CSAC Monographs 14

Power and Institutional Change in Post-Communist Eastern Europe

Edited by Birgit Müller

Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing
University of Kent at Canterbury
1999

CSAC Monographs 14

Power and Institutional Change in Post-Communist Eastern Europe

Edited by Birgit Müller

Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing
University of Kent at Canterbury
1999

12. Lifting the Lid on Local Politics in Przemysl, S-E Poland

Chris Hann

1. Introduction

One useful starting point for an investigation of continuities and discontinuities of power relationships in contemporary Eastern Europe is the old theoretical contrast between structure and culture. Although this opposition now seems rather dated, at least in anthropology, in looking at post-communist predicaments there may still some mileage in the notion that *cultures* tend to lag behind *structural* transformations of society. Since most anthropologists nowadays give primacy to some concept of culture, it follows that they tend to be the scholars who lay greatest weight on aspects of continuity in Eastern Europe's current transition. Other disciplines have documented and analysed the dramatic changes that have occurred in most countries in the economic sphere, in property relations, in the educational system, in the welfare system and so on. But we anthropologists have tended to point out that, even when changes in institutions have been genuine and radical (and this is by no means always the case), there is a sense in which they may remain limited and superficial so long as the attitudes and mentalities of the persons operating them remain unmodified.

To some extent the methods and scale of most anthropological enquiries may predispose the investigator to emphasise continuities of culture. Thus many anthropologists still conduct their fieldwork in relatively small rural communities where the high degree of face-to-face contacts, in which they themselves come to participate, has the effect of restricting the impact of economic and political changes taking place at the commanding heights of the wider society. Simply put, the anthropological fieldworker sees at first hand that even the most dramatic signals of change are filtered through webs of interpersonal relations, and no living human community can rework its social relations, as it were, on a *tabula rasa*. Stalin may have sought to liquidate the *kulaks* 'overnight', and enjoyed a high degree of success in one sense; but there is little doubt that the functioning of Soviet collective farms was profoundly affected by long term cultural continuities in the Russian countryside, and that some of these, significantly modified, of course, by the Soviet period, continue to influence rural transformation in the post-communist years.

To give an example from my own fieldwork, in the Hungarian village of Tázlár I have documented a much more gradual transition than that described by political scientists for the country as a whole (see Hann 1993). Significant changes began in the late socialist years when a corrupt, timeserving communist was removed from office as Council Chairman. He was replaced by a schoolteacher, also a longstanding communist, but one who earned the respect of the community through carrying out his duties in a thoroughly professional and apolitical way. This person resigned from the Communist Party shortly before it handed over power after free elections in 1990. In local elections later that year he did not stand for the new position of Mayor, but easily won election as a regular Council member. Another ex-Communist, the former Executive Secretary of the Council, was elected as Mayoress, easily defeating an aggressive young entrepreneur with no political record, whose promises of radical change were either not believed or not welcomed by voters. In short, the major new parties on the national stage have failed to establish themselves in this community of 2000 inhabitants. Most of those elected to the Council in 1990 had served on it before. Political behaviour in the other major institution of the local public sphere, the agricultural cooperative, also resembled the patterns of the past – this despite the fact that it was undergoing major economic upheaval and reorientation. In both institutions, most villagers seemed convinced of their essential impotence and dependence on the goodwill and resources of external powerholders at county and national levels.

More recently I have begun a new research project in Poland, and although this work is far from complete I have already seen enough to realise that working in a city of some seventy thousand inhabitants poses very different problems for the fieldworker. (1) On this scale, even anthropologists might be expected to acknowledge major changes in political behaviour. One might expect, for example, that national political parties would be able to organise effectively in a city of this size, and start to play the sort of role in aggregating and articulating interests that one associates with mass parties in stable western democracies. Anthropologists too, almost by nature, tend to prefer to see opinions and interests articulated 'from the bottom up', in contrast to the 'top down' style that so clearly dominated in eastern Europe under communism. Yet so far in the city of Przemysl this has not happened, at least not in ways of which western liberal theoreticians would approve. While some local voices have become articulate and made themselves heard in the public sphere, these have tended to be of a highly illiberal variety. In this project I am therefore very interested to explore and to call into question two aspects of the traditional bent of the anthropologist: a) in favour of providing cultural continuities in times of rapid structural transition, and b)in favour of 'bottom-up' populist initiatives as against 'top-down' control and regulation. I shall return to these issues in the Conclusion. In the next two sections I present some detail concerning the city of Przemysl and recent political developments there.

2. The Transition from Agrarian Society to Modernity

It is a commonplace to note that one of the most prominent 'fault lines' in European culture over the last thousand years is the division between Eastern and Western Christianity. On the plains of Northern Europe this religious division has coincided to a very significant degree with the linguistic division (by no means everywhere clear-cut, even in recent generations) between Eastern and Western Slavs. The principal political unit on the Eastern side has been Russia, but this polity was once known as Rus' and it had its capital in Kiev before its later consolidation in Moscow. On the Western side the principal political unit has been Poland, but here too the boundaries of the state and the composition of its people have been subject to changes, sometimes very radical. In between the centres of these polities, very extensive territories that correspond very roughly to today's Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania were not clearly and exclusively identified with either East or West. This situation fits well with Gellner's (1983) model of traditional Agrarian Society, according to which there is no reason to expect any congruence between the boundaries of political units (states) and the boundaries of ethnic or national groups. This age is characterized by fuzzy cultural and linguistic boundaries and by great diversity within the polity. This diversity was well illustrated in the composition of the medieval Polish state, particularly after the territorial expansion of Kazimierz the Great in the fourteenth century and the formation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which brought the entire zone from the Baltic to the Black Sea nominally under the control of a single polity. Cultural diversity persisted after the dismemberment of the Polish state in the late eighteenth century.

In Gellner's model nationalism, defined as the principle that the political unit and the cultural unit should be fully congruent (1983: 1), is associated primarily with the material and communications requirements of the age of industrialism. The nationalists extinguish the cultural diversity of the agrarian age by creating clearly bounded political units monopolized by the 'high culture' of a single 'nation'. Processes of standardization and homogenization are promoted through a national language and state-controlled educational institutions. The hierarchical divisions of labour characteristic of pre-industrial society, in which distinct cultural groups frequently occupy special niches in the economy, are swept aside and replaced by a more egalitarian society that is more mobile as well as more literate and 'generalist'.

Despite the Central European roots of this author, it is difficult to operationalize this model in the region with which we are concerned. The Polish and Ukrainian national movements cannot be directly explained in terms of material (industrial) transformation. Many Polish nationalists were profoundly influenced by western *ideas* of the nation, particularly those asserted in revolutionary France. Nor can the motivation of the Greek Catholic priests who were among the principal disseminators of Ukrainian nationalism be reduced, as Gellner would seem to imply, to calculations about their career prospects in a Habsburg Empire in which industrial progress was very unevenly diffused. The fuzzy borderlands between Eastern and Western Slavs had to accommodate themselves to the age of nationalism before industrialization had significant impact. Like other historians of nationalism, Gellner associates these parts of Europe primarily with the 'new' nations of the nineteenth century. Although the Polish national movement of this period may fit this image in some ways (e.g. it is at this period that a distinction begins to be drawn between the notion of nationality and the notion of citizenship), in other ways the Polish case falls closer to Western European countries. The nineteenth century nationalists were able to draw on a long history of statehood and 'high culture' associated with Poland. The Ukrainian case, on the other hand, does correspond more closely to the features of Gellner's 'Ruritania'. Here the new high culture had to be created on weaker foundations and the element of intellectual 'invention' necessarily played a greater role.

In short, Gellner's abstract model, in contrast to many anthropological approaches, postulates a sharp divide between traditional and modern, i.e. between agrarian and industrial societies, and associates

nationalism firmly with the latter. The model has relatively little to say about the agents, mechanisms and time-scales of the changes with which he is concerned. It does not help us to understand the strength of feeling and commitment that nationalism proved itself to be capable of generating in regions such as Eastern Galicia. The city of Przemysl (Peremyshl in Ukrainian) has been a crucible of cultural diversity for more than a thousand years. Many Ukrainians perceive it as a Ukrainian city, since there is some evidence to indicate that it was founded by an east Slav (Ruthenian) Prince. Equally, many Poles consider Lwów, nowadays L'viv, on the Ukrainian side of the border, to be a Polish city, on the grounds that it was for many centuries a flourishing centre of Polish culture. The ethnic composition of these towns was quite different from that of their rural hinterlands. Roman Catholics and Jews were the most prominent groups in the city, while Eastern Slavs practising both Orthodox and Greek Catholic versions of Christianity were disproportionately stronger in the countryside. The cities were diocesan centres for both Eastern and Western variants of Christianity. In the socialist period these cities experienced the full force of homogenization pressures within their respective national states.

After Poland's partition, the eastern borderlands with which we are concerned were divided between Russia and Austria. Eastern Galicia constituted the easternmost territories of the Habsburg Empire, and Przemysl became an important administrative and military centre for the Austrian authorities. It was perhaps the most important city in Galicia apart from the two provincial capitals of Cracow and Lemberg (in Polish Lwów; in Ukrainian L'viv). The Austrian presence had a major impact on all aspects of life, including religion. Soon after partition, the Austrians requisitioned the large, imposing church of the Carmelite order (Roman Catholic). Later they reallocated it to the Greek Catholics, who eventually gave up their plans to build separately and transformed this handsome building into a Greek Catholic cathedral. In the later generations of the Habsburg Empire the Austrians made significant concessions to the Poles in Galicia, including virtually complete freedom in the realm of culture. The proportion of Roman Catholics in the population of the city of Przemysl rose steadily in this period. At the same time the Austrians sought to balance concessions to an emerging Polish nationalism by tacitly encouraging new political movements among the Eastern Slavs of the province, notably the emerging nationalism that aspired to an independent Ukraine.

Przemysl witnessed long sieges, suffering and starvation during the First World War, when the Russian Czar paid a personal visit in the wake of his victorious army. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the re-emergence of a sovereign Polish state did not bring peace. Nor was there significant progress towards the creation of a culturally homogenous modern state in Gellner's sense. On the contrary, in the wake of Austrian 'divide and rule' strategies, Ukrainians proclaimed an independent republic of their own and in 1918-9 there was fierce fighting between Polish and Ukrainian forces. Attempts by western diplomats in Paris to devise a new border, known as the Curzon line, which would have passed quite close to Przemysl, went unheeded. The Poles triumphed militarily in Eastern Galicia and eventually (contrary to the express instructions of the League of Nations) divided up the main areas of Ukrainian habitation with the Soviet Union. This was the first outbreak of ethnic violence in Przemysl, but it seems to have been critical for much of what followed later in the century. Polish nationalist groupings became extremely strong, and the city erected a monument to the 'Young Eagles' who had defeated the Ukrainian insurgents (the eagle is one of the oldest symbols of Polish national identity; see Mach 1992).

The Polish state pursued highly repressive policies in the interwar period. On the Ukrainian side, the failure of 1918-9 did not discourage nationalists from continuing to organize resistance.Their slogans from this period emphasized the need to cleanse Eastern Galicia as far as the River San of all ethnic Poles. During this period it became ever harder to maintain the diversity of the agrarian age: communities of Latin rite Ukrainians and Eastern rite Poles came under pressure to make their *national* choices. As usual, the power relations were more favourable to the Western side. The authorities sought for the most part to promote an inclusive view of the Polish nation that would allow, for example, Greek Catholics to hold Polish nationality. But popular opinion increasingly denied this possibility and highly derogatory stereotypes of Ukrainians gained general currency. In Przemysl, the ratio of Roman Catholics to Greek Catholics and Jews continued to increase steadily in favour of the former in the interwar decades. Faced with these trends and attitudes, under the leadership of Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, the Greek Catholic Church became even more firmly committed to the Ukrainian national cause.

The legacy of prewar antagonism between Poles and Ukrainians in the interwar decades was responsible, at least in part, for the willingness of many Eastern Slavs to fight in Nazi armies and to co-operate with occupying German forces during the Second World War. Between 1939 and 1941 the River San was the boundary between the zones of Nazi and Soviet occupation, and the German authorities on the west bank authorized the destruction of the monument to the 'Young Eagles' in Przemysl. Much of the town was destroyed following the Nazi assault against the USSR in 1941. The elimination of the Jewish population was accomplished shortly afterwards. The Nazis did nothing to further Ukrainian hopes of establishing their own independent state. In the last years of the war, appalling violence was perpetrated against the civilians of the East Galician lands by all military parties. The activities of the Nazi and Soviet armies were increasingly overshadowed by the campaigns waged by Ukrainian nationalist forces, which were explicitly ideologized in terms of ethnic cleansing. Polish 'partisans' were hardly less fierce in their responses. When these lands were finally 'liberated' by the Red Army, it soon became obvious that the great majority of prewar Poland's Ukrainian population would now be outside the borders newly demarcated by Stalin. The frontier now followed the 'Curzon line', originally drawn up in very confused circumstances by British diplomats in 1920. It was also obvious that many Ukrainians in Przemysl, now just a few miles inside Polish borders, could expect retribution from Poles for their wartime activities. Accordingly, the remaining phases of ethnic cleansing in Przemysl and its hinterland impacted mainly upon the Greek Catholic (Ukrainian) population. They culminated in the mass deportation of remaining Ukrainians in 1947 (see Misilo 1993, Hann 1996).

Over the following four decades the socialist state pursued a minorities policy which, although it allowed small numbers of East Slavs to return to their Carpathian homelands from the late 1950s onwards, did little to prevent the steady assimilation of scattered Ukrainian communities into the mainstream Polish society. This policy supported a single national Ukrainian Cultural Association, which sponsored a choir in Warsaw and published a weekly newspaper to which the Ukrainians in cities such as Przemysl could subscribe. It did not grant any official recognition to distinct groups within the Ukrainian minority, and the policy was therefore particularly unpopular with those Lemkos (mainly from the most westerly district) who had never accepted Ukrainian national identity. In other respects, however, socialist policies promoted divisions within the minority. This was particularly evident in the realm of religion. The Greek Catholic church was not officially recognized by the state after 1946, following its liquidation by Stalin in the Soviet Union. The property of this church was confiscated by the state and, following the deportations of 1947, many valuable buildings were destroyed. Greek Catholics were allowed to practise their faith under the umbrella of Roman Catholic parishes in a small number of settlements, but state support was confined to the Orthodox church, to which some of the former Greek Catholic properties were transferred. In this way the Polish socialist state promoted internal divisions within its largest East Slav minority, just as its predecessor had in the interwar decades.

Following the massive population transfers, and with a single dominant political party facilitating manipulation of the media and the education system, a quite close approximation to Gellner's ideal-type, the culturally homogenous national society, emerged during the socialist period – or so it seemed. Whereas roughly one third of the population of the interwar republic had been non-Polish, by the 1970s the proportion was officially only 1.3 per cent (*Poland*, 1977: 137). At the same time the new state, located roughly some one hundred and fifty miles to the west of its predecessor and including many 'developed' districts formerly belonging to Germany, attempted to build up an industrial economy and a modern administrative system.

Przemysl was not initially selected as an administrative centre, and its population grew less dynamically than that of Rzeszow, which was also the chosen location for new higher education facilities in the region. Its cultural heritage was recognised through the application of conservation orders throughout the central area, but even after Przemysl itself became a county centre in 1975, it was unable to attract much funding for tourism or other development purposes. Nevertheless, in spite of its overwhelmingly agricultural environment, the city did develop an industrial base sufficient to ensure full employment. It attracted large numbers of 'worker-peasants', but also permanent migrants from the rural hinterland. Economic links with the neighbouring Soviet Ukrainian republic were minimal; even visits to relatives were difficult to organize and consequently rare.

Both in the rural hinterland and in the city of Przemysl, Roman Catholics have become virtually hegemonic. Many of those who did not belong to this category unambiguously by birth endeavoured to pass as Poles. Mixed families would forget their East Slav ancestors. Even families with strong Ukrainian traditions on both sides, numbering at most a few thousand, ceased to use the Ukrainian language or to teach it to their children. The long-serving President of the local branch of the Ukrainian Cultural Society was a well-respected doctor, but even he changed his surname for a name that sounded more Polish. Only in the physical landscape of the city, and above all in its churches, was it more difficult to obliterate the multi-ethnic history of Przemysl. True, the former Jewish quarters were rendered almost invisible by wartime destruction, but the Greek Catholic (Ukrainian) traditions were harder to stamp out. The Bishop's Palace became a state museum (one section contains a fine collection of icons, but there is otherwise virtually no evidence of eastern traditions). The seminary was turned into a grammar school, where the history teachers reveal nothing to their pupils about the multicultural traditions of the region. One of the main Greek Catholic churches was requisitioned to house the state archives for the province. As for the cathedral itself, it was transferred back to the Carmelite order (Roman Catholic). The adjacent monastic buildings were converted into a socialist factory, and the whole complex was allowed to deteriorate physically. The Greek Catholics maintained a small presence in the city throughout the socialist period, thanks to a handful of clergy who were allowed to practise their rite in Roman Catholic buildings. During this period, under the energetic leadership of Bishop Ignacy Tokarczuk, the Roman Catholic diocese of Przemysl expanded massively. The previous dense network of Greek Catholic parishes was replaced by an equally dense Roman Catholic network. In other words, Gellner's homogenization processes were effective on the terrain of religion as well as in the education system, the media and all areas of secular culture.

So far as political culture was concerned, the picture was generally as drab and uniform as everywhere else in the bloc. The Polish United Workers' Party was the dominant organization, and other parties, notably the Peasants' Party, were tolerated so long as they voiced no opposition. The citizens of Przemysl dutifully elected the leaders chosen for them in party cabals. Turnout was statistically impressive, but apathy and indifference predominated, locally as well as nationally. As everywhere else in the country, *Solidarity* had a brief galvanising impact in 1980-81. By the end of the decade the local political scene seemed moribund once again: Until, that is, following successful 'round table' talks, competitive elections were held in June 1989, and in Przemysl as across the country those nominated by *Solidarity* lists swept all rivals aside.

3. The Transition from Socialism to Democracy

Electoral patterns in Przemysl since 1989 show that the Solidarity activists had great difficulty in adapting to more routine conditions of party politics. The euphoria of the 1989 victory was repeated in the triumph of the 'Citizens' Committees' lists in the local elections of June 1990. In Przemysl this list actually included a Ukrainian, a medical doctor who was president of the local Cultural Association. But factions soon began to emerge at local as well as national levels. The full story of party politics in Poland in the early 1990s is much too tangled to narrate here, but by the time of the next local elections in 1994 the Citizens' Committees and the spirit of *Solidarity* had been consigned to the past. By June 1994 lists were drawn up by several local groupings, some of which had distinctive local names. But all were clearly tied to parties or coalitions of parties on the national stage. The greatest success was enjoyed by a coalition of Conservatives and Christian Democrats (16 Councillors elected). Ten Councillors represented the reformed Left (SLD), and eight the liberal party (Unia Wolnosci) that was the closest lineal descendant of Solidarity. Two Councillors represented an ultranationalist grouping. Compared to the 1990 figure of 46%, turnout in the local elections of 1994 was barely 30%. On this occasion, no Ukrainian was elected to the Council in Przemysl, or indeed anywhere else in the County. The voters of Przemysl elected an ultranationalist to represent them as a Senator in 1991. They voted heavily for Lech Walesa in presidential elections, both in 1990 and in 1995, when he was defeated by the 'reform communist' Aleksander Kwasniewski.

These bare statistics of elections conceal a new local political culture in which some novel groups were able to operate in the public sphere for the first time. This is frequently glossed as 'the flowering of civil society', but in Przemysl as in many other parts of Eastern Europe the actual consequences have been anything but civil. To register such a group you needed to muster only fifteen members. One such group calls itself the Association to Commemorate the Young Eagles of Przemysl, and its initial declared purpose was to collect funds to rebuild the monument that had been destroyed during the Nazi occupation. The leader of this explicitly nationalist group is a Pole, an engineer brought up in the Ukraine, who used to belong to the communist party. He is an example of a type which has sought to retain positions on the political stage by shifting from communism to nationalism. A number of other nationalist pressure groups are veterans' groups of one sort or another. Their memberships overlap, such that a petition signed by a dozen local organizations might actually represent the views of only a few dozen families.

The divisions of the past have flared up again most dramatically in the religious sphere. Following the rehabilitation of the Greek Catholic church, in Poland as in neighbouring countries there have been numerous conflicts over property with the Orthodox church. This is not an issue in Przemysl, where the presence of the Orthodox church has been negligible ever since the ratification of the Brest Union. Here the conflicts take place between the two varieties of Catholicism. Following the collapse of communist power the Greek Catholics naturally expected to gain not only legal recognition but also control over the property taken from them in the immediate postwar years. Above all, they expected the return of their cathedral on the hill from the Carmelites. The Pope himself endorsed this aspiration. Early in 1991 he appointed a Greek Catholic Bishop to the seat in Przemysl that had been vacant for almost half a century. It was generally expected that the Greek Catholics would move back to their old church in time for the papal visit to the city in June 1991. This did not come about. A poster recording the history of the church informs visitors today that 'a section of the local society' resisted the planned restitution. As a result of this action, which involved vigils and barricades orchestrated by small groups such as the Young Eagles Association noted above, the church has remained in the hands of the Carmelites. The Pope eventually backed down and designated another church, formerly associated with the Jesuits and occupying a less imposing site lower down the hill as the new cathedral of the Greek Catholics. The doors of the Carmelites' Church are mostly kept locked. When I was able to enter in 1994 I noticed a host of new memorial tablets and a plethora of decorations drawing on the Polish national colours and national symbols. The main effort is to commemorate Polish military heroism through the ages, and there is now scarcely any visible sign of the century and a half during which this building served the Greek Catholics.

As usual in such cases, both sides can and do make their appeals to 'history'. The Polish nationalists emphasize the fact that the Carmelite Church was endowed in the early seventeenth century by a Polish, Roman Catholic nobleman. (The castle and grounds of this noble family can still be visited a few miles outside the city; the feudal society that it dominated locally was not finally destroyed until the arrival of Soviet troops in 1939, when the fine renaissance buildings were comprehensively looted.) The Poles argue further that the building was taken away from them in 1784 only as a result of Austrian *diktat*, as the Emperor Joseph pursued his vendetta against the monastic orders. They therefore maintain that, however regrettable the circumstances in 1946 when the Greek Catholics were suppressed by the communists, it was morally right that this church should have been returned to them.

The Ukrainian (Greek Catholic) presentation of history is very different. Their priests and more educated members of the community point out that Przemysl was the centre of an Orthodox diocese long before it became the centre of a Roman Catholic diocese, and also that some of the building materials used for the Carmelites Church came from the site of an earlier cathedral of theirs. In their view, the transfer of ecclesiastical authority by the Habsburgs was totally legal and legitimate. Had there been any doubt about this, they would not have given up their plans in the mid-nineteenth century to erect an entirely new Greek Catholic cathedral. The Ukrainians therefore accuse the Roman Catholics of seeking to profit from the malign intervention of the communists.

The conflicts surrounding this church have not died down since 1991, for externally it still retains some visible signs of its history. In 1994 the Polish nationalists sought to alter the exterior of the Carmelite church by removing the tower and cupola that were added by the Greek Catholics in the nineteenth century. The county's conservation officer initially approved this plan and the crown of the cupola was dismantled. He then retracted authorization, to the fury of the nationalists in the city, who promptly sought his dismissal. They did this with an interesting mixture of methods, both old and new. They exploited the new possibilities provided by a free local press to exploit emotions among the Polish majority in the city. They also followed hallowed socialist precedent by having recourse to the central power, alleging in evidence to the ministerial authorities in Warsaw that, in allocating the greater part of his budget to the preservation of Ukrainian religious buildings, this conservation officer was wilfully neglecting the region's Polish heritage. The officer was dismissed and though his successor has yet to give a green light to the further dismembering of the Carmelite church, his position is not an enviable one. The massive belltower which stands adjacent to the church is the next likely target for the nationalists because of the conspicuous cyrillic inscriptions plainly visible on the bells. Meanwhile, the Greek Catholic church is nowadays officially referred to as the Byzantine Ukrainian church. This is an accurate indication of the national orientation of most members of this Church, at least since the days of Metropolitan Andrew, but most people still speak of 'Greek Catholics', and the change seems to be deliberately intended to distance them further from Poland's Catholic tradition. Both in the city itself and in other parts of the diocese, Roman Catholic clergy have been prominent in the campaigns to squash any possible revival of Ukrainian culture.

This affair has been settled, at least provisionally, by appeal to the state in Warsaw. Yet in the crucial sphere of the economy, it is quite clear that the state is no longer able to exercise the degree of control it maintained during the decades of socialism. The post-communist government embarked almost at once upon a radical market-oriented economic programme, associated with the Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs and widely known as 'shock therapy'. This very quickly led to high levels of unemployment, as irrational socialist production systems were closed down. However there was a compensatory expansion in other sectors of the economy, particularly in the expansion of every sort of small scale commerce. In the case of Przemysl, from 1991 onwards there has been a massive increase in petty trading. Ukrainians are now able to cross the Curzon line easily, and have a highly visible presence in the city which is their most convenient market centre. (Rather smaller numbers of Poles have taken advantage of the more relaxed political situation to travel and trade in the other direction.) Visiting Ukrainians sell goods cheaply for the convertible currency which they need at home. Most come from L'viv and adjacent areas of Western Ukraine, but some come from much further afield (there is a direct train service to Odessa). It is said locally that the central bazaar in Przemysl, which has expanded to take over the football field next door, is the largest in the country after Warsaw. Ukrainian customers have provided local Poles with opportunities to sell a wide variety of merchandise, generating significant incomes for all concerned. In spite of the discomforts and sordid character of a great deal of this activity, everyone in Przemysl is aware of the economic benefits. Given the disintegration of the old national economy, they know that they have little alternative but to exploit their convenient location for the Ukrainian market. None of the nationalist groupings has called for action to curtail this trade, even though it is responsible for a very large Ukrainian presence in the town.

Evidently in the post-communist conditions there is much greater contact with Ukrainians than before. Once again Ukrainians have a visibility in the town, the difference being that they no longer live there but arrive by train and coach to trade (some of them are renting temporary accommodation; but more seem to sleep on their coaches or at the municipal camp site: not even those who can claim that they lived in the city before 1945 and were never compensated for the appropriation of their property have any right to settle permanently). But it is also clear that ongoing processes of economic cooperation do not inhibit the continued assertion of derogatory stereotypes about the Ukrainian nation. Indeed, it seems likely that the squalid character of much of the trade, which includes a thriving prostitution business, and the shoddy quality of most of the goods brought from the East, reinforce such stereotypes. At the same time, amidst all the daily poverty the highly exceptional instance of a western car with Ukrainian plates will attract even greater opprobium, and disparaging remarks about corruption and the mafia.

Nationalist pressure groups are continuing to exploit this situation, and to legitimate their activities in terms of the paramount need to prevent what they see as a resurgence of Ukrainian influence in a historically Polish town. In 1995 they were prominent once again, this time in a noisy campaign to oppose any commemoration on Polish soil of the Ukrainians who died fighting for UPA. The construction of monuments to 'martyrs' and the organization of reburials have created sharp controversy. Polish nationalists have responded to 'provocations' by insisting that state law prohibits the commemoration of enemy dead. But for Ukrainians (as for many other peoples – cf. Weingrod 1995) the bones of dead heroes have a special emotional force. The campaigns to honour such men publicly are continuing, and Greek Catholic priests have been prominent in a number of the ceremonies that have already been held.

The Ukrainian activists who wish to dig up cemeteries are probably unrepresentative of the minority group, just as the Polish nationalists are hardly representative of the 70,000 population of Przemysl. Some local families have taken advantage of new opportunities in recent years to renew kin links in Ukraine, and commercial gain is not the sole motivating factor. There are more grounds for optimism if one looks at the younger generation of Poles, who do not seem to hold such derogatory views concerning Ukrainians, or to be very much interested in how Polish-Ukrainian relations are unfolding, nationally or locally (for more detail of this recent history and an evaluation of current minority needs in this region, see Fenczak and Gasiorowska-Czarny 1995). Further investigation might reveal that nationalist rhetoric is limited in its appeal, and the emergence, at least among the young, of some 'post-modern' fragmentation of identities. The aggressive head of the Young Eagles did not even run in the local elections of 1994, presumably because he knew he would not win election. However, groups such as his are, for the time being, still exercising disproportionate influence behind the scenes. They are maintaining noisy polemics in the local press (particularly a right wing weekly supported by a municipal subsidy). In 1995 they were instrumental in opposing their own state, when the Ministry of Culture decided to organize a Ukrainian cultural festival in Przemysl. Resistance took the form of vicious poster campaigns and an arson attack on the Ukrainian club. When I visited the city shortly after this it was alleged to me that employees of the Town Council had been forced out of their jobs simply because they had some Ukrainian ancestry. In a climate of continued economic uncertainty and high rates of unemployment, it is not difficult to persuade the majority of Poles in Przemysl that public funds should not be allocated to such festivals, or to support other minority needs such as educational provision.

4. Conclusion

Our eventual assessments of continuity and discontinuity will depend ultimately on the kinds of questions we pose, and to some extent also on the scale of our enquiry. Gellner's model of discontinuity in the transition to industrial modernity is very abstract and, as we have seen, of little help at the micro level. It cannot explain, for example, why Andrew (Roman) Sheptytsky became a celebrated Greek Catholic Hierarch, closely identified with the Ukrainian cause, while his brother Stanislaw was a Roman Catholic who became a General in the Polish army. The model is unhelpful in specifying the actual social agents of nationalism, and pays little attention to its symbols and meanings. In a sense Gellner is surely right to emphasize its fundamentally modern character. At the same time, other scholars (e.g. Smith 1991) have shed valuable comparative light on the importance of religion and warfare for the genesis and long-term persistence of ethnic and national identities.

In both Poland and Ukraine, comparatively small groups of nationalists have taken advantage of post-communist uncertainties to revive ethnic hatreds that have their roots in the past. However, a closer inspection suggests that this past is essentially post-1918, with the worst atrocities taking place in the 1940s. It is therefore comparatively recent history: many people can recall these events, or they have heard their parents and grandparents talk about them. Only the religious basis of group difference is really ancient; even this has been complicated by the formation of the Greek Catholic church in the early modern period.

But none of these legacies from the past, whether separately or together, can explain the disturbing events of recent years. Although there has not yet been loss of life or even serious injury in Przemysl, the potential for ethnic violence is very real. What, then, is the explanation? One argument would be that people seek scapegoats in uncertain and unstable social and economic conditions. It is beyond the scope of this article to enquire into how far such factors might explain the rise of ethnic tensions in the later Habsburg period and in the interwar decades. What is clear in Przemysl today is that the aggressive young hotheads who smear anti-Ukrainian graffiti on the walls of cultural monuments and deface posters advertising a Cultural Festival are unemployed with very poor prospects in this backward corner of Poland. It is true that the leading ideologists of the nationalist groupings tend to be older men, many of whom have been relocated from Ukraine, with memories and family traditions that invoke the violent conflicts which took place earlier this century. For decades these antagonism were overshadowed by the question of communist rule: the main enemy was the communist government, all blame could be directed there. But in the wake of communist collapse and faced with new kinds of existential threat, it is necessary to identify a new 'Other' (cf. Verdery 1992). The old antagonisms provide a store of potent images for skilful politicians to manipulate. Nationalist groups have been successful in mobilizing some people around symbols such as the Carmelites' Church in Przemysl and the graves of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the national cause. But I suggest that a large part of the explanation for this success is the pool of disaffected youth and the atmosphere of cynicism and greed spawned by the economic dislocation of the postsocialist period. The collapse of the old national economy and its partial compensation by the new pattern of petty trading are also significant factors in understanding the intensified invocations of Polishness by extremist factions which are exploiting the new possibilities for political organization in order to poison inter-ethnic relations.

Just as Gellner's abstract and macro-level model of nationalism has its limitations, so too do those theories of the transition to communism that posit a sharp, radical break with the past. It is quite obvious that the immediate socialist past has also left its mark on local political culture in Przemysl, for example in the way that politicians continue to look to the centre, and in the way that most ordinary people have shunned politics altogether. After the enthusiasm of the *Solidarity* period there has been a general drift back into feelings of apathy; people do not feel that they had any constructive role to play in the public sphere. The political parties of the 1990s have not yet succeeded in breaking this mould.

Finally, however, I should like to argue that my anthropological colleagues must also be fully aware of the social impact of the structural changes in economic and political life that were accomplished so dramatically in 1989-90. The current antagonisms are related to concrete material factors such as unemployment and welfare insecurity. They are not simply atavistic, and the common metaphor in postsocialist commentaries of 'lifting the lid on the ethnic pressure cooker', implying that the conflicts were always simmering and waiting to explode as soon as the old socialist lid was removed, is one that I would reject. Ethnic tensions such as those currently visible in Przemysl can be addressed by powerholders: for example, through educational programmes and through political and economic reforms. Unfortunately, there was little sign in the first half of the 1990s that the new political parties were capable of playing a responsible role of this kind (see Lewis 1994). In these conditions the conventional stance of the anthropologist, which I would characterise as 'let the voice of the people be heard', is simply not good enough. In Poland a genuinely popular mass movement was hijacked by factions and the florescence of a so-called civil society has generated ugly, potentially malignant forms of nationalism in places like Przemysl. Stronger central interventions and further measures of political, economic and cultural regulation may be the only ways to ensure that Ukrainians receive a fair deal in this corner of Poland.

Note:

1. This paper arises out of numerous field trips to South-East Poland since 1978, the most recent being in 1994 and 1995. It is an early product of a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (R 000236071: The Politics of Religious Identity: the Greek Catholics of Central Europe), which will support further field research in Poland and Ukraine in 1996-7. A somewhat fuller historical account can be found in Hann 1996. My greatest debt is to Ernest Gellner: sadly, he died in November 1995, before I had an opportunity to discuss this material with him.