

Chapter 12: In Transit (1995)

Projects in the provinces

It's been many years since I have made much use of trains in Eastern Europe, and the journeys in Poland in 1995 are as exhilarating as those I recall from the years of my PhD research. I first stumbled upon the Hungarian village of Tázlár in 1976 by accident, having mentally committed myself to leaving the slow train from Józsefváros at the first stop after Soltvadkert and setting out on foot in the most enticing direction. The social interaction that I observed on crowded trains was richer and more concentrated than anything I experienced in villages. Looking back, it is clear to me that many of my indelible impressions of social life in Hungary were formed in such settings, as well as in the social circles in which I participated during my lengthy stay in the capital. Very little of this impinges on my village monograph or other articles, though I suspect that my publications would be very different were I to be embarking on fieldwork in the more self-conscious climate of anthropology in the 1990s.

By the time I started work in Poland in 1978 I had acquired a second hand Lada and spent less time on trains. This led to social contacts of a rather different sort, also extremely revealing. My car excited attention everywhere I went, since it gave people an opportunity to marvel at the ingenuity of the Soviets in producing for the British market a right hand drive version of this standard socialist product. Whatever Polish sentiments towards the Russians, I soon learned that this vehicle enjoyed a higher reputation than the equivalent Polish adaptation of the Fiat original. But such discrimination paled into insignificance compared with the simple problem of keeping any vehicle roadworthy in deteriorating economic circumstances. I vividly recall the early December day when I awoke to temperatures some twenty degrees below those of the preceding day, and the realization that my English antifreeze mix was insufficient for the Polish climate. After several nights during which I was advised to get up every few hours and run the engine to avoid disaster, salvation came through the cousin of an academic friend of one of my Polish language teachers, who was able to provide access to the precious fluid. The same connection later proved of great help in obtaining discounted supplies of fuel from a state sector lorry driver. Such episodes afforded greater insight into the real workings of contemporary Polish society than whole libraries of sociology

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books and statistical analysis. (The academic who provided a key link in this chain has since become a highly successful entrepreneur in Poland's new 'market research' service industry.)

Even so, there were times when the Lada was out of action and I was obliged to rely on the train. I particularly remember one conversation on a damp, dull day during that same winter as I travelled between Cracow and Katowice. An elderly man, probably already retired, engaged me and another English student in faltering conversation in Polish about the country's economic situation. His message to us was that we should not be too disturbed by the apparent symptoms of crisis. These were necessary sacrifices that the country had to make in the short term. But since his generation had already made much greater sacrifices, for example in the construction of steel plants in Katowice and at Nowa Huta, near Cracow, the country could look forward to dynamic expansion in all areas very soon. I was far from convinced by the optimism of this committed communist, an engineer by training, but it was nonetheless impressive. Unlike many western visitors to Eastern Europe, who seemed only to encounter cynics and dissidents, both in Hungary and in Poland I also routinely ran into believers and enthusiasts.

I am pleased to find that in 1995 the trains still have the traditional 8-seater compartments, rather than the open plan which predominates now in Britain. The Poles seem more sociable than most people in these conditions, readily engaging each other in conversation and often sharing food. For the foreigner the experience offers a valuable free language lesson, and sometimes a good deal more. My conversation partner of 1978 is very likely dead by now, but in 1995 I find myself repeatedly wondering what he would make of the new Poland. As a communist he might take pride in the fact that the rail services are still entirely state owned and controlled, and that my journeys, adding up to some 1500 kilometres, take place on trains that are punctual, clean, and still remarkably cheap compared to other means of transport. But if this communist engineer were to travel on the trains of 1995 he would also see and hear much that he would surely deplore. There is a lot more graffiti visible outside, some of it crudely anti-semitic. Cracow's railway station has been impressively reconstructed, but as I stand in line for a ticket I am almost assaulted by two women beggars. One is a Romanian Gypsy, complete with unkempt child, and it is perhaps unsurprising to hear from friends later that most Poles would like their government to expel these people. But the other is a Polish *babcia*, and many other beggars on the streets of the big cities are also Polish. Even if their cases are, for the most part, cases of personal misfortune unrelated to the

change of régimes, their presence at railway stations and on the streets is nevertheless the most visible reminder that 'the transition' is not without its social costs.

But my communist interlocutor would also have to acknowledge that it is this recent transition to capitalism which is finally achieving some of the economic goals that he and the party leadership mistakenly imagined to be imminent under the socialism of the 1970s. Poland experienced the most extreme version of 'shock therapy' after 1989, and the jury is still out with the overall verdict. There has been political instability as well as social distress, and in many areas the economic successes have yet to be tasted to any significant degree. Even so, Poles feel little nostalgia for the shortages that characterized much of the socialist period. Half the steelworks at Nowa Huta has been closed and many workers have been made redundant. But the quality of Cracow's air has improved significantly, its tourism has expanded, and in this region at least the service sector generally has done much to compensate for the closure of antiquated industrial factories. It isn't only the physical atmosphere that's improved (though much of Silesia remains a death trap). The social atmosphere, too, seems newly vibrant. My superficial media sampling confirms the impression gained on trains and at railway stations of a tremendous unleashing of energy in society. No doubt my old communist would disapprove of the girlie magazines that decorate every news stall (*Playboy* and several other international magazines now appear in Polish versions, but there is strong local competition). He would almost certainly feel, as do many citizens of Cracow who never supported the communists, a certain sense of sacrilege as popular brand names invade prime cultural sites in the centre of the old city. But on the whole most people seem, if not enthusiastic about Poland's transition from socialism, at least more content with their present existential arrangements than with those that prevailed previously.

The reasons for widespread lack of enthusiasm become clearer to me after I leave Cracow and travel east towards the Ukrainian border. Przemyśl lies on the River San, mostly on its eastern bank. It acquired much of its present shape during the Austrian period, when it was the most important military base in Eastern Galicia. The city was split in two in 1939 when the Nazis and the Soviets agreed to carve up Poland between them, the frontier in this zone following the course of the river. Since 1945 the border has followed the so-called 'Curzon line', first devised by the diplomats at Versailles after the First World War. The Ukrainian Republic is a mere six miles away. Despite the damage done by two World Wars and by long-term neglect under socialism,

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the city retains much of its heritage and charm. For example, the railway station is in attractive Art Nouveau style that would not be out of place in Vienna or Budapest. Like a few other architectural gems, it is undergoing some long overdue conservation.

I am here to set up a research project to investigate religious conflicts in the city and its surrounding region. Rivalry between the Roman and Greek variants of Catholicism is an integral part of a more basic antagonism between Polish and Ukrainian nationalists. Here it is difficult to sustain the claim that an emergent market economy has been accompanied by a more attractive and open, 'civil society'. For several years this city of about 70,000 inhabitants has been in effect terrorized by extremist Polish nationalist groups.¹ The city has rich multi-cultural traditions, but ethnic cleansing in the 1940s put an end to these. Now the Jewish population is almost non-existent, and the Ukrainian population is tiny. Polish nationalists nonetheless campaign incessantly against threats to the city's Polish culture, and they see such threats everywhere. They have opposed the restitution of ecclesiastical property to the Greek Catholics, successfully defying the Pope himself when he requested that the former Greek Catholic cathedral be handed back to that community. Recently they have campaigned against attempts by Ukrainians to erect monuments in cemeteries to those who died fighting for an independent Ukraine in the 1940s: in the eyes of most Poles these fighters were 'terrorists', worse even than the Nazi oppressors. My friends update me on another fresh scandal. Early in 1995 the Ministry of Culture decided that its biennial Festival of Ukrainian Culture should this year be held in Przemyśl. The nationalists responded vigorously and, adopting the rhetoric of 'local democracy', persuaded the City Council to oppose the event (on the grounds that it was not wanted by the great majority of local inhabitants). When Warsaw refused to back down, tension escalated. The Ukrainian club in the city suffered a serious arson attack. The festival eventually went ahead in the most strained conditions: cultural programmes were overshadowed in the media coverage by security issues.

There is much irony and paradox in the current situation in Przemyśl. These nationalist groupings consist of small numbers of people but, because no other groupings are effective, they are able to dominate the scene and exacerbate tensions that were on the wane in the socialist period. Przemyśl has experienced economic restructuring, and many of those who no longer have jobs in the socialist sector make their living now through small-scale trade with Ukrainians. The local 'bazaar' is vital to the city's prosperity, and the nationalists do not dare to call for its closure. But their ceaseless negative stereotyping of all things

Ukrainian must have some impact in hindering the development of more positive links with Ukrainian partners: the relative success already achieved in promoting new contacts in the economic sphere is not allowed to filter through into the social and political spheres.

The situation in this city may be unique, but as I travel on to Sanok and further through the Galician countryside I see evidence of more general problems that cannot be easily dismissed by those busy constructing Poland's new propaganda of success. Galicia was a synonym for poverty and rural despair in the later Habsburg period (Śliwa 1994). In spite of high rates of emigration, extreme fragmentation of plots led eventually to what has been widely recognized as the most irrational agrarian structure in Europe (Hann 1985). The contrast with those parts of Poland that belonged formerly to Prussia and Russia remained marked throughout the socialist period, partly due to the country's failure to implement collectivization. In the late Habsburg period many peasants 'chose' North America. In the socialist period they could similarly choose to seek jobs in areas such as Silesia, or alternatively in smaller cities such as Przemyśl, where socialist sector employment was readily available. Large numbers remained in the villages, or returned there after stints elsewhere, because that was where they found it easier to meet their housing needs. Consequently a very high proportion of building investments took place in the countryside, while little or no attention was paid to creating a more rational agrarian structure. Plots remained small, indeed they became smaller. These carefully manicured fields are a delight for the traveller, who can look out of the window of his railway carriage and admire haystacks being constructed by the family labour force just as they might have been 100 or 200 years ago. But these same fields lie at the heart of Poland's structural problems, as it seeks to integrate its economy with that of the west.

More than 30 per cent of Poland's population lives in villages, and in counties such as Przemyśl the proportion is well over 50 per cent. As I already know from visits to the village of Wisłok in recent years, the options open to these people are now more limited than ever before. The *Voivode* of Przemyśl admits that from now on this vast rural population, which is still reproducing at a rate much higher than urban rates, must expect to remain located in the countryside.² He is careful not to say they must be restricted to the agricultural sector, but it is very hard indeed to see how they can find jobs elsewhere. He also underlines what most economists take for granted, namely that a radical reorganization of Poland's agrarian structure is an essential precondition for Poland's entry into the European Union. But the *Voivode* has little idea how

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this reorganization is to be accomplished, other than through a resumption of the policies first adopted in the 1970s to support the emergence of a new group of efficient, competitive 'specialist' farmers – policies that fired a great deal of resentment when socialists attempted to implement them (see Hann 1985, and this volume, Chapter Seven).

The rapid expansion of the commercial and services sectors of Poland's post-socialist economy has led some observers to hail 'shock therapy' as an unambiguous success. The United States Ambassador in Warsaw sees the country as 'the next economic powerhouse of Europe'.³ But the failure of the economic report in which this diagnosis was published to address, or even to acknowledge, the problems of this rural sector seems to me a critical omission. How can economists and diplomats be so very obtuse?

Cocooned in the capital

I have more opportunity to reflect on these matters during the second stage of my sojourn, attending the Fifth World Congress for Central and East European Studies in Warsaw. The capital is quite different from anything else in Poland – you feel this as soon as you look around after emerging from the catacombs of the very modern central station. Stalin's gift to the Polish people, the Palace of Culture and Science, still towers nearby. But the sacred space all around it is now being polluted by countless private kiosks and prefab supermarkets selling cheap household goods, not to mention the disruptions caused by metro construction work. Almost opposite the palace is an appropriate symbol of the new order: the expansive glass facade of one of the most intimidating McDonalds restaurants that I have seen anywhere. The sheer size of the Marlboro advertisements is awe inspiring, and so are the price levels in the new hotels. But there is also much to admire and enjoy in the centre of Warsaw, which has not been devastated by new tourist waves to quite the same extent as Prague and Budapest. Of course there is rather less to devastate here, but walking in the pedestrian-only sections of the reconstructed old town is still a pleasure, and browsing in the bookstores is a far more rewarding experience than it used to be in the period of shortages and socialist control over publishing.

If the capital is to some extent a cocoon, likely to mislead those visitors (including most foreign consultants) who do not travel to other parts of the country, the World Congress is a cocoon within a cocoon. (Perhaps a more appropriate analogy would be the nesting Matrioshka dolls that are everywhere

on sale as souvenirs.) It is being held at Warsaw University, in buildings that I know well from the winter that I spent here in 1980-81. Several thousand delegates have paid one hundred dollars (or even more, if late registering) for the right to attend. But for other, locally based participants, this would be virtually a month's salary: I recognize some old friends as they glide around surreptitiously, devoid of the yellow insignia identifying the rest of us. Has the end of communism really, as sometimes claimed, put an end once and for all to the need for compromise and duplicity in citizens' everyday lives? I also hear of recently graduated teachers and architects who have chosen the 'exit' option, at least temporarily, because by working in Germany, even in unskilled, manual jobs, they can earn up to ten times what they would be paid if they stayed in Poland and worked in their chosen profession.

The conference is multi-disciplinary, but times have changed for the field previously known as 'Soviet Studies'. I soon learn that the most general name in use now is 'Transitology'. One of the early plenary sessions is concerned with 'Western perception of communist and post-communist realities'. The first speaker is the Oxford-based journalist/historian Timothy Garton Ash, who delivers a stinging attack on past scholarly coverage of the region. Anyone who could have perceived the East German communist régime to have as much legitimacy as the Federal Government of West Germany is guilty, in his view, of the worst kind of moral relativism. These insults are politely applauded by the audience.

Later speakers go further with their anti-communist triumphalism. The Hungarian philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás is particularly provocative. He tells us that the Russian Revolution was the work of 'a small group of second rate intellectuals'. The revolutions of 1989, in contrast, were the first in human history not to be based on any kind of rational utopian programme. This, in Tamás's view, is the key to understanding post-communist conditions. People are now entirely egoistic, and the old political philosophies, with their assumptions about moral communities, are entirely inadequate. Tamás confides to his audience that his own political party in Hungary, the Free Democrats, is not in fact a serious party at all. None of the parties can be taken seriously in a system that is predicated on the decomposition of any rational political order. People have had quite enough of 'a second rate Victorian system masquerading as redemptive Utopia'. Now we are witness to 'the victory of empirical man', which can also be construed as the 'triumph of the first person singular'. Tamás's analysis, delivered in extraordinarily affected, stilted English, is also well received by the audience. But to anyone familiar with the man's role in Hungarian politics, the whole performance is simply a tragi-comic

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embarrassment. He himself has, indeed, always privileged the first person singular, and the irresponsible egoism shown by such vainglorious former 'dissidents' in the years after 1989 must be one of the main factors why people are again voting for the former socialists, in the absence of any remotely attractive alternative.

At the following day's plenary the audience has a very different treat. No one is sure of the right collective noun for a gathering of Polish Prime Ministers, but it seems that never before have so many been brought together to share a platform. (The joke circulating beforehand is that, with the expected tenure of the office so brief, their main concern is likely to be with their own pension arrangements.) Of the five promised, four turn up, including the first post-socialist Premier, *Solidarity* adviser Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Their speeches are aimed mainly at the domestic audience, and fail to generate much excitement. My overall impression is that no individuals or parties have succeeded in stamping their own mark on the course of Poland's headlong rush away from socialism. These leaders are mere pawns, and their analyses of the situation lack imagination or insight. Only one of them, Waldemar Pawlak of the Peasants' Party, manages to convey through his more direct but understated rhetoric that he, at least, has some grasp of the everyday concerns of the mass of his fellow countrymen. One wonders if the high Prime Ministerial turnover rate is connected to the high social and economic costs of the transition: whether it might not have been preferable for Poland to work harder at the construction of a political consensus, instead of opting for the more extreme variant of economic reform in those first decisive years after 1989.

For me the most valuable moments of the Congress are not these unwieldy plenaries, but the more specialized sessions with an anthropological component. There are just two of these, and I am lucky to be a discussant at both. As it turns out, they complement each other nicely, and give me much food for thought about the role of anthropology in illuminating the complex social processes of the transition. Anthropology has never been a major discipline in the Soviet Studies field, and it has to be admitted that the anthropological research carried out in this region has not, so far, made any dramatic impact on the discipline in general. Are there any signs at this Congress that this might be about to change?

The first anthropological session is organized by Frances Pine (Cambridge) and Sue Bridger (Bradford) under the title 'Transforming Local Economies: gender, survival strategies and the new under-class in post-communist societies'. Pine's own paper sets the tone for the session. She is primarily concerned with women's adaptations in the area of Łódź, historic centre of Poland's textile

industry, where many factories have closed and unemployment has reached high levels. Women, for whom socialist wage-labour has been central to the very definition of work, are obliged to develop alternative strategies. Combining unofficial work on cottage-industry scale with the drawing of state benefits may be one strategy, although the level of benefits is so low that these certainly do not offer a comfortable security cushion. Pine proceeds to outline a fascinating comparison with the strategies of women in the area of her earlier fieldwork in the rural south. For *Górale* peasant women the end of communism is less of a shock, since they have long had to practise the kind of survival strategies which are only now being worked out in regions like Łódź. Pine explores the social significance of this 'fragmentation' and considers local *moral* judgements of both socialism and capitalism. She brings out the complexity of the local models, in a style that contrasts sharply with the black and white categorizations of the intellectuals on the *podia* in the plenaries.

Sue Bridger's paper deals with her research among women in Moscow in the early 1990s, many of whom have found themselves victims of crude and inappropriate, gender-biased careers advice. The imposition of a narrow, skill-based approach has been based on an underlying assumption that women's place lies in the home. Some women have been encouraged to move into small-scale craft production, only to find that no market exists for their products, and they have no other option but to seek work as cleaners or 'dog sitters'.

The other papers in this session are no less rich, but deviate in fascinating ways from the focus on economic opportunities to examine how ethnicity and nationalism can also become vital elements in survival strategies. Deema Kaneff (Cambridge) presents her findings from an ethnically mixed village in Bulgaria. It is clear that the implementation of property restitution legislation, here as elsewhere in the region, is producing a situation in which many of those who own land are in no position to work it (for example, because they no longer live locally, or are too old), while those who use the land are losing the security and other entitlements to which they have been accustomed under socialism. In Kaneff's village the former category is overwhelmingly Bulgarian, while the latter includes members of several other groups: Pomaks, Macedonians and Turks. There is obviously potential here for land privatization to lead to heightened awareness of group belonging: of the kinship ties that bind one to one's own kind, and separate one from others. Kaneff shows that those classified as Pomaks and Macedonians find it relatively easy to be assimilated into the Bulgarian majority, while Turks and Gypsies are defined as essential outsiders. (In the discussion which follows this point is unwittingly reinforced by a Bulgarian social scientist, who insists that it is 'politically incorrect' to

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speak of Macedonians at all – whatever the villagers themselves might say.) As 'land' is transformed into 'territory', Kaneff argues persuasively that any social analysis must also take on board the full range of cultural meanings associated with this vital resource.

This theme is also explored by David Anderson (Cambridge), who presents data from his fieldwork among the Evenki of Eastern Siberia. These people have survived in a very harsh climate with what Anderson terms a 'sentient ecology', their unique way of making themselves at home in both social and natural environments. They adapted successfully to collectivization after 1937, but the imposition of a market economy in the last few years has created a dangerous new uncertainty. For the Evenki, whose self-identity as an ethnic group owes everything to communist ideology, a form of nationalist exclusionary politics has become an integral component of a survival strategy. Under the old ideology they were classified as 'primitive', certainly, but at the same time they enjoyed a certain esteem because they were thought to be close to the ideals of communism. Now they are simply a pre-capitalist anachronism, with no special collective status under the new liberal-individualist model of citizenship. Faced with the loss of the privileges and quotas which have sustained their social life under socialism, the Evenki are struggling to negate the new market through the only means at their disposal: stronger assertion of their collective identity, in a movement that Anderson sees as 'civic' in nature, though it is based on the principle of *excluding* non-group members from the full range of entitlements in this remote locality.

This is an important session, offering both high quality ethnography and stimulating new analytical frameworks. Other sessions at the Congress also claim to be addressing the 'local dimension' of transition, for example in studies of political democracy; but without anthropological fieldwork to illuminate local values and understandings it is hard to show these understandings feed into the larger processes. The Congress also has plenty of other papers on ethnicity and nationalism, but the specialists in other disciplines do not consider these phenomena at the micro level, where they are rooted in relations of kinship and ties to the landscape. Unfortunately, the anthropological sessions do not attract large numbers of economists, political scientists and macrosociologists, who will no doubt continue to use grossly simplified models of transition, and to consider kinship to be a technical term in the anthropological vocabulary, of no relevance to contemporary social transformation.

The other significant anthropological session (out of almost 300 in total) is pitched at a totally different level. This is convened by Janine R. Wedel

(Washington) under the title 'Foreign Aid as Politics and Ideology in Transitional Russia and East Europe'. The first paper is by Steven Sampson (Copenhagen), who explains his current work as a freelance consultant distributing Danish government funds for the promotion of civil society in Albania (see Sampson forthcoming). For Sampson, the transition is a complex process involving a wide range of western participants in various forms of interaction with eastern recipients. Concepts are bounced back and forth between east and west, with all the players using the common 'magical' language of 'development-speak' English. Terms such as 'empowerment' turn out to be untranslatable, and remain as abstractly mysterious as the peculiar currency of European community aid, the ECU. However, even when the same English terms are used, the central distinctions of the aid agents often make no cultural sense at all to the Albanians. Sampson illustrates the fascination of the external agencies with quantitative indicators, above all with the numbers of non-governmental organizations. He also points out that many of the organizations seeking funds in Albania are, in reality, fronts for the state authorities. All of the grants he has disbursed have gone to groups based in the capital city (though one has funded a Land Rover for an organization dedicated to the elimination of the blood feud among some of the country's more remote inhabitants).

Janine Wedel focuses on western aid linked to economic privatization. She begins by noting some of the metaphors used to justify extremely radical interventions: a good dentist does not pull gently on a rotten tooth; if Britain chooses to alter its road traffic regulations to conform to the continental norm, it can only hope to do so in one single decisive switch. Her own research (see also Harper and Wedel 1995) has explored a number of different instances of western aid, though the general ideological tone, notably the shunning of anything 'public', is very consistent. She argues that aid funds used to support public relations initiatives promoting privatization in Russia have not been wisely directed, since some of these campaigns were liable to distortion by political parties for partisan advantage. It is clear that there is considerable resentment toward the purveyors of western aid, at all levels of society. In Warsaw these people are apparently known as the 'Marriott Brigade', after the luxury hotel in which they invariably reside. However, Wedel does finally offer one glimmer of hope: if aid is channelled through small teams of advisors who are prepared to make a long-term commitment to support, on terms laid down by the host ministry and not by some external agency, then it can potentially serve some useful purpose.

Even in these ideal – and apparently very rare – circumstances, the aid would still of course have a political dimension. This point is taken up by

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Gerald Creed (Hunter College, NY), who argues that one of the lasting legacies of socialism is precisely to educate everyone to an awareness of how economics, politics and society are inextricably linked. Whether or not power becomes somehow less visible in post-socialist conditions, these societies will remain different from western capitalist societies because of the citizens' greater consciousness that power is being exercised over them. In this sense, the ordinary citizens with whom Creed has worked in Bulgaria are several steps ahead of those western advisers who imagine they are dispensing only technical assistance. In fact Creed is able to show how USAID support for the privatization of Bulgarian agriculture is systematically planned so as to foreclose cooperative options. This policy has not been very popular or successful and it has had to be scaled down. But Creed then identifies a 'terrible positive feedback system'. Expectations of the benefits of aid are gradually getting adjusted downwards, whilst the political rhetoric surrounding privatization is still being enhanced. He contrasts the Bulgarian case with James Ferguson's (1990) analysis of Lesotho, where aid processes support a powerful and apparently depoliticized bureaucratic machine. But this sort of (always fictional) depoliticization is impossible to achieve in the post-communist societies, the legacy of which continues to govern 'cultural interpretations of what aid is about'.

Comparisons with Third World countries are made more explicit in the discussion which follows these papers. One participant complains of a sense of *déjà vu*: the issues raised in this session remind her of debates that began ten or even twenty years earlier in the field of development studies. The main themes of the panel, that all aid is political, and that if it is to succeed at all it needs to pay close attention to local values and cultures, are points that organizations such as the World Bank have, at last, come to recognize in the Third World. Yet the very same agencies which would now automatically hire a 'social development adviser' before proceeding with any project in the south are blithely replicating the old 'cultural tone-deafness' in the east. Another discussant, who is apparently in a good position to know about such things, complains of tremendous cynicism at the headquarters of the World Bank. He claims that, if the agencies involved in aid to East Europe were to be subjected to normal Wall Street controls and auditing, then very many of their officials would now be in gaol for corruption.

This recognition of cynicism and corruption in all phases of the aid process reinforces Sampson's point about the need to examine the new forms of interrelatedness between east and west. There are some awkward moments for

me personally in this session. I give as one example of a fruitless western intervention some recent efforts to establish a 'Carpathian Euroregion' that would link the south-east corner of Poland that I have just been visiting with adjacent territories in Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary and Romania. Ostensibly aimed at promoting both a stronger civil society and a more vibrant market economy (through facilitating cross-border links between private businessmen), the initiative was clearly a suitable contender for western support. It found some, notably from the Institute for EastWest Studies in the USA. But when I had asked people about this Euroregion a few days earlier in Przemyśl and Sanok (where the secretariat had been located for a short period), they had answered with a rueful smile, or even a contemptuous laugh. I therefore feel able to report that the Euroregion has not led to any perceived improvement in the local economy. All it has done is create a few non-productive jobs in offices for those who have the right connections. I go on to point out that this initiative has provoked a strong Polish nationalist reaction in Przemyśl, where the nationalist leaders mentioned above have exploited popular fears of an influx of Ukrainians into local labour markets and organized a petition *against* the Euroregion. They have argued that it is essential to strengthen nationalist consciousness, rather than take any action to undermine national frontiers. Far from promoting a liberal civil society, this externally funded initiative has, in practice, added fuel to the fires of intolerance in this quarter of Poland. I therefore suggest that such interventions are misconceived, and that moneys would be better allocated if they were simply handed over to the Polish authorities, for the latter to use as they see fit.⁴

My embarrassment aries when the next discussant introduces himself as a Polish economist who now works for the Institute for EastWest Studies. He claims that I have seriously misrepresented the accomplishments of the Euroregion. According to him it is a local initiative (I respond that, even if local bureaucrats, notably the then *Voivode* of the country of Przemyśl, were the initiators, this *does* not mean that it has ever enjoyed substantial grassroots support). Neither of us knows enough about what has actually been accomplished in the economic sphere to resolve all the issues, but on many points we can agree. This economist, too, agrees on the need for more anthropological studies of the context in which aid is given and received. It is little short of a scandal that so little monitoring and evaluation of interventions has taken place so far. But if anthropologists are to become involved, the lessons of earlier experience in the Third World should be taken to heart: they must be involved in all phases of the projects, and not just called in to carry out the autopsy when the patient dies.⁵

Trafficking with transitologists

It is evident from the above examples that anthropologists have become involved in Eastern Europe in a great variety of ways. In the broader context of academic work on this region their contributions remain minuscule. But, as anthropologists like to point out, quantitative measures are not everything. For me at least, these two panels bring home the urgent need for anthropological voices to be heard by other disciplines and by policymakers. Anthropologists have a great deal to offer. The most basic job that they can carry out is to present some of the local opinions that they hear during fieldwork, to further understanding of the *subjective* experiences of socialism and the recent transformations. But they can, at the same time, develop their own theoretical explanations and models, to provide *objective* accounts. These will often expose the ethnocentric assumptions that underpin the explanations and models of the dominant disciplines of the Academy.

The presentations at these sessions fit in well with my notion of anthropology as a subversive discipline, outlined in the preceding chapter. This notion of subversion may not be one that all other anthropologists will find congenial. For some, anthropological subversion means some romantic, wickedly playful, anti-Enlightenment endeavour. Such scholars tend to concentrate on the subjectivities, typically of rather small numbers of people. They typically focus on the language people use to express their ideas ('discourse'), and on symbols and aesthetics. But such scholars tend to be less convincing when relating ideas and symbols to changing material conditions and power constraints, and some make no attempt to explore these connections. For me, discourse and symbols are of great importance and interest, but they constitute only one element of the anthropological approach. The more vital element remains the critique of abstraction that the anthropologist is able to conduct through his/her immersion in the concrete detail of daily life. Whatever the local community or the organization that is the focus of the ethnography, the close up observation of social realities is essential. At least as much attention has to be paid to social processes as to cultural ideas: exploration of the latter without the former is an impoverished version of anthropology. Anthropological subversion is most effectively pursued on a hard-nosed, empirical basis..

This position contrasts starkly with the stance of most 'postmodernists', who tend to rail against what they glibly characterize as 'Cartesian rationalism' but neglect the detailed empirical observation of social reality. I would prefer to leave the philosophers out of this altogether. Gáspár Miklós Tamás is a

philosopher (and failed politician), and he may well believe that an unfettered individualism has come to prevail throughout Eastern Europe. Anthropologists can give the lie to his conceit by describing the various forms of social intercourse that exist in different parts of society. Of course, there are all sorts of problems involved in the observation and documentation of social life; recent debates about literary forms and 'textuality' have shed useful light on some of these problems. But to jump from a recognition of these problems to a wholesale debunking of Descartes and of 'western rational thought' seems an unwarranted, even foolish response.

I am convinced that when anthropological subversion follows currently fashionable, 'postmodern' forms, it is likely to lead, not to a sudden revelation in other disciplines that their own premisses are mistaken, but to a marginalizing of anthropology. This trend must be resisted, for both intellectual and very practical reasons. Anthropological analysis needs to be communicated to the widest possible audiences. We should not be afraid of using the popular media when appropriate, both in our home countries and in the countries where we carry out research. We shall not reach these audiences if we adopt 'post-modernist' recipes. For the reasons already stated, I also want the insights of anthropologists to be taken seriously by colleagues in political science, economics and so on. I believe that East European anthropology has much to contribute to *anthropology*, but it can also contribute to work undertaken in other disciplines and it is important that it should do so. It seems to me that the chances of this happening will be improved if anthropologists strive to be as rigorous and 'scientific' as possible in the conduct of their research. For example, they can report facts in plain language that would have to be accepted even by rival observers who did not share the same values or ideology. They can justify their explanations in terms which are, similarly, open to inspection and critique by others. Even in that most slippery but vital realm, the realm of subjective understanding, they can strive to present local voices with careful contextualization, in ways that do justice to the authenticity of that specific human experience. None of this requires the anthropologist to abandon the mantle of social science (however tatty this may be looking in some sections of other disciplines).

Another reason for retaining the commitment to social science concerns the relationship between anthropologists and policymakers. There are some who argue that the anthropologist's subversion is best practised from a position firmly ensconced behind the walls of the Academy. From this vantage point it is relatively easy to launch your anti-Cartesian missiles at the rest of the world, but it seems a rather futile pursuit. Alternatively one may venture outside the

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walls, but only to critique the whole business of development and all its practitioners. As we have seen, there are indeed good reasons to be cynical in this field. But some anthropologists have become cynical even about the involvement of other anthropologists, for example in the implementation of development projects. They suggest that such involvement is bound to compromise the scholar, and that any input he or she may offer is likely to be little more than common sense, i.e. unrelated to any specific local knowledge the anthropologist may have.⁶

One can speculate on motives in this debate: is it fuelled by a desire on the part of the 'purists' to ensure that the 'practitioners', who earn allegedly lavish fees in their consultancies, cannot be allowed to match the tenured inhabitants of the Academy in terms of status and prestige? Though I have yet to be offered a consultancy myself, my sympathies are with the practitioners. It is vital that anthropologists like Wedel and Sampson should accept invitations to prepare reports for governments and other agencies, to show the uses of anthropological approaches. Their work will involve them as mediators with other scholars, who may include other, more library-based anthropologists, as well as with local people at all levels, from peasants and workers to the highest reaches of the ministries. As elsewhere, so in Eastern Europe too, this anthropological input must be based on understanding and respect for local needs and local values. The encounter with this region is paradigmatic of other cultural encounters. Directing aid to Eastern Europe in the form of MBA graduates who cannot tell the difference between Poland and Bulgaria is not a sensible way to proceed. There is an increasing body of evidence to confirm that increased anthropological involvement in aid to the Third World has, overall, significantly improved the outcomes. Of course, there is a great deal more that needs to be done; but so far, in Eastern Europe, not even these initial steps have yet been taken. The skeleton at the feasting which has accompanied the end of communism in Eastern Europe has barely been noticed.

Finally, I note with interest that many speakers at this Congress say that they now find the term 'transition' to be unhelpful. For Timothy Garton Ash there seems to be no detectable pattern: the transition is 'life itself'. I, too, have been suspicious of the term, but I cannot quite agree with this. This short stay in Poland confirms that some radical changes have taken place since the end of socialist power. Anthropologists should be capable of grasping these general patterns of change, as well as charting their infinite variety of expression at

micro levels. But certainly the emerging critics of 'transitology' are right to realize, at last, that there can be no unique destination, no 'end of history', for the people of this region.

Twenty years have now passed since I got off a train in Budapest to begin fieldwork in East-Central Europe, and my personal journey, too, is far from over.

Notes

- ¹ For further detail on the development of the current situation in Przemysł see Hann forthcoming e.
- ² See his interview in *Życie Przemyskie*, 3 May 1995.
- ³ Ambassador Nicholas Rey, in a speech delivered in January 1995, reprinted in *Poland: International Economic Report 1994/5*, Warsaw: World Economy Research Institute, pp.165-71. At least the American Ambassador sees Poland as an integral part of Europe: this is by no means always so clear in the attitudes of 'European Union' diplomats.
- ⁴ There is a case for making some funds directly available to *local* authorities: for some purposes, including perhaps most economic aims, this should be less bureaucratic and wasteful than routing such aid through central government. However, for other purposes the local or municipal authorities may not be suitable recipients. In the case of Przemysł, some externally directed investment in the education sector, specifically aimed at making inhabitants aware of the multicultural traditions of the city and its region, would not be amiss. It is worth noting here that the British government's Know-How fund, through the Institute of Local Government at Birmingham University, has for several years been advising Polish municipalities on how to expand the scope of local government. Education is one of the key fields in which it is considered desirable to give more power to the local authorities. In situations such as that which prevails in Przemysł, where there is no Ukrainian minority representation on the Town Council and its various committees, this can easily be a recipe for the continuation of prejudice. As usual there is irony in the dissemination of this western 'Know-How', since in Britain itself local level control over education has been radically weakened in recent years. I discuss the controversy concerning the Carpathian Euroregion in greater detail in Hann forthcoming d.
- ⁵ For a recent detailed study, showing how anthropologists can contribute illuminating ethnographies of the privatization process as it affects business enterprises at all levels of the workforce, see Czegledy 1995.
- ⁶ This point of view was bluntly stated in an interview by Maurice Bloch: see *Anthropology Today*, 1988, Vol.4, No.1. A more constructive critique has been developed in recent years by the EIDOS group: see, for example, Hobart 1993.