CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES TO CULTURAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

FAMILIES AS A COLLECTIVE ABUSER. A CASE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AGAINST CHECHEN REFUGEE WOMEN IN POLAND

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Family is usually perceived as a source of support. It includes the closest relatives that we turn to for help when in dire straits. In the case of migration, the family also constitutes an anchor of sorts that you can hold on to when the need arises. It is not always, though, that the family plays a positive role. When its role is extended to affect all the aspects of life, it can be seen as an oppressor. In my article I present different forms of the family's influence on a woman's choices among Chechen refugees in Poland. I focus on forced marriages and 'honour' killings. This article is based on fifteen individual in-depth, partly structured, biographical interviews with female refugee and asylum seekers women from Chechnya who had experienced violence at the hands of a close person. It is supplemented with 27 individual and 4 group semi-structured in-depth interviews with 35 experts, who work with refugees or women with the history of experienced violence.

The results show that in case of Chechen refugees in Poland, the family not only fails to provide protection but also its members are perpetrators of violence against their nearest and dearest. It is because of family's close ties which affect Chechen women in particular but also because of the weakness of the Polish welfare system. Without constant economic assistance from the members of the family (left in Chechnya or residing in another EU country) it is nearly impossible to support a large family in Poland.

Keywords: violence against women, forced marriages, 'honour' killings, domestic violence, violence against refugee women

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INTRODUCTION

The family is usually perceived as a source of support. It includes the closest relatives that we turn to for help when in dire straits. Similarly, in the case of migration, the family also constitutes an anchor of sorts that you can hold on to when the need arises, be it the relatives that accompany migrants or the family left behind in the home country. It is not always, though, that the family plays a positive role. In the following paper I present cases when the family not only fails to provide protection but also its members are perpetrators of violence against their nearest and dearest. The most common case in point is domestic violence, whereby one family member (usually a man) abuses others (usually women or children) (Ray, 2014). Domestic violence is a problem which affects 30% of women globally (Lysova, 2016: 509). I will concentrate only on violence in which the perpetrator is not a single person (usually the partner) but a bigger group of family members. In this context I will describe the problem of forced marriages and 'honour' killings. Some authors include these phenomena under the broad umbrella term of domestic violence (Siddiqui, 2005), while others argue that a new, separate category should be established, which is sometimes referred to as cultural offences (Chesler, 2009; Korteweg, 2012). In my opinion, due to their different nature, these two should be seen as separate phenomena (despite similar roots, namely misogyny, patriarchal relationships within the family and, more broadly, the society).

According to some authors, in the contemporary Europe the crimes referred to as 'cultural' occur in migrant communities, most commonly Muslim (Chesler, 2010; Chesler and Bloom, 2012; Clark and Richards, 2008). Hence the question arose, do they occur also in Poland? I will answer the question using research results from a study conducted with the Chechen refugees. This group is the largest among refugees in Poland and one of the most numerous Muslim community in Poland. I will identify different types and forms of violence experienced by forced female migrants in Poland including the types of crime that could be dubbed 'cultural'.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on fifteen individual in-depth, partly structured, biographical interviews with female refugee and asylum seekers women from Chechnya who had experienced violence at the hands of a close person (identified with the letter 'C'). All of them were Muslims.

The women were asked about their experience of violence against them or their relatives and friends as well as the form of support they received from Polish institutions or social organisations. Interviews were collected between November 2012 and July 2013. An interview lasted between 1,5 and 2,5 hours in average, it was conducted in Polish or Russian (based on the participants' decision), translated into Polish (if needed) and transcribed.

The interviews were carried out by accordingly-trained female NGO employee who work with female refugees on everyday basis and enjoy their trust. This approach enabled access to study participants (it was the researchers who selected the women that they knew, owing to their work, had experienced different forms of violence) and allowed for a tentative guarantee of honesty (though that cannot be guaranteed, see Desperak, 2013). The approach also allowed the immigrants necessary safety during interviews.

The material was supplemented with 27 individual and 4 group semi-structured in-depth interviews with 35 experts, who work with refugees or women with the history of experienced violence, including employees of various public institutions (twenty people identified with the letter 'U') and non-governmental organisations (fifteen people, identified with the letter 'N'). The experts had been asked to determine the scale of the violence in the migrant community, list the types (along with specific cases illustrating them that they came across during the study) and evaluate the support system available to the women.

Prior to describing them, in order to better understand the background of cultural crimes committed by families, I'will briefly outline the presence of refugees from Chechnya in Poland (including their integration), and characterise the position of the woman in the Chechen society. This should facilitate the understanding of the context of the cases described below.

BACKGROUND

CHECHEN REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN POLAND AND THEIR INTEGRATION INTO POLISH SOCIETY

Chechens are the biggest group of asylum seekers that have been coming to Poland within the last 20 years. Between 2003 and 2016, about 90 thousands of asylum seekers of Chechen origin claimed asylum in Poland. Although a lot of them fled the country and headed further to other Western European countries, many stayed in Poland for several months, and about 5 to 7 thousand are still living in Poland (Anacka, 2015). During the asylum procedure most of asylum

seekers are placed in refugee centres that are located mostly in rural areas with a limited number of possibilities to interact with members of the Polish society and few activities that could be counted as forms of integration. Those places provide housing and upkeep for foreigners who live there, but cannot be seen as a perfectly safe environment, which prevents them from different forms of violence. A lot of their inhabitants, for different reasons, don't recognise those centres as protective spaces that allow them to feel safe (Ząbek and Łodziński, 2008: 231–238; Klaus, 2016: 204–210).

Despite the fact that Poland joined the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in the late 1991, the system of refugees' integration is still quite poorly developed and is lacking many resources and instruments that are crucial for integration of foreigners. Having been granted one of the forms of internal protection, refugees are entitled to taking part in the so called Individualised Programme for Integration (introduced in 2001), although in practice it is not individualised at all. Within this programme, some social work is offered, but usually, because of limited opportunities, the programme does not address critical needs of its participants, and at the end of the day it mostly just focuses on providing payments of a meager allowance. Another problem is that integrational programmes in Poland last only for one year, and after that refugees are left almost completely to their own devices, without any special assistance from public institutions (see Frelak, Klaus and Wiśniewski eds., 2007; Chrzanowska, 2007).

All of this results in refugees being economically dependent on welfare assistance and struggling to integrate. One of the factors that contribute to this situation is the lack of affordable public housing. It forces refugees to rent expensive and substandard apartments on the open market. Another issue is that because of the lack of good-quality language courses many refugees do not speak Polish or the level of their language proficiency is insufficient to find a decent job. Even if they find any, they work in precarious conditions and for such low wages that they are unable to provide for their families. The problems mentioned above, combined with the structure of Chechens' families that are numerous (an average family consists of 4–5 children) lead refugees to poverty (Łukasiewicz, 2011c: 176–186).

One needs special skills to survive in these extremely difficult circumstances and those who try to manage somehow in this situation are women. They do their best to care for their families and elaborate strategies of management of poverty that include: finding some jobs (even low-paid ones), collecting all available public allowances (including a strategy to obtain them), and seeking other support from all available sources (such as NGOs). It leads to a redefinition of the traditional man's and woman's position in the Chechens society in which

the male role is to support the family. In the situation of emigration, women take over this responsibility (Łukasiewicz, 2011b; Łukasiewicz, 2012).

RESULTS

POSITION OF WOMAN IN CHECHEN SOCIETY

Many participants of this study consistently emphasised the link between the position of the woman in the Chechen society and the existence of violence against them. It was emphasised that the lack of equality and male dominance are the reasons behind the aggression exhibited by men. One person indicated the problem was the *perception of the servile role of woman in that anything can be done to her. Some men consider a woman to be their property, which facilitates violence* (N2). The communities of the Caucasian peoples are predominantly traditional and the position of a woman is not only different to that of a man but actually inferior (Refortowicz, 2014: 149–151). In the Chechen community gender roles are very clearly defined – the woman takes care of the household (and all the chores its running involves) and rearing children. She's a homemaker. The man is the breadwinner, providing for the family financially and in no way involved in the chores around the house.

Chechen women are raised to be obedient to men – first to their father, then husband and, finally, to the son, while their

> *Traditional upbringing predisposes or determines women to specific behaviours, i.e. meekly accepting what fate throws their way, accepting that the husband has the final say in how they should behave and is, as it were, the driving force behind the way of living [of the whole family] and its lifestyle* (U7).

Modesty and obedience are therefore the basic traits that Chechen women should possess.

According to Chechen men the woman commands god-like respect, is by all means exceptional, unattainable and impeccable. However, she is also not really taken seriously. She is more of an arm candy rather than their equal or a partner. The men spoke of women using terms such as 'delicate creatures' that should not be approached for fear of being befouled, until they become their wives, that is (Chrzanowska, 2007: 316–319).

This traditional perception of women's position has been recently overlapping with the new rules introduced by the President Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya. They aim to impose very restrictive Islamic rules which are to a large extent

foreign to the Chechen tradition. Yet, the power of President is absolute in Chechnya, hence he is free to make any decisions that the people will follow for fear of their lives. The reforms, which the authorities dubbed 'the campaign of morality', affect mostly women and infringe their freedoms, forcing them, for instance, to be covered head to toe in public places (in spite of it being a stark violation of the law of the Russian Federation, which deemed such attempts as discriminatory against women) (Lokshina, 2012).

At the same time the Chechen community is undergoing a different type of transformation, resulting in a redefinition of the roles of women and men and brought about by life under military conflict. The Chechen Wars have disrupted the traditional division of roles within the family. When men took part in military operations (and were therefore absent from home) it was the women that had to shoulder the responsibility of securing the survival of the whole family – not only by supporting the household and the children (as well as parents) but the fighting men as well, by providing them with food and clothing. Because, according to one subject, *a man can hide in the forest, while a woman can't. The woman stayed behind in the village, the city, left behind but sort of moving forward and standing in front of the man* (N3). This forced process of emancipation took place also in the families where the man remained at home. One Chechen woman recalls: 'During the war our men couldn't work, just like my husband, who could not show himself on the street. I took up selling then. In those days women earned the money to feed their men and their families' (Łukasiewicz, 2011b: 213).

A factor influencing the perception of gender roles in Chechen families is Muslim religion. Because of the media coverage, the religion is at the moment perceived by many Western societies as exceptionally violent and permissive as regards maltreatment of women and their abuse. Islam has however many 'faces' and is interpreted in many ways. What is more, it is influenced by local customs and traditions which are sometimes in opposition to the rules of Qur'an. Therefore, negative opinions about Islam are sometimes seen as a form of Islamophobia, which had spread among the western societies that have little understanding of the Muslim religion (Bobako, 2012/2013).

The relations between the sexes are often based on the interpretation of a single verse from Qur'an, number 4:34, which contains two rules. First of all, the woman is subjected to the man who holds power over her and secondly, a husband is entitled to discipline a misbehaving woman, i.e. a woman who violates the rules of Islam (e.g. by not praying). Other behaviours considered contrary to religious teachings are disobedience of the wife towards her husband,

opposing the husband and meeting other men, or exposing inappropriate attire in their presence, which may mean sanctions for failing to wear a burqa. However, the punishment can only be handed out to one's own wife and only as the last resort. If it comes to pass, it should be preceded by various corrective measures, such as a talk, reprimanding the wife, reminding her of the rules of Islam and finally refusing sexual intercourse. Only when none of the 'punishments' prove effective can corporal punishment be used. On the other hand, some Qur'an interpreters claim that a man can always punish his wife for practically any behaviour, without having to explain himself (Khan and Syed, 2007: 238–239).

Other interpreters of Islam claim that in no way does it legitimize violence against women, quite the opposite in fact, its writings assume equality between women and men. For instance, this narrative favoured by Islamic feminists (Pakzad and Alipour, 2016: 712–713; Bobako, 2013). They emphasise that in his comments the prophet Muhammad condemned violence of men against women multiple times and ordered husbands to be good to both the wives and the remaining members of the family, drawing attention to the fact that the purpose of marriage based on love is not only procreation but emotional well-being, as well as spiritual harmony of both spouses. Thus, according to many authors, acceptance of cruelty, harassment, battering or any other forms of brutal physical violence against women cannot be attributed to Qur'an (Kausar et al., 2011: 96–109; Douki et al., 2003: 169–170). Still, it is hardly a commonly accepted view. Most Qur'anic schools accept the practice of husbands' violence against their wives and only argue about where to draw the line. Qur'an interpreters seem to agree that the reprimand should be painful but ought not leave marks on the body (there is some disagreement in this respect, though), cause bleeding or result in broken bones. It is also forbidden to beat sensitive areas on the body, such as the abdomen or the face (Khan and Syed, 2007: 240–244; Pakzad and Alipour, 2016: 714).

While most scholars agree that 'honour' killings cannot be reconciled with the rules of Islam, the opponents beg to differ (Sherwani, 1993: 46–48; Muhammad et al., 2012). The real problem, however, is the widespread social acceptance of such practices in some circles or countries, which results in the impunity of perpetrators or very low sentences (Mojab, 2012: 129; Khan, 2006: 24–32). In those places, an 'honour' killing is perceived as a form of social control and is a punishment for the person who, by committing a forbidden act (i.e. behaving inappropriately) violated the norms of a specific community. As such, it also acts as a deterrent to anyone contemplating a similar act (Cooney, 2014).

FORCED MARRIAGES

One form of culture-determined violence against women which stems from inequality between sexes is forcing women to marry a person chosen by the family. It is however difficult to draw the line between forcing a marriage (hence a forced marriage) and a marriage arranged by relatives[2]. Forced marriages are those where a person is deprived of freedom of choice, both with regard to whether she/he wants to get married and who is she/he going to marry. In other words, whenever in either of these aspects a spouse expresses objection to the marriage. Coercion which occurs in such circumstances can take physical, psychological, economic or emotional forms. These forms of behaviour are treated by much European legislation as crime (Clark and Richards, 2008: 501–503). However, a forced marriage is also one where at least one of the prospective spouses is not yet of age required to express a legally binding consent to get married. Hence, all marriages concerning minors, especially less than fifteen years of age (known as child marriages or early marriages) are treated as forced.

The scale of the phenomenon is very difficult to estimate, given the ambiguous definition and the fact that most of these acts remain unreported. Although the phenomenon concerns both women and men, the feminisation of suffering is clearly visible. The data obtained by the British agency supporting the victims indicate that 85% of people seeking their help are women (Clark and Richards, 2008: 503–504). Various communities make use of this form of getting married, but it's most widespread in the countries of South Asia, i.e. India and Pakistan (Kazmirski et al., 2009: 37).

During this study, the foreigners who spoke about their marriages provided examples that would suggest they experienced forced marriages rather than arranged ones. These marriages had been always religious, because for Chechen community this form of marriage is expected (according to their tradition and religion), and recognised. Few diaspora members in Poland use official way to get marry. The religious way of marrying makes those acts informal from the legal point of view[3].

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[2] Usually in this kind of marriage all parties should be consulted and agreed upon the act of marriage itself and a candidate who was chosen. Although in practice this freedom of choice is restricted due to different kinds of cultural and economic circumstances (Rude-Antoine, 2005: 17–18).

[3] Although, according to Polish legislation, after fulfilling some conditions, it is possible to marry in different churches (including mosques) and be officially recognised by the law as a married couple. Chechens for some reasons do not use this opportunity.

The difference between arranged and forced marriage is indeed fluid. After all, in the former case the woman has no possibility to oppose the choice of her parents. One of participants recalled her experience:

> *I did not marry out of love; I was married off to him. I cried. They wanted me to marry someone from our village.* [...] *Of course I didn't love him and I didn't want to marry him. It just happened. They just married me off* (C5).

The custom is not merely historical: *These days the woman can decide for herself when it comes to marriage. But if her dad is very conservative, then it's not going to happen, whether we are in Poland or not* (C15). As demonstrated, such occurrences are not uncommon nowadays and affect women regardless of where they live.

Women are married off at various ages. In Poland it sometimes happens at a young age. Between 2009 and 2014 the Office for Foreigners discovered 11 cases of marriages with minors (under eighteen years of age), and suspected three more such cases. All of those cases took place in refugee centres and all were connected to Chechen diaspora. There is however a shortage of effective tools enabling identification of similar incidents (Klaus, 2016: 74–77).

Such practices are not accepted by the whole Chechen community. When a twelve-year-old girl was discovered to have been married off in a refugee centre, *there was a huge uproar in the Chechen community. It was not accepted by the majority of its residents* (U9). Currently in Chechnya girls are married off roughly at the age of sixteen. Earlier the tradition was more widespread in small mountain villages and was absent from bigger cities like Grozny or among educated families (Klaus, 2012: 116–117).

An overwhelming majority of child marriages identified in this study concerned cases of girls who'd turned fifteen. The boy was usually not much older, though in most cases already over 18 years old. Only once was a marriage mentioned where a husband was over forty and got married to an underage wife.

Many cases, when the information about the marriage with a minor reached Polish authorities (usually employees of refugee centres), a quick divorce was arranged (which is possible and acceptable in Islam). None of the cases ended with sentencing the perpetrators as they had mostly left Poland (often with the young wife and her family). In the already mentioned case of a marriage of a twelve-year-old girl, the case was dismissed because her mother submitted a 'new' birth certificate confirming that the girl had turned fifteen at the moment of the marriage (Klaus, 2016: 143–145).

In some cases, arranging marriages at early age is considered as 'protecting' a girl from disgrace:

> *The girl needs to be married off quickly, especially here, in Europe, where she's exposed to so many temptations and dangers and can compromise her honour any moment. Then they'll start talking about her and that is very dangerous for her. That's why she must be married off as quickly as possible, even when she's as young as twelve or thirteen, simply to prevent a situation where she develops physically and psychologically to such an extent, if you like, that she starts raising suspicions of different kinds* (N7).

Still, such early marriages are a threat to young girls since, as one immigrant put it, *when a young girl gets married, she might get lucky and everything ends well but she is going to be dependent, always dependent on her husband* (C14). Thus, an early marriage contributes to lowering the position of the woman in the relationship and may lead to different forms of domestic violence (Choi et al., 2012). The perpetrator of violence needn't be the husband either; often the role is taken on by the member of his family. The mother-in-law plays here a special part of 'preparing' the girl to be a good wife. In reality it means forcing her to adopt the behaviours that are expected by the husband and the family she has just become a member of.

Such marriages are sometimes held 'for the sake of the children'. The partner is often in possession of a residence permit to stay in Poland or another country in the European Union. The marriage allows a person not to go back to Chechnya, in case of the negative outcome of the refugee procedure for the family (which often happens). Fabienne Brion (2011) has noticed this link between arranged or forced marriages and the migration policy of many countries of the global North. She argues that such practices are popularised by the restrictive migration law, which makes the entry to the European Union for immigrants quite difficult. Marrying a person who has the legal right to stay in any of the territories of the European Union is often the only way available to enter or remain in this 'better world' as it prevents deportation.

The custom of arranging marriages by the family is common in Chechnya. To bypass it, a tradition of kidnapping girls was born. The kidnapping is yet just a different form of forced marriage since the girl has no control over the incident and no possibility to refuse to formalise the relationship.

The custom used to be exploited, but it was also thoroughly regulated to prevent the kidnapped girl from disgrace (Szczepaniková, 2004: 39; Łukasiewicz, 2011a: 100–101). The kidnappings were sometime arranged by the young couple who were in love but the parents disapprove their relationship. One of such kidnappings took place in Poland:

> *How did they steal her? Not by force. Turned out they were friends and in love. But she was underage. So he kidnapped her, because he loved her. And she wanted it too. But the parents were against* [the marriage] *because the girl was underage* (C3).

The kidnappings do not always follow this romantic path. Often, the girl does not to wish to marry the kidnapper but she is forced to do so after the kidnapping takes place, by the force of the tradition and by her family (to retain the dignity and honour of the family). The kidnapped girl often has little choice of getting out of this situation other than by getting married. The alternative is to escape abroad. Most women are however not ready to undertake it, either because their families would simply not agree to that or because it would permanently cut off family ties. As a result, girls yield to their family's decision (Turowicz, 2013: 125–126).

Another form of forced marriages concerning women is forcing the woman who was raped to marry the perpetrator. Such marriage is perceived as a 'punishment' for the rapist. The victim has no say in the case. She has to consent, otherwise she's under threat of falling victim to 'honour' killing. She has been shamed and marriage is the only solution to wash away the disgrace. One of the foreigners recalls a story she's heard:

> [The girl was] *fifteen years old, they threw her inside the car and took her to this flat in some block. She was raped by a nineteen-year-old. After that she was in shock and spent a month in the gynaecological ward, where I met her. She had no father; mum was unable to protect her. She was really just a child. Didn't want to marry the rapist. They accused her of asking for it – why did she agree to meet this guy up? She wanted to go back home and repeated that God could see her innocence. But then she started to worry that she might be pregnant and in the end agreed to get married* (C14).

The woman who experienced sexual abuse is then secondarily victimized by being blamed for an intercourse she did not want. She is next punished further by being forced to marry the man who raped her. It is difficult to fathom a bigger accumulation of violence. As Susan Moller Okin (1999: 15) bitterly observes:

> Clearly, rape is not seen in these cultures primarily as a violent assault on the girl or women herself but rather as a serious injury to her family and its honor. By marrying his victim, the rapist can help restore the family's honor and relieve it of a daughter who, as "damaged goods", has become unmarriageable. […] A rape woman is a used item. No one wants her.

RAPE AS CAUSE OF ‘HONOUR’ KILLING OF WOMEN

Rape as a phenomenon is not about a man satisfying his sexual urge, but a need for power and control. The goal of the perpetrator is to dominate over the victim and the sexual intercourse is used as a tool to achieve it. Studies show that with the rising position of women and their growing independence from men comes an increase in the number of rapes. It’s worth pointing out that rape, or rather a threat of rape, has long been used as a method of exercising control over various behaviours of women. In the 18th century for instance, the ban on working and travelling solo was justified with the need to protect women against sexual abuse (Johnson, 2014).

In my study the stories of sexual abuse of women appeared in many interviews. Most commonly it took the form of rape or attempted rape, and happened in refugee centres. The majority of incidents went unreported since women feared serious negative consequences for them. The victims of rape were single women who had no ‘protection’ of any man. Therefore their abuse did not insult any men who would stand up for his wife, daughter, sister or mother and demand justice. In Chechnya, the latter could mean either death for the perpetrator (as a form of clan revenge), or, in most cases physical (beating him by the victim’s relatives) or symbolic shaming: *they can* [also] *take the man’s trousers off and parade him. The man is shamed. It’s a traditional form of lenient punishment. Severe punishment is death. They kill girls and pull men’s trousers down* (C14).

The odium of rape is always attached to the woman. She is the one to blame for bringing shame on herself and she becomes completely and thoroughly discredited in the society. A Chechen woman who was raped found herself in a precarious spot:

> *If my brothers or mother-in-law found out* [that I was raped] *they would have to kill me. For Chechens it’s a disgrace for me, the whole family, and my daughter – my daughter would never be able to get married* (C12).

Therefore, women from North Caucasus would do anything to hide the rape (Procházkowá, 2005: 30). Otherwise the negative stigma affects the whole family of the victim. The stigma is acute enough to render the life of relatives impossible, since the exclusion from the society is utter and complete: *cousins, sisters or brothers will have difficulty starting a family, no one will greet the mother* [of the girl] (U2). In such circumstances relatives will use whatever measures to rid of the stigma and restore the family’s honour. The tradition says that only death

of the woman can wash away the stigma. *Only death invalidates the disgrace. If there's no person* [woman]*, there's no problem* (C14).

It should be remembered that as part of the military conflict in Chechnya women have been repeatedly abused sexually by members of various military groups. Rapes are often used during military conflicts. In fact, as it were, they become their indispensable element. The role of rape is instrumental and serves to symbolically humiliate the hostile nation (or opponents) and show dominance through the act of shaming its women. Rape is used to intimidate the whole community, to punish a specific woman for their activity in the resistance movement, or to force certain behaviours, e.g. cooperation of a given village or surrender of a certain guerrilla group. Another reason for why rapes happen during war time is simply the 'availability' of women, who are not protected by men who went to war (Monteiro, 2013). Due to the social stigma and threat that affect rape survivors, women do not talk about their experiences. It is not uncommon that even when applying for a refugee status in Poland they withhold this information, which could be crucial in granting them the protection. They simply fear that somehow the family or community could find out about what happened, which would mean a very serious danger for them (Klaus, 2016: 131–132).

OTHER CAUSES OF 'HONOUR' KILLINGS

Marrying a non-Chechen exposes a woman to grave danger. Chechen women who marry outside their nationality are not only condemned by the whole community but also find themselves at risk of their lives. One of our participants related the story of her friend:

> *When she married* [no Chechen and non-Muslim] *a whole fleet of cars with Chechens arrived at their place. They wanted to kill them.* […] *If you marry a Pole or a Russian, or anyone of a different nationality, a Christian you always have to remember that it will cause huge trouble* (C1).

A different refugee who is in such a relationship, talked about her experience:

> *They would call me nonstop, threatening to kill me, saying that they know already where I'm going and where I'm planning to live, they know everything. They would threaten me, so that my life is in danger to this day* […]. *In the end I couldn't even leave my house to buy something for the child because they would call me and tell me that there was a car in front of the centre waiting for me to go out and kill me and get me. I was afraid of my own shadow* (C4).

These customs have remained unchanged for years. Even in the times of Soviet Union interethnic relationships were frowned upon in Chechnya and were very rare. In this respect the republic stood out in the whole country – 93.7% of families in Chechnya and Ingushetia were mono-ethnic in 1989 (Łukasiewicz, 2012: 116–117).

A question arises then, whether the custom is dictated by the religious teachings or by the North Caucasian tradition. Jusuf al-Kardawi, a theologian of Islam, believes that only a Muslim man can marry a woman of a different faith. Such a marriage, being already a major exception in itself, is acceptable if the wife is either Christian or Jewish. A Muslim woman, on the other hand, can never marry a non-believer (Stryjewski, 2012: 193).

In the case of mixed relationships, both Chechen traditions and religion complement each other. While Chechen tradition allows women to marry only a Chechen man, the religious norms order them to marry a Muslim, regardless of his nationality. Studies indicate, however, that for a Chechen woman marrying a man of a different nationality poses a problem. One of our interlocutors recalled the reaction of her family to her union with a Muslim non-Chechen:

> *My sister* [as the only one who was at the wedding] *recorded us and went to Chechnya. Everyone saw it and was in shock. Only then did they find out the he… He was really black, now he's become paler* (laughs). *Older brother* […] *said that the moment he sees me he is going to tear me into pieces and kill me. Father said that I could never enter his house again.* […] *I'm still afraid of my older brother to this day. As long as I live here I will be afraid of him. I'm ready, all the time.* […] *Maybe they would not kill my husband. But my older brother would not even speak to me; he would just kill me on the spot* (C2).

In the recent years there has been a visible change, however, in how responsible the communities feel for the 'immoral' lifestyles of women. Earlier, as tradition had it, only the family had the responsibility of guarding the honour of girls who 'belonged' to then. No male stranger could interfere in the affairs of a woman or criticize her in public. These days, most likely under the influence of President Kadyrov's policies, each man is entitled to take offence at what they consider inappropriate behaviour on the part of women, even complete strangers. Inconsequence, many Chechens feel entitled to punish a woman who, in their opinion, behaves inappropriately, including handing out the most severe punishment, i.e. killing her. What's more, this is precisely the kind of behaviour that Kadyrov himself encourages in his public addresses (Littell, 2011: 134–135).

The recurrent theme that permeated the stories told by the women who took part in our study was the fear of members of their own community, including

those who live in Poland. In fact, the social taboo concerns entering not only formal marital relationship but any closer contact (not necessarily intimate) with men representing different cultures.

'HONOUR' KILLINGS IN POLAND

No 'honour' killing has so far been witnessed in Poland in the families of Chechen refugees. It does not mean however that Chechen refugee women are not at risk of this practice. One of the foreigners participants of this study recounted a story of her friend whose brother came to visit from Germany to kill her. The only reason why he did not do it was that he couldn't find her. Knowing he would come to meet her with her employer's help she'd gone into hiding (C2). The real threat is forcing women to leave Poland and return to Chechnya, where the act can be executed without punishment. One migrant clarified:

> *We are here in Poland, we can be punished* [for the murder] *so we have to wait* [then]. *If they* [men] *do something, they will be put behind bars. They have to kill,* […] *but they wait. They need to do it somewhere else, take the woman away to Chechnya. Here they are afraid of the penal law* (C14).

This kind of relationships was mentioned by many participants. Both Chechen women and experts heard of similar scenarios where, after civil service institutions discovered some crime perpetrated by a man against a woman, either both of them left Poland, or at least the woman 'disappeared'. Consequently, no migrant who used violence against women was sentenced in Poland. It only confirms that Chechen women are not safe in Poland. It is too easy to force them to go back to Chechnya, where they are likely to fall prey to family revenge.

A woman in Chechnya, especially if her own family is against her, has nowhere to turn to for protection. The authorities will not help her, because Ramzan Kadyrov, to put it mildly, is not an advocate of women's rights. He seems to be obsessed with the idea of women living immorally (Turowicz, 2013: 132). Sadly, a family cannot resist the system, even if they wanted to. Those in power in Chechnya lay the law in the republic in an arbitrary fashion so that it fits their own purposes. Women are to pay the highest price for the reinvented return to tradition imposed by Kadyrov. In fact, the president imposes a selection of new rules of behaviour concerning mainly women and being only roughly based on Islamic law (Littell, 2011: 129–131).

Organizations operating in North Caucasus often point to soaring levels of violence against women in the region. The cases include not only violence but 'honour' killings and 'disappearances' of women who were deemed unworthy by the community (Refortowicz, 2014: 165–170; Łukasiewicz, 2011a: 96–97).

CONCLUSION

It may seem that emigration from the country of origin may be a perfect way to escape oppressive customs of one's homeland. Unfortunately, in most cases it does not happen for a variety of reasons. First of all, migrants, even when abroad, retain a close and continuous link with their country of origin (thanks to communications advances it's incredibly easy) and the expatriate community in the host country. The refugees from Caucasus who currently reside in Poland are strongly connected with their families in Chechnya and *in crisis situations they call home, miles away, to speak to their mums. These are their closest people; they can confide in them and give vent to whatever is troubling them* (N5). In most cases the foreigners are not ready to give up those ties, especially that apart from moral and emotional support they receive economic support from their relatives (in Chechnya or other European countries) which is indispensable for their survival in Poland (Łukasiewicz, 2011b: 218–219). Moreover, not many people socialized in a culture that puts family over an individual are ready to face the consequences brought about by a complete cutting off of ties with the family and the whole community.

Emigration, however, can have other results. Leaving the homeland often leads to a perception of cultural rules more orthodox than it was the case in the country of origin, along with idealization of own culture and stricter adherence to all the customs. Maintaining tradition aids in regaining a sense of security. Among Chechen women raised in exile, turning towards radical Islam is a noticeable phenomenon (Szczepaniková, 2012: 485–486; Łukasiewicz, 2011a: 98). Cultivating tradition gives the migrant a feeling *that they are supported in some moral, religious code. And in this way they are different, away from the immoral European promiscuity* (N1). The aim of these practices is the desire to retain own cultural and religious identity in opposition to the surrounding society, hence preventing too much integration within the host society that could lead to even a partial denationalisation. Paradoxically, this strategy is counterproductive in the case of Chechens as it leads to taking over foreign Islamic customs and rejecting many traditional rules (Wiktor-Mach, 2009; Szczepaniková, 2004: 37).

The questions arise how do Polish institutions protect refugee women from violence, and how do they help violence survivors? The answer is pessimistic. Polish institutions do almost nothing to protect women from violence and help survivors. Although attempts have been made, especially at the centres for asylum seekers, in practice they are unsuccessful in protecting woman from violence and in meeting their expectations and needs, once violence occurs (Klaus, 2016). This lack of protection system, combined with a failure to integrate refugees in Poland (which drives many Chechen families to poverty) and imposed by Chechen traditions, can be seen as a form of collective oppression and a form of structural violence against refugee women from Chechnya (Galtung, 1969).

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