

The First Letter from the Field

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Upon learning that the whole Kubik family was preparing to leave this August for a yearlong fieldwork in Poland, David Kideckel suggested that I should keep sending to the Review brief reports from the field. I love the idea (one more reason to be systematic) and promise to be a diligent correspondent. By the way of introduction, let me tell you a brief story of how the idea of this fieldwork came about and what preparations have been made so far. In July 1989 I returned to Poland after almost seven years of absence. Having just finished my doctoral dissertation at Columbia, entitled *The Role of Symbols in the Legitimation of Power, Poland: 1976-1981*, I was anxious to immerse myself in the country undergoing a dramatic change and find ideas for new research projects. A four week stay, in addition to the very emotional reunion with my family and friends, allowed me to collect a considerable amount of data on the recent (June 1989) semi-democratic elections and the emergence of the movement of Citizens' Committees. This preliminary study helped me later to develop a proposal for long-term fieldwork under the working title of *Political Discourse and Political Praxis of the Current Polish Democratization*, which I hope to begin in September 1990, thanks to the IREX grant.

The country I visited was still euphoric after the unexpectedly high electoral victory of Solidarity. I interviewed several Solidarity activists who had worked in the union's election campaign. All shared with me an amazing story of the frantic 57 days before the elections, during which the powerful communist party, although still in firm control of the media, practically disappeared from the public spaces. Instead, these spaces were filled with home-made and often amateurish visual propaganda by Solidarity. What really attracted my curiosity and later became a subject of two conference presentations (including my last AAA meeting paper) was the fact that during this campaign the communist party candidates pretended to be everything but communists. They were instead promoting themselves as patriots, champions of democracy and self-government, efficient and successful managers and, very often, unambiguous supporters of private enterprise (sic!). This strategy of mimicry, which served to hide the real political affiliations of the communist candidates, seems to have been the most conspicuous feature of the 1989 election campaign.

I also did some interviewing and background research on the Citizens' Committees. These spontaneously created bodies replaced in many places chapters of Solidarity as focal points of social activism. In Ustron (a site of my planned fieldwork in the Beskidy Mountains, southern Poland) I participated in a meeting of the local Citizens' Committee whose members were deliberating how to resurrect the local chapter of Solidarity. This exemplifies one of the fundamental dilemmas of the emerging civil society in Poland: Solidarity has been organized by people in the workplace; Citizens' Committees have been organized by people living in a certain area. The transition from the former organizing principle to the latter proves to be very difficult.

I started also working on the theoretical and conceptual background of my upcoming fieldwork. I decided to concentrate on three themes. First, I have been reading literature on the transition to democracy from authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. I am studying, for example, O'Donnell's and Schmitter's *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* and trying to figure out how to connect such analyses with my "anthropological/ethnographic" framework and problematic. Second, I have been developing an analytical framework I will need to study the change in the public discourse (symbols, works, styles of thinking, concepts, etc.). I intend to study the interaction of symbols and politics/power in a small community - thus far I concentrated on the national level. I would like to utilize some linguistic methods (although my competence here is limited). It seems to me, for example, that M. Moerman's *Talking Culture: Ethnography and Conversation Analysis* provides me with enough clues to develop an efficient mode of analysis of everyday verbal exchanges (beside I am a long-standing fan of Schutz and Luckman and *The Structures of the Life-World* will travel with us to Poland). Third, I have been looking at the more recent works dealing with the folk religion in Europe, such as, for example, a volume edited by Ellen Badone (in my preliminary research in Ustron I detected a growing tension between Protestants and Catholics; the former voted for Solidarity candidates, the latter had their own representatives). Another very useful aspect of my trip to Poland was an opportunity to catch up with the most recent publications on a variety of topics. Here I would like to share with you brief bibliographic information about several works recently published in Poland in the fields of ethnography and sociology.

Arkady, a Warsaw publishing house, put out *Sztuka Ludowa w Polsce* (Folk Art in Poland) by Ewa Fryś-Pietraszkowa, Anna Kunczyńska-Iracksa and Marian Pokropek (1988). This carefully edited work contains 13 synthetic studies (emphasizing history) on such topics as

architecture, pottery, cloth, painting, etc; an extensive bibliography; index of geographic locations; index of names; index of terms and iconographic motifs; and 453 black-and-white and color pictures.

Artia (a Czechoslovak publisher) and PA Interpress (a Polish house) brought out *Tradycje Tworczosci Ludowej, Ludowa Kultura Materialna w Czechach i na Morawach* (Traditions of Folk Arts and Crafts. Folk Material Culture in Bohemia and Moravia) by Alena Vondruskova and Vlastimil Vondruska. A handsome volume (many beautiful black-and-white and color pictures), though not as carefully edited as the previous one (no indexes or bibliography), contains a lot of useful information about the material culture of the two Czechoslovak lands.

The work I found particularly interesting is *Cyganie w Polsce, Dzieje i Obyczaje*. (Gypsies in Poland. History and Customs) by Jerzy Ficowski (known to the English-speaking public for his superb editorial work on the English version of Letters and Drawings of Bruno Schulz. with Selected Prose). It is a carefully researched and concisely written essay presenting a story of Gypsies in Poland (note: not Polish Gypsies), accompanied by 207 black-and-white and color pictures. It begins with an examination of the first written sources documenting the Gypsy presence in Europe and on Polish territories. A brief history of the Gypsies in Poland until 1939 is followed by a detailed description of their tragic fate under the Nazis. Then, the very difficult relationship between Gypsies and both the communist authorities ("productivizing" actions) and ethnic Poles (e.g., an attempted pogrom in Konin in 1981) is scrutinized. The last and the largest part of the essay is devoted to a presentation and analysis of old and modern Gypsy folklore. I would also like to bring to your attention a serial publication of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences entitled *Sisyphus, Sociological Studies*. Some of you may know Volume III: Crises and Conflicts, The Case of Poland 1980-81, one of the best sources of primary materials (e.g., fragments of workers' memoirs) and original studies by Polish sociologists dealing with the Polish "self-acting" revolution of 1980-81. By now six volumes are available. Volume IV, for example, entitled Poland in the 1980s. Reassessment of Crises and Conflicts, contains such studies as W. Morawski's "Dilemmas of the institutional change in Contemporary Poland," Stefan Nowak's "The attitudes, values, and aspirations of Polish society," J. Wasilewski's "Social processes of regional power elite recruitment," or J. Koralewicz's and E. Wnuk-Lipinski's "Vision of society, differentiations and inequalities in the collective

consciousness." Sisyphus is an invaluable source of first-rate, original sociological studies, although the quality of English translations is very uneven. I know that the future of this publication is endangered by the lack of funds and our Polish colleagues appeal for help, for example in the form of subscriptions (if you have questions concerning this issue or you need more information please, call or write me).

If you have any comments, criticisms, useful hints, bibliographic suggestions etc., concerning my fieldwork or the works I briefly reviewed, please call me at (216) 263-2219[(919) 299-0653 after May 31)] or write to: Jan Kubik, c/o Ruth Shope, 516 Willowbrook Dr., Greensboro, NC 27403.