CSAC Monographs 9

The Skeleton at the Feast

Contributions to East European Anthropology

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against the agricultural sector as a whole. This is why the country's food supply is in the state it is in. General Jaruzelski has promised that both kinds of discrimination will cease: until they do, I think it will be very difficult for him to forget about *Rural Solidarity*.

Chapter 8:

Ethnic Consciousness in Lemkovina (1987)

Soviet *ethnos* theory

The discussion of 'ethnicity' in Soviet anthropology seems in some ways to have been richer and more rigorous than western approaches to the study of ethnic groups.[1] Anthropologists in both traditions have analyzed cultural features, such as language or religion, to explain group unity. It is perhaps surprising that one finds considerable emphasis upon socio-economic factors in the writings of influential contemporary western writers, whilst Soviet theorists have been more explicit in bringing out 'subjective' aspects of ethnic identification, even when these seem unimportant politically, i.e. no institutions exist to make the ethnic group corporately effective.[2] Thus, according to Bromley (1974: 65) the *ethnos* exists if there is a generally acknowledged group name, and can be said to persist 'as long as its members preserve the idea about their affiliations to it'. The same author has also elaborated a complex taxonomy of ethnic phenomena. If this were applied by a Soviet anthropologist to the population whose history I shall chart below, he would probably define them as an 'ethnographic group' which is part of the Ukrainian *ethnos*. This latter term refers both to an 'ethno-social organism', i.e. to some unit of social and political organization, and, in a distinct cultural sense, to an *ethnikos*. At the highest taxonomic level the group is part of the East Slav ethnic community.

In the contemporary situation, such an analysis might seem perfectly obvious. But it would be a mistake to suppose that it was always thus. In the past it is difficult to find traces of ethnic awareness in the terms developed by Bromley and his colleagues. If these groups existed at all in previous centuries, it was not in the minds of their members. Most members of the group on which I shall focus did eventually acquire the sense of belonging to an *ethnos*, but the group itself does not enjoy any vigorous corporate existence. It is not effective politically. Following Kozlov (1974), I simplify analysis of the transformation it has experienced by concentrating upon the following three aspects of ethnicity:

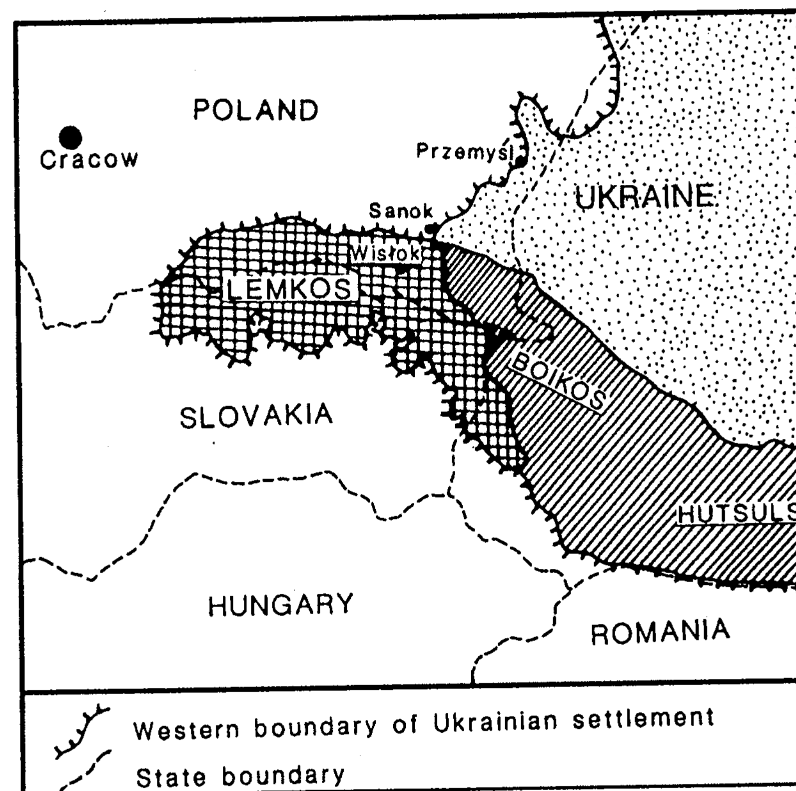
1. The elements of culture which members of a population have in common and which can serve 'objectively' to distinguish the group from other populations. Language, religion and economy are the main such markers in this case.

2. A territorial base. This, too, is part of the 'objective' endowment of the group in question. The territory at issue here is a section of the Carpathian chain some eighty miles long and bounded for as long as it has been permanently settled by more powerful groups possessed of state organization (notably Poles to the north and Hungarians to the south).
3. Subjective ethnic awareness, without which there is no *ethnos* of any kind, effective or ineffective.

I am concerned with the northern regions of this part of the Carpathians which for more than 600 years have either been formally a part of the Polish state or (between 1772 and 1918) come under the same Austrian administration as adjoining Polish territories. Provisionally, let us call this territory Lemkovina, and its inhabitants the Lemkos. Within Lemkovina I am particularly concerned with the easternmost segments, largely because it was here that my fieldwork was carried out between 1979 and 1981. The Lemkos of Poland were virtually indistinguishable culturally from the mountain populations which lived south of the border, and also closely related populations further to the east. The name Lemko has not, however, been applied in these adjacent districts. To the south, the usual self-designation has been simply Rusyn, while further east the terms Boiko and Hutsul have acquired some currency (see map 4). These populations are sometimes referred to collectively as Ruthenians.[3] Most Ruthenians have now been incorporated into the Ukrainian *ethnos*, but until this was achieved politically (in the aftermath of the Second World War), it may be safer to refer to them as the westernmost fragments of an East Slav ethnolinguistic community. They were indeed fragmented, by political boundaries as well as by difficult terrain, and the Lemkos came closer to establishing an effective 'ethno-social organism' of their own than did 'Ruthenians' collectively. That the Lemkos, too, eventually failed in this endeavour can be explained in part by their inability to satisfy at the same point in time all three of the conditions suggested by the aspects of ethnicity listed above. By the time condition 3 was met, condition 2 could be met no longer.

A short history of Lemkovina

Lemkovina and the neighbouring foothills lay on the borderland between two ethnolinguistic communities in the Middle Ages. Between 1030 and 1340 the



Map 4. The Lemko Homeland in the Carpathians

eastern districts of Lemkovina formed the southwestern corner of the East Slav principality of Galicia within the Kievan Rus' federation, and later the independent polity of Galicia-Volhynia. However, relatively few permanent settlements were established before the fourteenth century, when Casimir the Great completed the annexation of this territory by the Polish kingdom. The ensuing processes of colonization have been carefully analyzed by Polish historians.[4] They could not claim that Poles were the major force in this process, because the evidence suggests that the role of Eastern Slavs and also of Germans was patently greater. Instead, Poles have argued that the decisive influence, not only upon the economy but also upon the entire folk culture of

the new group, was that of nomadic Vlach pastoralists, who arrived in this territory from Romania and other parts of the Balkans throughout the Middle Ages.[5] The Polish accounts essentially allege that interaction between these pioneer mountain communities and Polish feudal society led to the formation of a new ethnic group that stood far closer to Poland than to any other nationality.[6]

Such arguments are dismissed as chauvinist falsification by most Ukrainian historians.[7] In their view, Slavs from the east were the original inhabitants of these mountains, long before they were integrated into the medieval Polish state. The precise details of the situation on the ground at different periods need not detain us here. There seems little doubt that, at least as far as eastern Lemkovina is concerned, Ukrainian historians are correct in asserting that Eastern Slavs were dominant in the late medieval process of colonization.

So far as language was concerned, with the exception of a few small pockets which were Polish speaking, the language of these settlers from the east became the language of all of Lemkovina. As for religion, probably the most important marker of ethnic differences both in the colonization process and later, the divisions coincided with the ethnolinguistic boundaries. Whilst the Western Slavs and Germans were Roman Catholics, the Eastern Slavs practised the Byzantine rite and were not in communion with Rome. Whatever pagan practices the Vlachs may have had before their arrival in the northern Carpathians soon disappeared, and in the territory we have called Lemkovina it is clear that the eastern rite was dominant from the earliest recorded traces of settlement. Distinctions between the western and eastern rites did not weaken during the centuries in which the Lemko ethnic group took shape. However the situation was complicated by the formation of the Uniate or Greek Catholic church from the end of the sixteenth century. The effect of this was to transfer the religious allegiance of Orthodox congregations in Lemkovina away from the ecclesiastical centres of the east, and bring them formally into line with the affiliation of their political master.[8] However, recognition of the Pope and episcopal reorganization (not actually achieved in Lemkovina until the end of the seventeenth century) did not entail the abandonment of Orthodox liturgy. At the local level, the differences were as clear as they had been before, and the eastern rite retained its near monopoly position. So, while in one sense the foundation of the Greek Catholic church can be seen as an important complement to the strategy of the kings of Poland, based on the modern state's goal of *cuius regio eius religio*, it should be made clear that Polish colonization of Lemkovina in the feudal period went no further than this. It was not yet

considered important that most of the actual colonists were Eastern Slavs, with a language and liturgy very different from those of 'ethnic' Poles. Such diversity was characteristic of what Gellner (1983) terms the 'Agrarian Age'.

Poland was partitioned for the first time in 1772. From this date until the end of the First World War Lemkovina was under Austrian rule, part of the province known as Galicia. The eastern districts fell within Eastern Galicia, where Western Slavs formed only a minority of the rural population. In the course of the nineteenth century the matter of ethnic identity became more urgent for Poles and non-Poles alike. It should not be supposed that ethnic consciousness was any more developed in the West Slav areas, merely because Poland had enjoyed several centuries of statehood. In fact, Polish speaking peasants, if they were not merely pawns in the political struggle, often seemed to be more sympathetic to their Austrian administrators than to their Polish lords, e.g. in taking sides with the foreign Emperor during the 1846 uprising in Galicia. However, Austrian policies towards the non-Polish population tended positively to encourage nationalist sentiment amongst their Eastern Slavs, the intention being to counter not only the far-reaching political aspirations of the Poles, but also the threat represented by panslavic ideas (Kann 1974: 294, 298). Austria did not wish the Poles to enjoy a monopoly of devolved powers in Galicia, nor that the non-Polish population there should react by identifying with Austria's enemy, Czarist Russia. Hence, Austria's imperial interests facilitated the rise of Ukrainian nationalism, a current which was eventually to have a profound impact on Lemkovina.

Lemkovina and its inhabitants were discovered and labelled by Poles in the second half of the nineteenth century. The name was bestowed by early travellers, and its origins are obscure. It probably stems from a folk nickname mimicking a feature of the dialect of the inhabitants of northeastern Lemkovina, used not by Eastern Slavs but by their Polish neighbours (Reinfuss 1948). Other names were also used by nineteenth century explorers, and it was only after the First World War that the term Lemko gained general acceptance in the ethnographical literature and a certain grudging acknowledgment from the Lemkos themselves. At this time the most common self-designation was still *Rusnak*, meaning 'Russian', but denoting the medieval state that was centred on Kiev rather than modern Russia, and therefore better translated as Ruthenian-Russian. The language spoken in Lemkovina was generally classified as an East Slav dialect, and later, as Ukrainian gradually won recognition as a literary language, as a dialect of Ukrainian. However, language did not in itself provide a clear-cut basis for ethnic identification.[9]

During the first half of the twentieth century, then, basic differences in language and in religion between Lemkovina and adjacent Polish territories were more widely and explicitly recognized. However, this did not imply much wider consciousness of unity among either Lemkos or Poles. In the period of Austrian rule, which was also the period when capitalist relations of production were expanding throughout Galicia, not only was there little understanding in Lemkovina of the ideals of Ukrainian nationalism (mainly propagated in cities several hundred miles to the east), there was also a lack amongst the Lemkos of any group identification above the level of the locality. The situation was analyzed in the inter-war years by Roman Reinfuss (1948), the best of the Polish ethnographers to investigate Lemkovina. He divided the territory into three parts on the basis of the 'objective' date supplied by history and folk culture (including dialect), and into about a dozen smaller units when the prime criterion was the 'subjective' identification of the inhabitants. Thus, for example, the largest such unit in the eastern section of Lemkovina was known as the 'Royal Demesne', because most of the villages it comprised had belonged to the Polish Crown in pre-Austrian times. In the nineteenth century, the inhabitants of this area would not acknowledge any wider group identification than this (except perhaps *Rus'*, referring to their status as Eastern Slavs, followers of eastern Christianity).[10]

Of course this was not the only area of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy where the inhabitants of quite sizeable territories seemed at this time to be devoid of any national orientation. National consciousness was no more advanced among other 'Ruthenian' groups, such as the Boikians and the Hutsuls, who also spoke languages now recognized as dialects of Ukrainian. It was not much more developed in more central Ukrainian areas, nor did the concept of the nation in the sense of 'ideological fatherland' hold much meaning for the average Polish peasant in the Austrian period.[11] The boundary between Polish-speaking areas and Lemkovina was clear to all: it was often demarcated by the natural line of the mountains or by river and did not seem to change at all during the nineteenth century. But in all this time there was little antagonism that might be called 'ethnic' in character. Conflict of an economic nature could be found in every village, and economic conflicts often had their ethnic aspects. In otherwise fairly homogenous Ruthenian-Russian villages, the larger owners of property (frequently absentee owners) tended to be Poles, whilst local trade, including the trade in alcohol, was controlled by Jews. For non-Jews, marriage outside the group was not unusual (though Bromley (1974: 65) regards endogamy as 'an essential feature of an *ethnos*'). It did not threaten the ethnic homogeneity of Lemkovina: in-marrying Poles would acquire the local Ruthenian-Russian dialect and were expected to

conform to eastern religious practices. Equally, Lemkos who left their group were received into the Roman Catholic church in their new Polish parish. Hence, in the Austrian period religious alignments underwent no substantial change and there was little expansion of Roman Catholic influence in non-Polish territories such as Lemkovina.

After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Lemkovina enjoyed a brief spell of 'independence' in 1918-1919 before being re-incorporated into the new Polish state. The revolutionary councils set up at the end of 1918 illustrated the diverging political orientations which had emerged in the closing years of Austrian rule. Activists in the central and western sections established a separate Lemko republic, which they later sought to link to the new state of Czechoslovakia rather than to either Poland or the Ukraine. In the eastern section a Greek Catholic priest was instrumental in founding a short-lived council aligning the inhabitants of that area to the cause of an independent Ukraine. After several years of fighting between Poland and the Soviet Union, Ukrainians had to settle for the status of an autonomous republic within the USSR, whilst vast regions of the Western Ukraine were occupied by Poland. The chauvinistic policies of the Polish government made ethnicity a major factor in politics throughout the interwar period in all regions of the country.

For the new Polish authorities the Lemkos constituted a special group, definitely not to be confused with Ukrainians. These were the years when numerous branches of scholarship set about documenting the Vlach ancestry of Lemkian culture and also the full extent of Polish influence upon it. Amongst the Lemkos themselves, the government was able to capitalize upon the fact that many inhabitants of the central and western regions had only an ill-defined Ruthenian-Russian ethnic identification and had not been exposed to Ukrainian influence. As the Greek Catholic clergy had been the principal Ukrainian campaigners in Lemkovina (see Himka 1979), the government's strategy of 'Polonization' clearly called for decisive policies in the field of religion. Not only was the expansion of the Roman Catholic rite encouraged, but Lemkos were induced to transfer in large numbers to the Orthodox church of Poland, much more susceptible to state influence than the Greek Catholic church. With the approval of the Vatican, a separate diocesan organization was set up for the Greek Catholic church in Lemkovina, with instructions to restrict Ukrainian influence over priests and parishioners alike.

The policies of right-wing Polish governments enjoyed some success in Lemkovina, but also caused considerable acrimony, not so much between Lemkos and Poles as between different Lemko factions. This was particularly

the case concerning religious issues: many communities became deeply divided when part of the population was persuaded to affiliate to the Orthodox church. However, in some areas, including most eastern parts, the Greek Catholic church was better able to withstand Polish propaganda and the effect of government policies was rather to strengthen Ukrainian consciousness. The inter-war organization of the underground opposition party, the Polish Communist Party (KPP), had similar consequences in eastern Lemkovina (Makuch 1963: 248, 255). For avowedly tactical reasons, political opposition here was guided not by the KPP itself but by a largely autonomous wing called the Communist Party of the Western Ukraine (KPZU). Whereas the KPP followed a more genuinely 'internationalist' line, calling for Ukrainian areas to be restored to an independent Ukraine, but concentrating its attack on the general programmes of the government, the KPZU was prone to see the campaign in ethnic terms, to focus attention on ethnic discrimination rather than economic issues. Although discriminatory policies did not affect the Lemkos to the same extent that they affected the millions of Ukrainians in more easterly provinces, nevertheless communist tactics may have helped to ensure that by the end of the inter-war period, most inhabitants of eastern Lemkovina were more conscious of their Ukrainian ethnicity.

In other sections of Lemkovina the influence of the Polish authorities, and also of the large American diaspora, outweighed the influence of Ukrainian nationalists. The term Lemko was now in wide use, but it was still not always acknowledged by those to whom it was applied. There was no consensus as to what national orientation Lemkos should have: could they hope to be sufficient unto themselves, should they join the struggle to re-establish a Ukrainian nation, or should they content themselves with aiming only at some special minority status within the Polish state? Because Lemkos did not experience the effects of Polish pressure in the inter-war decades as severely as did the great mass of Ukrainians, there was still on the eve of the Second World War relatively little ill-feeling in Lemkovina towards the contiguous Polish population.

It is sometimes argued that ethnic conflict develops as a consequence of the economic conflicts engendered by the spread of capitalism, but the evidence from a small region such as Lemkovina does not support any simple link. In the eastern provinces of inter-war Poland, where economic and ethnic discrimination were normally fully congruent, protest often emphasized the ethnic factor. Yet peasant strikes in and around Lemkovina during the depression years seem to have been conducted with exemplary cooperation between ethnic groups (Kiryk and Kowalski 1967).

A distinction should be drawn between the relative cultural tolerance of the Austrians and the aggressively nationalistic policies of inter-war Polish governments. Perhaps the latter hastened the politicization of the Lemkos, but ethnic awareness had begun to expand under the Austrians, and as a result of policies designed to serve political and dynastic ends, rather than the interests of a new economic order. It may be argued that capitalism helped to engender the urban elites which began to develop Ukrainian consciousness in the nineteenth century. Yet it was a traditional (pre-capitalist) stratum, the Greek Catholic clergy, which was primarily responsible for transmitting the new ethnic consciousness to Lemkovina. Thus this case study poses a challenge to general accounts of nationalism that would link it in any simple fashion to the demands of a modern, industrial social order.

The demise of Lemkovina

The predictable outcome of inter-war policies was seen after the German occupation of Poland, and the question of their ethnic identity finally became a vital one in the lives of all Lemkos following the German defeat. During the war the Germans gave considerable encouragement to Ukrainian nationalists, granting them policing powers in many occupied areas, including Lemkovina, and permitting numerous atrocities to be committed against Jews and Poles. Lemkos were not prominent in such activities, and were in general subjected to the same regulations as Poles in occupied territories, e.g. concerning forced labour and compulsory food deliveries. When new borders were established for Poland by the USSR at the end of the War, the Lemko question was re-assessed. In line with the policy of the Communist Party of pre-war years, it was agreed that they be treated as a Ukrainian minority and that large numbers of them be transferred to the Soviet Ukraine. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Poles were obliged to return from the eastern provinces and settle in the provinces acquired in the north and west from Germany. Probably about 50 per cent of the population of eastern Lemkovina was evacuated to the Soviet Union in Autumn 1945; only a fraction of them, the pre-war communist sympathizers, went voluntarily.

Ukrainian nationalist groups continued to operate in the mountains after the capitulation of Germany, subjecting both Poles and remaining Lemkos to a terrorist campaign. The struggle lasted until 1947, when all these groups were liquidated by the Polish Army. It was then alleged that Fascist terrorists had drawn support from the local Lemko population, and this was the justification advanced for deporting all remaining Lemkos from their mountain villages to

various regions in the north and west which still had some room for settlers ('Operation Vistula'). In view of the fact that few Lemkos actually joined the 'Ukrainian Liberation Army', that Lemkian villages were also raided by this army, and that Ukrainian nationalists had no base at all in the central and western sections of Lemkovina, it is difficult to accept this mass evacuation of the civil population as a military necessity. It deserves to be seen rather as the culmination of pre-war government policies, an attempt to resolve the problem posed by the new state's largest ethnic minority with methods as drastic as those employed by the wartime enemy. Lemkos were scattered in small groups in remote regions, prohibited from returning to their native hills and required to adapt to an alien environment in conditions substantially less favourable than those enjoyed by other settlers. Their homeland was resettled by ethnic Poles, mostly poor peasants from other parts of Galicia.

The linked problems of ethnicity and religious faith were very much to the fore in these years. Some Lemkos strained genealogies to establish their Polishness, but strict rules were applied and only those mixed families where the *father* was Polish managed to avoid deportation. Some families succeeded in persuading compassionate Roman Catholic priests to convert them to the Latin Church, but in the majority of cases, even this was not enough. The Lemkos were accused of collaborating with terrorists by the soldiers who threw them out of their homes and into cattle trucks, then branded as terrorists themselves by their new Polish neighbours, often refugees from territories incorporated into the USSR. Unsurprisingly, this was a decisive experience, one that finally rendered Ukrainian identification authentic for most Lemkos. In other words, what clerical agitation was unable to complete in preceding generations, the postwar conjuncture and socialist method of population transfer accomplished in just a few years. Relations between Lemkos and Poles were deliberately poisoned, just as relations between Poles and Ukrainians generally had been before the Second World War. The socialist state's minorities policy did not recognize Lemkos, but only Ukrainians. In the field of religion, following Stalin's precedent in the USSR, the Greek Catholic church was banned by the new secular authorities and its assets confiscated by the state, both in Poland and in the USSR.

Uprooted and dispersed, deprived of their religion and inhibited from using their native tongue, Lemkos nevertheless endured their new living conditions as they had put up with difficult conditions in the past. From the late 1950s, they were no longer forcibly prevented from returning to their old village; but they were still for many years 'discouraged' from returning, and relatively few have done so. Some are still fearful of provoking conflict with the Polish

settlers who now predominate in all sections of the homeland. Besides, the land is richer in the new territories, and the younger generation has no ties of sentiment to the mountains. Many have adapted successfully, in agriculture and in industry, and do not have a good grasp of their parents' language. Hence it is not surprising that some Polish sociologists contend that full assimilation into Polish society may be only a matter of time (Kwilecki 1974; Nowicka 1980). However, if we return to Bromley's emphasis on ethnic consciousness as the prime condition for the existence of an *ethnos*, the Lemkos have constituted such an ethnic formation since their immediate postwar experience. They cannot now hope to become more than a 'splinter' group within what Bromley would call the Polish 'ethno-social organism' (1974: 71). But there is now a greater degree of consensus amongst members on the definition of the group. Few today deny that at the higher level of national identity they are Ukrainians, though many still seem to regard the Lemkian subgroup as the primary group with which they identify. Probably most now feel that they belong both to the Lemkian ethnic group and to the Ukrainian nation (just as the Polish inhabitants of the Tatra Mountain district can claim to be both 'Highlanders' (*Górale*) and Poles – this analogy is frequently advanced by Lemkos themselves). It was their misfortune that full national awareness as Ukrainians, accompanied by general appreciation of the lower level of group identity, could be attained only when their communities were destroyed and they themselves were forcibly dispersed by the Polish Army.[12]

Notes

1. For my understanding of Soviet '*ethnos* theory', I have relied upon the papers in English by Bromley (1974), Kozlov (1974) and Dragadze (1980).
2. Among western authors such 'subjectivism' is present in some of the work of Epstein (1978), and also in that of Barth (1969), where it sits uneasily alongside an emphasis on rational economic decision-taking.
3. This term comes from the old Latin label for East Slav populations. Closely related terms like *Rusyn* and *Rusnak* have been among the most popular self-designations in this region. Even in the inter-war period, the latter was still more common than 'Lemko' in the region we have labelled Lemkovina (Reinfuss 1948). In this region, 'Old Ruthenian' refered, as in other parts of Galicia, to a political current powerful in the later Habsburg period, which tended to advocate a Czar-centred Panslavism in preference to the emerging Ukrainian orientation. This orientation continued to attract adherents in Lemkovina in the inter-war decades.
4. Fastnacht (1962) has written the definitive study of early settlement in the eastern parts of Lemkovina.

5 Accounts of Vlach migrations can be found in Cranjala (1938). Influential general accounts of pastoral influence on the folk culture of the Polish Carpathians have been given by Dobrowolski (1977: see his footnote 9 for detailed bibliography).

6 Contributors to Goetla (1935) and also Pieradzka (1939) are representative of the Polish historians who strained historical facts to suit political requirements in the inter-war period. However, even more scholarly studies, such as those of Paszkiewicz (1954, 1963), have been vigorously contested by Ukrainian sources.

7 On the Ukrainian side, Pritsak (1982) seeks to clear up some of the problems left by Hrushevsky (1941), the great historian of the Ukrainian national movement; I have relied more on *Ukraine* (1963-71).

8 See Halecki (1958) for a detailed history of the birth of this church; and Halecki (1966) for background to the delay in ratification of the Union of Brest in the Przemyśl (Peremyshl) diocese.

9 Many Lemkos who today proclaim Ukrainian ethnicity also claim to be speakers of a Ukrainian language. Others refer to their speech as 'Ruthenian-Russian' or sometimes 'Lemkian', but this does not necessarily diminish their attachment to the Ukrainian *ethnos*.

10 A few ethnographers and anthropologists claimed that genetic as well as cultural similarities helped to unify the population of the eastern districts of Lemkovina, where the Ruthenian-Russian influence was alleged to be more dominant in both these respects than in other sections of the Lemkian homeland.

11 Though Polish national consciousness may have been slow to spread in the countryside, Polish sociologists were amongst the first to study the implications. See Wierzbicki (1977) for discussion of the contributions of Znaniecki and in particular Ossowski, the first to draw out the distinction between 'private fatherland' and 'ideological fatherland' or nation.

12 Re-reading these last paragraphs in 1995, it is clear to me that I have exaggerated the impact of the tragic events of the 1940s in creating any kind of consensus about group definition. I was generalizing on the basis of a limited number of Lemko informants in the eastern section of the territory. However, many Lemkos in contemporary Poland, who nowadays find it much easier to organize and to promote their culture than they did at the time of my fieldwork in 1979-81, continue to resist what they see as the external imposition of Ukrainian identity. Much scholarly effort is currently being expended, in Kraków and elsewhere, on the compilation of dictionaries and on grammar books for the Lemko language, seen by a small number of activists as a language quite separate from Ukrainian. For further information about these recent developments see Magocsi 1993b and Hann forthcoming c, d.

Chapter 9:

A Critique of Anthropological Self-Contemplation (1988)

> *Useful to a degree, fieldwork introspection endlessly replayed can become a sub-genre that loses both its novelty and payoff for developing a knowledge of other cultures.* (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 42)

1. Self and others in a village in Poland

This paper is a no doubt exaggerated protest against some recent tendencies in the discipline. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the disparate subjects raised by participants in this symposium,[1] I feel that the pursuit of an 'anthropology of anthropology' is beguiling but dangerous. I am far from denying the validity of the sociology of knowledge or the history of ideas as fields of academic enquiry, and I think that applying anthropological techniques to the history and method of anthropology, as well as to other branches of science, can be fruitful and stimulating. But I also think that a danger arises when a focus upon the production of anthropological/ethnographical texts comes to stifle the production of new ethnographies. Recent concerns with the 'genre' of ethnographic writing, and with the complex triad of relations which exist between fieldworker/author, people/informants, and audience (both lay and academic), have led to a situation in which anthropologists are invited to write 'reflexively'. I find that this is easily interpreted as an incitement to be autobiographical, to meditate upon the full extent to which the culture under focus is being asessed, for better or for worse, in relation to the culture of the observer, and to speculate upon the extent to which what is being reported about the 'other' is influenced by the fieldworker's presence, by his/her 'supremacist' ideology, by histories of imperialist relations, and so on. Alongside this authorial subjectivity is the increasing expectation that the anthropologist should explore in similar subjective style the particular character and 'world view' of his or her key informants. Some view the present period as an 'axial moment', one of exciting radical experimentation throughout the human sciences (Marcus and Fischer 1986). I tend to see a crisis of confidence, with autobiography as a most unsatisfactory refuge. As a reader, when I pick up an ethnographic representation of some aspect of contemporary East European socialist societies, it is Eastern Europe that I want to read about, and not the preconceptions and values of middle class English or American anthropologists.