

Following the ethnographic approach, key themes were not established prior to the research (Wiersma, 1986; Gay and Airasian, 1992; Tuckman, 1999), but emerged during the feasibility study. A detailed guide for the fieldwork was constructed based on the key themes which emerged during the feasibility study.

The present research is exploratory and descriptive, in that it aims to explore the causes of migration, migrant experiences and the impact of migration on livelihoods. Kamza was chosen as the case study since it stands as a symbol of mass internal migration for the whole country.

4.3 Stages of the field work

This research went through two main stages: a) pilot study, b) fieldwork

a) Pilot study

As a first stage a three-month feasibility study (August–October 2008) was carried out to develop an exploratory framework. It was a small-scale study to explore the research sites selected and the migrant population in Kamza Municipality. The feasibility study included a small number of participants (n=15), with ten in-depth interviews and five expert interviews. The study was limited to fifteen participants as this number was considered sufficient to determine the feasibility of a larger study and it was possible to conduct the interviews and to engage in participant observations within the feasibility study period.

The main goal of the feasibility study was to understand the macro and micro-context of Kamza and its migrant community, to identify the key themes, concepts and hypotheses for the conceptual model, and to collect existing documents and archival records to validate the goal of the research. Moreover, it provided and developed connection and further contacts with institutions, individuals, NGOs, CBOs and other actors in the field. It was a first important step in the preparation towards the extended fieldwork.

b) Field work

After the feasibility study, I returned to Holland for few months to analyse the data and to explore the key themes which emerged. After analysing the data and writing up a report, an in-depth interview guide was prepared for the fieldwork. With the interview guide, I returned to Albania for the fieldwork, which was carried out between March and November 2009 at eight sites in the Kamza Municipality (see Figure 4.1). The research sites for the ethnographic study were identified during previous pilot research.

The purpose of the fieldwork was to gain greater insight and to explore the perceptions, experiences, opinions and feelings of migrants regarding their migration process, the social and economic situation, community and their adjustment process in this community. The information used for this research was collected from a variety of sources consisting of: 1) a series of in-depth interviews, 2) expert interviews, 3) participant observation, 4) visual methods, and 5) field diaries.

1) In-depth interviews

A total of 40 in-depth interviews were conducted during the fieldwork. All the respondents were rural-to-urban migrants who migrated to Kamza since 1990. Among respondents were women and men, the better-off and the poor, newcomers and long-term migrants, young and old, Muslims and Christians. The socioeconomic status of migrants ranged from lower to middle-class. The number of participants (40) was not determined in advance but in the field as a saturation point was reached (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Ages ranged from 18 to 60. In the research sites I worked with four women and three men as key informants. The participants were identified with the help of social workers operating in the area and key informants through snowball methods. The in-depth interviews were carried out in the Albanian language. The in-depth interviews ranged from 60 to 95 minutes per respondent. The interviews with women were conducted at their homes and within CBOs, while the interviews with men were conducted in coffee houses and at their places of work. All the interviews were tape recorded with the oral consent of the respondents. The interview started with an introduction to our research and to the researcher. After the oral consent of the respondent was obtained, the interview was conducted.

The whole interview guide (see Appendix 1) was divided into six main sections. The sections included background characteristics, origins and migration history, social networks, community feeling and experience, work and financial situation, perception of adjustment and, towards the end, a few wind-down questions on future plans for further or return migration. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher. At this stage, the transcripts were preserved in their original language (Albanian) with the aim to preserve the originality, the metaphors, symbols and proverbs used by the respondents. The quotations from the respondents used in the findings have been translated into English.

2) *Expert interviews*

Expert interviews were conducted with researchers, NGOs and local authorities. There is one interview with the Mayor of Kamza, two with representatives of an NGO working on projects in Kamza Municipality and two with experts and researchers in the field of migration studies. The purpose of the expert interviews was to develop an understanding of the economic, social and infrastructural transformation of the Kamza Municipality over recent decades, the role of migration as facilitator of these transformations and the adjustment processes of the migrant community into the context of Kamza Municipality and the wider context of Tirana.

The recruitment method for this part was based on the researcher's previous contacts with NGOs, researchers and local authorities. The experts were contacted in advance and were informed about the project. In the selection of the experts, specific importance was accorded their level of representation – different levels were sought for (regional, researchers and experts from NGOs involved in projects in the area). We could thus collect information and opinions from different point of views. The whole interview guide was divided into four main topics (see Appendix 2). The topics included the socioeconomic transformation of Kamza Municipality, the role of migration, the migration and adjustment process of migrants, and the future potential and perspectives for the development of the region. The same procedure was followed in transcribing expert interviews as was followed for the in-depth interviews.

3) *Participant Observation*

Participant observation is considered the most important method of collecting data in an ethnographic study (Herbert, 2000). The participation of the researcher can be at different levels of interaction. McCall and Simmons (1969) recognize three different levels of observation and participation: participant as observer, observer as participant complete participant. During the fieldwork I employed all three levels of observation. At first, being an outsider and trying to become familiar with the migrant community, I decided to participate as an observer. I spent time with women and young migrants in social centres. I participated in their group discussions and informal meetings, always without participating – simply being present and only explaining why I was there. Once the migrant community became accustomed to my presence and project, I started to participate more actively. In order to feel part of the community and to gain the community trust I spent considerable time with the migrant community. At this stage I visited migrants at home at almost daily gatherings, where we had coffee or tea, or using the outdoor spaces just in front of their homes to exchange news and chat about various issues. I was invited into the houses of migrants to try some traditional dishes from their places of origin and I would end up taking some of the food back home. I participated with women and young people gathering in the CBOs, where I had vigorous discussions with them. And then, as a third stage I started to contribute more to the community, reaching the level of complete participation, where the migrants themselves

invited me to take part in social and community activities, birthday parties, trips, excursions etc. At that point, I decided to live in the community for a period. Initially, I had decided to stay for a month but in the end I stayed two months. I lived in the house of one of my key participants, Antoneta. Her husband was an emigrant to Greece and she was living alone with her two children in a two-story house. Living in Kamza and together with the migrant community increased my chances of being accepted and becoming part of the community. Antoneta was an early migrant (her family had migrated to Kamza in 1994) and had many friends within the migrant community. She received many visits during the day. I participated in all the informal gatherings inside the house. I also followed Antoneta when she paid visits to other migrant's houses. Slowly I became the one person that young migrants could come to, talk with and express themselves to. Living in the community and actively participating in migrant's lives and activities strengthened the bond with the study participants and amplified my understanding of the different social phenomena, traditions, behaviours and networks of the migrant community. Moreover, the participant observation I conducted enabled me to observe and understand their interactions and behaviour closely, to carry on conversations with them and to exchange opinions.

4) *Visual Materials*

Visual material such as photographs turned out to be very useful in understanding and exploring the local context of the area, the migrants' place-making, the role of remittances, gender relationships and the conservation of traditions or changes thereof. The visual materials gathered during the fieldwork have been an important and complementary source of other methods.

In general, the migrants were uncomfortable at being photographed. As a result, the photographs were mainly taken inside houses and in open areas. I also tried to collect photographs taken by the migrants of the area and each other over the years, with the aim of comparing and understanding the development of the area and houses over a period. This effort was quite unsuccessful, as the migrants did not possess much photographic evidence. Often, the migrants were surprised at my question and they responded that the migration process, settlement and adjustment have been so difficult, time and energy-consuming that there was no time and interest for such 'unimportant' activities as taking photographs. The technique of 'walk through the places' (Bailey, 2008) helped in exploring and understanding the local context, the migrants' place making, and their gender and generation interactions.

5) *Field Diary*

During the pilot study and the fieldwork, I regularly wrote down my impressions, feelings, thoughts and stories in a diary. Every day, I wrote the impressions of that day. These impressions were sometimes drawn from a short story I had heard in the field, in the bus, or just at the shop where I bought coffee. Sometimes I wrote about things, behaviour and

interactions that I experienced in the streets or other public and private spaces. I would write my thoughts and feelings, especially after the informal meetings I mainly had with women and young people. During the entirety of the fieldwork, I used the field diary to guide my decisions about the number of participants, the key issues for investigation and the focus of my questions. Later, during the analysis phase I used my diary to enrich the findings and to complement the data gathered. I establish new codes and family codes based on the new concepts that came up from the field diary.

4.4 Developing contacts in the field

In conducting ethnographic research in an expanding, developing and mainly informal area in Albania, there was a need for strong contacts and collaboration at the national, local and community level. These contacts enabled me not only to conduct the fieldwork but moreover to feel part of the migrant community, to understand the local context, the values and the norms of a newborn community.

First, the Geographic Studies Centre provided supervision in the adaptation of in-depth interviews into the Albanian language and in the conduct of the feasibility study, through my contact, Professor Arqile Bërxfholi (executive director). He is a well-known scholar of migration studies in Albania with broad and long experience. Based on his experience, he was very helpful in providing fresh insights for the research.

Second, at the local level the Kamza Municipality was an important source for our secondary data gathering. The Mayor of Kamza, Xhelal Mziu, was one of the informants for the expert interviews. The MoK was very helpful in providing extended information about the area under study and its development over a period of years. The Mayor of Kamza provided his insights, especially those related to policy implications, plans and future developments.

Third, I remained in touch through the pilot study with local NGOs involved in projects in Kamza, such as Co-Plan and Hope for the Future. Ms. Darina Kokona from the Co-Plan was one of the expert interview informants. She helped by providing information related to the transformation of the area and the role of migration process in this transformation. She has been project manager of some community orientation and policy implementation projects in Kamza. She was very helpful in contacting the people and other organizations in the area, and in sharing the problems and likely obstacles to be encountered during the fieldwork.

Fourth, at the community level the assistance of and role played by CBOs operating in Kamza turned out to be unexpectedly helpful. There were two CBOs contacted: 'Eja²⁶ – which is a Christian-oriented centre and 'Gli Amici dei Bambini'²⁷ – a centre working mainly with children and women. These CBOs were our gatekeepers and played an important role in introducing me to the community and winning the migrants' trust. The key players, Etleva,

²⁶ Come

²⁷ Friends of Children

Erjona and Elvira, were three young social workers involved with the community for 4, 8 and 9 years respectively. Their help, opinions and advice were crucial to conducting the in-depth interviews, the participant observations, exploring Kamza and to forming my in-depth understanding of the community.

4.5 Ethical Issues

When undertaking an ethnographic research, the researcher is in close interaction with the study population; hence certain ethical issues always arise. Before going to the field, during analyses and in reporting the data some ethical issues were taken into consideration. Once I was in the field, I made sure that the study participants were informed about the research, what was involved and what I wanted to achieve with this research. Before every in-depth interview, I informed the study participants that the information given will be used only for this current project. Afterwards I got their oral consent and I informed them of the right to stop the interview at any point or to not answer any of the questions they did not feel comfortable with (see appendix 1). Moreover, I assured each study participant that the data would be handled with confidentiality and their anonymity would be preserved. To keep the anonymity of my study participants I changed their names as well as some of the information of their life-stories that are not important in the following discussion. Additionally, this ethnographic research includes visual methods in form of photographs of people and private and public places taken in the field. The full consent of the participant was taken prior to the photograph as well as their consent at a later stage, after the analyses, to use the photos in the study.

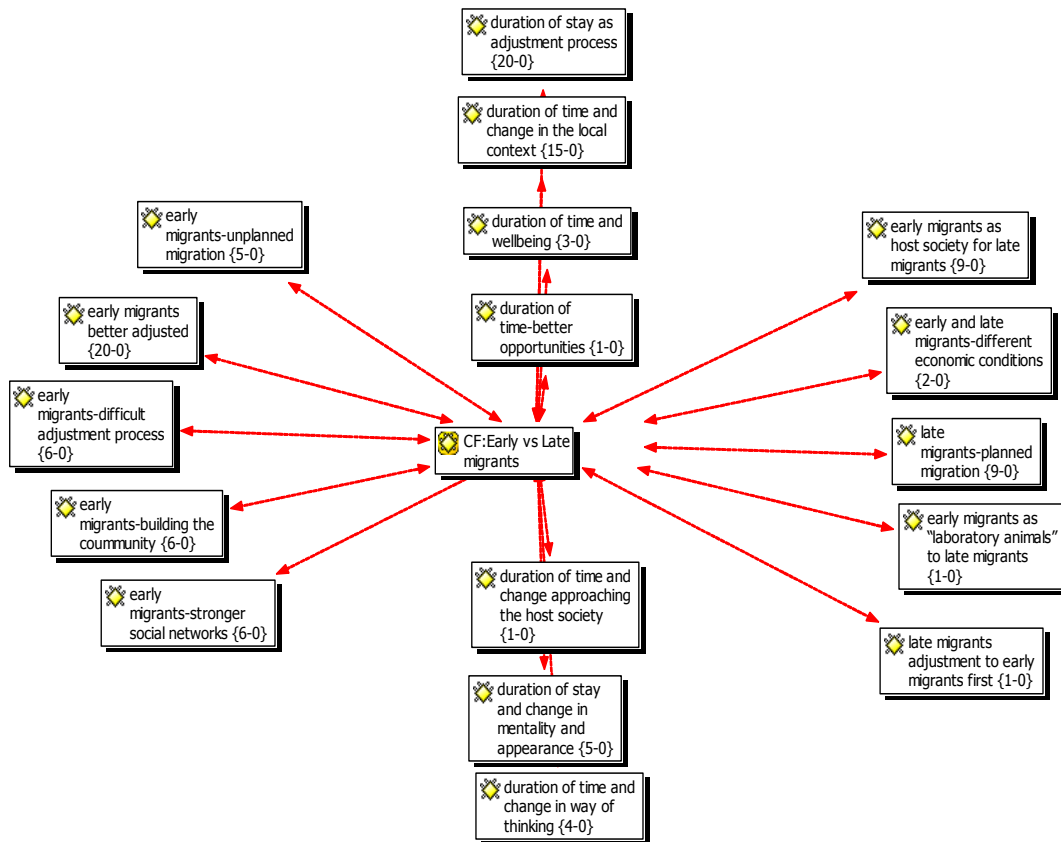
4.6 Data Analysis

Corbin and Strauss (2008:1) define qualitative analyses as “a process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge”. The gathering and analyses of qualitative data are processes of learning and reflection. The data analyses did not only start following the collection of the data but also during it. During the in-depth interviews, participant observation and informal discussion, I started to discern some clear paths that were becoming increasingly visible from day to day. An extensive field diary was kept throughout the fieldwork. Moreover, following each in-depth interview, I sat and listened to the recording repeatedly. At that stage, key themes and frameworks for comprehension emerged. These moments of reflection were important in clarifying the ideas that developed into my issues. During data transcription, I kept notes of interesting facts and situations that turned out to be very helpful in the later process of writing up my findings. It was an important decision to perform almost all the transcription myself, as it increased my familiarity with the data and it simplified the data management during the analyses. Based on the grounded theory framework the data gathered was organized into two different groups: in-depth interviews and expert interviews (Strauss and Corbin, 1989).

The analysis of the generated data set was made using specialised qualitative data analyses software, Atlas.ti™ version 4. The computer software was useful for managing and sorting the data. It allows the researcher to have a visual presentation of all the data, making it easier to go into the text in detail while coding each interview. The ability to write extensive memos in the form of thoughts, reflection and interpretation of different codes in the analyses through Atlas.ti was a very useful feature. The process of writing memos also served to break up the flow of analyses, allowing the researcher to reflect on the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1989). In the process of coding, an inductive approach was employed that allowed the generation of new hypotheses and theoretical considerations.

Once the interviews were imported into the file and systematically coded, I started to group similar patterns and common categories among all the interviews. I tried to group them meaningfully by type of participant or by interrelations among different categories; creating key themes through the variety of categories (see an example of a family tree of the theme early VS late migrants in figure 4.1). The themes that emerged became the research questions and the subjects of inquiry for this research. The same procedure was also followed for the field diary and participant observations. The analyses of the field notes were very useful in generating the contextual grounds of the fieldwork, the researcher’s positionality and points of view.

Figure 4.1 Family tree of codes



4.7 Research sites

This section briefly describes some key features of the research sites, such as their geography, socioeconomic situation, population and mobility. The fieldwork among the rural-to-urban migrants was carried out in the Kamza Municipality. Kamza Municipality is a new suburban area emerging on the outskirts of Tirana. This area was selected as a case study because of its scientific interest as a periphery engendered by internal migrants. Due to its characteristics, Kamza Municipality is considered as a ‘laboratory for internal migration studies in Albania’.²⁸ Another reason for its selection are the connections I had created with social centres and workers in the area.

Since the 1990s, Kamza Municipality has grown to become one of Tirana’s largest informal housing settlements. Over 90 percent of all dwellings have been constructed illegally (Figure 4.2). In the early 1990s, Kamza was primarily agricultural land. At that time, the total population of Kamza was around 6000 inhabitants (Aliaj et al. 2003). Its population has grown substantially, numbering 90,000 residents in 2009 (MoK 2009). Today, Kamza is the sixth largest municipality in the country. Within Kamza we can distinguish Bathore, an informal quarter of Kamza Municipality. Bathore used to be inhabited agricultural land before the 1990s which today it counts more than 35,000 inhabitants (World Vision Albania, 2007).

Figure 4.2 View of illegal settlements in Kamza



Source: Erka Çaro 2008

The population of Kamza is very young, with an average age of 26.5 years (MoK 2009). Education levels are modest, with over half the population having completed eight years of compulsory schooling, while a quarter have high-school level education and a very small

²⁸ Expert Interview with Arqile Bërsholi, and a term used by Rusell King (2005)

number are university-educated (Mok, 2009). Kamza offers a cheap labour force, with most people seeking employment in central areas of Tirana. Unemployment levels are high, at around 50 percent (MoK, 2009). The vast majority of employment is in the informal economy, with a high proportion of small and family businesses. Low-level service jobs represent 84 percent of employment, and other minor activities take place in construction, food and light industry (MoK 2007; 2009). The area has been characterized by rapid, unplanned subdivision and development.

The fieldwork was conducted at eight sites in Kamza (Fig. 4.3). Four sites are located in Bathore (neighbourhood number four, five, six and seven) one site in Koder Kamza (at the Agricultural University) and three other sites located near the municipality of Kamza. Not all the research sites received the same attention. I lived in Bathore for more than two months. Moreover, because of the location of the two main CBOs, which acted as gate-keepers and key informants in Bathore, the four neighbourhoods (sites) in this area received much more attention from me. I therefore conducted almost all participant observation, visual materials acquisition and around thirty-two in-depth interviews in this area. At Koder Kamza I carried out my research by frequent visits, some participant observation of young people (this site also houses the Agricultural University) and five in-depth interviews with students. Several visits were paid to Kamza Centre, which is home to municipal offices. In the three sites near Kamza Centre, I gathered secondary data and information from the municipal authorities. Moreover, I conducted two expert interviews and three in-depth interviews.

Figure 4.3 Research Sites



Source: Adjusted from Google Maps™

4.8 Limitations, lessons learned, and reflections

As in any study involving fieldwork, sampling depends upon the willingness of the respondents to be interviewed and their availability. A number of problems and limitations were encountered in the fieldwork. Some dilemmas and issues of researcher's positionality will be explained more in detail in the chapters to follow. However, in this section I would like to provide a general overview.

Although I have lived almost all my life in Tirana, I had never been to Kamza before starting my fieldwork. Occasionally, while travelling to Durres (a city 60 km from Tirana popular with tourists) I would notice a street sign with the name Kamza on it. The first time I set foot in Kamza was when I began my pilot study. Moreover, I am originally from the very southernmost part of Albania and many of my childhood memories are connected to that area. Though it is not very pronounced, I speak Albanian with a slight southern accent. As more than 90 percent of the migrant community in Kamza comes from the north of the country, my origin and background made me an outsider for the migrant community. This was reflected in the way participants would regard me as 'ignorant' of the traditions, culture and living conditions in the north. At this point, the migratory history of my family came to the rescue. My parents met and married in a small city in north Albania. They lived there for 15 years and it was there where I spent five years of my childhood. Through this connection I could obtain a position as an insider, at least to the extent of having migrant status (first from the north to Tirana and then abroad).

At first, I did not have any accumulated knowledge of the migrant community, their socioeconomic, cultural and political context. In addition to the disadvantages, this positionality stimulated my focus and attention in every detail. I was eager to listen and learn about the migrants' lives, past, present and future. I tried not to overlook anything, and by focusing on the details, I spotted elements and situation that in other more familiar conditions would not have been possible.

First contact with the people and the community, when I started visiting the area, were quite challenging for me. Kamza is an area full of human stories. Hearing tragedies, sad narratives and seeing tears in people's eyes made it difficult for me to maintain my equilibrium and to make the distinction between being a researcher and just a fellow human being. What made the early days difficult was also a general belief among the people not of the community – yet based in the community – that the migrants always expect outsiders to help them economically. The migrants often present their lives much more black and white than they really are, thereby hoping to appeal to the compassion of others. An Italian nun, who had been in the area for 15 years, talked about this community attitude as follows:

Kamzalinjte (people from Kamza) will never tell you the truth. You will never learn how their lives really are (another nun joins in, saying 'You shouldn't say you came from abroad they will watch your hand (ask for money) rather listen to your words').

This situation raised many questions. Did it require me to put myself in a lower position? Could I say that I am a student in Tirana and not in Groningen? By doing so I hoped they would not expect something from me, while nonetheless revealing their true selves. However, how ethical would that be? These concerns influenced my opinion of the migrant community to a certain level. Often I sensed that the first thing I heard when I met people was how sick they were and how much the medicines cost, how their children were sick and could not work and so on.

However, everything became clear as soon as I conducted the first interview. I understood that I could figure things out while trying. I forgot everything I had heard and I concentrated on my professor's words:

If you conduct your interviews correctly, thus establishing rapport with the people themselves, I am sure people will go beyond the asking for money/care.

This 'prediction' proved true. After having coffee with people at their homes and talking with them a while, it came very naturally for me to tell them that I was a student somewhere in a Western country. Somehow, they were proud of me, which in turn established a closer bond. It did not affect their opinion and their behaviour; on the contrary, I felt much closer to them. The feeling that I got from the first in-depth interview was priceless to me. Initially, I was probably more tense than the respondent. The respondent acted coldly to my request and seemed concerned about the duration of the interview. After I told her that it would take no more than 90 minutes, she, still distant, agreed. At the end of interview when she checked the time, I was happy to hear from her, with a big smile all over her face:

Wow, it is so late; I didn't notice the time passing. I really enjoyed this 'chat'.

In the sociocultural context I encountered, the researcher's gender is important, with being female acting as a barrier to gaining information, especially from male migrants. Therefore, availability and willingness proved to be a far bigger problem in this study for male middle and older generation migrants. The number of male migrants declining to be interviewed was significantly higher than the number of female ones. This was also to a degree related to their time constraints, as male migrants would be working and away from home almost all day. The absence of male migrants during the day was one of the main reasons that I decided to settle in the area for few months.

However, it was not only my gender that acted as a barrier to being able to involve a wide range of migrant typologies into the study. Being unmarried, having no children and, surprisingly, having short hair, was a concern among older generation women. They did not

express this fact explicitly but I could sense it in their remarks. Often, I got suggestions to let my hair grow and to have children as, according to them, I was getting older.

The main aim was to get as close as possible to the people there, to their daily lives. This was made possible through time and continued contacts in the community. As such, it was a pleasant feeling to walk around the neighbourhoods and having the people greeting me, stopping to meet me – with four kisses, as traditional, not just a handshake – and many times stopping to have a little chat.

Moreover, by actively participating in the migrant community, and conducting in-depth interviews and informal group discussions, I learned to handle some topics which were sensitive migrants, which I did not consider so at first. For example, living in illegal settlements, the migrants were conscious of who I was and what I wanted from them. When I asked them about the land and how they found it, sometimes I got short answers of the type ‘I don’t know, my husband knows’ or otherwise hesitation and their changing topic. After gaining their trust and many times when the recorder was off they started to talk about it and about their worries. Another issue that I was concerned with was the identity issue and the use of terms *Malok* and *Cecen* as identification names for the migrant’s community, originating from the North of Albania, used by the host society. I expected this to be quite a sensitive topic and even considered not including it in the interview. However, when managed in the right way, it turned out to be quite an easy topic to talk about. Moreover, I had the feeling that the migrants wanted to talk about this topic, to express their opinions and sometimes their anger. Sometimes, specifically on one occasion, the person that I was interviewing was so poor, desperate and hopeless that I could no longer understand the meaning and the importance of what I was doing.

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