

Ukrainian Epiphany in Southeast Poland

Chris Hann

Hann, Chris 1998: Ukrainian Epiphany in Southeast Poland. – *Ethnologia Europaea* 28: 151–168.

Przemyśl, a smallish city in southeast Poland, close to the Ukrainian border, is the centre in Poland of the recently re-legalised Greek Catholic Church, which is almost exclusively Ukrainian in membership. This paper begins with an outline of this Church's *Jordan* rituals, as observed during a recent fieldtrip. This is followed by a sketch of long-term processes of Latinization and the nationalization of religion. This part of Central Europe has in the course of this century lurched from polyethnic empires to monoethnic 'nation-states', but contemporary Poland is not quite as monoethnic as was sometimes claimed in the socialist years. The ecumenical and multicultural images generated in Przemyśl by the recently revived *Jordan* rituals conceal the pressures brought to bear in recent years upon the city's Ukrainian minority, which was supposed to have been eliminated in 1947. Some of the sharpest postcommunist conflicts have concerned the property claims of the Greek Catholic Church. The paper focuses on the controversy that has surrounded just one building in Przemyśl, where the political, legal and even architectural issues are especially complex, in order to highlight more general social and political problems facing European societies, such as the long-term consequences of ethnic cleansing and the compatibility of democracy and multiculturalism. In a few years time Przemyśl will become a frontier city of the European Union; does this Europe have space for a religion which, though Christian and Catholic, differs markedly from the western European mainstream? Finally, the paper problematizes the vocabulary currently available in anthropology to address situations such as this, including the concepts of ethnicity/ethnic group and culture itself.

Professor Chris Hann, Department of Anthropology, Eliot College, The University, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NS, Great Britain.

Jordan

In January 1998 I visited Przemyśl in southeast Poland to observe and participate in the Epiphany rituals of the church now known officially as the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite.¹ I shall use the shorter designation 'Greek Catholic', since this is the name used by virtually everyone in Przemyśl and in the rest of the Poland, where this Church currently numbers about one hundred thousand faithful.² Przemyśl is the seat of the Metropolitan, the head of all Greek Catholics in Poland.³ Today virtually all of the city's 70,000 inhabitants are citizens of the Polish Republic. This state does not at present record the ethnic or national origin of its citizens, but were it to do so it is likely that more than 68,000 *Przemyslanie* would classify themselves as ethnically Polish. Virtu-

ally all of these would give their religion as Roman Catholic. The Ukrainian minority numbers less than two thousand, of whom perhaps nine tenths are Greek Catholic, the remainder belonging to an Orthodox parish that was only formed in 1984.

Christian rituals have been coming under anthropological gaze for quite some time now, but I am not aware of any work done on the Epiphany. This is surely at least in part because, compared with other occasions in the Christian calendar, the ritual work that gets done at Epiphany in Western and Southern Europe is not very spectacular. There is nothing to compare with Corpus Christi processions, let alone with all the extensions of Carnival that are nowadays so prominent in most parts of Europe. Theologically the feast of *Epiphania* (this Greek term is usually rendered in English

as *Manifestation*) has considerable importance as marking the closure of the Christmas cycle. The principal popular association in western Christianity has been with the Magi, the Three Kings who came bearing their gifts of myrrh, frankincense and gold to the baby Jesus. The feast is popularly known by this name in a number of languages, including Polish (*Święto Trzech Króli*) and German (*das Heiligedreikönigsfest*), though each of these languages also has a more formal term, *Objawienie* and *Er-scheinung*. But the feast seems largely to have lost its former significance in popular culture in western Europe, even for practising Catholics.⁴

Przemyśl on 6th January conforms to this western European norm, though its many Roman Catholic churches may be a little fuller than usual. Things are different, however, on 19th January. The Greek Catholics, like the Orthodox, follow the Julian calendar, so the whole Christmas cycle takes place two weeks later than the Roman Catholic cycle. Moreover the rituals and popular associations differ radically. In place of the Three Kings, a relatively late western development, the Epiphany rituals of eastern Christianity continue to give pride of place to Christ's baptism in the River Jordan. The feast of the Epiphany is therefore known simply as *Jordan*. For Greek Catholics this is a day when attendance at mass is compulsory, but the most important element is the praying and blessing that take place after the

service at the bank of the nearest river. Some Greek Catholics say that this feast is even more important than Christmas (though all agree that it is less important than Easter).

Let me summarise briefly the main events as witnessed and explained to me in Przemyśl in 1998, when Jordan fell on a Monday. The coming holiday was marked by a large social gathering on the preceding Saturday in the *Dom Narodowy* ('National House') of the city's Ukrainian community, in which carols, folk singing and short plays were performed, mostly by schoolchildren and young male novices from the Basilian order. The religious significance of the occasion was highlighted in welcoming speeches and prayers led by the parish priest and the Metropolitan himself. Some of the scenes enacted on the stage were religious, and they included a rendering of the story of the Three Kings. However there was also much good humour and mirth of a purely secular nature. The language used was modern standard Ukrainian, but the repertoire included Ukrainian versions of popular international carols such as *Stille Nacht (Silent Night)*. Patriotic sentiments towards the Ukrainian homeland were evoked several times, especially in the closing prayers. The only food served to the audience of some 300 was a simple sweet dish called *kutia*, made from wheat and raisins. Had there been no communal evening, I was told, many families would have made this dish at home; indeed



Kutia Festivities at the Ukrainian National House: the Three Kings bring their Gifts.



Procession through the Market Square to the river.



Pontifical Epiphany Mass in the Greek Catholic Cathedral.



Metropolitan Iwan Martyniak (right) about to consume some holy water at the end of the riverside ceremonies.

many had made it at home for Christmas Eve, the other celebration when *kutia* is customary.

On the following day, Sunday 18th January, all three masses in the Greek Catholic cathedral were well attended. I caught the end of the afternoon service, which was followed by a ritual known as 'the small blessing of the water'. This involved relatively brief prayers over a large pan of plain water positioned in front of the iconostasis. I was told that this was mainly intended for those who, for whatever reason, would be unable to attend the main Jordan rituals on the following day. At the end of the prayers a number of people filled empty containers they had brought along with them by dipping them into the bowl of water. On this eve of the feast some families observed a fast which they broke only with a large evening meal: this would typically comprise *bortsch* followed by *Ruski* dumplings and *kutia*.

The following morning the cathedral was full well before the 9.00 am start of the main ('pontifical') service. Towards eleven o'clock the entire congregation, led by the Metropolitan, accompanied by the city's Roman Catholic Archbishop and another Roman Catholic Bishop, processed through the central streets of the city for approximately one kilometre to an empty green site on the bank of the River San. Here a sort of wooden podium had been constructed in the fast-flowing river. The clergy stepped onto it

and led a further half hour of praying and ritual performances, focused around another large pan of water. A crowd of perhaps two thousand people participated on the bank behind them, while further onlookers were positioned on the opposite bank of the river. Candles and crosses were dipped into the bowl of water, the leading celebrants made crosses above it in the air with their breath, and two white doves were released into the air. The celebrants then drank some water (this was taken not from the pan or from the river but from a small thermos flask they had brought along). There was then a frightful rush as the clergy stepped aside and members of the congregation swarmed forward to fill their receptacles (including the odd vodka bottle) with holy water from the pan. Some avoided this scrum and took the water they needed directly from the river itself. A few people drank the river water. The water is collected to serve as holy water in the home throughout the year – it should be sprinkled at once into all corners to bring prosperity. In the past it was used medicinally by family members, and written accounts record that drops of this water were customarily sprinkled onto animals when they left their winter stables for the spring pasture. Other written sources embellish aspects of folk custom which grew up around *Jordan*. Since the San was often frozen at this time, it was sometimes necessary to dig holes in the ice

before the blessing. It was also common to erect large crosses out of ice.⁵

I am not a folklorist and my primary interest lies neither in these folk customs nor in the theological significance of the ritual. As a social anthropologist I am interested in the contemporary sociological and political aspects of religious identity in this city, in how *Jordan* figures in changing relationships between Roman and Greek Catholics, Poles and Ukrainians. As we walked back towards the city centre at the end of the rituals, an elderly Ukrainian told me that he remembered how, in the 1930s as now in 1998, Roman Catholics had joined Greek Catholics in their procession. Certainly the total numbers participating this year exceeded most assessments of the number of Greek Catholics in the city. Apparently at least some Roman Catholics also took water from the pan or from the San, for use in their home during the following twelve months. I was told that the example set by the Roman Catholic Archbishop and many of his faithful is emulated by the Greek Catholic Metropolitan and many ordinary members of his Church when they process with the Roman Catholics on their most conspicuous public feast, the Assumption (15th August). This was how things were done in the city before 1945, and this was how things were done again since 1990, when socialist prohibitions of public religious processions were finally lifted.

Are we then witnessing in postcommunist Przemyśl the return of a more plural, multicultural society? Alas, only an exceedingly superficial researcher could conclude that these two branches of the universal Catholic Church do in fact co-exist here harmoniously and on a basis of parity and reciprocity. Later on this *Jordan* evening, at a meeting organized by my main research partner, the (ethnically Polish) historian Stanisław Stępień, at the research Institute which he directs, other viewpoints were expressed. A dozen of us, Ukrainians, Poles and myself, a Welshman, gathered to discuss the topic of majority-minority relations in the city. Discussion was animated and lasted several hours. I was told that, that although the present Roman Catholic Archbishop attends *Jordan*, his predecessor never did so and was distinctly unsympathetic to Ukrainians. Other Roman

Catholic clergy in the city did not encourage their congregations to attend *Jordan*, and whereas virtually all Greek Catholics have attended Roman Catholic services, the reverse remains extremely rare. A Ukrainian journalist, the local correspondent of *Nasze Słowo*, a newspaper published in Warsaw for the country's Ukrainian minority, characterised Polish attitudes towards the Ukrainians as grounded in surprise on the part of Poles at the *ujawnienie* of this minority in Przemyśl, that is to say at the appearance or manifestation of this group (the word is closely related to *objawienie*, the formal Polish term for Epiphany). They were supposed to have vanished half a century before, in the course of a military operation known as Operation Vistula (*Akcja Wisła*) in Spring 1947. Yet all of a sudden, after the collapse of socialism, Ukrainians were becoming visible again, and not just at *Jordan*. This revival was unacceptable to many if not most Poles, and had already generated a lot of tension and even some violent conflict in Przemyśl in the 1990s.

History

Like most anthropologists I tend to be more interested in how 'ordinary people' construct their pasts than in questions of fact and interpretation as debated by professional historians.⁶ But of course the two are sometimes closely related, and the writing of nationalist histories by scholars over the last century or so has had tremendous impact upon the popular constructions. Thus there are certainly some Ukrainians who believe that Przemyśl was 'originally' an exclusively Ukrainian settlement, just as some Poles believe it was once exclusively Polish. Needless to say it makes little or no sense to try to project today's national communities back more than a thousand years into the past. Archaeological finds are inconclusive. The earliest written source is a monk in Kiev in 981 who refers to a campaign which involved the capture of Przemyśl and other settlements from the 'Lachy', who may be taken to be western Slavs, one of the elements which later coalesced into what we now call the Polish ethnic community or nation. In succeeding centuries it is clear that both eastern and western Slavs and both

eastern and western Christian traditions were represented in the town and its hinterland. It seems that the eastern Church, usually known as the Orthodox Church, was the first to establish a diocese in Przemyśl. After the incorporation of the province of Halicz into the Polish state by Casimir the Great in 1341 the elements of Polishness gained in strength, both here and in the wider region; most of these lands now form part of Western Ukraine. However the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was no more like a modern nation-state than its great contemporary to the south, the Ottoman Empire. These polities were built upon an extraordinary religious and linguistic diversity. Following William McNeill (1986) and Ernest Gellner (1983) I term this agrarian polyethnicity. It would be anachronistic to term these polities multicultural. In this era culture was singular and universal; however, political and social conditions in this region of Central Europe ensured that this 'high culture' was increasingly identified with the language and traditions of the west.

The Counter-reformation marked the first stage in the weakening of agrarian polyethnicity. The Greek Catholic Church was brought into being according to the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*. At the Union of Brest in 1596 a group of Orthodox Bishops within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth agreed to acknowledge the authority of the Pope and to accept the Roman position on a few theological points of little significance to the ordinary members of the Church. In all practical aspects of religion the Greek Catholics were to be allowed to continue to follow their old customs. This, then, was a compromise that produced a sort of hybrid church, uniting the theology of western Christianity with the practical religion of the Orthodox tradition. The proposed changes were controversial and the Union was not finally ratified by the Orthodox Bishop of Przemyśl until 1692, after a good deal of violent protest. The Orthodox were right to fear the aggressive agitation of the Jesuits, for in the following centuries the new Church came under severe pressure from the more powerful western tradition. Latinization can be seen in iconography, church architecture and music, as well as in

various ritual actions that remain controversial today, such as genuflecting, and in increasing pressures on the clergy not to marry and to shave their beards. Despite this Latinization, the form of the Greek Catholic liturgy and the performance of a ritual such as *Jordan* remained essentially the same as in the Orthodox Church and radically different from the Roman Catholic practice. The diversity of the 'Agrarian Age' was not yet seriously threatened. Limited social and geographical mobility reinforced complexity. For example, west Slav peasants who moved eastwards might adopt the religion and language of their east Slav neighbours but not necessarily at the same time, thereby breaking the correspondence between religion and language. Upwardly mobile east Slavs tended to adopt the language and religion of the politically dominant element, i.e. Polish and Roman Catholicism.

These processes continued after the collapse of the Polish state in the middle of the eighteenth century, when Przemyśl along with the rest of southern Poland passed into Habsburg hands. By the end of the nineteenth century Przemyśl was the second city (after Lemberg/Lviv) of Eastern Galicia and a major military stronghold of the Austrians. Galicia was also the main stronghold in the later nineteenth century of both the Polish and the Ukrainian national movements. It suited the Austrians to play them off against each other. Literacy rates rose sharply and both movements enjoyed considerable freedom to promote nationalist histories. But the province remained underdeveloped economically and millions were constrained to emigrate, mostly to North America, in movements which also played an important role in the dissemination of the sense of belonging to a people, to a nation. For several critical decades the most important agent in spreading Ukrainian nationalism among the predominantly rural population was the only intelligentsia available at this time to east Slavs, the Greek Catholic clergy (Himka 1984).

Przemyśl saw bitter fighting between Russia and Austria-Hungary during the First World War, which was followed by the re-emergence of a Polish state. Ukrainian nationalists established a Republic of Western Ukraine and there

was fighting between Poles and Ukrainians in Przemyśl, where a number of Polish schoolboys were killed, and (much more seriously) in Lemberg. The Polish army was much the stronger and Eastern Galicia was effectively incorporated by force into the new Polish state. Ukrainians numbered about 16% of the total population in 1929, and other minorities, among whom Jews were the most numerous, added up to roughly the same number (Tomaszewski 1985). This state was thus still significantly polyethnic, a long way from the ideal of the homogeneous 'nation-state'. Continued political action by disaffected Ukrainians brought repression from Warsaw, which also sought to undermine the power of the Greek Catholic Church, now more than ever perceived as the national church of the Ukrainian people. There was pressure to end the diversity of the Agrarian Age once and for all: for example, Polish-speaking Greek Catholics were targeted and told that they were *really* Poles and that they should not be taken in by Ukrainian nationalist propaganda. At this time Roman Catholic Poles and Jews were the largest components in the population of the city of Przemyśl, while Greek Catholic Ukrainians, though weaker in the city, still predominated in the surrounding rural areas. There are evident signs of increasing tension in the 1930s, e.g. in the construction by Poles of a monument to honour the schoolboys killed in 1918, and in boycotts of Jewish shops that were observed both by Poles and by Ukrainians. Nevertheless it is striking to observe that in this decade every other Christian marriage registered in the city was a mixed marriage.⁷

The decade that followed the outbreak of war in 1939 was bloody and decisive. German soldiers found many willing collaborators among Ukrainians, though the most committed nationalists soon understood that Germany had no serious intention of assisting them in the creation of their own state. The Germans crossed the San in 1941 and the elimination of Przemyśl's Jewish community began shortly afterwards. After its recapture by the Red Army in 1944 Stalin determined radically new boundaries for what was shortly to become the People's Republic of Poland. The eastern border followed the Bug and the so-called Curzon line, while the

western border followed the Oder and the Neisse. Virtually overnight Przemyśl became a border city. An exchange of populations was organized in 1945, which involved considerable movement of Ukrainians from Przemyśl and its hinterland into the Soviet Ukraine and movement in the opposite direction by Poles. Most of the latter went to the lands acquired from Germany but some settled in Przemyśl, bringing with them very strong anti-communist and anti-Ukrainian sentiments. The Greek Catholic Church was suppressed in 1946, following earlier Stalinist moves against this Church in the Ukraine. All its property was confiscated, though some was reallocated to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. The last Greek Catholic Bishops in Przemyśl were deported to Siberia: one died in a camp, the other eventually committed suicide. Ukrainian nationalist resistance continued after the end of the war, mostly in isolated actions in remote parts of the Carpathians. The new Polish government decided to put an end to this once and for all in Spring 1947. In the course of *Akcja Wista*, the entire remaining Ukrainian civil population was rounded up and deported, on the grounds that it was providing support to terrorists. About 300,000 people were dispersed in small groups to the former German territories, with normally no more than 3 families allowed to settle together, to ensure that they would always be outnumbered by Poles. They were deprived of basic civil rights, including the right to travel back to their native villages and towns. Their homes were allocated to others or destroyed.⁸

During the rest of the socialist era Przemyśl was quiet and stagnant. Its population soon recovered to pre-war levels and there was a steady process of rural-urban migration. However, Przemyśl was overtaken by Rzeszów not only as a centre for state administration but also as a recipient of industrial and educational investment. Only the ecclesiastical sector continued to flourish. With the elimination of the Jews and the Greek Catholics, this now consisted almost exclusively of the Roman Catholic Church. However, after the first of a series of major crises that were to hit the People's Republic, in 1956 a Greek Catholic parish was re-

established under the protection of the dominant Church. Here and in a handful of other locations, most of them in the remote former German areas to which the Greek Catholics had been deported, surviving clergy were able to practise their own rites within Roman Catholic buildings. Some Greek Catholics converted to Orthodoxy in order to be able to enjoy more freedom and religious practices almost identical to their own (the Orthodox enjoyed state support in many rural localities of the region; after the formation of their parish in Przemyśl in 1984 they were even allowed to process publicly at *Jordan*, which the Greek Catholics did not dare to do until 1989). However, wherever a Greek Catholic priest and services were available, most people remained loyal to their church. In Przemyśl the great majority attended Sunday masses in the former Jesuit building named after the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Officially it was a Roman Catholic foundation known as the Garrison Church; in reality it catered mostly for Greek Catholics and it played a major role in the consolidation of their new community.

Who were these parishioners? Officially all Ukrainians had been 'resettled' in 1947, but socialist propaganda abandoned the rhetoric of 'Polish Greek Catholics' and after 1956 it was acknowledged that, in fact, not all Ukrainians had been swept up in *Akcja Wisła*. During the same political thaw of 1956 a national Ukrainian Socio-Cultural Society was formed. A Communist Party member was given the job of establishing the Przemyśl branch, but it was slow to get going. The reason was not a shortage of Ukrainians, since it was well known locally that as many as several hundred had managed by some means or other to avoid deportation (the majority were married to Poles and with the complicity of friendly priests had been officially listed in church records as Roman Catholics). But they were reluctant to come forward because they feared that this new Society was just a government ploy to draw them out, as a prelude to a further round of deportations. Only gradually did it become clear that Polish socialism was not going to emulate other variants of socialism in this respect. Both the Society and the Greek Catholic parish became securely es-

tablished and provided a range of services to their members. Within a few years numbers began to expand significantly as many deportees took advantage of opportunities to move back from the north and west. Most of these were not natives of Przemyśl at all, but it was easier to resettle here than to move back to a village in which your property had been allocated to a Pole and all traces of Ukrainian culture had been obliterated. These people were consciously looking for a milieu where they could feel at home, where they could practise their traditional religion, and at the same time be in touch with the modern world via Ukrainian radio and television. Many returnees consciously asserted their Ukrainian identity, even when this created problems in finding work and accommodation, whereas most of those who had avoided deportation preferred to carry on concealing their Ukrainian identity. In other words the Ukrainian, Greek Catholic minority as it took new shape after 1956 was very much a *willed community*. Its members were obliged to use Polish in everyday social life, but they maintained close contacts with other returnees and declared a strong preference for marrying within the ethnic group.⁹

The new minority played no conspicuous roles in the public affairs of the city. There was relatively little traffic across the nearby border, and visitors to Przemyśl during these years could have been forgiven for failing to notice any reminder of the city's Greek Catholic, Ukrainian history. The major visible signs were the unusual architecture of a number of churches, including one converted to serve as the state archives and another prominently located on a central hill which had clearly visible inscriptions in Cyrillic script on its huge bells. This building was called the Carmelite Church, but the *Przemyślanie* knew that before 1946 it had been the Greek Catholic Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

Postcommunist Civil Society

The concept of civil society has been at the basis of some of the most pervasive perceptions of the end of communism, both within Eastern Europe and in external analyses of the region.

Civil society, in this contemporary usage, has an unambiguously positive valency. The civil society is the opposite of the totalitarian society, it is one in which individual citizens enjoy full rights of association and equality before the law. A good deal of the aid flowing Eastern Europe has been channelled through international non-governmental organisations and explicitly targeted at the promotion of such organizations, since these are held to epitomise the spirit of civil society (Wedel 1998).

There is much irony in the trajectory of this concept since its first theorisation in a preindustrial era. Civil society (*Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) was also used in opposition to the state by Hegel and Marx, but civil society was not the positively evaluated pole in their work. Civil society was rather seen as the sphere of socially divisive egoism, equated with the sphere of the market, which was to be transcended by state-societal integration. Neo-Marxists in the twentieth century, notably Gramsci, led the way in drawing attention to the integrating aspects of civil society. These currents culminated in the writings of Eastern European dissidents who theorised an opposition between civil society and the repressive socialist state. In Western Europe Jürgen Habermas tried to find a way around the definitional problems by introducing the term *Zivilgesellschaft* in place of *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* to denote this positive contemporary sense of civil society; but it can hardly be claimed that he offers a convincing resolution of the theoretical issues.¹⁰

I prefer to follow Hegel and Marx, and also to draw on another important nineteenth century contribution, that of Tocqueville. Tocqueville distinguished 'political society' from both the state and civil society. It is worth differentiating a little further and distinguishing between political elites at the national level, in this case Warsaw, and political society at the local level, in this case Przemyśl. Most theories of democracy take it for granted that continuity between these levels can be secured through universal suffrage and representative institutions. Post-communist Poland has indeed instituted an impressively democratic Constitution. Governments in Warsaw have also been anxious to protect the rights of 'national and ethnic minor-

ities'. The Ministry of Culture in Warsaw has taken the initiative in promoting better relations with Ukraine, e.g. by moving the bi-annual Festival of Ukrainian Culture from its location on the Baltic coast, where it was inaccessible to Ukrainians, to Przemyśl. Political society in Przemyśl, however, did not welcome this initiative. On the contrary the mayor and most local politicians did their best to prevent this relocation, arguing that the great majority of the city's inhabitants did not want this Festival in their city.

More important in Przemyśl than the new national political parties were the activities of a mass of new and ostensibly independent associations, the sort of development so attractive to civil society theorists. Unfortunately the most prominent of these all turned out to have rather narrow, anti-Ukrainian and anti-socialist political agendas. They were associations of Veterans who had experienced Soviet camps in Siberia, Ukrainian terrorism in Volhynia in the 1940s, and so on. Many members were not natives of Przemyśl but Poles 'repatriated' after 1945 from the former eastern region. The most dynamic was the 'Association for the Commemoration of the Przemyśl Eaglets' of 1918–9, i.e. the schoolboys who gave their lives in the fighting for an independent Poland at the end of the First World War. This Association was formed to rebuild the statue that had been destroyed on Nazi orders in 1940, and it did so in a grand style. Far from limiting its activities to this one cause, it went on to take up anti-Ukrainian issues generally. It and other associations were able to use the new freedoms of the media to whip up local public opinion against any initiative that they perceived to be in the interests of the minority, such as the organisation of the Festival, the restitution of property, or the erection of monuments to Ukrainian victims of Polish violence half a century ago.

There was no countervailing force to this welter of right-wing nationalism which came to dominate local political society in Przemyśl as soon as communist controls were lifted. The Ukrainian minority was much too small to mount any effective resistance. It is nonetheless hard to explain how these Veterans' associations, with barely any formal representation

in the city council, were nonetheless in effect able to impose their agenda upon other parties. When the leader of the Association for the Commemoration of the Przemyśl Eaglets ran for public office he polled very badly. Yet his organization and a handful of others with overlapping memberships managed to constrain all the activities of the elected politicians by ceaseless manipulation of nationalist discourse, by accusing anyone who disagreed with them of not being 'real Poles'. For members of the minority Ukrainian group, this transition to a new political society meant far more day-to-day pressure than they had experienced in the last three decades of communism.

Civil society also re-emerged in Przemyśl in something like its classical form in the realm of the economy. Here the wishes of Warsaw elites seemed to be more in accord with those of local people, who welcomed the early decisions of post-communist governments to relax controls over cross-border trade. As a result a border which had been largely closed to individual or familial entrepreneurial initiatives was now suddenly open to every possible flow of goods and people. Dramatically worsening economic conditions in Ukraine ensured that much of the trade consisted of Ukrainian citizens taking anything they could lay their hands on to the nearest Polish bazaars. Even tiny amounts of convertible currency could help them to survive at home. As unemployment increased in Przemyśl in the wake of the government's 'shock therapy' programme, the bazaar also assisted many Poles in their own survival strategies. In time the liberalization of trade almost certainly did assist some to gain the benefits visualised by national elites, as long-term mutually beneficial trading partnerships were formed by small businessmen. There are no statistics to sum up all this new activity, but it is estimated that, eight years after the collapse of the centrally planned economy and the launch of the 'Balcerowicz Plan' as the optimum route to the new market economy, as much as one third of the Przemyśl economy is nowadays directly or indirectly dependent on small-scale trade with Ukraine.¹¹

There is little reliable information either as to the effect the much increased contact with

and visibility of Ukrainians in Przemyśl has had on Polish perceptions of the other group, including the Ukrainian minority within their own city. However, these markets are sometimes dirty, insanitary places, and many of the visiting Ukrainians did not have the resources to pay for respectable accommodation, even if Przemyśl had had such accommodation available to offer them; some of them no doubt engaged in activities that brought them up against the law (not so much organised crime, of which the city seems to have stayed remarkably free, as infringement of labour market regulations by working on a casual basis when not entitled to do so). Some sociological research on stereotypes in the town (Jestal 1995) confirms the impression I formed when visiting these new markets: that contact of this sort does little to promote better inter-ethnic relations, but rather accentuates negative stereotypes, in this case that of the 'dirty trader' (*brudny handlarz*). The visitors may be described as having an inferior culture, or as being 'without culture'.

Religious Property¹²

The end of communism in Poland, in which many observers felt that the Roman Catholic Church had played a major part, inevitably brought major changes to that Church and, in the case of Przemyśl, even more dramatic changes to the Greek Catholics. The latter focused on the injustices of 1946–7, which could now for the first time be subjected to public criticism. It soon became clear that the most intractable issues were those concerning property. Greek Catholics looked for support from the Vatican, where the Polish Pope had consistently upheld their right to an open existence under conditions of full equality with the Church of the Latin rite. Early in 1991 he appointed a new Greek Catholic Bishop to the ancient see of Przemyśl. From this moment the aspirations of the Greek Catholic community centred on regaining possession of their former Cathedral, which had already been requested by their Cardinal in Rome.

However, almost as soon as Greek Catholic aspirations were articulated a group of (lay)

Roman Catholics formed an 'Association for the Defence of the Carmelite Church', which opposed the transfer on many grounds. They could not deny that the building had been used by the Greek Catholics down to 1946, but in this case they argued that the usual postsocialist logic, based on erasing the evils of socialism, could not be followed. They pointed out that this church had been part of a Roman Catholic Carmelite foundation between its foundation in 1630 and its suppression by Emperor Joseph II of Austria in 1781. It had been allocated to the Greek Catholics only in 1784, after they had refused the alternative offer of the city's Jesuit church, located on a less imposing site lower down the same hill. Members of the Defence Association argued that this act of violent appropriation was contrary to natural justice, and to specific laws enacted much later by the Polish Republic in 1928. They insisted it had never received any legal sanction. Thus the Carmelites had been fully entitled to regain their former property in 1946 – all the more so as they had just themselves again been the victims of illegal appropriation, by the Soviet authorities in Lemberg. The Association even traced descendants of the founder's family, who stated that it would be disrespectful to them if the church were to pass into other hands.

The Greek Catholics offered a quite different interpretation of the past, emphasizing the elements which suited their case. The building was said to incorporate materials from an even older Orthodox church, and in any case they had only abandoned their plans to erect a separate cathedral in the eighteenth century on a clear understanding, shared with Roman Catholics at the time, that the transfer of the former Carmelite church was irrevocable. Some claimed that the building had in any case been legitimately purchased from the Austrians, and that other members of the founder's family shared their view that it should be returned to them. They also claimed that their ownership had been confirmed in a 1925 Vatican Concordat, and was consistent with many other cases all over the world where a church founded by one rite of the Catholic church had passed into the hands of another. Finally, Ukrainian Greek Catholics emphasized that Roman Catholic

Poles had not disputed its ownership in the generation before its confiscation in 1946, so that in effect the latter were seeking to profit from socialist immorality.

Both sides could make a case in the realms of historical discourse, but practical outcomes are determined elsewhere. At first it seemed that a compromise would prevail: the Papal Nuncio Józef Kowalczyk, Primate Józef Glemp and the Archbishop of Przemyśl Ignacy Tokarczuk agreed at a meeting in Warsaw that the building should be returned to the Greek Catholics for five years, within which period they would set about the building of a new Cathedral church. As soon as this decision became known the group of lay activists, with tacit and even some explicit support from junior local Roman Catholic clergy, set about organizing protest campaigns in the local media and then later on the streets. There were hunger strikes. Senior Roman Catholic clergy were accused of being KGB intelligence agents, others were condemned for refusing to hear the confessions of members of the protesting group. Some junior clergy sympathised with the activists and helped to frustrate attempts to mediate in the dispute. The protesters argued quite explicitly in the same 'us' versus 'them' terms that *Solidarity* had used so successfully over the years against the socialist authorities. They insisted that not only did they have a legally clear-cut case to retain the Carmelites' church, but that the city's Polish heritage was coming under a more general threat from returning Ukrainians. This issue of ecclesiastical property was central in fomenting a widespread climate of mistrust in the city at the very time the Pope himself was due to visit it in June 1991. Eventually John-Paul II had little choice but to back down. During his visit he gifted the building which the Greek Catholics had used unofficially for many years, the former Jesuit Church, which they had rejected in 1781, to be their Cathedral church in perpetuity.

Although there has also been some controversy about other buildings, the Carmelite church has remained the principal symbolic focus for the minority issue. Having won the main battle in 1991, the nationalists made various alterations to the interior to highlight



The Carmelite Church, formerly the Greek Catholic cathedral, with cupola (1996).



The Carmelite Church with its new spire (1997).

its Polish affiliation. One wall was covered with a large map of Poland showing the pre-1939 boundaries and a plaque showing the Polish national eagle with a swastika in one claw and Ukraine's national symbol in the other. The following year the Carmelite clergy, supported by the nationalists, began an attempt to transform the exterior of the church by removing the tower and cupola that had been added in the nineteenth century by the Greek Catholics. At first the county Conservation Officer gave his permission and demolition commenced. He then changed his mind, only to be accused of pro-Ukrainian bias and in effect hounded out of office after the 1994 local elections by a coalition of nationalists and ex-socialists. The issue simmered while a successor was appointed. For several years the remnants of the cupola provided a visible reminder on the city skyline of the tradition that the Polish activists wished to obliterate.

The cupola was finally demolished in 1996, in circumstances which once again highlighted the tension between the local and national levels of political society. To the earlier historical propositions a new one was added in media discussion: the claim that the canon law of the Carmelites prevented any building belonging to them from being adorned with any form of tower or cupola. Hence the cupola would have to come down, irrespective of what the secular authorities might have to say. The National Conservation Officer insisted that state conservation law overrode any such canon law. Various 'experts' declared that the cupola was structurally unsound (no one took this argument very seriously) and that it did not harmonise architecturally with the rest of the building. No one asked the Ukrainians for their opinion.

As on the earlier occasion these various strands of discourse were eventually rendered brusquely irrelevant by practical action. The new County Conservation Officer was the ex-socialist who had held the post before becoming a casualty of the political transformation of 1989–90. He still lacked qualifications, but the nationalists knew he would do their bidding. In scenes which read in media accounts like high farce, after ordering demolition to proceed he hid himself away from his office, so as not to be

able to take the countermanding call which he knew would be made from the Ministry in Warsaw. The Carmelite clergy and demolition workers sealed themselves off from the world, as had the occupiers of the church in 1991, in order to frustrate any last minute instructions to prevent the destruction of the cupola. In the following year, 1997, and apparently in disregard of their own canon law, the Carmelites erected a slim new tower in place of the demolished cupola. Thwarted, the National Conservation Officer in Warsaw contented himself with the observation that the cupola, far from being Eastern Orthodox in character, had in fact been modelled on St. Peters in Rome. To a foreigner, the onion shapes incorporated into the new tower have a more distinctive oriental character than the cupola it has replaced – but that is not how the skyline is perceived on the ground in Przemyśl.

As for the perceptions of the minority, several of those interviewed said that they had wept when the cupola was dismantled. Most said that they had felt powerless to influence the course of events at any stage. Questioned about responsibility, some agreed with the interviewer that only a tiny minority of the Polish population was responsible. Others gave more thoughtful answers: some felt that the active minority was giving expression to prejudices that were deep and widespread throughout the Polish population. Although their Bishop has decided not to question the Pope's gift establishing the former Jesuit church as their Cathedral on a permanent basis and major redecoration of this building was completed only recently, some Greek Catholics in Przemyśl still do not feel at home in this church. Confrontation is continuing in 1998 over proposals to alter the Latin inscription on its facade, which are being opposed by Polish activists. Although this building was given to the Greek Catholics by the Pope himself, they believe that it is still viewed by many Poles as a Polish church. Some Greek Catholics therefore favour a return to the plan of erecting their own new Cathedral, a building with an explicitly eastern design which would be undeniably 'ours'.¹³

Conclusions: Cultural Differences, Past and Present

In this final section I draw out a few themes of this case study which may have more general significance.

First there is the question, sadly again a topical one in the Eastern Europe of the 1990s, about the consequences of ethnic cleansing. From the point of view of Polish nationalists wishing to free their country of all 'foreign elements', the strategy of deportation and fragmentation implemented in 1947 must have seemed the optimal means to ensure the assimilation of remaining Ukrainians into Polish society. The actual consequences were rather different. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have assimilated, but others have not and some have chosen to return to Przemyśl. They have taken bitter memories back with them, and a determination to recreate and retain their different identity. It is conceivable that the goals of Polish nationalists might have been better served by leaving the Ukrainians in Przemyśl alone; had they done so, more might have assimilated, and the creation of a willed community with an overwhelming sense of injustice might have been avoided.

Of course this argument can be turned around: perhaps Polish style ethnic cleansing was too soft, somehow not the real thing. Yet the basic elements are not unlike some of the forced movements that have taken place more recently in former Yugoslavia, and there may be lessons to be learned here. One implication might be that, to realise the nationalists' programme, only the complete physical extermination of the threatening group is sufficient. Yet here the Jewish case is instructive. Jews were subject to genocide rather than 'merely' ethnic cleansing. Unlike Ukrainians, they have hardly been at presence at all in Przemyśl for the last half century. Yet anti-Semitism is alive and well, for as many observers have noted you don't need the physical presence of a Jewish minority for the old prejudice to retain at least some of its force.

This raises more fundamental questions about nationalist agendas. The basic attitudes found in Przemyśl are not peculiar to this city or

to Poland. They are found, in somewhat different forms, in most European countries, whatever the formal details of citizenship legislation. It is true that there has been considerable investment in recent years in many countries in transcending the principles of exclusion inherent in nationalism by promoting instead the claims of a European identity. This is still vigorously rejected by some, such as rightist politicians in Przemyśl and in Britain, as an undermining of national sovereignty. Continued progress towards a 'united Europe' may only be possible if governments ride roughshod over the strongly held opinions of their citizens, just as liberal initiatives from Warsaw in the 1990s have ridden roughshod over the views of local 'civil society' in Przemyśl. But even if this progress is made, it seems to me that this merely reproduces the exclusiveness of nation states at a higher level. Przemyśl will be a frontier city of the new Fortress Europe, but this role is unlikely to bring any improvement either in relationships with Ukraine or in the position of the Ukrainian minority inside their own city.

The final questions I wish to raise are questions about the appropriate units of analysis and the adequacy of key concepts in the discipline of anthropology. First there is 'ethnic group' and various cognate terms. This has become extremely popular in most parts of the world in the last three decades or so. Even in African anthropology it is nowadays usual to talk about ethnic groups and ethnicity, rather than tribes and tribalism. Is this more than a mere cosmetic change, a matter of ephemeral political correctness? It seems to me that anthropologists are merely repeating the problem on another level when they go on to suggest replacing ethnic with national, on the grounds that nations and nation-ness are the most basic discursive formations of the modern world (usually of course claiming both a unique cultural identity and possession of a state).

The Polish case provides a good illustration of the semantic confusion which prevails in this field. *Naród* is usually translated as nation, while *narodowość* is the term for nationality in the sense of ethnicity. Polish ethnographers have long used the concept of *grupa etnograficz-*

na. Poland's post-communist Constitution refers in Article 35 to protection of the rights of 'national and ethnic minorities', without offering any definitions. Polish social scientists have assumed that *national minority* is intended to identify a people who have their own state elsewhere, such as Ukrainians, while *ethnic* identifies scattered groups such as Roma, some regionally concentrated people such as Kashubs, and people whose language and religion link them to the Ukrainians but who nonetheless reject that identity, preferring the designation Lemko. In practice it seems that the Polish authorities in the 1990s have not been able to operationalise this distinction between national and ethnic minorities. I propose that the terms ethnicity and ethnic group are the most acceptable designations for the sort of collective identity that has considerable importance for most people in the contemporary world – and, of course, fundamental importance for nationalists. Most people, including virtually everyone in Przemyśl, feel only one such identity; but in principle citizens should be allowed to declare more than one, or none at all. In some cases the name of one's ethnic identity will be similar to or the same as the name of the state to which one belongs, and we must acknowledge ethnic *majorities* as well as ethnic minorities; the rights conferred by membership of a political community are entirely different from the identity one obtains through belonging to an ethnic community, be it majority or minority.

At the end of the day, what is this collective identity that has such experiential importance in our contemporary world? In this paper I have largely avoided the term culture, a concept which has become increasingly central to anthropology in the course of this century. I am by no means the first anthropologist to suggest that it is high time we questioned this centrality. Contemporary nationalist discourses in Przemyśl are predicated on essentialist assumptions about unchanging identities. Yet at the same time many Ukrainians share with Poles a tacit universalist definition of culture. They use this word to express the idea that western countries such as England and France are more advanced or 'civilised' than Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe. Poles and Ukrain-

ians may even agree that the Poles are, according to this universalist yardstick, a more cultured *narod* than the Ukrainians. But both parties also assert a particularist concept of culture – each lays claim to a valuable national culture that is uniquely its own and historically fixed in some essential way. In fact the national cultures that contemporary nationalists assert and wish to protect are largely creations of the nineteenth century: yet it is in their name that communities have been destroyed and driven apart communities in places like Przemyśl. It is for the sake of maintaining a national culture that many people are now opposed to intermarriage, and even to participation in the religious festivals of the other group. Thus Ukrainian children at the newly established minority school in Przemyśl learn about their national culture in standard literary Ukrainian; at their *Dom Narodowy* some of them practise national folk dances and learn to play the *bandera*, an instrument previously unknown in the Przemyśl region, but now considered part of their nation's heritage.

It is important not to exaggerate the change that has occurred. I do not wish to claim that no clearly defined boundaries of a kind commonly called cultural existed in Przemyśl before the emergence of nationalist antagonisms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Clearly there were such differences, and the most important were rooted in religion and expressed in different religious calendars and public rituals. These differences did not prevent the development of a high degree of 'inter-culturality': not only were the economic and social lives of Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic villagers largely identical, but the houses and churches they built, even the carols they sung at Christmas, were often a genuine synthesis of east and west in which it was impossible to say which element had chronological priority.¹⁴ On the whole an east-west boundary was preserved, notably in the dialects people spoke (though as in most such contacts there was a great deal of borrowing and mutual influence). But this was not a boundary imagined, as today's boundary is imagined, as a seal. It was a boundary that most people crossed constantly in their everyday lives, as they switched languages, visited their

kin, – and joined in the religious celebrations of the other group.

In short, while it may be reasonable to speak of ‘cultural differences’ in the age of agrarian polyethnicity, it is misleading to speak of separate ‘cultures’ in the way these are postulated by Poles and Ukrainians today. Many anthropologists have recognised this problem, yet they continue to write about cultures in the plural because they have not found any better terminology.¹⁵ This seems rather feeble. I feel uncomfortable when I see the central concept of my discipline fitting so snugly into the discourse of nationalists. I know from what I see there and from what they tell me that Ukrainians in Przemyśl identify very strongly with something they call Ukrainian culture, in which religion and language are primary referents. Yet in their everyday lives they are indistinguishable from the Poles with whom they interact, and for many obvious material reasons I have not met anyone who has seriously considered relocating from Poland to Ukraine. So the problem is: how can our efforts to improve social science terminology assist in efforts to shape a more tolerant society, one which would allow the Ukrainians in Przemyśl to use their language, practise their religion, and diverge from mainstream Polish norms in any other ways they wish that fall within the law, without causing them to be classified in some fundamental(ist) sense as different human beings, because possessed of a *different culture*.

Notes

1. This field trip of one week followed similar short visits in each year since 1994. I have maintained contacts in the city since first visiting it in 1979. Recent trips have been supported by grants from the University of Kent (1994) and by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (R 000236071, ‘The Politics of Religious Identity; the Greek Catholics of Central Europe’). I should make it plain that all my work in the city, including discussions with members of the minority, is through the medium of Polish. I am much indebted to my main partner in this research Dr. Stanisław Stępień, Director of the South-East Scientific Institute. An earlier version of this paper was presented at a Colloquium in the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in February 1998 and I thank my co-Fellows for many helpful comments.
2. The Church is also sometimes still referred to as the Uniate Church, though not by its members, many of whom see this as a pejorative term. For more on the background and recent history of the Greek Catholics in this region see Keleher 1993.
3. It is also the centre of a Roman Catholic Archdiocese, and it contains numerous religious orders of both sexes and both Catholic denominations, and one small Orthodox church. Until the 1940s there was also a large Jewish population, of which almost nothing remains (though the present city library is immediately recognisable as a former synagogue). In total, including seminary students, about five hundred people out of a total city population of just under 70,000 make their living as bishops, priests, monks or nuns. Taking into account other direct and indirect employment effects, the ecclesiastical sector is certainly one of the most important in the contemporary economy, as it was in the past.
4. For an exploration of Western epiphany traditions, and in particular of their political significance in the legitimization of powerholders, see Trexler 1997.
5. See Garnska-Lempicka 1969: 438–9.
6. The discussion in this section is taken largely from Hann 1998a, where further references are supplied.
7. Personal communication, Dr. Anna Krochmal, county archivist in Przemyśl. The boundary was commonly preserved within the mixed family, children being brought up in the faith of the same-sex parent; it is difficult to conceive of such a practice today.
8. For comprehensive assessments of this action see Misio 1993, Mokry 1997. The action, widely commemorated by Ukrainians in 1997, has not been officially disavowed by any of Poland’s post-socialist governments.
9. There was virtual unanimity on this last point in the interviews carried out by Dr. Stępień in 1996–7. See no.1 above and Stępień and Hann 1998.
10. See Habermas 1992. I have discussed the concept of civil society at greater length in Hann 1996.
11. Interview with Dariusz Iwaneczko, Public Relations officer, in the city council offices in January 1998.
12. Again, for further detail and references concerning this section see Hann 1998a.
13. For more detail concerning minority views see Stępień and Hann 1998.
14. For specific examples of such fusions see Hann 1998b.
15. For a recent example see Geertz (1995: 43) who points acutely to some of the difficulties with the concept but recommends that we continue to use

it regardless. A similar line is followed by the literary scholar Geoffrey Hartman (1998). Perhaps the best way forward is that indicated by Eric Wolf, who shows in his latest book precisely how concrete relations of power and ideology can be integrated into investigations of culture (1998: 285–91).

References

- Geertz, Clifford 1995: *After the Fact; two countries, four decades, one anthropologist*. Cambridge, Mass. Garnska-Łempicka, Jadwiga 1969: Moje Miasto. In: Stefania Kostrzewska-Kratochwilowa (ed.), *Z dziejów Kultury i Literatury Ziemi Przemyskiej*, Przemysł.
- Gellner, Ernest 1983: *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford.
- Habermas, Jürgen 1992: *Faktizität und Geltung*. Frankfurt/Main.
- Hann, Chris 1996: Introduction: Political Society and Civil Anthropology. In: Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn (eds.), *Civil Society; challenging western models*. London: 1–26.
- Hann, Chris 1998a: Postcommunist nationalism: re-discovering the past in southeast Poland. In: *Slavic Review* 57: 840–863.
- Hann, Chris 1998b: Galician Greek Catholics between East and West. Paper read at conference, *Galicia – A Region's Identity*, Slavonic Department, University of Aarhus, May 1998.
- Hartman, Geoffrey 1998: *The Fateful Question of Culture*. New York.
- Himka, John-Paul 1984: The Greek-Catholic Church and Nation-Building in Galicia, 1772–1918. In: *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 8: 426–52.
- Jestal, Jerzy 1995: Stereotyp Ukrainca w świadomości młodzieży Polski południowo-wschodniej. In *Fraza* 4 (5–6): 89–97.
- Kelcher, Serge 1993: *Passion and Resurrection; the Greek-Catholic Church in Soviet Ukraine, 1939–1989*. L'viv.
- McNeill, William H. 1986: *Polyethnicity and National Unity in World History*. Toronto.
- Misiło, Eugeniusz 1993: *Akcja "Wisła"; Dokumenty*. Warszawa.
- Mokry, Włodzimierz (ed.) 1997: *Problemy Ukraińców w Polsce po wysiedleńczej Akcji "Wisła" 1947 roku*. Kraków.
- Stępień, Stanisław and Chris Hann (eds.) 1998: *Tradycja i Tożsamość; wywiady wśród ukraińskiej mniejszości etnicznej w Przemysłu*. Przemysł.
- Tomaszewski, Jerzy 1985: *Ojczyzna nie tylko Polaków. Mniejszości Narodowe w Polsce w Latach 1918–1939*. Warszawa.
- Trexler, Richard C. 1997: *The Journey of the Magi; meanings in history of a Christian story*. Princeton.
- Wedel, Janine R. 1998: *Collision and Collusion; the strange case of Western aid to Eastern Europe, 1989–1998*. New York.
- Wolf, Eric R. 1998: *Envisioning Power; ideologies of dominance and crisis*. Berkeley.