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Fieldnotes from ethnographic research in rural areas of the Polish Jurassic Highland as a record of the process of becoming an anthropologist

Dzienniki terenowe z badań etnograficznych
na obszarach wiejskich Jury Krakowsko-Częstochowskiej
jako rejestracja procesu stawania się antropologiem

Summary: This article is based on research conducted in rural areas of the Polish Jurassic Highland by first-year ethnology and cultural anthropology students as part of their first field exercises. One of their tasks was to keep fieldnotes, which provided an insight into the young anthropologists' experiences. Based on an analysis of these notes, I decided to inscribe the process of becoming an anthropologist into the pattern of the rite of passage according to the model proposed by Arnold van Gennep. The purpose of the article is to analyze and interpret the students' notes and present the point of view of a young researcher – including myself, the author of this article, who participated in this research – on the Polish countryside and the role of the field in the “anthropological initiation.” Making fieldnotes is not only a technique or method of producing anthropological knowledge, but also a source of information about the researcher's inner experiences during their professional initiation. The article investigates how the specificity of the rural areas of the Polish Jurassic Highland (as the first research field) influenced the process of the symbolic transformation of a student into an anthropologist.

Keywords: cultural anthropology, researcher, ethnologist, fieldnotes, field research, rites of passage, Polish Jurassic Highland

Streszczenie: Niniejszy artykuł powstał na kanwie badań przeprowadzonych na obszarach wiejskich Jury Krakowsko-Częstochowskiej przez studentów pierwszego roku etnologii i antropologii kulturowej w ramach swoich pierwszych ćwiczeń terenowych. Ich zadaniem było między innymi prowadzenie dzienników terenowych, które stanowiły obraz doświadczeń młodych antropologów. Na podstawie analizy zawartości tych dzienników postanowiłem wpisać proces stawania się antropologiem w schemat obrzędu przejścia według modelu zaproponowanego przez Arnolda van Gennepa. Celem artykułu jest analiza i interpretacja studenckich dzienników oraz przedstawienie punktu widzenia młodego badacza (w tym samego autora artykułu, który wziął udział w tych badaniach) na polską wieś i udział terenu w „inicjacji antropologicznej”. Dziennik terenowy to nie tylko technika czy metoda produkcji wiedzy antropologicznej, ale także źródło wiedzy na temat wewnętrznych przeżyć badacza, które towarzyszą mu podczas inicjacji zawodowej. W artykule został podkreślony wpływ specyfiki obszarów wiejskich Jury Krakowsko-Częstochowskiej – jako pierwszego terenu badawczego w biografii – na proces symbolicznej przemiany studenta w antropologa.

Słowa kluczowe: antropologia kulturowa, badacz, etnolog, dziennik terenowy, badania terenowe, obrzędy przejścia, Jura Krakowsko-Częstochowska

In life, everything has a beginning, and every experience a history. This article deals with the beginnings and first steps of young students of ethnology and cultural anthropology¹ from an academic center in Łódź. I believe that my text can be classified as autoethnography, as it raises questions about the discipline itself and contains elements of self-observation. I will try to present the most important motifs of experiences described by students in their fieldnotes and interpret them in terms of an “ethnological initiation.” The source basis is the students’ first fieldnotes from their research in the Polish Jurassic Highland or Jura, and more specifically, in the municipality of Mstów. The research took place in April 2022. The group was comprised of sixteen students from Łódź, for whom the field exercises were part of the curriculum in the first year of their undergraduate studies. This group also included me. The topic of the research project was “Changes in the rural landscape. The example of the municipality of Mstów (Silesian voivodeship).” The research was commissioned by this municipality, and the report from it was to be included in drafting a new local development plan. The objective of this project’s coordinators, Dr. Aleksandra Krupa-Ławrynowicz and Dr. Alicja Piotrowska, was to record our experiences on the ground in the fieldnotes, and at the same time, to build self-awareness of what we were participating in and who we were becoming.

¹ In the text, I will use interchangeably the terms ethnographer, ethnologist, anthropologist and ethnography, ethnology, and anthropology.

This is not the first, and probably, not the last operationalization of the status of fieldnotes in ethnography. This matter has been addressed, for example, by Katarzyna Kaniowska,² Grażyna Kubica³ or Sebastian Latocha, who drew attention to the bizarre elements in fieldnotes.⁴ Tarzycjusz Buliński and Aleksander Posern-Zieliński write that the researcher's individual experiences related to everyday life and things outside work are often overlooked in scholarly publications. Meanwhile, the "kitchen" adds a vital dimension for three reasons: it broadens the researcher's personal experience, it is important for documenting anthropological research in Poland, and helps shape young ethnology students. Paying attention to personal ethnography is important insofar as it influences the formation of research conclusions, even though it does not fall within the discipline's methodological standards.⁵

The field in anthropology

Ethnology and cultural anthropology cannot be defined without components such as ethnographic research and the field. They distinguish it from other humanities and social sciences, giving anthropology a certain autonomy. The field – at least since the time of Bronisław Malinowski – is the nucleus of ethnology. Anthropological experience is built precisely in the field. James Clifford bases this kind of learning on participatory presence, contact with the reality one wants to understand, relationships, and concreteness of perception. It takes commitment and time for the experience to gain depth. The world, which is understood as an experimental product of experience is an accumulation of knowledge about the studied field, and thus becomes the personal experience of the researcher.⁶ The concept of the field has changed and evolved over the years. At first, it was a workroom where theories were created based on descriptions made by missionaries and clerks; today, it can be the area of engaged anthropology. Nowadays, the field is not limited to far-flung regions inhabited by communities different from the one represented by the researcher. Here is Clifford's definition of "the traditional field":

2 K. Kaniowska, *Opis. Klucz do rozumienia kultury*, Łódź 1999, pp. 49–83.

3 G. Kubica, "Wstęp," [in:] B. Malinowski, *Dziennik w ścisłym znaczeniu tego wyrazu*, Kraków 2002, pp. 5–36.

4 S. Latocha, "Ethnoarchaeological Bizarres. Fieldnotes (2015–2017) from the Research in Polish Jurassic Highland," [in:] *Places of Memory and Oblivion in the Cultural Landscapes of the Polish Jurassic Highland. References and Extensions*, eds. O. Ławrynowicz, A. Krupa-Ławrynowicz, Łódź 2019, pp. 335–360.

5 T. Buliński, A. Posern-Zieliński, "Etnografia osobista. Antropolożka i antropolog w terenie," *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2021, vol. 7, p. 11.

6 J. Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations* 1983, no. 2, pp. 118–146.

Fieldwork normally involves physically leaving “home” (however that is defined) to travel in and out of some distinctly different setting. [...] Intensive, “deep” interaction is required, something canonically guaranteed by the spatial practice of extended, if temporary, dwelling in a community. Fieldwork can also involve repeated short visits.⁷

The field of today is no longer understood as a reality alien to the researcher. The research area can be very close and literally anything can become it. It no longer has to involve distant travels and people outside the anthropologist’s cultural circle.⁸ The crux of ethnographic fieldwork, however, remains the same and that is interaction with another human. It manifests itself through numerous conversations, participation in the events of another person’s life, and recording the socio-cultural space in which the researched group and the researcher who analyzes and interprets the field material, find themselves. “In the classical approach to the field, we are dealing with a myriad of components: the field is comprised by the researched group, the researcher and all the cultural and social elements (customs, rituals, etc.).”⁹ A different approach is presented by Michał Żerkowski, who defetishizes the ethnographic field,¹⁰ concluding that the researcher “is leaving the field,” which can be disappointing because, as Sławomir Sikora observes in his commentary on Żerkowski’s essay, the latter offers no alternative.¹¹ However, is the anthropologist indeed “saying goodbye to the field”? The field is changing and this can seem like abandonment. Sikora notes that the field in anthropology has the hallmarks of Eliade’s sacrum: “the field is not so much everywhere, as it CAN exist anywhere.”¹² I feel that Żerkowski does not give a clear answer to the question of why he is saying goodbye

7 Idem, “Spatial Practices: Fieldwork, Travel, and the Disciplining of Anthropology” [in:] *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, eds. A. Gupta and J. Ferguson, Berkley–Los Angeles–London 1997, pp. 190–191.

8 An example is the field research conducted in 2021 by first-year undergraduate students at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Lodz. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exercise took place in an online format. The researchers worked from their homes and “met” with the respondents using various electronic communication tools.

9 M. Rauszer, “Antropolog jest nagi (nawet pod ubraniem),” *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2015, no. 1, p. 178.

10 M. Żerkowski, “Pożegnanie z terenem. Esej antropologiczny,” *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2015, no. 1, p. 156.

11 S. Sikora, “Przedwczesne pożegnanie,” *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2015, no. 1, p. 175.

12 Ibidem.

to the field, or the answer is certainly not exhaustive. In the comments on his essay, Rauszer and Sikora do it for him, as if defending the figure of the field researcher and softening Żerkowski's position. In this "dispute," everyone has their own vantage points. However, the field will remain the foundation of ethnological methods and identity. It cannot be suppressed in the way attempts were made to mask the connivance between anthropology and colonialism.¹³ Żerkowski's text opens a new gateway in understanding the field and discussing it. It is a signal of new emotions emerging in the ethnological community. However, according to Sikora, the essay cannot become a manifesto of anthropology, because it is not spirited enough¹⁴ (whatever this word implies).

Katarzyna Mirgos made her field her "other love." She was discovering it with great fascination, experienced her difficulties with it and in it, and incorporated it into her biography and that of her family. The Basque country she describes is different from the field she learned about in college. She could truly experience the field she had heard about only once she was there, and it was there that her personality as a researcher was formed. The field absorbed her so much that from the "other" studying "others," it molded her as "one of them" among "her own kind."¹⁵

In an article summarizing his many years of work among the Roma community in Podlasie, Lech Mróz shows how important it is for the research to understand the people with whom we work and who provide us with what we are looking for or give us what we were not expecting. During his research work, he entered the world of the Roma and came to understand their problems resulting from their imposed change of lifestyle and the effort they put into maintaining their traditions. The last caravans, and later, settled Roma communities became his field – a field wounded by stereotypes and a lack of understanding from others. Mróz's attitude during his research is an example of how much effort must be put into the search for the identity of the field before it bares the "soul" of the elements that comprise it.¹⁶

Maciej Ząbek described his memories of his research in Sudan. The field was a great challenge for him, especially since it was happening at a time of great socio-political upheaval. His stay among the "others," as well as the adventures he encountered in Africa, led the author to the conclusion that ethnology is more of an art than a science. It requires moderation in the acquisition of knowledge in order

13 M. Żerkowski, op. cit., p. 161.

14 S. Sikora, op. cit., p. 175.

15 K. Mirgos, "A pomidory są te, co zawsze. Refleksje z baskijskiego terenu," *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2021, no. 7, pp. 111–126.

16 L. Mróz, "'Teraz ci powiem.' Praktykowanie przekraczania granic," *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2021, no. 7, pp. 127–150.

to properly and unhurriedly process it, as well as talent, cleverness and skill in writing. For him, the field is a deep and constant immersion in the “other world” and with the “Others.” Going from house to house for ethnographic interviews is the surrogate field, while the real experience and sense of being an ethnographer can be tasted during intensive research.

Having such experience, you look at the world a bit more realistically; you also better understand what others write and say, have a critical approach to the so-called literature on the subject and the ideologies that are steeped in it. As a result, you have a chance to make your mark in this art that is anthropology, although nothing here is a foregone conclusion, for anyone.¹⁷

Magdalena Zowczak recalls two-year research seasons (ethnographic laboratories organized by Warsaw University) involving students and faculty. Joint expeditions and scouting the field brought researchers together. The field became a link and intermediary between successive generations of anthropologists. It has been the foundation of cooperation, effort and results coming from both. The field is also the substrate of communication and learning about the other, and not only the person who is studied.¹⁸

Kamil Pietrowiak touches on the subject of the anthropologist’s work in the field understood as a rhetorical figure. It would be difficult to find a geographical place with an accumulation of blind people. The field here is people with a characteristic that sets them apart from the crowd. Working with “the field” framed in this way was a challenge for the author. The distance was bridged when both parties saw each other as people, not as research material or a data-acquiring being. The field requires feelings and emotions. The researcher concluded that the field does not end when the research is finalized; it lingers in the researchers and accompanies them on their further journey.¹⁹

Buliński and Posern-Zieliński, recapitulating the memories and testimonies of Mirgos, Mróz, Ząbek, Zowczak and Pietrowiak, draw attention to the initiation aspect of the field that is vital from the perspective of my article:

17 M. Ząbek, “Spowiedź antropologiczna. Z notatek PRL-owskiego etnografa – o niektórych kontekstach badań terenowych w Sudanie,” *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2021, no. 7, p. 95.

18 M. Zowczak, “Obrazki z terenu albo oniryczne reminiscencje Laboratoriów etnograficznych,” *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2021, no. 7, pp. 151–164.

19 K. Pietrowiak, “Relacja, zobowiązanie, współpraca. Założenia i wyzwania badań etnograficznych wśród osób niewidomych,” *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2021, no. 7, pp. 99–110.

They all point to the special importance of the first, earliest phases of ethnographic experience, which acted largely as a kind of rite of passage, leading from attempts at rather haphazard recognition of the specificity of the studied field to later stages of well-conceptualized, and therefore, professional penetration. These first contacts with the field, with a culturally or ethnically alien environment, were usually not easy, as they tore the researcher away, and often for a long period, from loved ones and familiar surroundings, forcing them into unexpected loneliness and confusion in a strange environment.²⁰

Zofia Sokolewicz observed similarly that fieldwork is a kind of initiation that is not always obvious. The field tends to surprise you, varying in its intensity, and the researchers themselves do not always know why they are going and what they are researching.²¹

Many of anthropologists dream of distant research expeditions. In her essay, JoAnn D'Alisera describes experiences from such an expedition and juxtaposes them with the experience of student field trips. In her view, the conceptualization of the field in our discipline is a colonial legacy of modern ethnographers that has a purpose. In their own mind, the anthropologist must become "the other" in order to analyze and interpret, and not get stuck in a web of their own conceptions. This is especially important when conducting research in a community that can be classified as "one's own" under categories, such as country, city, neighborhood, region or village. The researcher and the researched group share common characteristics. However, the researchers must become "the other" in relation to their own kind while not gaining a sense of superiority over those who help them and comprise their field.²²

The countryside as a site of ethnographic research

The field – the far and the near – requires preparation, especially for a novice anthropology student like me, who needs to acquire a range of research methods and techniques. At the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Łódź, these are learned during classes on ethnographic research methods. In my case, several meetings before the trip to Mstów were devoted to the topic of

²⁰ T. Buliński, A. Posern-Zieliński, op. cit., p. 15.

²¹ Z. Sokolewicz, "Badania terenowe jako gwarancja empiryzmu antropologii?," *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 2016, no. 2, p. 141.

²² J. D'Alisera, "Field of Dreams: The Anthropologist Far Away at Home," *Anthropology and Humanism* 1999, no. 24(1), pp. 5-19.

research and the field specificity, but we did not gain real practice until we found ourselves in the rural areas of the Polish Jurassic Highlands. Franciszek Bereźnicki described this kind of exercise as “preparation for professional work through the acquisition of professional skills.”²³ This experience cannot be substituted by any simulations and laboratory examples from academic classes. The field presents real problems that need to be solved before you go further.

Ethnographic field research is different from other academic classes. Each field has its own peculiarities. The municipality of Mstów, where the research was conducted, is located northeast of Częstochowa. Administratively, it belongs to the Silesian province, which includes the central and northern parts of the Kraków–Częstochowa Upland. A characteristic element of the landscape of the Mstów municipality are limestone hills, often in the shapes of picturesque rock formations, mounds, spires, flues and rock ridges. The terrain is different from the lowland landscape that prevails in Poland. Numerous hills and inliers immediately catch the eye. The territory of the municipality is inhabited by almost 11,000 people. The administrative unit is divided between 18 *sołectwa*, which include the towns of Brzyszków, Cegielnia, Gąszczyk, Jaskrów, Jaźwiny, Kłobukowice, Kobyłczyce, Krasice, Kuchary, Kuśmierki, Latosówka, Łuszczyn, Małusy Małe, Małusy Wielkie, Mokrzysz, Mstów, Pniaki Mokrzyszkie, Siedlec, Srocko, Rajsko, Wancerzów and Zawada.²⁴ It is a rural municipality that is famous in the region for its fruit growing. The seat of government is located in Mstów, which was once a small town that lost its city rights as a result of tsarist repressions after the January Uprising. The town stands out from the neighboring villages, and one can still see the urban character of its buildings: numerous tenement houses surrounding the market square and the layout of the streets. Local officials are striving to display the urban history of the municipality’s capital. In the notes, students compared it to the outskirts of their hometowns: “I felt at home walking along these paths, as the houses, as well as the roads, looked similar to those in my hometown of XYZ, or at least in its outskirts where there are single-family neighborhoods.”²⁵

The old buildings – limestone houses and farm buildings – do not resemble those from central Poland. The first observations of the area focused precisely on what is superficial and often different from what the researcher knows. I am no

23 F. Bereźnicki, “Organizacyjne formy kształcenia w szkole wyższej” [in:] *Wprowadzenie do pedagogiki szkoły wyższej*, ed. K.W. Jaskot, Szczecin 2006, p. 195.

24 “Charakterystyka gminy.” Available on-line: <https://www.mstow.pl/art/2552,charakterystyka-gminy-mstow> [accessed on: September 9, 2022].

25 The diaries and the information they contain that could be linked to their authors or respondents have been anonymized/alterred. Excerpts from the notes are quoted verbatim. Diary dated April 4, 2022 by P.

stranger to the countryside. However, the one that constitutes the Jurassic landscape is far from the one lingering in my childhood memories. Each village and hamlet has a different past inscribed in its scenery – large orchards, post-PGR²⁶ landscapes of former mansions and palaces, traces of the Jewish community's presence... For some young researchers from the city, coming into contact with the countryside and the people living in it was an opportunity to revise their views on rural areas. The best way to do this was to interact with the local population. Contact with another person did not always come easily – the local dialect, local problems, the network of neighborly and family relations constituted a communication and cultural barrier. The most important factor that affects the image of the field is the person being studied, who is not constrained – unlike the researcher – by scholarly methods and tools. They are not bound by research ethics. They are simply themselves. During the interview, they can react in any way they want, according to their beliefs and way of conducting themselves. This can generate unexpected and problematic situations for the students, which are beyond the typical procedures learned in class.²⁷ This makes fieldwork an application not only of professional methods, but also of the researcher's personal qualities, temperament, emotions, congeniality, kindness and endurance.²⁸ I can say confidently that they are a test of social life. The level of these soft skills in individuals varies. They cannot be acquired through academic learning, but they should be in the repertoire of qualities that we have acquired in the process of socialization. I mentioned that every field is different, and thanks to these traits, we can find ourselves in different situations and among different people we meet on our way. After studying anthropology for a year, it seems to me that this is its essence – being with and listening to the other person, not just collecting dry facts.

The rural character of the field is not insignificant in the whole process of forming the researcher's identity and their ethnological initiation. Sociologists agree on the characteristics of a rural community, even one of the 21st century.²⁹ People in it know each other quite well, there are numerous contacts between them on many levels, and there are often blood ties. They are united by an intergenerational community of experience and the residents are bound together by the village. No one is

26 PGR – a State Agricultural Farm in communist Poland.

27 A. Deredas, A. Piotrowska, "Dziennik terenowy. Zapis stawania się badaczem," [in:] *Nie tylko o wsi...* Szkice humanistyczne dedykowane Profesor Marii Wieruszewskiej-Adamczyk, ed. D. Kasprzyk, Łódź 2013, p. 266.

28 K. Kaniowska, "Etyczne problemy badań antropologicznych," *Łódzkie Studia Etnograficzne* 2010, vol. 49, pp. 19–32.

29 P. Żebrok, "Gen solidarności w polskiej społeczności wiejskiej," [in:] *Solidarność: człowiek w sieci zależności społecznych*, eds. J. Jagiełło, K. Tytko, Kraków 2021, pp. 104–120.

anonymous here, and any “intruder” is immediately conspicuous, especially one as obtrusive as an ethnographer – a newcomer from another place. In modern ethnology, the village is a carbon copy of the distant expeditions of “old anthropology.” In the field, one is noticed, one is an outsider, and the “natives” met along the way are orientalized and inscribed in the image of the “savage” straight from the diaries of Captain James Cook. From the perspective of a young student of the art of anthropology, the countryside – through its peculiarities (strong dependence between residents, lack of anonymity, common centers, rapid exchange of information) – becomes a tiny island in the boundless sea, unlike a city. Research conducted even in a small neighborhood still gives a sense of anonymity. I can refer to my other research – as part of my anthropological studies – from late June and early July 2022 at a Łódź research center. Together with my fellow students, we collected data on revitalization in selected areas of Łódź. The place – a few streets in the city center – was completely different from the rural areas of the Mstów municipality. There were countless people on the sidewalks and constantly new passersby. During conversations, respondents mentioned the anonymity and lack of close relationships between people sharing the living space. Everyone lived in a bubble there. In Mstów and its vicinity, it was different. The world of the local community was centered around common elements and signs of identity: Mstów, the church, history and common problems. The countryside turned out to be our surrogate “dream field.” The specificity of the village – this particular one, but also understood in a general way – and the research focused on the problems arising in rural areas made us feel like researchers among the Others – researchers who stood out. In many cases, they allowed us to come into contact with another culture, with another vision of the world. The field also facilitated research “successes.” The dense network of familial and friendship relations allowed one to quickly and rather easily find interlocutors and helped open the doors of many a household. It was enough to say that Mrs. X sent you for the interlocutor to let you inside and show you a slice of their reality. Nevertheless, the countryside was not the anthropologist’s dream for everyone. The village, also by its very nature, posed some problems, such as reluctance to share information for fear it would disturb the harmony of the rural community. The village is a certain entity that has developed mechanisms to filter out unwanted factors. “Natives” from the countryside are to a large extent already familiar with the optics and perspective of the “urban researcher,” which also makes research more challenging. However, I can say without a doubt that the experience of the rural area is a pillar in the formation of the researcher’s identity, bolstering them during initiation. The rural area is a major figure in this rite of passage. It teaches, exposes, helps and plays tricks, all to fortify the young ethnographer. This is a unique experience and certainly impossible to achieve in a metropolitan setting.

Fieldnotes

The competence of fieldwork is also influenced by the fact that every researcher is different, with a unique frame of mind. How they experience being in the field and their attitude translate into the research outcome. The fieldnotes represent a “genre” that can accommodate those experiences for which there is no place in the research report, even though they influenced its shape. The notes provide a space for personal ethnography, as Buliński and Posern-Zieliński aptly pointed out.³⁰ During our stay in Jura, we kept notes daily and described everything we felt, what we encountered and moved us. According to our supervisors, this exercise was meant to show how we perceive ourselves and the field. It was our self-analysis. Anna Deredas and Alicja Piotrowska conclude³¹ that it is impossible not to agree with what Kubica observed in her introduction to Malinowski’s *Dziennik* [Diary]: “According to what he wrote [...] about his diaries, they primarily contain self-analysis. It is more or less general, deals with various issues, but it is essentially about one thing: to capture the state of the object that undergoes the experiment. To describe it. To realize the state of affairs.”³²

According to Malinowski, the diary is not a research tool. It is an exercise to be performed. It was similar in our case, as I have already mentioned. The fieldnotes offer some anthropological knowledge, they help in self-reflection, and furthermore, talking about them eases entry into the field. What we felt during the research and what we wrote down also proved to be very helpful when compiling data after returning from the field. The diaries recount the researchers’ feelings and their intimate experiences; it is a place where the ethnographer’s insight is intertwined with that of a regular person. The diaries became a space of first interpretations. The notes gave us ideas that we might not have had later. The content of the diary speaks about me as an anthropologist and a researcher as well as presenting an attitude towards the situations that took place. In an article addressing a similar problem, Deredas and Piotrowska stated: “This is a space for recording aesthetic and emotional impressions, as well as mental attitudes revealed as the researcher experiences the field and the studied group.”³³ This observation is confirmed in the fieldnotes that are the subject of my article. Ethnographic knowledge cannot be divested of the feelings and emotions accompanying the researcher, whose experiences cannot be conveyed even by the best interviews conducted. The element of “I,” which was singled out by Rauszer

30 T. Buliński, A. Posern-Zieliński, op. cit., pp. 10–11.

31 A. Deredas, A. Piotrowska, op. cit., p. 267.

32 G. Kubica, op. cit., p. 20.

33 A. Deredas, A. Piotrowska, op. cit., p. 268.

in his commentary on Żerkowski's essay,³⁴ is vital here. The position in the symbolic grid affects the results of the study. It provides a prism through which one evaluates and draws conclusions. The position in this grid is reflected precisely by the field-notes – witnesses to the researchers' undisclosed struggles with themselves and the field. The captured notes can be transformed and their character will no longer be intimate.³⁵ Instead, they will become anthropological knowledge. These notes also safeguard against the unreliability of human memory. Along with self-discipline and systematization of work, this is one of the main goals of diary writing.³⁶

During the field research in which I participated, students adopted different forms of diary keeping. Some chose the classic version – they wrote down their thoughts and feelings about the events that happened to them on a particular day. Others expanded their descriptions with photographs. One student opted for yet another formal solution – she recorded what she wanted to put on paper. Such a way of expressing one's ethnographic self seems to me very interesting and beneficial. The literal sense of the words is enriched by the pitch, tone and timbre of the voice. This is another element that helps in the analysis and interpretation of the study materials. The reason for keeping such diaries was also very prosaic – they saved time. In a busy fieldwork schedule, recuperation is crucial, and the auditory form of the diary certainly saved time that could be used for rest. In the diaries, we recorded the field and our impressions. We developed an intangible map of the rural areas of a fragment of Jura, a collage built from different perspectives and emotions.

The diaries created during the field research in Mstów differ in their contents and forms. This is due to differences in the personalities and temperaments of their authors. Each of the researchers participating in the project had their own unique style of writing and expressing what they felt. Since the diaries often contained sensitive information, I decided to anonymize them and keep the number of people quoted to a minimum for the sake of the article's length.

Becoming an anthropologist: the initiation

Becoming an ethnographer is a process. The first fieldwork is the initiation into this profession. I will now review the various stages of becoming an anthropologist and try to fit them into the model constructed by Arnold van Gennep. I will analyze and interpret the diaries of young researchers through the prism of this concept in

34 M. Rauszer, op. cit., p. 178.

35 M. Hammersley, P. Atkinson, *Ethnography. Principles in Practice*, London 2007.

36 A. Deredas, A. Piotrowska, op. cit., p. 269.

order to show how important it is to experience anthropology outside the lecture hall or the workroom.

Going into the field for the first time is a “baptism” for the ethnographer and resembles a rite of passage.³⁷ In various cultures and societies, the initiations that people undergo highlight transitional periods of life, entry into a new social role, etc. Van Gennep expanded the term to include a wide variety of rites, such as a birth, a post-nuptial, a wedding, and a funeral. A rite of passage always consists of three phases: the exclusion phase (preliminal, or separation), the marginal phase (liminal, or transition period) and the inclusion phase (postliminal, or integration). Our trip to Jura was no different. Going into the field required that we leave the place of our residence, put our other responsibilities on hold and separate from our loved ones. In a sense, for the world we knew, we became “dead” for ten days. All our attention was absorbed by the area of the rural municipality near Częstochowa and the people we wanted to meet. This was accompanied by fear, uncertainty, and at the same time, curiosity:

I was very stressed all day. Later I had a little cry before lunch and then my mood improved a bit. However, I still feel this ominous atmosphere of calm before the storm. Because of irrational anxieties, I only think about the negatives and feel trapped in some kind of nervous bubble. I can't seem to think beyond it.³⁸

We are in a small town whose name I have known for only two weeks. My buddy's girlfriend (who comes from this municipality) told me about it one evening a few days ago. Now from a white spot on the map, a small Polish town has emerged, surrounded by an endless expanse of fields, dispersed trees and small islands of gray bricks (air-bricks or something) and cheap slate. [...] I'm oozing skepticism. But paradoxically, I'm full of hope.³⁹

This is the first stage, the preliminal phase. The desire to perform the assigned task, to be a professional is mixed with the fear of the unknown. The diaries reveal that students are anxious about what they may encounter in the field. Lack of respondents, attacks from animals such as dogs, and struggles with their own well-being – these are just some of the issues mentioned by the students. Undoubtedly, all these elements have an impact on the way the research is conducted, its results, and the researchers themselves. The peculiarities of the contact in the field for the first

37 A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, London–New York 1960.

38 Diary dated April 4, 2022 by M.

39 Diary dated April 4, 2022 by Z.

time can determine the further research path of young anthropologists. The thoughts with which we entered the project were gradually confronted with the living field.

The second stage in initiation rites is the liminal phase. Here you must face yourself, confront fear, experience loneliness, and overcome difficulties. On the level of heroic myths, this is a time of traversing various physical and spiritual distances, and meeting people from all walks of life who have their own roles to play in the hero's initiation journey.⁴⁰ In her essay, "The anthropologist as hero," Susan Sontag addresses the subject of ethnographic initiation.⁴¹ The anthropologist in the field becomes "homeless" and, being in this state, they try to find themselves and the meaning of their work. The ethnologist must leave their comfort zone and look at their own person through the eyes of others. In this way, they learn about their external image and can juxtapose it with their own feelings about themselves. The field to which the researcher goes can give rise to fear and helplessness, which call into question the validity and purposefulness of the anthropologist's work. The feelings that surface during fieldwork can affect the evaluation and analysis of the collected material. Sontag notes that the field leads to catharsis. It is a turning point in the ethnographic rite of passage. The researcher, through cleansing and gaining a new perspective, becomes a different person, and the field can condition their way of thinking and acting. This breeds courage, which is necessary in conducting research. "The heroes of the field," who are trying to find themselves in fieldwork and aim to gain valuable experience for others, must demonstrate mental and physical strength to overcome adversities that arise during research, and as a result, maintain objective research judgment.⁴² The field becomes a trickster: sometimes it helps you and at other times, it turns against you. An excerpt from one of the diaries illustrates this:

The field proves to be a living creature. It has its whims and makes promises; it lies, smiles, dances and sleeps. It's a strange fruit that, the moment you want to bite it, turns into a stone or a lizard and runs back to the tree only to repeat the trick. In the midst of people, I had to meet myself once again; to decide what is mine and alive, and what I must discard like a scab.⁴³

Anthropology cannot be learned only theoretically. It also has a practical dimension expressed in the field, which teaches, offers guidance, and changes us. Entering the

40 J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, New York 1949.

41 S. Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, New York 1966, Part II, e-book edition.

42 Ibidem.

43 Diary dated April 8, 2022 by Z.

field provides new experiences. It is not just purely rational knowledge, contained in written theories. It is, first and foremost, an empirical experience of the world of the studied group. The field is not limited to administrative space, to boundaries set by nature or man. These are its components, but it also has a layer that goes beyond reality. It becomes a partner in wandering.⁴⁴ This leads to the conclusion that the field participates in ethnographic rites of passage, and thus takes on the character of an initiatory figure of entry into “anthropological reality.”

Being in the field and learning about it through the residents also results in thoughts that can, and should, be used in every aspect of life:

Transcribing yesterday’s interviews, I realized today that the impression my respondent makes is not a reflection of what he communicates to me. An unpleasant respondent does not equal he is saying stupid things. My personality does not express what I know, and vice versa. I think this is a valuable insight for me [...]. Sometimes you have to transcend yourself to be able to see something more.⁴⁵

In the case of our anthropological rite of passage, the liminal phase was the longest of the stages. It started already on the second day of the research. We had to go into the field and deal with it, which – in the context of Van Gennep’s model – can be interpreted as tests to which the subject of initiation is put. The people we met on our way reacted differently to us. Sometimes they were friendly in conversation, sharing their life experience, while at other times, they approached us with reserve, chasing us away. Unpleasant experiences were a kind of lesson about the reality of the field. Research failures and chagrin were a stimulus to work on ourselves and the ethnographic technique, whereas field successes were a driving force for action. All this strengthened us and built the foundation for the anthropologist’s identity. Going into the field certainly developed our professional as well as social competencies. The skills we acquired affected the way we began to perceive our respondents, and how they viewed us. In the field, we were strangers who were not always welcomed with open arms. However, “taming” the field allowed us to become part of the rural community for a while, which made us empathize more with its situation and understand why we were perceived by some in a given way. Kazimiera Zawistowicz-Adamska described similar experiences in *Społeczność wiejska* [Rural Community]. In Zaborów, she faced the problems and conventions found in the pre-war countryside. Her field experiences were published in the book, as the author writes: “for those who undertake field research with goodwill, but without due

44 S. Sontag, op. cit.

45 Diary dated April 8, 2022 by S.

experience. And for those who cling to the conviction of their own alleged superiority and thus do not know how to adopt a proper, humane attitude towards the rural community – a deep and reliable one.”⁴⁶ This approach to the villagers can be seen in the author’s memoir. From the beginning, she made efforts to relate to all manifestations of village life and each of the residents with attention and respect, including the poorest ones, in whose cottages she struggled to conduct interviews due to sanitary conditions and unpleasant smells. Before she began her work, she had to convince residents that the research was necessary and beneficial. The villagers did not immediately accept her presence or consent to recording data about their lives. However, once she gained their trust, she became “one of them.” She gave an emotional account of a young woman’s funeral. Her transformation took place there – from a participant, she became a co-participant; from a stranger to an almost full-fledged member of the local community. The situations and events which she encountered in the field influenced her development as a researcher and a human being. The time spent there taught her consideration, as she admitted in her monograph, where she noted that “with understanding should come forbearance.”⁴⁷

As I mentioned, field research is a school of empathy. In some situations, the researchers became invested in the problems of their respondents and tried to solve them:

I realized how draining the field can be for anthropologists, and how necessary it is to distance yourself from your feelings and those of your respondents. I don’t know if I could simply forget about this lonely old woman, for whom we were but a joyous moment in her otherwise sad everyday life. [...] I don’t want to forget her and I don’t want her to forget me. I want her to remember that there is someone out there who wants to listen to her.⁴⁸

One of the “tests” during our rite of passage were certainly the transcriptions. An analysis of the materials indicates that this was the most strenuous part of the entire research work. We had not practiced transcription in class, so we found it all the more difficult. However, this exercise turned out to be very fruitful, allowing us to “review” the meeting with the other person, refresh the accompanying emotions in the field and make new observations or notice mistakes. As a result, we could improve on our subsequent interviews. No work is in vain, as one diary stated:

46 K. Zawistowicz-Adamska, *Spółeczność wiejska. Doświadczenia i rozważania z badań terenowych w Zaborowie*, Łódź 1948, p. 15.

47 Ibidem, p. 128.

48 Diary dated April 11, 2022 by W.

“Unfortunately, analyzing our interviews, some mistakes came to the fore, but I still think they were necessary.”⁴⁹

Studying the fieldnotes, I noticed that about halfway through the research, most students observed a certain drop in their energy and, consequently, a negative mood. Some experienced it sooner, others later. Fatigue with the field, lack of physical and mental strength, and the desire to have an A-performance affected us in different ways. There was doubt and dejection, but also attempts to identify the meaning and role of anthropology as a scientific discipline and a lifestyle:

The last few days I've been swept by emotions, trying to suss out what it's all about (and whether it's even about anything at all). Today clear skies and serenity prevail. Now I feel the bliss of it. Why only now? I don't know. I am only guessing. I made the worst mistake. I chose seriousness as the leitmotif of my action. After all, what am I doing here? I left with a “herd” of wonderfully quirky and messed up people to travel to the edge of civilization (this is not a description of a fact, just a feeling a person has when he leaves a pathologically organized reality to a place where the bus may not arrive on time or not at all and this is normal and no one will make a fuss about it). We have our research. We have our studies. Everything has a purpose (to pass the class). Everything has a place, etc. Rubbish. Complete nonsense... All the academic fetor floating in the air overshadowed the most important thing for me. That this is my – MY – first field, and that it doesn't matter in the least what the final outcome is; whether it will be beautifully concise and to the point, or a thousand miles beyond the fringes of the known universe; whether the results of our daily struggle with the system, with people, with cold food, with ourselves will find approval or complete rejection. It's rubbish. This is my first field. I don't know anything, I can't do anything, but a funny scar has been seared on the line of my life the moment I faced the world as an anthropologist (yes, yes without a degree, without the blessing from “the elders,” but nonetheless). It's like being a baby. You can't walk, you can't talk, they carry you around in their arms and you learn, but you already qualify as a human. So I'm already an anthropologist. In my infancy, but still. Anthropology for me is not a science. It's an experience. It's a way of seeing the world more deeply. It's the courage to go beyond your own tamed space and meet the stranger and the other. Science is safe, while anthropology is constant exposure to potential wounds. It's absorbing the poisoned nectar and trying to understand both the sweetness of the flowers and the astringency of their poison.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Diary dated April 5, 2022 by O.

⁵⁰ Diary dated April 9, 2022 by Z.

The state of infancy mentioned in the above passage is similar to the situation of an initiate. Initiation is a “small death,” and at the same time, represents a person’s rebirth, but with the baggage of new qualities or knowledge. Acquiring them makes a new being. The field best verifies whether anthropology is a good lifestyle for a person. The rural area where we came to experience metaphorical “death” has left its mark on us. It helped some to “spread their wings,” while it made others realize how difficult it is to leave your comfort zone, cut yourself off from your environment and find yourself in the “edge of civilization.” In the case of our study, the liminal phase of the rite of passage revised our educational and professional plans. It solidified them for some, and pushed others to change.

The final stage, post-liminal, was a return to Łódź, our homes, our own affairs and people we knew well. However, we did not return the same. Our stay in the rural areas of the Jura region enriched us with new experiences and skills; it allowed us to look inside ourselves and see hidden layers of strength or lack thereof. The return to the “interior” was described in the diaries:

The adventure with Mstów in a sense is over. Am I glad? Yes, but that’s because it was my first try and very quickly I had to learn to mask my own habits. And then – no, because I felt I could have done a little more. [...] I’d never thought about how something written on my hat might be perceived. I wear this hat because I lost my old one (in fact, I found it in another jacket) and my parents bought me a new one. Now I know how everyone’s anthropological sensitivity is attuned to different issues. I appreciate this question. On my way back, images flew before my eyes, and I noticed that my brain immediately analyzed the space as if it were part of our project. Talking with loved ones, I was even more struck by the change and transience of form. While I was away, they started building a new section of road in my neighborhood, and there had been a fire in my town.⁵¹

“Finally, I’m back. When I got home, I was spent and immediately turned in.”⁵² Arriving in “your world,” against all odds, was not an easy experience. On the one hand, it sparked joy, and on the other, it offered some difficulties. In Mstów, we left a part of ourselves, some even our hearts. We became part of the landscape that we explored. The initiation affected our anthropological “self.” We went through symbolic death and resurrection – an ethnographic rite of passage.

⁵¹ Diary dated April 13, 2022 by J.

⁵² Diary dated April 13, 2022 by M.

Culture shock and back to square one

In addition to the rite-of-passage model, whose subject is the novice ethnographer, the concepts of culture shock and reverse culture shock⁵³ also explain the situation in which we found ourselves in the field. The beginning of the research bears the hallmarks of the “honeymoon” – the first stage in the culture shock model. Theoretical preparation suggests that the field will be a Mecca for the anthropologist who will not be taken aback by anything. After the initial successes, the first interviews with the respondents, things seem clear. However, the more thoroughly one gets to know the field, the more differences one begins to notice, differences that represent the boundary of two worlds. What comes next is the culture shock. Even the field from the researcher’s socio-cultural circle can prove to be foreign. The researchers see that they are someone else in relation to the group in which they find themselves. They notice their foreignness. This can have a destructive effect on young researchers and discourage them from their work. The hostility, resentment or indifference they have to tackle bear the stamp of initiation tests. These and many other adversities must be faced by the students of ethnology in order for them to adapt to the space and time in which they happen to be. The researcher enters a phase of adaptation. Sometimes the field becomes a second home, a “promised land,” and sometimes a scary place, a nightmare. Field research always has an end. The researchers think they are back to the starting point. However, it is no longer the same reality or the same person. The field has changed the researchers, and when they were away, even for a short period, the place they left changed. This can pose further problems. Sontag noted that the anthropologist is homeless, but this time at home.⁵⁴ The analyzed material did not include post-fieldwork reflections. From my own experience, I can say that the world to which I returned changed, various issues developed in my absence, and I had to “jump” into their natural course. How can one not “get winded” in this situation?

Me – an anthropologist?

Fieldnotes give insight into our ambitions and fears. The professional initiation of young researchers coming mainly from the city took place in Jura. The village and its inhabitants had a decisive influence on the course of this rite. It is a matter of having to find oneself in the reality of the country, to enter a life that runs on “different

53 M. Chutnik, *Szok kulturowy. Przyczyny, konsekwencje, przeciwdziałanie*, Kraków 2007, pp. 41–80.

54 S. Sontag, op. cit.

tracks” – the lack of anonymity, the dense network of neighborly relations, and the high context of issues that animate the local community. The completion of the ethnographic rite of passage in the field is not the end of the process of becoming an anthropologist. However, as I mentioned, the first field research is the cornerstone of the anthropological researcher’s body of work. What is experienced during the first research has a foundational part in the creation of the researcher’s identity. This is a very important motif of the fieldnotes, in which one of the authors concluded: “The heart of anthropology is the field.”⁵⁵

This article is important to me for many reasons. First of all, I myself participated in the research, of which the diaries that were the subject of my analysis were a part. In describing the stages of the transition process (of becoming an ethnographer), I relied on my own experiences, which were often the same as those of my fellow students. I am glad that I can see myself developing anthropological competence. Secondly, in the field, relationships were formed on three levels: student – master, researcher – researcher, and researcher – the researched,⁵⁶ which was manifested during the initiation and played a role in the process of becoming an anthropologist. The fieldnotes we kept became the basis for interpreting the researcher’s work in the field, perfecting the methodology and the art of conducting field research. The rural landscape of Jura – our field – became a witness and a “training ground” for the struggles of young students of ethnology and cultural anthropology.

What was the first field research for me? The field is the center of our discipline, the *axis mundi* of ethnological biography and the non-academic part of life. The first field was kind to me on a physical level. I did not have to traverse the rural fringes of the Mstów municipality – I was located in the very center of it. However, the social skills I gained through contact with other people are valuable to me and will stay with me forever. This means that I completed my professional initiation.

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55 Diary dated April 13, 2022 by S.

56 A. Deredas, A. Piotrowska, op. cit., pp. 179–180.

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