Struggling for peace: understanding Polish-Ukrainian coexistence in southeast Poland (1943-2007)
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Conclusions
Explaining Polish-Ukrainian coexistence

The question why massive ethnic violence remained absent in Poland after 1990 has led us back to the past sixty years of Polish-Ukrainian coexistence in Poland. In exploring the history of the Polish-Ukrainian relationship my focus has been on both micro and macro level processes. These processes include changes in relationships between and attitudes among individuals and groups, as well as changes in the overall Polish society from the mid 1940s—the period in which a socialist Polish People’s Republic was established—to the turn of the 21st century—the time when Poland’s new democratic leadership opened up ways to a free market economy as well as to a political and economic return to Europe. The key to the question why in today’s Poland the diverse viewpoints and demands of majority and minority populations are articulated peacefully can be found in these micro and macro level processes. Relationships at the local and central levels have developed in such a way that a resort to violence is generally considered obsolete and counter-productive. This is not just the norm propagated by Poland’s mainstream political leadership, but also a generally accepted belief by the great majority of Poland’s citizenry. This is not to say that interethnic conflict is absent in Poland. The point that is at issue here is that interethnic tensions and conflicts have not escalated into massive violence. Below I will explore a number of key factors that have contributed to the current situation. The first two sections survey the macro conditions that formed the basis of the two contrasting outcomes: protracted conflict (1944) and consolidated peace (1990). The third section investigates how peace became consolidated and articulated in relationships between Poles and Ukrainians at the local level. Sections one to three reveal how the development of a strong state, the establishment of a near homogenous nation, and the successful assimilation and integration of individuals and groups in Polish society, provide complementary answers to the question why massive ethnic violence remained absent in Poland after 1990. The final section will combine these findings to offer an analysis of the conditions for and the dynamics of peaceful coexistence.
Macro level contrasts: from a weak to a strong Polish state

Invaded, robbed and destroyed by Nazi-Germany and the Soviet-Union little was left of Poland’s infrastructure, let alone of Poland’s state machinery by 1944. Cities and towns, trade and transport networks, industrial, financial and agricultural centers, state and public institutions—all had to be rebuilt practically from the ground up. The fact that two invading forces had crushed Poland during World War II set the conditions for Poland’s immediate postwar future, which can be summed up in the following key-points:

• **A weak geopolitical position:** With its entry into Poland the Soviet Army brought a ready-made pro-Communist and pro-Soviet administration. The Soviet-sponsored Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN), later called the Provisional Government of the Polish Republic (RTRP), was unelected and unconnected with the exiled Polish Government in London. As a Soviet satellite state, which eventually became endorsed by the Western Allied Powers, Poland had no voice in determining its own future.

• **Insecure state boundaries:** Prospects of a restoration of Poland’s prewar state boundaries were almost nil, as the Soviet Union had no intentions to give up Poland’s eastern territories that it had annexed in 1939. Instead, Stalin negotiated with Churchill and Roosevelt that Poland would be compensated for this loss by extending its Western borders at the expense of Germany. The newly acquired territories in the West, euphemistically referred to as “recovered territories” (*ziemie odzyskane*), besides making up for the loss of territory in the East, were particularly instrumental in securing domestic support for Poland’s new communist leadership.

• **The absence of a state monopoly on violence:** the weak internal power basis of Poland’s new communist regime was epitomized by widespread armed resistance. The ready availability of arms from regrouping partisan armies that earlier on had fought Nazi and Soviet occupation posed a direct physical threat to the new communist establishment. The fight against armed anti-communist resistance was so much prioritized by Poland’s political leadership that military and security organizations and institutions for decades dominated the Polish state apparatus.

• **The presence of large ethnic minorities:** With the border change Poland lost millions of its Ukrainian, White Russian and Lithuanian minority group members without the need of having to relocate them. But it gained a new German minority of several millions in the western “recovered territories”. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Poles lived outside the borders of the new Polish People's Republic, that is, in the eastern territories annexed by the Soviet Union. Last but not least,
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ethnic minorities were numerical majorities in most of Poland’s eastern and southeastern border regions.

Polish society in 1944 had disintegrated to a Hobbesian rule: the absence of a strong central authority resulted in lawlessness, discord and civil war (Hobbes 1654). The assumption of political disintegration also underlies the theories that seek to explain ethnic violence in contemporary Europe, as in, for example, Barry Posen’s (1993) theory on the so-called “security dilemma”. His argument runs as follows. When the central state power collapses, as happened in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the members of society no longer have someone to protect them, which increases their dependence on those groups with which they identify and which they believe will act in good faith: their coethnics. Whenever ethnic groups surmise potential threats to their security under conditions of a weak or absent state, they take into account a number of structural elements. These, among others, include: the history of their relationship with the alleged enemy group or groups; their demographic, economic and military strength; settlement patterns; responses of the international environment. In the event that an intergroup relationship has a history of hostility and violence, the members of the groups are likely to fear more violence in the future. In the event that a group’s predominance in the overall power balance with the other group is judged to be on the wane, it may attempt a preemptive attack before the ‘political momentum’ has gone.

In a similar vein, James Fearon (1998) argues that a so-called “commitment problem” arises whenever an imperial power disintegrates, leaving behind a society in which majority and minority groups confront each other. Even though these groups, according to Fearon, should have strong incentives to settle political differences and disagreements without a war—as fighting is an extremely costly business—they sometimes do engage in warfare. One important reason for this is that an ethnicized state leadership, even with the best intentions, is unable to “credibly commit” itself to protect the lives and property of subordinate ethnic groups. No matter what a political leadership agrees to in the present, there is never a guarantee that it will not repudiate its promises in the future. Since this problem is insoluble, only secession may give the minority the security it desires. Fearon suggests that the commitment problem may operate more or less strongly depending upon certain conditions. First, the problem intensifies when the minority anticipates that its prospects for secession will diminish once it enters the new state. Second, it is stronger for rural people than for urbanites, since urbanites can more easily chose emigration than peasants, who would have to leave their land and farms behind. Third, ethnic warfare becomes more likely in a setting where settlement patterns are intermixed; in order to control a certain territory the minority must eject members of the majority group, which inherently implies the use of violence.
Posen’s “security dilemma” and Fearon’s “commitment problem” clearly played havoc with the Polish-Ukrainian relationship in the 1944. Even with the prospect of internationally approved state boundaries, the presence abroad of a considerable number of Poles, as well as the presence in Poland of large minority populations, weakened the political legitimacy of Polish rule within the territories of a very vulnerable Polish People’s Republic. Neither Poland’s political leadership nor the political leaders of the neighboring Soviet Republics were able or willing to deliver a credible commitment regarding the legal status of ethnic minorities in their new states. While Poland’s political leadership translated its ambivalent attitude towards ethnic minorities into a violent policy of expulsion, leaders of the Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army opted for violent resistance in the hope of winning secession from a very weak and barely formed state. The fresh memory of hostility and violence between Poles and Ukrainians during World War II; the military weakness of the Polish state; the intermixed settlement pattern in the Polish-Ukrainian border region; the peasant background of the Ukrainian secessionist movement; the positive sanctioning of ethnic cleansing policies first by Nazi Germany and later by the Allied powers—all these factors contributed to a strengthening of the security and commitment dilemma, and thereby, to a polarization of relations between the Polish majority and the Ukrainian minority in Poland in 1944 (chapters 2 and 3).

If we explain interethnic rivalries as the outcome of the breakdown of state control, as the above theories do, than the absence of interethnic rivalries in Poland in the 1990s can be explained in terms of the absence of such state collapse. Indeed, by the time the communist administration was replaced by a democratic ‘Solidarity’ administration the conditions had been reversed. The key-conditions listed below substantiate the conclusion that by the 1990s Poland was in ‘full control’:

- **A strong geopolitical position:** Of all countries in the former East Bloc, Poland was the first to free itself from communist political domination. What is more, Poland actively advanced the independence of the neighboring Belarus, Ukrainian and Lithuanian Soviet republics by following a ‘two track’ policy: through its maintenance of parallel contacts with Soviet leaders in Moscow and with the political leaders of the independence seeking Soviet republics it stressed the strength of the latter. Moreover, by adopting a policy of ‘European standards’, Poland introduced its eastern neighbors to international legal and ethical norms as well as to the attractive perspective of European integration.

- **Secure boundaries:** A Polish-German border treaty was signed in November 1990. In October 1990 Poland and Ukraine signed a state-to-state declaration, including a pledge of non-aggression, acceptance of existing borders, and cultural rights for minorities on both sides. A similar declaration was signed with Belarus in 1992 and
with Lithuania in 1994. The quick resolution of territorial issues during the 1990s points at the fact that Poland’s new political leadership was less concerned with redeeming lost national territories and more with preserving a Polish state within its present frontiers.

- **The presence of a state monopoly on violence:** Even though opponents of Poland’s communist regime continued to challenge the legitimacy of communist rule in Poland, they never risked to take resort to violent opposition. The implementation of martial law in the 1980s, as well as the peaceful transfer of power in the 1990s, demonstrate that the monopoly on violence was firmly in the hands of the Polish state.

- **The absence of large ethnic minorities:** The 2002 census—the first in postwar Poland that included the variables “nationality” (*narodowość*) and “language spoken at home” (*język używany w domu*)—reveals the extent to which Poland, in statistical terms, was mono-ethnic: 96.74 percent of the respondents declared themselves as of the Polish nationality; 1.23 percent declared that they belonged to a nationality other than Polish; the nationality of the remainder was not specified. According to the same census, members of ethnic minorities formed less than one percent of Poland’s total population (Nijakowski and Łodziński 2003: 279).

The security and commitment dilemmas that had plagued Poland in the 1940s had lost their significance in the 1990s. The new democratic Polish state, whose political representatives commanded full political legitimacy in and outside of Poland, proved very capable of avoiding and resolving any intrastate or interstate security problem by non-violent and democratic political means. The absence of belligerent challenger elites, as well as the availability, recruitment and placement of highly qualified personnel in the post-communist Polish governments, helped consolidate the security and stability of Poland on the state and interstate levels. Moreover, Poland’s minorities had been reduced to such insignificant numbers that a mutual commitment between the majority and minority populations did no longer entail a risk. On the contrary, in the light of its much-desired integration into the European Union, Poland could gain if it would make commitments regarding the political and judicial status of its ethnic minorities. Indeed, Poland’s post-communist political leadership made extensive commitments to grant ethnic minority members the full package of civil and human rights (Nijakowski and Łodziński 2003). These commitments were strengthened by the acceptance of international conventions regarding minority rights that became closely monitored by Western observers (cf. ECRI 2000). In this political setting, Poland’s ethnic minorities felt secure
enough to make extensive use of the new democratic state infrastructure to further their group aims.

While the absence of a strong central authority in 1944 resulted in lawlessness, discord and civil war, the presence of a strong central authority in 1990 resulted in order, reconciliation and peace. Without security from foreign attack or internal violence there is no foundation on which to build economic and social institutions or to successfully advance domestic and foreign policy goals. Poland’s postwar communist governments had established just that: firm state control in all domains of Polish society, most crucially, including a secure monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Ultimately, Poland’s transition from a weak to a strong political state significantly improved minority-majority relations. In the absence of a power vacuum, the transfer of power from a communist to a democratic regime did not undermine the state’s role in enforcing law and order, and thus, in repelling internal and external threats such as interethnic violence.

**Macro level transitions: the strength of a homogenous nation-state**

The formation of a Polish ‘nation’ formed an essential part of the process that produced a strong Polish state. The ‘success’ of Poland’s nation building project may therefore in part explain the peaceful outcome of the 1990s. The argument hinges on the assumption implicit in some conflict theories, namely that it is the weakness of national revival projects rather than their strength that motivates violence within and between ethnic groups. Sidney Tarrow (1994), for example, argues that major outbreaks of violence especially occur when leaders of political movements are on the verge of losing their mass power base. According to David Laitin (1998), leaders of political movements often introduce violent means when they fear that the momentum of their efforts to trigger a general national revival is diminishing; violence may then be instrumental to give the nationalist struggle new impetus. The heyday of national revival in Poland, as in many former East Bloc countries, was in the 1980s. And it was carried by two mass movements: the independent trade union ‘Solidarity’ and the Roman Catholic church. In the late 1980s, when the power of the communist administration was on the wane, these movements gained instead of lost the support of the masses. In August 1989 the mass based Solidarity Citizens’ Committee finally succeeded to sweep Poland’s communist stronghold by legitimate political means. In other words, the strength of Poland’s nationalist movement had rendered a resort to violent means to reach their goal—the rise of a sovereign Poland—entirely superfluous.

The overwhelming success of Poland’s national revival in the 1980s had its origin in the preceding decades, when Poland’s communist governments did everything in their power to build a homogenous one nation-state. As matters stand, by the 1980s Poland was
more ‘Polish’ in terms of its people, its culture, and its administrative landscape than ever in its thousand years of history. Let us briefly consider how homogeneity permeated Polish society as a result of communist nation-state building.

The people. The communist leadership that took control of Poland in 1944 linked the establishment of a new Polish state with a nationalist ideology. In accordance with this ideology, the establishment of the Polish People’s Republic coincided with the formation of an ethnic frontier and the transfer of millions of people to and from Poland. Under the pretext of “repatriation” virtually all members of minority groups (Ukrainians, Russians, White-Russians, Lithuanians, Germans) living within Poland’s new state borders became subject to expulsion and/or deportation. At the same time, millions of Poles from the Soviet Republics, from the central and southern provinces of Poland, and from Germany (former POW’s and captive laborers) were resettled to take the place of those who had left. The consequences of state demographic engineering were considerable. Firstly, from a multi-ethnic state in which one-third of the population had been of non-Polish descent in the 1930s, Poland had turned into a mono-ethnic state in which non-Poles were virtually absent, estimated at 1.5 percent in 1962 (Kwilecki 1963: 87). Secondly, an overwhelming part of Poland’s postwar population had been subject to one or another form of relocation (chapter 3).

Polish scholars unanimously stress the sheer dimension of the population movements during and following World War II. Consider, for example, the fact that the newly acquired western territories, an area amounting to a third of the Polish state, had to be refilled with new people. The 4.7 million individuals (nearly one-fifth of the total Polish population) who had been resettled to this area lived alongside the 1.1 million indigenous inhabitants, and these were by no means the only persons who had been expelled from the environments in which they had grown up and lived (Mach 1993; Kersten 2001). Henryk Słabek (1974: 254), a scholar of rural transformation processes, estimated that in the first years following World War II as many as 60-65 percent of peasant families found themselves in a “totally new” or in a “somewhat altered” situation as a result of expulsion, migration, land reform, or destruction of property. Fact is that in the course of the 1940s and 1950s Poland’s ruined cities as well as hundreds of thousands of resettled villages and towns became gradually filled with new residents who formed new local communities that bore little resemblance to the prewar communities.

The culture. The massive population transfers provided a leveled social terrain on which the subsequent Polish communist regimes could build a new socialist and national culture. The massive transfer of people weakened social cohesion in the local communities to such a degree that it mitigated opposition to the state-enforced assimilation of minority and majority populations into a new socialist way of life (cf. Kersten 2001; Ther 2001). In addition, the resettlement of millions of people into areas that were alien to them
diminished their allegiance to a local and regional identity and strengthened their allegiance to a national identity. “It can be said”, writes Kersten (2001: 84), “that the once-familiar local points of reference were not recreated, and that the locus of identity shifted toward a Polish national identity.” Snyder (2003) argues in a similar vein that in new surroundings ‘national’ characteristics such as religion and language come to the fore: “A Lemkini who finds herself in L’viv after the Second World War will know little of urban life, but she will know how to pray in some of the local churches and how to speak the Ukrainian language.” In just the same way, a Volhynian Pole “resettled from L’utsk to Gdańsk will have never seen the sea, but he will be a Roman Catholic and speak a Polish comprehensible to most people around him” (2003: 209). Since religion and language were the sole features that linked these new migrants to their new surroundings, it is to these features that they and the people surrounding them appealed in day-to-day life.

By its socio-demographic consequences, expulsion and deportation thus creates what Snyder (2003: 210) has termed “lowest-common-denominator nationalism” (2003: 209-10). Kersten (2001: 84) points at similar consequences: “[The] further weakening of the social fabric was combined with the narrowing of national communities and the rise of xenophobia. Mistrust toward foreigners became a permanent fixture on the Polish stage, as did the conviction that everything foreign represented a lethal threat.” Hann (1998a: 842) too argues that under socialism nationalism continued to grow, as “rigid control of education and culture helped to ensure that the nation, rather than any sub-or supranational entity, became the dominant focus of loyalty and identity.” The exclusivist claims of Polish nationalism resulted in an ambivalent attitude of the Polish majority towards Poland’s residual minorities. While on the one hand minorities were regarded as “foreign” (obcy), as is clear from the abundance of negative stereotypes and pejorative idioms in Polish popular culture, on the other hand they were regarded as “one of us” (swój), that is, as an intrinsic part of the Polish nation-state. Thus, while minorities were recognized as Polish citizens of a different “nationality”, they were so on the condition that they be loyal to the Polish nation-state. This principle is made very explicit by the Polish sociologist Andrzej Kwilecki (1963: 87), who spoke of “strong, multiple ties” linking Poland’s “national minorities” with their “one and only fatherland—Poland” in which they were born and raised and in which they were building a future “in harmony with the entire Polish society”.

The administrative landscape. In addition to building a uniform state bureaucracy, Poland’s communist leadership also committed itself to building a socialist bureaucracy, which emphasized the principle of centrally coordinated planning for all sectors of society. The omnipresence of the state in almost every aspect of life had important homogenizing implications. Firstly, it gave rise to a socialist way of life. Having to deal with uniform state legislation, state planning, and state institutions Polish citizens encountered similar
conclusions and developed similar techniques to cope with these constraints, irrespective of their places of living or their social and cultural backgrounds (Dzięgiel 1998). Secondly, standardization and central planning gave way to a typically socialist landscape, which to a significant degree diminished the variance between neighborhoods, cities, towns and villages, even between urban and rural areas. State shops, state cooperatives, railway stations, industrial buildings, apartment buildings, even private houses that were built in the socialist era all looked identical. Thirdly, state policy ensured that traces of former non-Polish residence in certain areas—in particular in the territories formerly inhabited by Germans, Ukrainians, and white Russians—were obliterated by means of destruction or neglect in the case of physical traces such as buildings or cemeteries, or by means of polonization in the case of geographical names (cf. Monitor Polski 1977; Urbańczyk 1981; Nalecz 1988; Majewicz and Wicherkiewicz 1998).

The attempts of Poland’s communist governments to construct a “productive, disciplined, mono-ethnic society”, to quote István Deák (2003: 205), have contributed to the situation where the Polish state had a firm grip on its minority and majority populations. Through its institutions and legislation the Polish state secured the commitment of all citizens to Polish society in general and to Party goals in particular; their incorporation and assimilation into Poland’s socialist society was a sure path. This firm grip is what united members of Poland’s minority and majority populations during, and most clearly also after socialism. As naturalized citizens of Poland they had similarly been subjected to assimilatory and disciplinary state policies. And as victims of an oppressive regime they had similar aspirations to resist that system. They found common grounds on many issues that were discussed and debated in the trade union Solidarity during the 1980s. The regime change in 1990 did not significantly weaken the bond between the minority-majority populations. On the contrary, the search for new identities and the critical scrutiny of the past by members of Poland’s ethnic minorities and ethnic majority ran surprisingly parallel. Most importantly, neither Poland’s ethnic minorities nor ethnic majority felt the need to challenge Poland’s unity: prospects were for a democratic society allowing for diversity, which could but include all citizens within Poland’s current state border.

Postwar nation-state building in Poland involved both the violent exclusion of ethnic minorities from Polish society as well as their subsequent repressive inclusion into Polish society. Policies of exclusion resulted in the violent expulsion of most of Poland’s Ukrainians, White Russians, Lithuanians and Germans during the late 1940s and of Poland’s Jews during the late 1960s. Paradoxically, it is the strength of the idea of a modern Polish nation-state that has contributed to a situation where both residual ‘Polish’ and ‘non-Polish’ Poles consider Poland as their uncontested fatherland (ojczyzna).
Micro level transitions: the strength of diversity

The rapid shifts in political governance between 1939 and 1944, the absence of a sovereign and elected political leadership, the excessively violent policies of the Nazi and Soviet occupying powers—all these conditions culminated in a deterioration of the Polish-Ukrainian relationship that slipped further and further into a downward spiral of violence and counter-violence (chapter 2). Four subsequent decades of nation-state building, as described in the previous sections, transformed local relationships away from violent interaction and in the direction of stable and peaceful relations. This section will explore the process of gradual stabilization with reference to four key features at the micro level: local autonomy; ethnic identification; local alliances and interdependencies; and mental outlook. This account of on-the-ground-dynamics is largely based on fieldwork, which the author carried out in intervals between 1997 and 2007 in the rural district Komańcza. Having been the locus of violent Polish-Ukrainians confrontations during and in the aftermath of the Second World War and of non-violent Polish-Ukrainian coexistence afterwards, this area presents an exemplary case to investigate and explain the transformation of micro level Polish-Ukrainian relations.

Local autonomy. Five years of foreign occupation, intervals of power vacuum, as well as the Nazi and Soviet persecutions during the war years had spurred the development of self-governance and self-defense in the local communities. Massive ethnic and political violence was rampant between 1943 and 1947. In Poland’s southeastern territories branches of a variety of Polish armed resistance groups, as well as divisions of the Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army (UPA), controlled many, if not most, local communities in the region (chapter 2). In order to impose its rule in southeast Poland the new, and particularly vulnerable, Polish state resorted to drastic measures. It used its military force not just to inflict defeat on enemy soldiers, but also to expel and deport the local civilian population. The military pacification of the area coincided with the installation of an abundance of security and militia posts and the establishment of new (Polish) settler colonies. By 1947, after the final massive deportation that had cleansed the area of virtually all its Ukrainian residents, mass violence was replaced by incidental occurrences of disorder and lawlessness. The pacification and colonizing policies, however, were successful to a degree. They did eliminate collectively organized ethnic and political violence in the area. But they did not stabilize local relationships, at least not instantly (chapter 3).

Once military forces had retreated from the area and new people came to inhabit the houses and work the land of the expellees, a severe struggle for power between different social groups with similar claims to scarce resources started. This struggle for power was especially fierce due to the lack of state investments in the area. The lack of state support, next to impeding the integration of the local communities, also resulted in the defacto
powerlessness of the state vis-à-vis the local residents (chapter 4). Blunt attempts to consolidate state power in the local communities, such as the state-initiated installation of Orthodox clergymen in the research area, had an ambiguous impact; while on the one hand it committed some local residents to the state, it alienated many more others from the state (chapter 5). It was not before the mid 1970s that a basic infrastructure was in place, including roads, electricity, housing, public institutions (such as schools and healthcare centers), state cooperatives, state shops and state-sponsored village organizations (such as rural youth and housewife clubs, houses of culture, and village Party cells). It was around that same time that the integrating and disciplining effect of state building became palpable. Local autonomy decreased and state power increased with the participation of adult village residents in the socialist economy, the entrance of young generations into the—by then fully developed—socialist educational system, and the participation of young and old in the state-sponsored cultural, social and political institutions (chapter 4).

**Ethnic identification.** During the war years and immediate postwar years local residents were being mobilized, persecuted, expelled, deported, or left uninjured on the basis of their ethnic identity. These experiences increased the ethnic awareness of both Ukrainians and Poles and strengthened the importance of their religions. Even today the ethnic cleavage divides between Poles and Ukrainians in the research area; it is by means of these ethnic categories that village residents identify themselves and others (chapters 3 and 7). The ethnic cleavage largely overlaps with the religious cleavage, in that most Poles in the research area adhere to the Roman Catholic church and that most Ukrainians are affiliated to the Greek Catholic church (a small minority of Ukrainians adheres to the Polish Autocephalic Orthodox church). The ethnic boundary is discernible in many areas of village life. Firstly, even though mixed marriages are common, endogamous marriages are preferred above exogamous marriages by many local families. Secondly, cultural life in the villages, which for an important part is set by the calendars and initiatives of the respective religious communities, basically follows a segregated pattern. Thirdly, the appropriation of places of worship and cultural signs by the village residents and local clergy are motivated by narratives of ethnic belonging and/or suffering. Finally, ethnic expressions, including the pejorative use of ethnic terms, are part of the vernacular language of day-to-day interaction (chapter 7).

Despite the past, the gradual integration of the village population into the Polish state produced a shift in the role of ethnic identity in interethnic encounters. First, both Polish and Ukrainian village residents have learned to appreciate the importance of their citizenship identity, namely the fact that they are all citizens of the Polish state. In their identity cards and passports, and during their travels abroad, it is this citizenship identity, and not their cultural, religious or ethnic identity that carries weight. Second, considering the increasing differentiation of the village communities in terms of class, occupation,
migration history, social background, religious and political affiliation and so on, a person’s ethnic identity is one among many. Third, as most current dividing lines cut across the ethnic cleavage, ethnic identity is no longer a decisive factor in relationships; it is the amalgam of multiple identities, rather than one single identity that forms the basis for relationships in the village today. Fourth, ethnic identification is much more situational and personal than that it is directive and group-oriented. This being the case, ethnic identity does differentiate between people, but it no longer provides a blueprint or dominant incentive for social, economic and political (inter-)action (chapter 7).

Local alliances and interdependencies: War, expulsion and deportation put a radical end to prewar social cohesion within the village communities and among members of ethnic groups. First, the civil war had jeopardized local relationships, thereby leading to new divisions within the local Polish and Ukrainian communities. Second, expulsion and deportation, next to drastically altering relative population sizes in the area, cut through social hierarchies within the village communities. This being the case, expulsion and deportation not just destroyed local social networks; they also significantly altered power relations within and between the Polish and Ukrainian communities (chapter 7). Third, the intense movement of people in the postwar era gave rise to a hierarchy of settlement. This hierarchy divides between village residents who are indigenous to the village and those who are not; between those who were forced to leave the village and those who were not; between those who remained in exile and those who returned; between those who arrived first and those who arrived later. Finally, the very diverse histories of individual Poles and Ukrainians in wartime and postwar Poland resulted in deep ideological splits and divisions. These revolve around discrepant ideas on what exactly a group identity should entail and whether or not, and if so, which ethnic members should team up as a group (chapters 4, 6 and 7).

An overwhelming majority of the local population has settled in the area relatively recently (most notably in the 1960s and 1970s). These new arrivals entered into relationships with other new arrivals and with the tiny minority of indigenous inhabitants that had been able to stay. Naturally, the social networks that developed from these relationships did not in the least resemble the social networks from the prewar era (chapters 4 and 7). Other developments, such as the increasing differentiation, individualization and liberalization of many aspects of village life, further transformed social networks away from the traditional bonds of family, ethnic group, and village community. Among others, they spurred the expansion of individual networks, and thus, the establishment of weak ties. Thus, while local relationships became split by a multitude of (new) cleavages, they also became increasingly linked by a multitude of social ties that almost by definition cut across the ethnic and religious clefts. Both the weak ties and cross-cutting cleavages in local social networks gave rise to negative feedback
mechanisms: the mutual dependencies and conflicting loyalties between Polish and Ukrainian village residents impede their mobilization along ethnic or religious lines (chapter 7).

**Mental outlook:** In the 1940s a resort to massive ethnic violence was considered mandatory, even beneficial, by a considerable number of village residents. In the 1990s a resort to ethnic violence was not just an irrelevant option; it was also strongly disapproved of by most village residents. This points at a significant shift in the mental outlook of the village residents: the macro and micro conditions in which they are embedded today clearly motivate them to respond less violently and have brighter expectations of the future. From this the paradoxical situation emerges, whereby the ethnic cleavage is still deep and ethnic ideologies are still strong, but violent political mobilization along ethnic lines encounters strong resistance. Extreme opinions or behavior are not tolerated, on the contrary; those who voice excessive opinions or expose excessive behavior can count on little respect and cooperation. Peaceful coexistence dominates the political discourse at all levels of the village community. In this discourse ethnic diversity is defined not as an impediment but as a recommendation for future progress. Since the regime change in 1990 the discourse of harmony has taken on increased significance, as it contributes in many ways to the survival of the peripheral village communities; it brings in subsidies, sponsorships, and tourists (chapter 7, Buzalka 2007).

In summary, the above-sketched developments suggest a significant relationship between macro and micro level transitions: the overall transformation of Polish society gave way to certain sets of relationships at the micro level that generated specific patterns of behavior, thinking and feeling, which formed the basis of a distinctive kind of mental outlook. Rather than being forced upon the people, peaceful coexistence developed from inside the local communities where peaceful modes of interaction were established following a period of overt tension and violent conflict. These peaceful modes became strengthened and consolidated with each new step in the state and nation building process and with each new generation.

**Conclusions: the dynamics of peaceful coexistence**

The previous sections explored the conditions that gave rise to violent conflict between Poles and Ukrainians in the 1940s, as well as the conditions that have prevented ethnic friction from escalating after Poland’s regime change in 1990. This section will address two questions that have been left unanswered so far. The first question concerns the consequences of one particular aspect of nation-state building, namely the expulsion of ethnic minorities from Poland: has ethnic cleansing worked? The second question tackles the issue of sustainability: how stable or volatile is peaceful coexistence in Poland today?
Both questions attest to the fact that peaceful coexistence, rather than being static and an inevitable and natural outcome of things, results from conflicting and contradictory processes and always remains vulnerable.

If not for the ethnic cleansing policies of the 1940s, minority-majority relations in Poland would surely have looked entirely different today at both the state and interstate level. Stable borders and homogenous nation-states created the indispensable conditions on which the Polish, German and Ukrainian governments were able to establish friendly neighborly relations after the collapse of communism. Moreover, ethnic cleansing had reduced Poland’s minority populations to such negligible numbers that they were rendered a rather harmless factor in post-communist Polish politics. The imbalance of power has long played its part to prevent the minority populations from competing for political control and to facilitate their political subjugation to the majority of ethnic Poles. Under socialism ethnic minorities were defined as cultural groups that could claim representation only, quoting Koloski (2004: 138), to “the border of folklore”. While ethnic identity became depoliticized, ethnic diversity was displayed only on strictly controlled stages: within circles of the minority organizations, in open-air museums, during folk festivals, in the works of ethnographers, poets and writers (Lovell 1970; Kwilecki 1974; Koloski 2004). In other words, Poland’s ethnic minorities came to play the role of domesticated objects—as cultural exotics in a rather dull and monotonous landscape of the Polish one-nation state (cf. Mihalasky 1997; Koloski 2004). This situation hardly changed after the regime change in 1990. Even though ethnic minorities attempted to mobilize themselves politically, their political power was still negligible and the societal pressure was still towards a cultural appreciation of diversity.

The fact that minority identities have survived despite ethnic cleansing and that tension and conflict still pervade minority-majority relations have led some scholars to conclude that ethnic cleansing has not worked (cf. Hann 1996; Motyka 1999). Ther (2001), in addition, presents a moral argument against the practice: even if ethnic cleansing does, in some cases, eliminate pretexts for violent conflict, the human costs are too high and the benefits too low for ethnic cleansing to be an effective solution. “Ethnic homogeneity,” Ther (2001: 63) concludes, “turned out to be a myth, and the attempt to achieve it had terrible consequences.” Fact is that ethnic cleansing in Poland has destroyed the lives of many, has contributed to irrevocable divisions within the minority and majority populations, and has played an important part in the strengthening of minority and majority nationalisms. But whereas the ethnic cleansing policies had not been entirely successful in homogenizing Poland, they proved quite successful in enforcing state control on Poland’s minority and majority populations. In other words, ethnic cleansing has worked not because it homogenized Poland (it did so to a degree), but because it weakened social cohesion and divided social relationships within both minority and majority groups.
(chapters 3, 6 and 7). It is precisely this social consequence of ethnic cleansing that has contributed to the rise and consolidation of power by Poland’s communist political establishment, and ultimately, to the elimination of violent ethnic conflict.

“Can the demands of modern national ideas, so brutally expressed by ethnic cleansing, find a peaceful articulation?” Snyder (2003: 2) asks this rhetorical question that he himself answers with a startling juxtaposition of success and failure in the new Europe: “As NATO admitted Poland, it bombed Yugoslavia. As the world followed conflicts among the Serbs and their neighbors, a joint Polish-Ukrainians peacekeeping battalion was dispatched to Kosovo” (2003: 3). Snyder convincingly shows how during the 1990s Poland’s eastern policy fashioned a stable geopolitical order that paved the way for Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation at the state and interstate levels. “During the first half of the decade,” writes Snyder (2003: 288), “Poles and Ukrainians had agreed to ‘leave history to the historians’ in the mutual interest of securing the state. In the second half of the decade, after issues of recognition, border and minorities were resolved, discussions of history could demonstrate the depth of Polish-Ukrainian rapprochement.” In May 1997, the two presidents signed a reconciliation declaration, which listed the wrongs done by each nation to the other, including Operation Vistula and the terror in Volhynia, and expressed the need of mutual forgiveness (Snyder 2003). The declaration was as much a political statement as it was a diplomatic answer to pleas for rapprochement made by various pressure groups and scholarly specialists over the years. The emphasis on rapprochement is what characterizes the Polish-Ukrainian relationship to this day: despite the very dissimilar political demands and agendas of the participants to the dialogue, they do not call for revenge or war. On the contrary, they make a case for tolerance, justice and reason (Ośrodek KARTA 2001; Żur 2001; Gil 2004; Buzalka 2007; Żur 2007).

The Polish-Ukrainian rapprochement at the state and interstate levels should not conceal the fact that the challenges at the local level are real. The ethnic cleavage has diminished, but it is still there, and tensions between the Polish and Ukrainian communities at times do lead to open conflicts. An example of a location where during the 1990s clashes between Poles and Ukrainians have regularly hit the mainstream news is Przemyśl, a town bordering the Ukraine. When in 1991 plans were raised by Pope John Paul II to return a local church to the Ukrainian, Greek Catholic community a small group of Poles occupied the church. The group persisted and the church remained in the hands of the Roman Catholic Carmelite order that had been using the church since 1946. In 1996 the Carmelite monks proceeded to destroy the church’s dome in order to neutralize its ‘eastern’ (read: non-Polish) shape, thereby infuriating the local Ukrainian community (Hann 1996, 1998a; Buzalka 2007). The church controversy was followed by a series of other incidents, which all point at the persistent refusal of a local group of Polish nationalist activists to follow the course taken by Poland’s central leadership to seek closer
cultural and economic links with the neighboring states. For example, when in 1995 Warsaw decided to move the biennial Ukrainian Cultural Festival from its customary location at Sopot on the Baltic coast to Przemyśl, local Polish activists mobilized to prevent its organization. Hann (1998b: 855): “After a campaign that included the defacing of public posters advertising the festival and an arson attack on the Ukrainian Socio-cultural Society, the festival eventually went ahead in an atmosphere of considerable tension, with a high security presence.” Local activists mobilized once more to prevent the festival’s organization in 1997, but they were again overruled by Warsaw (Hann 1998b).

The above incidents demonstrate that Poland’s religious as well as secular centers failed to reckon with the strength of Polish nationalist opinion in Poland’s periphery (Hann 1998a, 1998b). That being the case, Hann is right to conclude that policies proclaimed by the new liberal elites in Warsaw cannot in themselves bring about greater tolerance between minority and majority groups in the ethnically mixed peripheral areas (1998a: 861). Still, the refusal of the political center in Warsaw as well as the Roman Catholic hierarchy to conform to local forms of extremism, even if indirectly, supported the great majority of citizens who chose not to play an active part in fomenting ethnic hatred. Fact is that the aggressive and persistent actions by a handful of nationalist offenders have not escalated into massive violent conflict. “Nationalist groups have been successful in mobilizing some people around symbols such as the Carmelites’ church in Przemyśl and the graves of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the national cause,” writes Hann. “However, so far there is little evidence in this region that they are capable of mobilizing larger numbers of citizens” (1996: 403). Hann’s studies from the 1990s suggest that the great majority of the town’s population remained insensitive to provocations to ethnic violence; they rather disapproved of it (Hann 1996, 1998a, 1998b). Buzalka’s (2007: 134) recent study of Polish-Ukrainian relations in Przemyśl, in addition, demonstrates that “narratives of multiculturalism” have increasingly become part of both religious and secular reconciliation events. Such events, meant to foster reconciliation between Poles and Ukrainians, are supervised by the churches and supported by the state, nongovernmental organizations, and intellectuals. These examples point to local resilience to violent ethnic conflict.

Institutional resilience is also what James Fearon and David Laitin (1996) have advanced as a possible explanation for the paradox that interethnic relations tend to be simultaneously tense and peaceful most of the time. The argument of Fearon and Laitin runs as follows: due to the costs of persistent violence and the various benefits of peaceful interethnic relations, decentralized institutional arrangements are likely to arise to moderate problems of interethnic opportunism (i.e., group-interested behavior that has socially harmful consequences). Using a social matching game model, Fearon and Laitin show that local-level interethnic cooperation can be supported in essentially two ways. In
spiral equilibria, disputes between individuals are expected to spiral rapidly beyond the two parties, and fear of this induces interethnic cooperation “on the equilibrium path” (1996: 715). In in-group policing equilibria, individuals turn a blind eye on violations by members of the other group, since they expect that the offenders will be identified and sanctioned by the members of their own ethnic group. The in-group policing equilibrium will have relatively greater cauterizing capacities compared to the spiral equilibrium once interethnic relations move “off the equilibrium path”: under a regime of in-group policing the mistake or misinterpretation of a group member is blamed only on the defector, whereas under a spiral regime the whole group is punished for the transgression of just one member (1996: 731).

A crucial concept in the analysis of Fearon and Laitin (1996) is trust—it is trust (in the case of an in-group policing equilibrium) and the lack of trust (in the case of a spiral equilibrium) that induces individuals to cooperate in interethnic encounters. If we apply the equilibrium argument to the Polish-Ukrainian relationship in postwar Poland we may distinguish three phases in interethnic cooperation. The first phase covers the immediate postwar years, when fresh memories of interethnic hostility and violence had instilled fear on both Poles and Ukrainians for a collective punishment in the event of interethnic transgression. Indeed, Polish-Ukrainians encounters were characterized by extreme apprehensiveness and cautiousness, while missteps tended to spiral into indiscriminate violence (chapter 3). Once the state monopoly on violence had been established and Poles and Ukrainians increasingly engaged with each other on a daily basis, Polish-Ukrainian encounters became less driven by distrust. This signaled the second phase, in which the state, even though its control did not extend to the local communities in the border region, set an upper limit on ethnic violence at a level that prevented spirals and encouraged in-group policing to avoid state intervention (chapter 4). A third phase started when state-policing, following the full integration of the local communities into a Polish state structure, complemented in-group policing mechanisms: the reassuring presence of the police, the court, the local bureaucracy, and mediating institutions (such as schools, churches, clubs and reconciliation committees) helped Poles and Ukrainians to establish relationships that were increasingly build on mutual trust (chapters 4 and 7).

In the above example trust had been restored by the interference of the state. This seems to contradict Gellner’s position, who, following the 14th century scholar Ibn Khaldun, argues that it is “effective government which destroys trust” and anarchy that engenders it (1988: 143). Gellner is right to claim that the advance of modern states significantly weakened local systems of social cohesion. “The security of men no longer lies in their cousins: the collective oath is abolished, the feud is no longer practicable. It is now easily suppressed by the gendarmerie” (1988: 153). However, one may argue that with the erosion of local systems of social cohesion and the establishment of central
authority, trust, instead of weakened, was relocated to other systems of authority and rule. First, while a person’s trust in the strength of his or her kin group may have weakened, his or her trust in a friend at the nearest district office most certainly gained strength. In other words, the introduction of a monolithic state structure produced distinctive types of relationship and formed the basis of new social networks in which trust was a basic ingredient as well. Second, the fact that non-state forms of policing became substituted by state-policing eventually gave rise to expectations of an efficient enforcement of law and order by a central authority. Similarly, Fearon and Laitin (1996) found that some systems of non-state policing (such as the Ottoman millets, the Russian kahals, or the Hausa sobos under British rule) were certainly related to—or even made possible by—indirect and direct state rule.

In their analysis of decentralized modes of cooperation between ethnic groups, Fearon and Laitin (1996) address another issue that also bears relevance to the case of Polish-Ukrainian coexistence in Poland. While trust leads to certain expectations regarding the costs and benefits of certain forms of behavior, the expectations themselves are often self-fulfilling: interethnic cooperation is sustained by the expectations people have about what will happen if they deceive, attack or otherwise injure a member from another group. The case material presented in this study supports this assumption. The expectations of the people that live in Poland today are grounded in Poland’s societal infrastructure: a strong central authority; numerically small ethnic minorities; strong ethnic boundaries and, simultaneously, strong intragroup divisions; and finally, multiple interdependencies at the local and central levels. These conditions produce expectations among Poles and Ukrainians that foster their mutual cooperation at both the local and central levels. What is more, the expectations form a buffer against any random ‘noise’ in interethnic relations: mistakes, misinterpretations and miscalculations at the central level will not necessarily lead to a breakdown of cooperative patterns of interaction at the local level, and vice versa. In other words, under certain conditions peace is robust enough to reinforce peace. It is by means of this reinforcement that reconciliation and rapprochement could gain momentum in Poland in the 1990s.

Just as ethnic turmoil can be explained as “symptoms of social disorientation, of the fraying, and sometimes the snapping of the threads, of what used to be the network that bound people together in society” (Hobsbawm 1992: 7), ethnic peace can be explained as symptoms of social security, of trust that is enhanced instead of curtailed and that helps consolidate the network that binds people together in society. The fact that in Poland in the 1990s such security and trust prevailed in many domains of society suggests that the regime change in Poland had not resulted in a social, economic and political ‘break-down’. One important foundation for the great majority of Polish citizens was the continued strength of their ethnic and religious identities. Even though in some areas, particularly in
the ethnically mixed border areas, ethnic and religious boundaries became more intensely defended, most members of the minority and majority populations felt quite secure in their identities; they did not find it necessary to stand up against an alleged or real aggressive enemy-other. “In south-east Poland”, writes Buzalka, “tolerance has developed into a celebration of diversity, but with the boundaries between the two religious-national groups strictly drawn” (2007: 208). These firm ethnic and religious boundaries not just divide between individuals and groups, they have an important integrative function as well: they allow people to reach beyond the group boundaries and establish complementary relationships with non-group members (chapter 7). This supports the theory that cultural differences can result in the avoidance of competition and the emergence of cooperative relationships, especially if they cut across other social dividing lines (cf. Granovetter 1973; Flap 1985, 1997; Lehmann 2001; Schlee 2008).

In Poland today the expectations of a great majority of citizens are such that they enhance and sustain a dominant political discourse that emphasizes harmony. It is unlikely that a small amount of ‘noise’ in interethnic interactions will change these expectations. A large amount of persistent ‘noise’, however, may result in a shift of expectations. This shift, in turn, may cause a gradual erosion of mutual cooperation, and may, ultimately, undermine the present conditions. After all, neither the peacefulness nor the belligerency of Poles and Ukrainians are set in stone. If the ball of distrust and fear begins rolling, a cycle with an entirely different dynamic will set in (compare chapters 2 and 7). This, obviously, had been the case in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, when prophecies for a better future coincided with a strong discourse of hatred. These prophecies resulted in expectations that had a lethal effect: inhabitants of the former Yugoslav Republic collectively discarded reconciliation and embraced war as the preferred strategy to resolve all problems once and for all (van de Port 1995; Cohen 1998; Lake and Rothchild 1998; Peterson 2000). In a convincing article Mattijs van de Port (1995) chronicles how in the town Novi Sad people consciously went the sure path to destruction; war seemed unavoidable to them even though, as yet, not a single shot had been fired. The urgency of the war as felt by the townspeople is captured by the following words of a female informant: “For God’s sake, let this war begin, so that we can start again with a clean sheet” (van de Port 1995: 91).

From the foregoing it may be concluded that neither ethnic cleavage nor a history of ethnic hostility are a recipe for violent ethnic conflict. Similarly, we have seen that occurrences of ethnic tension and conflict are not necessarily a precursor to violent escalation. The case material has shown that conflicts play a role in establishing group boundaries, which define groups and relations between them. Conflicts may thus have an integrative function in society. The shift from nonviolent to violent modes of conflict, as Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 426) argue, is a phase shift: “Violence is not a quantitative
degree of conflict, but a qualitative form of conflict, with its own dynamics”. This study has directed particular theoretical attention to the ‘peace’ phase, in which nonviolent modes of conflict predominate. It has been argued that macro level conditions interact with micro level conditions to form a foundation for trust and security that gives rise to the expectations that determine behavior. While there may be similarities in the macro and micro level conditions between a society in the ‘peace’ phase and a society in the ‘violence’ phase, there will be significant differences in the degree of trust and security experienced by the population. Therefore, interethnic ‘noise’ will be interpreted differently and responded to differently. This explains why, despite the existence of tensions, massive ethnic violence remained absent in Poland after the regime change in 1990. In contrast to the situation in some other former communist countries, Polish society had developed a high degree of stability, which engendered a basic degree of confidence in the central authorities and provided the basis for interethnic relations based on trust.