The Strength of Diversity: A Micro-history of Ethnic Conflict and Coexistence in Rural Southeast Poland

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Abstract
This article addresses the problem of ethnic conflict and coexistence by examining the Polish-Ukrainian relationship from an anthropological perspective. It explores why today Poles and Ukrainians coexist peacefully in southeast Poland, despite a bloody civil war in the 1940s. The case study suggests that a dynamic system of alliance, guided by cross-cutting cleavages and cross-cutting social networks, provides for negative feedback mechanisms that contribute to resilience to violent ethnic conflict at the community level. Although the ethnic cleft has increasingly been bridged, the ethnic cleavage remains a source of structural vulnerability. [Keywords: ethnic conflict, peaceful coexistence, cross-cutting cleavages, weak ties, Ukrainians, borderland, Poland]
A society [...] which is riven by a dozen oppositions along lines running in every direction, may actually be in less danger of being torn with violence or falling to pieces than one split along just one line. For each new cleavage contributes to narrow the cross clefts, so that one might say that society is *sewn together* by its inner conflicts.
Edward Alsworth Ross (1924: 165).

**Introduction**

“In Komańcza there are no conflicts,” reads the headline of an article on ethnic and religious relations from a regional weekly of the Polish Communist Workers’ Party in 1988 (Machnik and Pająk 1988). In Komańcza, as in other villages in the Bieszczady region of southeast Poland, Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, and Gypsies coexisted peacefully until the outbreak of the Second World War (Lehmann 2001). The Nazis killed and deported nearly all Jewish and Gypsy village residents. Subsequently, Poles and Ukrainians got themselves involved in a bloody civil war. This was followed by the expulsion and deportation of most of the Ukrainian population from the region. Given this history, the newspaper article is striking for two reasons. First, peaceful coexistence in this region seems to be a serious concern for a wider Polish public, which is also evident from a number of more recent scholarly publications on interethnic relations in Poland’s southeastern border area (cf. Babiński 1997, Buzalka 2007, Hann and Stepień 2000, Krochmal 2001, Wojakowski 2002). Second, the article suggests a most intriguing paradox: while it is based on the assumption that religious and ethnic diversity inevitably leads to conflict, the case of Komańcza shows that this need not necessarily be the case. Even though tensions between the divergent religious and ethnic groups in this rural district have flared up at various times over the past sixty years, they never assumed the force necessary to threaten peaceful coexistence again.

This article explores why massive violent confrontations did not re-occur after the civil war ended sixty years ago, despite tensions and conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians. What this article does not offer is a comparative case study between regions. Instead the focus is on the in-depth transformation processes within one particular location. The empirical data presented in this article are based on extensive anthropological fieldwork in the Komańcza rural district (see Map 1). It is by means of a detailed case history of relationships in the Komańcza rural district that this study seeks to explain why local relations transformed from violent into nonviolent ones.
The villages in the Bieszczady region have very diverse settlement histories. As a consequence of diversity in settlement patterns, the proportion of Poles, Ukrainians, Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, and Orthodox differ from village to village. Population densities also vary widely from district to district ranging from 5.8 to 104 inhabitants per square kilometer in respectively Cisna and Lesko. Three types of settlement may be identified: 1) settlements that are populated by a population of almost exclusively Polish newcomers; 2) settlements that are inhabited by a mixed population of Polish newcomers and Ukrainian returnees; 3) settlements that due to their administrative function or transport hub had kept a small part of their Polish and Ukrainian indigenous populations and that, starting from the 1950s, in addition received returnees and newcomers. All three settlement types are present in the Komańcza district, which has 11.2 inhabitants per square kilometer. Komańcza itself, a railroad hub and the administrative centre of the district, represents the third type of settlement. While each location is unique in its own way, the transformation processes to which the inhabitants in the Komańcza district have been exposed are fairly representative for this part of Poland (cf. Babiński 1997, Biernacka 1974).

The article begins by exploring the social cleavages and social networks in the Komańcza district today. The transformation of these networks and cleavages since the eruption of violence in the 1940s is the subject of the second part. Special attention is paid to the formation of networks in conflict situations. The third part shows how the transformation of social relationships in the local village communities was embedded in the overall transformation of Polish society. I argue that social relationships at the micro-level changed in such a way that for most inhabitants of the Komańcza district a resort to violent means to settle a conflict is no longer a relevant option. In the final section the wider implications of these findings are discussed.

Part 1. The Ethnographic Present: Cross-cutting Cleavages and Weak Ties

The Argument
Since the early decades of the last century, anthropologists as well as sociologists have come to appreciate the importance of cross-cutting cleavages in maintaining social cohesion in societies—be they stateless, pre-industrial societies or Western parliamentary democracies. Studying the East
MAP 1. Location of the research area.
African pastoralists, the Kipsigis, the British anthropologist Evans-Pritchard (1939) found that simultaneous memberships of the Kipsigis to multiple social institutions (such as warrior groups, age groups, and clan systems) strengthened the bonds between otherwise divided individuals and groups, leading to a more cohesive coexistence. Investigating the social paradox of “friendship despite quarrels,” the British anthropologist Gluckman (1966:10, 138) pointed at the importance of cross-cutting systems of alliance so that “divisions in the ranks of any group, which link its members with its enemies in other relationships, exert pressure to prevent open fighting.” In dealing with the effects of cross-cutting cleavages (as opposed to reinforcing cleavages) on voting behavior in Western parliamentary democracies, the political scientists Rae and Taylor (1970) found that more cross-cutting results in more floating votes as well as in more votes for moderate (non-extremist) political parties. Rae and Taylor consider this non-intended side effect of cross-cutting a crucial element for the enhancement of political stability in parliamentary systems. In a similar way, the Dutch sociologist Flap (1985, 1997) argues that, to the extent that social cleavage involves conflicting loyalties between memberships, especially in a case of cross-cutting social circles, a restraining effect emerges. Flap’s discussion of the “cross-cutting cleavage” argument may be summarized as follows:

- Each society is divided by one or more cleavages or social dividing lines;
- Although a social dividing line does not necessarily involve a conflict—or a conflict of interests—between groups and their members, any social dividing line inevitably turns into a major binding or dividing force in conflict situations;
- If social dividing lines are cut by simultaneous membership to multiple groups, individuals will inherently be bound by conflicting loyalties, as their social capital (i.e., the network that they possess) is distributed among multiple segments of society;
- In a structure with cross-cutting cleavages the alternative ‘compromise’ has a greater expected utility to opponents and third parties in a conflict situation than the alternatives ‘doing nothing’ or ‘fighting’, as the latter two alternatives almost certainly result in a loss of social capital for each party, and in due course, in a loss of the parties’ social honor.

Central to the “cross-cutting cleavage” argument is that network structures have an influence on the expectations, attitudes, and behavior of
the people who are embedded in such networks. The argument is that societies with intersecting social cleavages are more peaceful than societies in which social cleavages coincide. Flap makes a point of stressing that the feedback relation between on the one hand network structure and on the other hand behavior and attitude is time-dependent. The mitigating effect of cross-cutting cleavages is likely to be more pronounced if they have structured the lives of people over a longer period of time. Flap: “Persons that find themselves in situations of conflicting loyalties frequently and for long periods will gradually develop strong self discipline and tolerance” (1997:209). Conversely, segmentation will eventually result in “more impulsive, violent and intolerant attitudes, especially towards members of out-groups” (Flap 1997:209).

Even though cross-cutting ties generally tend to be discussed as a factor of social cohesion, there are others who argue that cross-cutting relations may not always serve this purpose. Schlee (2008), for instance, found that in northern Kenya cross-cutting ties among the Gabra and the Elemo Rendille subclan (which has Gabra roots) were unable to prevent a violent conflict: in 1992 the Gabra attacked the Rendille and captured a large part of the Rendille camels. Schlee further argues that cross-cutting ties, instead of producing social cohesion, resulted in internal divisions within groups: as a consequence of the conflict some Elemo joined the Gabra, while at the same time, a pro-Elemo and anti-Elemo faction was formed among the Gabra. Schlee finally found that cross-cutting ties did fulfill an important function in coping with the consequences of war: some members of the Elemo sub clan found refuge among their Gabra clan brothers who protected them from attacks by other Gabra. Looking at the case presented by Schlee it seems that the cross-cutting ties negatively affected the internal social cohesion of the two groups. However, the question remains what role cross-cutting played in the social cohesion of the overall system. It could be argued that, since cross-cutting ties tend to produce in-group divisions, they must form at least some impediment to conflict escalation, because of the social costs involved in internal division. Also, cross-cutting ties appear to affect the mobilization potential, as internal divisions will reduce the number of participants in intergroup violence.

Network models such as described above typically deal with strong ties, thus confining their applicability to small, well-defined groups. The American sociologist Granovetter (1973), however, pointed out the impor-
tance of weak ties for maintaining social cohesion. In his pioneering paper “The Strength of Weak Ties” he revealed a most interesting paradox: weak ties, often denounced as generative of alienation, are in fact indispensable to individuals’ opportunities and to their integration into communities; strong ties, breeding local cohesion, lead to overall fragmentation (1973:1378). The cohesive power of low-density networks (weak ties), according to Granovetter, lies in the fact that the latter establish a bridge between various densely-knit networks (strong ties) that, if not for these bridging links, would otherwise never have touched: “Weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups than are strong ones, which tend to be concentrated within particular groups” (1973:1376). Granovetter’s argument further asserts that individuals with few weak ties have limited access to information from distant parts of the social system. This lack of information will not only detach individuals from the latest ideas and fashions, but may also put them in a disadvantaged position in the labor market, and may hinder their organization and integration into political movements of any kind. “The macroscopic side of this communication argument,” writes Granovetter (1983:202) in a reappraisal of his strength-of-weak-ties argument in 1983, “is that social systems lacking in weak ties will be fragmented and incoherent. New ideas will spread slowly, scientific endeavors will be handicapped, and subgroups separated by race, ethnicity, geography, or other characteristics will have difficulty reaching a modus vivendi.”

The above arguments—the “cross-cutting cleavage” argument and the “strength of weak ties” argument—will serve as tools to analyze social relationships and patterns in the research area: fragmented on the one hand, cohesive on the other. Following the “cross-cutting cleavage” argument, two questions have special relevance to the case at hand. First, by what social cleavages are the people inhabiting the Komańcza district divided? Second, to what extent does membership to one or another group across the social dividing lines overlap? In order to explore the inbuilt cleavages along which local conflicts may develop, this section begins by briefly reviewing the current dividing lines at the community level. Next, it explores local patterns of cross-cutting relationships to assess the relative importance of the ethnic dividing line. Finally, using Granovetter’s concept of “weak ties,” local patterns of interaction are linked with patterns of interaction across local groups.
Socio-economic Stratification

The working population in the Komańcza area today is active in seven main economic sectors: agriculture, forestry and forest administration, wood industry, public service, tourism, construction, and trade and commerce. The first three sectors experienced a momentous decline following the collapse of the socialist economy after 1989. Hundreds of village residents lost their jobs following the liquidation of the State Farms (PGR) in the early 1990s. Former socialist industries, such as the sawmills and related wood production factories, were privatized, resulting in another bulk of jobless villagers. The state forestry, once a major local employer, subsided due to overall budget cuts. The dramatic decrease of job opportunities and state pensions along with the introduction of the free market resulted in increased poverty. Poverty struck hardest in those villages where the majority of the population (mainly Polish newcomers) had relied on work in the State Farms. Many of these former peasant-workers live in multi-storied blocks without access to farmland, leaving them without an opportunity to make a living from farming. In 2005, thirteen years after the liquidation of the State Farms, still more than 40 percent of the welfare aid went to families of ex-State Farm workers and to the families of their meanwhile adult children (cf. Buchowski 2003, Gmina Komańcza 2005b). In contrast, residents living in the administrative and economic centers of the district have been able to profit from the new economic liberties. The number of grocery stores and kiosks in the Komańcza district, as well as the number of cafés, restaurants, hotels, and bed & breakfast accommodations rose significantly during the early 1990s. Also agro-tourism, a modern form of rural private initiative, experienced a significant growth since the turn of this century. Statistics from 2005 show that of the 743 farms in the district 50 farms engaged in agro-tourism, 15 farms had applied for a EU eco-certificate, while seven farms had already been granted such a certificate (Gmina Komańcza 2005a).

The unemployment figure for the Komańcza district confirms this mixed picture. With 348 registered unemployed residents out of a total of 3618 residents in the working-age, the unemployment percentage of 9.6 percent in 2005 for the Komańcza district was relatively high compared to West European standards, but relatively low compared to the Polish average of 18 percent (Gmina Komańcza 2005a, GUS 2008). One factor that has significantly contributed to the relatively low unemployment rate in the Komańcza district is the massive emigration of villagers abroad.
Interestingly, it is not just the young generations but especially the older generations who travel and stay abroad for long periods of time. But then again, not all families have been in the position, or have been successful, in establishing connections and finding jobs outside of Poland. The villagers with steady jobs, and/or regular cash flows from abroad, and those villagers who possess their own houses and land, have been able to maintain a standard of living that is markedly different from those who are cut off from such income sources and landed properties. The local divergence in wealth is reflected in the wide range of housing conditions in the villages. From well-kept farm houses to dilapidated wooden shacks without running water and electricity; from handsome little palaces with a garden to tiny apartments without balcony—it is all there, and poor families live steps away from their richer neighbors.

**Political Diversity**

With the collapse of the Polish Communist Party in 1989, Poland ceased to be a single-party state. During the 1990s, political differentiation at the community level became manifest in two ways: by the explosive growth of political groups seeking election and by the wide distribution of votes. During the parliamentary elections in 1997, local residents could bring out their vote for a multitude of political parties covering the whole political spectrum—from far left to far right. Of the ten political parties that sought election in 1997, each party received more than 2 percent of the votes; three parties won more than 10 percent. The municipal elections of 1998 showed a similar pattern with no fewer than 16 local lists to choose from (several of them multiethnic). The active participation of local inhabitants in the new democratic state structure does not necessarily point at increased political equality. Power remains in the hands of those with privileged access to social and public institutions and services. However, after 1989, local power holders, instead of depending on a central government or Party organ, increasingly depend on private, non-governmental sponsors and supporters. It is through the mediation of a number of large NGOs that sponsors and commissioners have been attracted to finance and guide a large number of development programs in the district. During the late 1990s, church organizations and religious charitable foundations have similarly tried to gain ground in the Komańcza district, but they have been much less successful than the secular NGOs. The success of the latter can
be explained by the fact that, unlike their religious counterparts, the NGOs have been able to draw on EU and UN sources and funds. Presently, the Komańcza district is part of an extensive, non-local administrative and political network.

**Cultural and Religious Heterogeneity**

The large number of cultural events and religious sites in the area point at the region’s rich cultural history, but even more so, it points to the staging and exploitation of cultural difference by its local residents. A leaflet advertising the Komańcza district with the intriguing title “Exotics at the Border” reads: “Today one of the major exotic attractions unknown in Western Europe is the culture of the Lemko people” (Bartosik 2005:XII). The notion of the region’s cultural and religious distinctiveness is one that is carefully promoted and cultivated by many: by the local religious leaders, who throughout the year organize church fairs and cultural events in their parishes; by the local lay authorities, who sponsor and organize yearly cultural meetings within the district; and last but not least, by local cultural entrepreneurs, who expose their cultural distinctiveness by setting up private museums and galleries and by participating in folk fairs and workshops. The exposure of the region’s cultural and religious distinctiveness attracts a growing number of cultural tourists and has inspired one of Poland’s finest folk music groups to contribute to the preservation and furtherance of cultural traditions in the region (Mękarska 2006c). In 2004, a major Polish television station featured the Komańcza district in a program that explores the cultural, natural, and historical richness of Poland (Dzikowska 2004). But besides being a commodity that is sold to a non-local audience, local forms of cultural and religious distinctiveness forms the basis of ethnic identification among village residents.

Local ethnic identities are based on a shared awareness of cultural belonging. This awareness is signified by a number of outward expressions, such as church affiliation and the language spoken at home. Informants base their ideas of “who is what” on their personal knowledge of family networks and histories. It is on the basis of this knowledge that informants distinguish between “Polish” and “Ukrainian” fellow villagers, the latter sometimes also referred to as “Lemko.” Using this emic distinction—Poles versus Ukrainians (including Lemkos)—I made the following calculation in my 1997 census of the Komańcza village: of the 258 fami-
lies living in Komańcza (village proper) 32 percent had an exclusively Polish background, 38 percent had an exclusively Ukrainian/Lemko background, and 23 percent had a mixed Polish and Ukrainian/Lemko background (7 percent unknown). All Polish families spoke exclusively Polish at home, whereas most Ukrainian families spoke a derivative of Ukrainian at home. The dominant language spoken by mixed families was Polish. Most Polish families were affiliated to the Roman Catholic church, whereas most Ukrainian families were affiliated either to the Greek Catholic or Orthodox churches (cf. Hann 2005). Members of mixed families generally frequented services in the Roman Catholic church, but in some cases family members would frequent both Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic or Orthodox services. These figures show that ethnic and religious diversity is considerable in Komańcza.

Looking at the pattern of ethnic diversity for the whole district, the 2002 census carried out by Poland’s Central Bureau for Statistics (GUS) reveals a different picture (GUS 2002). Of the 5143 residents living in the Komańcza district 89 percent declared themselves Poles, 10 percent identified themselves as Ukrainians, while the remaining one percent identified themselves as Lemkos. In other words, while there is a more or less equal distribution of ethnic Poles and ethnic Ukrainians in Komańcza (village proper), ethnic Poles predominate in the Komańcza district. This is a direct outcome of the resettlement policies carried out by the Polish state in the first two decades following the Second World War, when most ethnic Ukrainians had been deported from their native villages, and when ethnic Poles had been encouraged to settle in the villages that had been left by Ukrainians. The demographic upheaval resulted in unique patterns of settlement for each single village in the area (cf. Biernacka 1974). On the whole, it gave rise to at least two important demographic features. First, the majority of people that inhabit the Komańcza district today have settled in the area relatively recently. Second, the inhabitants have very diverse geographical and social backgrounds. Both features affect local relationships not just between but also within the ethnic communities, an issue that is discussed in greater detail in the second part.

**The Komańcza Case: A Cross-cutting System of Alliance**

In trying to assess the significance and implications of the main dividing lines for local relationships, a number of observations can be made. A first
observation would be that there is no one-to-one relationship between, on the one hand, ethnic identity and, on the other hand, the various memberships and roles a person may assume. In other words, wealth, social status, political affiliation, and profession are not correlated with a person’s ethnic or religious identity. There are poor and well-to-do households among Poles as well as Ukrainians; however, most Polish and Ukrainian households earn just enough to make ends meet. Poles and Ukrainians occupy local government positions and are similarly employed in local administration and the state forestry. Election results do not specify the ethnic or religious identities of the voters, but the local election lists show that Poles and Ukrainians can be found in all political parties. Polish as well as Ukrainian youth attend the local primary and high school. Interestingly, the dropout rate among Polish school kids is higher then among Ukrainian school kids. This may be explained by the fact that Poles outnumber Ukrainians in terms of population size and may also be related to poverty: the bankruptcy of the state farms has primarily affected Polish families, many of whom live in the villages that depended on employment in the former state farms. A second observation is that, even though membership to a particular ethnic or religious group to a large extent defines a person’s identity, it does not restrict a person’s radius of action. Finally, it may be noted that the non-exclusivity of social categories allows villagers to establish a wide range of relationships across the ethnic boundary.

An example of relationships that cut across ethnic and religious group boundaries are family relations. Almost one quarter of all families living in the village in 1997 had a mixed Polish-Ukrainian background: 60 out of 258 families. The members of another 25 families were affiliated with at least two different church communities. The book of baptism, kept by the Roman Catholic parish priest, gives a revealing picture of the extent to which relationships cut across religious and, consequently, ethnic boundaries during the 1980s and 1990s. Of the 89 baptism ceremonies that took place between 1980 and 1996 in Komańcza, half of the parental couples were affiliated with two different church communities. For the godparental couples this was as much as two-third. In Komańcza today the meaning of baptism is less a religious fulfillment and more a function of the preservation of existing social ties. The primary duty of the godparent, therefore, is to witness and celebrate the most important stages in the life of his or her godchild, such as first communion, graduation from primary and secondary school, marriage, and childbirth.
The above relationships are examples of what Granovetter (1973:1361) defines as “strong ties”; i.e., ties that involve a great amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services. As we have seen from the above examples, in a situation of cross-cutting social circles, “strong ties” may have the power to transcend existing social boundaries. This is different for “weak ties,” due to the intrinsic superficial quality of a contact that is established through such ties. Weak ties may not have the power to cut-across existing social boundaries; they do, however, establish a link between individuals on either side of the boundary. Such links, based on occasional contacts, can be observed widely in Komańcza, where people with different backgrounds meet in the streets, at work, while shopping, in school, and at public meetings.

That local networks, as a rule, have a wide geographical reach is illustrated by the background of the pupils of groups 7 and 8 from the secondary school in Komańcza. In April 1997, half of these pupils lived outside of Komańcza (village proper). What is more, over three quarters of the pupils could trace their family background outside of the Komańcza district. Both figures have two important implications for the range of ties in which a single individual—in this particular case, a secondary school pupil—is enmeshed. Firstly, the networks of which the pupils are part always transcend the boundary of the village in which they live. What is more, the networks often transcend the boundary of the district and the province. Considering the large number of local residents who live abroad as emigrants, the networks frequently also transcend the country borders. Secondly, even though the pupils are part of entirely different social circles, the pupils themselves form a bridging link between these separate social clusters. In other words, in addition to being part of densely-knit networks (strong ties) with a wide geographical reach, the pupils are part of low-density networks (weak ties) linking these geographically dispersed clusters of strong ties.

Part 2. A Short History of Conflict: From Polish-Ukrainian Civil War to Coexistence

The Armed Polish-Ukrainian Conflict in Komańcza

Following the retreat of Nazi Germany from Poland in 1944, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrains’ka Povstans’ka Armia, UPA), waging an armed
The struggle for an independent, non-communist Ukraine, and the Polish People’s Army, trying to enforce law and order in a region largely controlled by UPA soldiers, engaged in a war for control of Poland’s southeastern regions. “Somehow all villagers were involved in the UPA,” explained the Ukrainian informant Mrs. D. during a ceremony in Komańcza in 1997 commemorating the violent death of five local UPA soldiers in 1947. “The UPA soldiers were armed,” Mrs. D. further clarified, “so we gave them food and offered them shelter. We had to, if we wanted to live.” The close proximity of the villagers to local units of the UPA is also stressed by Mr. K., who, at another occasion, explained that soldiers of the Polish army were stationed at the lower end of the village, while Ukrainian partisans had their stronghold at the upper end of the village. “During cease fire, both parties would meet at village gatherings to spend leisure time together. They would play [cards] and drink a few glasses.” It is common knowledge that the “Chrin” unit of the UPA, besides being omnipresent in the village and its surroundings, drew its recruits from the village population. Informants made no secret of the fact that quite a few villagers who had been active in the UPA left for the Ukraine, Slovakia, and North America to escape persecution in Poland during the late 1940s. Mr. B., one of the organizers of the commemoration in 1997, publicly stated on the occasion that the five killed UPA soldiers “died as heroes for an independent Ukraine.”

With the UPA depending for its strategic success on the overall support of the local population, and with the Polish Army trying to destroy the local hideouts of the Ukrainian partisans, acts of intimidation, violence, and repression from both sides, were directed as much to the civilian population as they were directed toward each other. Informants still recall the burning of villages, bridges, and train tracks by Ukrainian partisan soldiers. An event that informants repeatedly related is the attack on Zawadka Morochowska, a village some 20 km away from Komańcza, by soldiers of the 34th squad of the Polish Army. During the attack, which was conducted in several waves, an estimated 70 men, women, and children, Poles as well as Ukrainians, were killed, and most of the village was burned (cf. Misiło 1999, Motyka 1999, Smoleński 1998). On 7 April 1946, the same army squad provoked, harassed, and finally murdered the Greek Catholic parish priest as well as his oldest son in the yard of their house in Komańcza (Misiło 1999). Later that day, the army squad took hostage a handful of local male inhabitants from Komańcza. The accompanying soldiers harassed the men as they were marched out of the village. The
group, growing bigger with still more detainees from other villages, was marched to the nearest district town Sanok (37 km) where they were imprisoned as UPA suspects.

One event stands out for its massive impact on the lives of virtually all village residents. On 28 April special forces of the Polish Army, operating under the codename Operational Groups “Vistula” (GO Akcja “Wisła”), proceeded to marshal and deport nearly all non-Polish families living in the Komaničza and adjacent districts. Military records reveal that between 28 April and 7 May 1947 from Komaničza itself 353 people were deported, while 97 Poles and 171 Ukrainians remained behind (Misiło 1993:418). There were in total nineteen villages in the Lesko and Sanok administrative districts (powiats) where 15 or more Ukrainian individuals escaped deportation. Informants gave a variety of reasons to explain why certain Ukrainian families in Komaničza could escape deportation: some were dispensed because they worked at the railway (and thus were indispensable as they had to keep the transports going); some were talked out by their relatives; some were exempted through their connections with local administration.

The railway station in Komaničza served as an embarkation point during the operation. Other embarkation points near Komaničza were Szczawne-Kulaszne (13 km east of Komaničza) and Łupków (13 km south). Military records registered 2,026 men, women and children who between 29 April and 7 May 1947 passed through the Komaničza embarkation point (Misiło 1993:427-429). In that same period, a total of 47,562 persons and 24,126 animals (horses, cattle and sheep) were transported out of the wider Sanok region (Misiło 1993:427). As a consequence, and as a result of the war and earlier ‘voluntary’ repatriations, 90 percent of the villages in the Komaničza rural district were left without inhabitants (Misiło 1993:410-412, 417-419). The degree of depopulation in the Komaničza area relative to the 1921 population is illustrated in Table 1. This table shows the changes in population for the villages that are located within the geographical boundaries of today’s Komaničza rural district. The 1950 population comprised only 7 percent of the prewar total, and even as late as 1988 the population was only a third of the prewar total. Map 2 shows that many of the villages within the boundaries of the Komaničza rural district were never repopulated after the 1940s.

The villagers were warned only a few hours in advance. Trapped in a village that was locked down, the villagers had no choice but to obey the soldiers who escorted them to the railway station. This was the time when
### TABLE 1. Depopulation and repopulation in the Komańcza rural district 1921-1988

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**Total** | 16,405 | 1,163 | 3,283 | 4,809 | 4,909 | 5,313

Notes: The table includes all villages that are or were located within the geographical boundaries of today’s Komańcza rural district. < Indicates that the village no longer appears in any of the postwar censuses and that the number of people living at this location today is very low, likely less than five persons.

the first selection took place and when some villagers were sent home. When orders were given the villagers were loaded into freight trains and sent off to unknown destinations. The journey, taking on average two weeks, was stopped only once, at the railway station in Oświęcim. Although officially a sanitary and food supply stop, this stop was used by officials of the Security Forces (UB) to double check the identity of the passengers and to arrest and detain UPA suspects in Jaworzno, a former Nazi auxiliary concentration camp. It was also during this stop that officials of the State Directorate for Repatriation (PUR) determined the final destination of the passengers (Misiło 1993:127). Each single transport was split into nuclear family groups and sent into different directions—this being an effective way of cutting extended family and village ties.

Taking the armed conflict at face value, one might get the impression of a struggle between two coherent, inimical groups. Indeed, the dichotomy of the population into two opposed parties—the Ukrainians and the Poles—is considered an uncontested fact by both Polish and Ukrainian informants. “There were times when things were quiet,” Mr. S. explained, “but when the two world wars broke out, it went from bad to worse. Suddenly, there was hatred between the nationalities.” The circumstances that had contributed to the unpredicted upsurge of hatred between Poles and Ukrainians during the 1940s, according to Mr. S., were the divide and rule policy of the Germans, the power vacuum following the capitulation of Nazi Germany, and the nationalist agitation of various militant groups. Interestingly, Mr. S. draws a parallel with the armed Polish-Ukrainian conflict that took place a few decades earlier. In November 1918, following the collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, a Greek Catholic parish priest from the neighboring village Wislok instigated a political movement by announcing political affiliation with the newly erected West Ukrainian National Republic. Some thirty villages joined the movement, of which Komańcza became the main organizational centre. The so-called Komańcza Republic was short lived—founded in November 1918, it succumbed to Polish forces on 23 January 1919 (cf. Hann 1985, Michna 1995, Motyka 1999).

Both armed conflicts show striking similarities. They started in a period when there was no identifiable central leadership, they involved all village residents, and they placed the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian residents in a pro-Ukrainian camp. While pro-Ukrainian sympathies were not uncommon among local Ukrainians, their political views were hardly decisive for their role in the conflict. During the second decade of the twenti-
MAP 2. Repopulated, relocated, and destroyed villages in the current Komańcza rural district
eth century, as in the 1940s, it was the political and military leadership of the Polish and Ukrainian warring parties that turned the population into two opposed parties. This ideologically and military-enforced political dichotomy had far-reaching social consequences. Firstly, the villagers faced a situation where the demand to choose sides was particularly urgent; any choice made by them was irrevocable and determined their future fate. Secondly, even those who despite political agitation had refrained from choosing sides were pushed into the arms of one party or the other, as their purported political sympathies were simply inferred on them by either party. While the division of the population into two opposed parties was, first of all, an effective strategy to distinguish between allies and enemies, on the long run it became a social reality as well thanks to its powerful self-fulfilling force. What is more, it strengthened the firm ethnic dividing line in the village and engendered a profound sense of victimhood, especially among Ukrainian village residents, who time and again found themselves trapped in a no-win (and lose-all) situation.

From Fraternity to Dissension: Ukrainian Discord in Komańcza

The state re-established its monopoly of violence by particularly violent means: by pacifying Ukrainian insurgents and expelling Ukrainian civilians from their native villages and towns. But whereas the use of state violence eventually put an end to the systematic use of violence by non-state parties, in the short term it exacerbated tensions between Poles and Ukrainians, as the state actions coincided with relentless anti-Ukrainian propaganda. Flares of the wartime ethnic divide can still be observed in Komańcza today, albeit in a somewhat watered-down form. The common usage of the terms “Ukrainian” and “Pole” to distinguish between fellow villagers is one example. Expressions like “he is worse than a Pole” (on gorsze jak polak) or “she is a haughty Ukrainian” (ona wielka ukrainka) have their origin in this period. Most significantly, the war trauma still exists in many people. Victims of repression and expulsion still carry their painful memories, which they pass on to the next generations. The informant Mr. S. who witnessed the murder of the Greek Catholic parish priest as a ten year old boy comments on the event: “Little as I was, it really upset me, it made such a tremendous impression. This brutal murder made me realize that we [Ukrainians] are a humiliated and suppressed people.” Mrs. P. gets very agitated each time
The Strength of Diversity: A Micro-history of Ethnic Conflict and Coexistence in Rural Southeast Poland

she relates the story of her father being beaten with rifles while Polish soldiers screamed at him, “You can put your Ukraine up your ass!” Her father was forced to walk the punitive march to Sanok, was jailed for two years, and came out physically broken. Born in the 1950s, Mrs. P. was no eyewitness to the event, but the trauma of her father strengthened her awareness of her own Ukrainian identity.

The experience of civil war, repression, and expulsion not just widened the gap between Poles and Ukrainians, but also divided the Ukrainian community. The first transports of “volunteers” that left the village to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in the spring of 1945 split the village community into two groups: those who left the village “voluntarily” (mostly poor families) and those who did not. What is more, the departure of a number of families to the Ukraine, as well as the subsequent return of some of them trying to escape extreme poverty in the Ukrainian villages of exile, gave rise to a political regrouping at the village level: besides those who professed that the village was already located on Ukrainian territory (and that, therefore, there was no reason to remove its population to the Ukraine), there were those who claimed that the village inhabitants were of mixed Polish and Lemko descent (who, therefore, did not have the slightest aspiration to live on Ukrainian territory). Operation Vistula affected most of the village as it implied the forced deportation of virtually all village residents in April and May 1947. But Operation Vistula gave rise to new dividing lines in the village as well. After April 1947, there were (1) those who were deported to the north-western territories of Poland, (2) those who were exempted from deportation (a small minority), (3) those who in later years returned from exile and are native to the village, (4) those who in later years returned from exile but are not native to the village, and finally, (5) those who never returned from exile but have maintained contact with their family grounds through family ties.

All in all, the armed conflict produced a loosely-knit network of relationships between people that only share a common birthground (rodowita zemia), but otherwise form a heterogeneous group of people. Neither these so-called “natives” (rdzenni, miejscowi), nor the so-called “new arrivals” (przybyszy) who arrived in the village during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, form a homogenous group. The new settlers, filling the empty space left by the deportees, originate from different parts of the country and have different social backgrounds as well. A crucial outcome of the wartime conflict is that in the village today relationships between “natives” and “new arrivals”
are considered far less problematic than relationships among “natives.” The extremely difficult and violent conditions during the 1940s, including the daily occurrence of lawlessness and abuses, gave rise to feelings of distrust and fear among the village residents. These feelings intervened in all types of relationships, even affecting friendships and family relations. “No one trusted no one,” explains Mrs. D., “everyone tried to fend for himself through bribery, deception, and betrayal.” Looking at the wartime events from a local perspective, the ethnic cleavage becomes much less urgent. One version of the murder of the Greek Catholic parish priest holds that it was not his UPA militancy that had killed him, but the love affair of his wife with a Polish army officer. “People say she betrayed him,” told Mr. S. “In any case, his wife left him a few days before the assault, taking her daughter with her.” Mrs. P. claims that she knows “damn well” who had incriminated her father. Not wanting to give any names, she suggests that one of his (Ukrainian) neighbors gave him up. “Yes ma’m, we had such good neighbors!” (cf. Bringa 1995, Brown 2004, Kalyvas 2006).

The fact that former enemies in the conflict included not just “them Poles” but also, and especially, one’s own kin (sami swoi) raised bad blood among many. Listing the families that were exempted from deportation, Mr. B. suggested that he was providing a list of “traitors.” In his view, those who stayed in the village through the war years had been able to stay at the cost of others. Even though not all remaining villagers may have engaged in acts of betrayal, the very fact that they had been able to elude the fate that befell most other village residents, according to Mr. B., was proof of their disloyalty. So were their subsequent attempts to obstruct the return of their fellow villagers. Accusations like the ones made by Mr. B. induce people like Mr. W. to emphasize that “there is one thing we should never forget: it was them [Poles] who precipitated local antagonism. They divided and ruled us. And they still do.” Mr. W.’s conclusion is true to a degree. While it is doubtful that “them Poles” have ever been able to direct and control every single local intrigue, the armed conflict unmistakably led to a number of new divides that is splitting up the village to this day. Ironically, the decline of antagonism between Poles and Ukrainians coincided with an increase of in-group rivalry among so-called “native” villagers. As a matter of fact, the village disputes that took place after 1947 and that went beyond the level of individual clashes typically involved “native” villagers. An example is the schism of the Ukrainian community in 1961 that divided the Ukrainian community into two opposed groups:
Greek Catholic and Orthodox Ukrainians. Another example is the building and inauguration of the Greek Catholic parish church in Komańcza in the 1980s, which gave rise to a conflict that involved outside (Orthodox) opponents to the new parish church (Lehmann 2000).

Examples from the present confirm the persistence of inner cleavages. Efforts to establish a “Lemko museum” by the Greek Catholic parish priest in 1998 were stifled by disputes about the museum collection and issues of housing and access. By 2005, the museum initiative had been abandoned; the extensive collection of artifacts is stored in the cellars of the Greek Catholic parish church ever since. A Lemko folk dance and song group in Komańcza was established in 1989 but discontinued in 1992, due to a conflict about leadership. It took the villagers years to form a new folk group. A parent visiting one of the founding meetings in 1997 told the researcher: “Here we go again; another fruitless attempt to make it work out together, holding hands in harmony.” Between 1999 and 2002, the Lemko folk song group “Kapela Zberana” from Komańcza made successful performances all over Poland. A little later the Lemko folk dance and song group “Kariczka” appeared on stage. While the “Kapela Zberana” is no longer performing, supposedly due to a lack of new members, the folk group “Kariczka” still performs on a regular basis. The conflicting views on heritage conservation and heritage promotion reflect the cleavages within the Ukrainian community. These cleavages, in turn, directly relate to and are grounded in the divergent biographies of the villagers, that is, in their divergent wartime experiences, migration, and family histories.

From Violent to Peaceful Relations: Polish-Ukrainian Coexistence in Komańcza

The cases brought to the government initiated and village-based Reconciliation Committee (Społeczna Komisja Pojednawcza) witnessed the weakened importance of ethnic identification in village disputes since the 1970s. Of the 55 cases brought to Reconciliation Committees in Komańcza in the period between November 1976 and June 1984, 13 cases concerned disputes between Poles and Ukrainians. Most of these cases involved ordinary village disputes among neighbors: field damage; contested landownership; contested access to gates, roads or water wells; disturbance of peace through drunkenness. The ethnic identity of the opponents was at stake in exactly three of these cases. Mrs. and Mr. C. from Szczawne, for
example, filed a complaint against their Polish neighbors, whom they accused of having physically attacked them and having insulted them by calling them ethnic names (“bugger off, you Ukrainian whore”) (SKP 1977). Mrs. M. from Długopole charged her neighbor for having willfully killed a chicken from her flock and for having called her a “Ukrainian whore,” “Ukrainian bitch,” and “old Ukrainian fogy” (SKP 1979). Mrs. P. from Wisłok Górne accused her neighbor of threatening her daughter while she was pasturing the cows on a field that her neighbor claimed to be his by telling her daughter to “clear out, just like your Ukrainian father, who belongs at the other side of the Bug [river]” (SKP 1983b).

The Reconciliation Committee was successful in reconciling the parties in just one case—the Długopole case. The fact that the committee was unsuccessful in its attempt to arbitrate in the other two cases cannot be attributed to its lack of concern or will power. In theory, the parties to a dispute would bring their case to the board of the reconciliation committee, whose members would act as “arbitrators” and by whose decision they would eventually agree to be bound. In practice, however, the de facto power of such a decision, being not a judicial verdict (wyrok) but a formalized mutual agreement (ugoda), was only limited. Of the 55 reported cases brought to Reconciliation Committees in Komańcza between November 1976 and June 1984, arbitration had been successful in slightly more than half of the cases (29); in seven cases the charges were dropped as one party did not show up at the reconciliation meetings; in one case the charges were dropped by the accuser; in seven cases the parties would not give in and thus did not reach an agreement; five cases were eventually redirected to other state institutions; and six cases had no outcome.

With a board consisting of two or three Ukrainian members out of a total of three, the Reconciliation Committee did not tolerate public scolding, let alone ethnic insults. Time and again the Committee stood up to defend the “principles of social coexistence” (zasady współżycia społecznego) and “good neighborly relations” (stosunki dobrosąsiedzkie). The members of the Committee, whose assignment was to condemn bad and reward good civil behavior, based their position on two key issues: first, the level to which the conflict harmed public interests, and second, the social status—in terms of work discipline, moral standards, and rank among neighbors—of the parties involved. Next to social status, a similar weight was attributed to the characters of the individuals involved in the conflict. Typologies of (mostly female) individuals described in the reports
range from querulants (kwerulant), to brawler or quarrelsome persons (osoba konfliktowa), to provocative or aggressive persons (osoba zaczepna) (SKP 1983a). As is clear from the cases dealt with by the Reconciliation Committee during the 1970s and 1980s, conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians in the Komarów district were rare. Also, the few recorded incidents of Polish-Ukrainian conflict did not escalate into a communal conflict, that is, into a conflict between the two ethnic communities.

Two conflicts witnessed by the researcher in 1997 and 1998 confirm the above pattern. Neither of these conflicts transcended the village level or produced a single ethnic following. Both conflicts involved individuals who were related to each other as neighbors. Not less important, the conflicts were initiated by individuals with a quarrelsome reputation. One informant recounted an incident where she was in a car with three former colleagues, all of whom had recently lost their job because the agency where they had worked had been closed down. One of them, a Polish lady, Mrs. B., had set her mind on a job that was already taken by a fellow villager: Mrs. S., a young Ukrainian lady. It was when they passed Mrs. S. that Mrs. B. exclaimed: “Look at her, this Ukrainian whore. She has her connections, but I’ll show her who the stronger party is.” The informant recalled: “She used these ugly words just out of the blue. We sat there, three Ukrainian women, left with our mouths wide open. And we didn’t know what to say. I bet she didn’t even realize that she was speaking to us, three of her Ukrainian colleagues!” Rumor had it that it was not just Mrs. B. who had it in for Mrs. S., but that their former boss, Mrs. T. had involved Mrs. B. in her plot against all (mostly female) Ukrainian workers. The plot, however, did not bring Mrs. B. the intended results. As evidenced by comments of other villagers in the presence of the researcher, her actions, instead of getting her a job, antagonized her former colleagues and made her much disliked by them and their families and friends.

The dispute between the Polish Mrs. M. and the district had developed into an impasse that by spring 1998 already lasted for two years. The district had wanted to pave the road passing Mrs. M.’s house with asphalt. However, Mrs. M. refused to give free passage, claiming that the road was hers. The dispute gave rise to a road blockade, a hand-to-hand fight between Mrs. M.’s son and a (Polish) community official, a series of accusations from the side of Mrs. M. about “Ukrainian attempts” to chase her off her ground, and, finally, to an intervention of police and court in the conflict. While at first sight the conflict seemed to be between Mrs. M. and,
quoting Mrs. M., the “white-collar Ukrainian conspiracy,” the conflict really was between Mrs. M. and Mrs. Z., her Polish neighbor next door and elected mayor (wójt) of Komańcza. Years before, Mrs. M., her small group of friends, and Mrs. Z. had been involved in a conflict. In this conflict, an overwhelming majority of village residents had shown their support for Mrs. Z., resulting in her victory when she ran for the position of village mayor during the elections of 1994. Since then, Mrs. M. and her friends keep on thwarting Mrs. Z. in every possible way. Judging from the comments of the informants, their actions are loathed by a majority of villagers. This and the above case show that in the village today ethnic provocation may still be used as a means to mobilize political support, but that it is done so by socially “marginal” individuals, and that it is met with contempt rather than approval from the side of most village residents.

One domain that lends itself for in-depth research into the impact of increased interaction between members of both ethnic communities, as well as into the firmness and persistence of the ethnic cleavage is the domain of marriage and love. “Back then [in the 1960s] Poles were not allowed to settle in the village, unless they had an acquaintance,” explains Mrs. K. “And there were plenty of poor Ukrainian girls around. Their Polish lovers did not demand any properties, because they were poor themselves. They just wanted a place to stay.” She was in her late teens when Mrs. K., born in a Ukrainian family in Komańcza, dated a Polish army conscript who was stationed in her village. Her parents did not approve of her Polish boyfriend and were glad to see the young soldier leave for his home. A little later Mrs. K. met a nice Ukrainian man from a neighboring village. Her parents insisted that she marry him, which she did. Mrs. K. was fine with her decision until her former Polish boyfriend came to visit her. It turned out that he had been writing letters to her, which her mother had hidden from her. Mrs. K. felt betrayed and was furious with her parents. Despite her anger back then, she herself insists that her two teenage daughters marry Ukrainian men. She has seen many mixed couples end up in life-long struggles. “My father’s sister married a Pole, and they get on very well. But at what cost? She broke entirely with her background, with her religion and family.” A second aunt married a Pole too, but she kept to her own traditions. “She is scolded by her husband for that. If there is something not to his liking he calls her ugly names, like ‘Ukrainian bitch.’ She came to visit us just recently, and she warned my daughters: ‘Don’t you ever get involved with them [Poles].
They pretend to be tender, and then they show their real faces. You better stay spinsters your whole life!”

Stories like her aunt’s leads Mrs. K. to conclude that “there is no taste of honey in mixed marriages. And there is no respect. I would not want my daughters to live through such misery and pain.” Mrs. S., born in a Ukrainian family in Komańcza, has had her deal of agony in her marriage with Byszek S., a Pole from a neighboring village. But it was not her husband who rejected her, but her family in-law, even though she was prepared to give up her religion. “They told all this nonsense like I was some kind of different species, like I wasn’t a human being just like them!” When Byszek S. nevertheless decided to marry his Ukrainian girl, he was threatened by his brothers and shown the door by his parents. “My mother begged his parents to be present during the wedding, but they wouldn’t. And the Roman Catholic priest and the convent’s oldest sister tried their best to make a beautiful wedding for us, young bride and groom, as to compensate for our embarrassment.” After years some sort of rapprochement took place, but the past still intrudes on family relations. Her experience has strengthened Mrs. S. in her belief that she should raise her own children in freedom. “I couldn’t care less with whom they relate or become friends with. Even if they bring home a Negro (murzyn), it’s fine with me. I prefer to trust my children; I prefer to think that they will make a sensible choice. My only wish is that they be happy.”

In any marriage, partners will have to find a balance regarding their loyalty towards each other, towards their own family, and towards their in-laws. The fact that partners in a mixed marriage not only bid for access to a new family but also to a new social group, makes the loyalty issue even more urgent. It involves choices—regarding the wedding ceremony, religious affiliation, the upbringing of children, the burial ceremony and place—that otherwise would not have to be made. Generations have dealt with this loyalty problem, as intermarriage among Poles and Ukrainians was common also in the prewar era. A strict but simple protocol helped prewar generations to solve this loyalty problem: partners to a marriage would continue to go to the church where they had been baptized; girls born in the family would follow their mother’s religion, boys would follow the religion of their father. Postwar generations no longer hold on to such protocol: they live as they choose. Today most partners in a mixed marriage choose to convert to Roman Catholicism, which points to the weak political position of the Ukrainian minority in the region.
But even the strategy of conversion does not solve the loyalty problem entirely; it presents itself in each new stage of life, as it did in the life of Mrs. L. This elderly Ukrainian lady confessed in the presence of the researcher and her Polish husband: “I don’t care what people think of me. I even don’t mind the opinion of my husband. But I shall be buried in the cemetery where my parents lie buried. That is the place where I belong.” If worse comes to worst, blood relations and bonds of common ancestry are stronger than other relationships and bonds. The primacy of common ancestry leads to inevitable conflicts where individuals leave their family and group when they intermarry. As evidenced by the stories of the informants, fear of “disloyalty” does give rise to pre-emptive intolerant behavior in mixed marriages. While this intolerance most certainly affects relationships between the partners in a marriage, it hardly affects relationships between Poles and Ukrainians outside the family sphere. It does signify, however, that despite increased rapprochement, a degree of caution remains between the two ethnic communities.

Pacification at Work: The Strength of Diversity
Peaceful coexistence is never self-evident—certainly not in an area that has suffered from war and excessive violence. The trauma of the Second World War and the ensuing civil war is still tangible in the Komańcza district today—through the stereotypes that are still applied to members of both Polish and Ukrainian communities, and through the pejorative language which members of both ethnic groups sometimes use to address one another. Signs of a firm ethnic boundary are also tangible through the pivotal role of blood relationships and territory of birth for group membership. During the second half of the 1990s, the Greek Catholic clergy facilitated the re-inauguration of numerous cemeteries, chapels, and churches in the old, destroyed and formerly Ukrainian villages. This trend coincided with the wish of local village residents to establish a permanent link—both spiritually and physically—with their territory of birth. Not just village residents, but also former residents of the villages from around the world attended the ceremonies, placed crosses, and had their bodies buried in the newly re-inaugurated cemeteries. Finally, signs of a firm ethnic cleavage are palpable through the resentments that still infest the lives of the older generations. “If we had guns available,” said Mr. W., “this place would be hell on earth.” The remark by Mr. W. suggests that
the grass in the village is dry to the degree that any violent action could theoretically spark fire and spell disaster for its residents. However, in practice such fire has not occurred in the village since the summer of 1947. Given the scenario Mr. W. presents, the question remains, why? Why did violent confrontations not occur, despite tensions and conflicts? An answer to this question, as suggested at the outset of this article, involves an inquiry into the transformation of local social relations, which includes both processes at the macro and micro-level.

The re-establishment of the state monopoly of violence in the immediate post-war years did pacify local relationships. The military destruction of the UPA, the deportation and expulsion of the Ukrainian civilian population from the area, and the subsequent repopulation of the area with ethnic Poles during the 1950s and 1960s, not only contributed to a complete disarmament of the local civilian population, they also produced a significant shift in the distribution of population groups. Ukrainians no longer formed a majority population regionally. What is more, the state interventions had resulted in the irreversible destruction of local systems of social cohesion. Social networks at the village level had been destroyed down to the bottom: families had been broken, and village communities dispersed. New settlers that eventually came to live in the villages did not mix, as they had neither been selected for their economic skills nor for their social background. The new society that evolved from the turbulence of the 1940s was characterized by the prevalence of inner cleavages and tensions. The divergent social backgrounds, migration histories, and memories of war and persecution divided this society to such a degree, that members of each social group (village community, village section, ethnic community, religious community, or family) were no longer willing or able to merge into one single whole. This increased heterogeneity, in turn, significantly contributed to an increased potential of conflicts between individuals. At the same time, it has contributed to a decreased potential of conflicts between groups.

State efforts to seek the integration of all citizens, including members of ethnic minorities, into a thriving socialist economy had a long term de-escalating effect as well. The growth of the socialist sector in the area coincided with an increase of employment and educational opportunities. Next to small-scale subsistence farmers, there were peasant-workers employed by the State Farms, the State Forestry, the state owned wood factories, and the State Cooperatives. Secondary and vocational schools (especially technical and engineering studies) spread rapidly across the
country, while literacy and agricultural training courses were organized even in the remotest villages (Biernacka 1974, Hann 1985). In the process, the closed, rural communities in the Komańczka district developed into communities of rural citizens for whom upward social mobility and participation in the national economy gained increased significance. One major consequence of the integration of the village communities into modern socialist ways of life was that it prompted the extension of weak ties and the weakening of strong ties in village networks. The expansion of individual networks spurred processes of individualization within the village communities, fostered the establishment of new identities and relationships (weak ties) beyond the traditional bonds of family, ethnic group, and village community (strong ties), and significantly broadened access to non-local sources of information, opinions, and ideas.

Local cross-cutting social networks have similarly contributed to peaceful modes of interaction between Poles and Ukrainians. Today, village residents are split by a multitude of cleavages, while, at the same time, they are linked by a multitude of social ties that cut across these clefts. These cross-cutting cleavages and ties generate mutual dependencies and conflicting loyalties between village residents, which in turn, impede their mobilization along ethnic or religious lines. In such a setting, conflict-seeking persons find themselves confronted with a recalcitrant practice. Take, for example, the informant who spit his venom over the “traitors,” that is, the Ukrainian village residents, who were exempted from deportation in 1947, and who had hindered his return to his native village. Despite his anger, he kindly greets his neighbor Mrs. S., daughter of a “traitor” couple, every time he meets her in the street. The comment of Mrs. S. on this: “Of course he is greeting me, but this is not because of kindness! I was supervising the unit in the State Farm where he was working with the machinery. And I watched him dismantle a piece of equipment with which he later worked his own fields. Oh yes, he is still afraid that I will denounce him as a thief!” This example points out the restraining effect of cross-cutting. First, resentment is felt not just between members of both ethnic communities, but also and especially, between members within the ethnic communities. Second, even in the case where resentment is felt, mutual dependencies oblige individuals to respect common rules and behave decently toward one another.

In Komańczka today, ethnic antagonism is no longer at the root of the conflicts in which it is invoked. What is more, ethnic conflict does not currently
go beyond discourse. Let us take the earlier mentioned Mr. W. who stated that the village site would turn into hell if guns were available. A fellow Ukrainian villager, who had witnessed the conversation, later explained. “He is pitiful. He forgot to tell that he is married to a Polish woman and that he has failed to stand his ground and raise his children in his own, Ukrainian, tradition. He has no right to be mad at others, he should be blaming himself.” This example highlights the fact that people are tied, hand and foot, to their multi-ethnic social networks. The state enforced deportations of the late 1940s severed the strong ties that for centuries had kept families and ethnic communities together. During the 1950s and 1960s, weak ties developed between the residual population and the newcomers, establishing the first bridges across the ethnic cleft. As the situation normalized, intermarriage such as found in the prewar era, gradually re-emerged, establishing a growing number of strong (family) ties between members of the Polish and Ukrainian communities. The large number of ethnically and religiously mixed couples in Komańcza (village proper) is not only indicative of the extent of integration between Poles and Ukrainians, it also provides for an increased bond between the two ethnic communities.

Cross-cutting relationships, social differentiation, and individualization do not just affect relationships among and between the village residents; they have an impact on the relationships between ordinary village residents and local elites as well. There are reasons for the local elites to proceed very carefully when addressing people through their multiple identities. Firstly, attempts of the elites to mobilize village residents for a parochial purpose will bind some but alienate others. For example, attempts by the Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic bishops to politicize their sermons at the occasion of the commemoration of Operation Vistula (April 1997), the Pope’s visit to Poland (June 1997), and the parliamentary elections (September 1997) were firmly criticized by many village residents, as evidenced by their comments in the presence of the researcher. Secondly, local elites now face the situation where, due to a general population decrease in the villages, the political mobilization potential of the village population is lower than ever. Take, for example, the decrease of members of the three religious communities. Between 1997 and 2007, this decrease was 18 percent for the Roman Catholic community, 22 percent for the Greek Catholic community, and 30 percent for the Orthodox community. The decrease of members coincided with a decline in church attendance. To give an example, the Greek Catholic parish priest reported
that church attendance today is only 25 percent of what it used to be two decades earlier: while in the mid 1980s over 500 parishioners would attend the mass in church on a high holiday, in 2007 the number of parishioners scarcely exceeds 120. “This is a sad development,” the priest confessed. “Without parishioners, I have no power whatsoever.”

Local prospects and local interests have developed in such a way that for the majority of village residents in the Komanańca district a resort to violent means to settle a conflict is no longer a relevant option. The scope and climate of the setting in which village residents and elites operate today may be illustrated by the events immediately following the burning of the oldest church in Komanańca. The fire started in the evening of 13 September 2006 and destroyed the whole church building. The official cause of the fire was a short-circuit in the outdated electrical wiring system (Murawka and Potaczała 2006). The church, presently used by the small Orthodox community, was built in 1802 and had been put on the UNESCO list of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 2003. The news of the fire spread rapidly, reaching the overseas diaspora communities within hours. All villagers—resident and non-resident, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic and Orthodox, Polish and Ukrainian—grieved over the loss of the Orthodox parish church. The Orthodox Archbishop responded to the event by announcing that an exact copy of the destroyed church was to be rebuilt on the scene of the catastrophe. The Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic parish priests responded by offering the Orthodox parishioners a new temporary home in their respective churches. The local political establishment reacted by calling for financial support for the immediate rebuilding of the church.

The event met with nation-wide attention and concern as well. It became an item in the national media and in the regional media it was an item for weeks (Bończak 2006, Gorczyca 2006, Kozimor 2006b, Mękarska 2006d). Support came from all over Poland and from a long list of Orthodox and non-Orthodox citizen groups, organizations, and institutions. Most interestingly, the parties that offered a helping hand have never once questioned the imminent return of the church building to the small orthodox community. This is especially surprising considering the fact that the acquisition of the parish church by the Orthodox community in 1961 had been illicit. What could have easily evolved into a source of conflict, in fact became a source of cooperation, involving all levels and all strata of society. Krzysztof Potaczała (Murawka and Potaczała
2006:11), reporter of the daily local newspaper *Nowiny*, documented this process at the village level. Weeks after the fire, he interviewed a number of village residents from Komaniecza. He quotes Mr. M.: “It was terrible, the view of the burning church. Over a month has passed since the disaster, but nobody has forgotten about the incident. People still mourn the church, regardless of their religion.” Mr. S.: “The people living here respect religious diversity. Greek Catholics, Orthodox and Roman Catholics—they all live in harmony in one village. This church served the Orthodox community, but for us it wasn’t just a house of prayer. It was the symbol of Komaniecza, a unique historical monument.” Potaczała finally quotes the motto that the village residents repeated over and over again: “We will set our shoulder to the wheel and get down to work. That is our duty towards history and posterity.”

It should be stressed that critical voices were not absent in the village. Some village residents would stick to the rumor of arson long after the cause of fire had been established. Others complained of neglect of duty by the fire fighters, whom they held responsible for the destruction of the church building. Still others were disenchanted by the fact that the Orthodox villagers kept relying on the destroyed church building that for centuries had belonged to the Greek Catholic parish and, thus, “isn’t really theirs.” This opinion is voiced by Mrs. M., who in the presence of the researcher asked the rhetorical question: “Isn’t it obvious? This fire must have been the hand of God!” What matters is that these critical voices have never dominated the public discourse about the event. Once they reached the surface they were toned down by pragmatic arguments that evolved from a need to seek cooperation and support rather than conflict and neglect. The fact that this need was most urgently felt by a majority of village residents is crucial for our understanding of peaceful coexistence in the village. The absence of conflict in the village after the disastrous fire is not just the result of a conscious attempt by local policy makers to prevent an old conflict from escalating; it is much more the result of the inbuilt resilience of the village community toward tensions and turmoil. While this resilience is the outcome of long-term processes at the macro and micro-level, it is also the outcome of short-term assessments of social advancement: for the village community to survive economically and socially, it will have to overcome its intragroup tensions and factions and, instead, it will have to cherish and exploit its main treasure—the riches of ethnic and religious diversity.
Conclusions

“Our diversity is our weakness and our strength,” said Mrs. D., “Generally speaking, we respect each other.” The comment of Mrs. D. touches on the small margins of peaceful coexistence: difference makes society vulnerable for conflict, but it also offers opportunities. Most residents of the villages in the Komańczka district tend to operate within these small margins. If asked, any ordinary village resident, parish priest, or official would agree that people in the Komańczka district respect each other and treat each other right. This attitude is present in popular and institutional representations. It is manifest during collective church processions, religious celebrations, and funerals. It is embedded in the communal projects carried out by the local government. It is part of the regulations and objectives of the numerous local institutions and organizations. And, last but not least, it is the subject of local, regional, and national media attention. The emphasis on interethnic tolerance seems to pervade all domains of village life. The reverse side of this emphasis is the intolerance towards quarrelsome individuals—in many of the studied cases such individuals fell victim to a village campaign of condemnation. Not just laymen and women, also church representatives became subject to such village campaigns. While each new spiritual leader produced a different dynamic in the village community, it generally applied that those leaders who propagated mutual tolerance and respect stayed on longest.

The Komańczka district is not unique in its tendency to “celebrate diversity,” to quote Buzalka (2007:156). In his study on the politics of commemoration in the Przemyśl area (some 100 km northeast from Komańczka, see Map 1), Buzalka found that within the realm of politics and religion multicultural tolerance has a prominent place. Buzalka distinguishes between “artificial” and “ordinary” tolerance. While the first is practiced by those who seek to establish a political following by invoking romantic ideas of a multicultural past or Western ideas of individual liberalism and democratization, the latter is practiced by those who enter in peaceful, everyday forms of relationships that are based on trust. According to Buzalka (2007:157), ordinary tolerance is manifest in the general rejection of extreme nationalist viewpoints and practices, in the survival of agrarian traditions of cooperation in the villages (that in fact predate the socialist era), in the pragmatism of petty trade, and in the cordiality of neighborhood trust. In support of the observations made in this
article, Buzalka (2007:157) suggests that ordinary tolerance “seems to exert at least equal influence on local civility” as artificial tolerance.

This article has sought to explain why the region of which the Komańcza district is part—once the scene of war and massive ethnic violence—has developed into a predominantly peaceful society. It is argued that the current emphasis on interethnic tolerance, evident in the presented case material from the Komańcza district as well as in Buzalka’s study of the Przemyśl area, is the outcome of the overall transformation of Polish society. Several long-term macro and micro processes stand out as fundamental to this transformation. The integration of the local village communities into Poland’s postwar state structure, following the massive destruction of the prewar multiethnic society during the 1940s, helped consolidate interethnic cooperation in several ways. First, it involved the extension of weak ties and the weakening of strong ties in village networks, which in turn, spurred processes of individualization within the village communities. Second, it produced new social cleavages, dividing not just between but also within ethnic groups, and prompted the establishment of social ties linking members across ethnic groups. While all this allowed for the gradual establishment of new identities and relationships beyond the family, group, and community level, it also contributed to a broadening of views and ideas. Moreover, the mutual dependencies and conflicting loyalties between village residents, induced by the prevalence of cross-cutting ties, hampered those wanting to mobilize along lines of ethnic or religious cleavage.

Changes in the local and wider society not only resulted in a decrease of violent modes of behavior; it also resulted in a shift of local attitudes and expectations. Over the decades mutual distrust between Poles and Ukrainians was gradually replaced by mutual trust, which led to a code of conduct based on mutual tolerance. Village residents not only respond with respect to, but also demand respect from, their fellow villagers. It is this tri-pillar structure of local interests, local patterns of behavior, and local attitudes and expectations that has laid the basis for the ingrained resilience to violent escalation of conflict within the village communities. As this ingrained tolerance is further strengthened by the tolerance-focused macro level discourse, ethnic difference no longer constitutes just a potential source of conflict. The village residents themselves have come to appreciate ethnic and religious diversity not as a weakness, but as a major strength of their communities because it attracts tourism and broadens access to gov-
ernmental and non-governmental funds. In this setting, ethnic diversity besides “an instrument of hostile mobilization,” to quote Schlee (2008:12), might as well serve as “a vehicle of integration.”

The case study presented in this article suggests that a dynamic system of alliance, guided by cross-cutting weak and strong ties, can provide negative feedback mechanisms that contribute to resilience to violent ethnic conflict at the community level (cf. Flap 1985, 1997). This is not to say that conflict is absent in such systems, or that violent escalation is no longer possible. It has been shown that while the gap between the Polish and Ukrainian communities in Komańcza has increasingly been bridged, it has hardly been filled. Herein lies the system’s structural vulnerability. Bridges narrow the gap between the Polish and Ukrainian communities, but the ethnic cleavage remains all the same. Ethnicity continues to be a strong part of individual identity that can play a positive role, but can also be used as a convenient heading to express negative feelings, as is exemplified by the activities of and provocations by various nationalist groups in the Przemyśl area since the early 1990s (cf. Buzalka 2007; Hann 1998a, b). Still, with the exception of a few sour notes, it is the discourse of tolerance rather than the discourse of hatred that currently dominates the entire field of political and religious activity in the region (cf. Babiński 1997, Buzalka 2007, Wojakowski 2002). People at all levels of society tend to strengthen this trend—sometimes consciously by promoting a politically correct type of tolerance, but most of the time unconsciously, as their behavior and expectations are grounded in peaceful day-to-day interactions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
For their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article, I am most grateful to Ot van den Muijzenberg, Peter Romijn, and Hans Vermeulen. I am especially indebted to Chris Hann, David Niemeijer, and an anonymous reviewer for their constructive criticisms. I am much obliged to the Municipal Office in Komańcza, the Reszów State Archives in Sanok, and the Department of Social Statistics of the Central Statistical Office in Warsaw for letting me use their administrative, archival and statistical files. This research was supported by the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation.
ENDNOTES

1Fieldwork was conducted from January 1997 to May 1997 and from September 1997 to February 1998, as well as during a number of shorter visits between 2005 and 2008.


3Figure from 2006 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gmina_Komańczca).

4Most notably these are the Foundation of Partner Groups for a Green Bieszczady (Fundusz Grupy Partnerskiej Zielone Bieszczady) and the Foundation of the Bieszczady Partnership for the Environment (Fundacja Bieszczadzka „Partnerstwo dla Środowiska”), both members of Carpathian EcoRegion Initiative.

5The “Orchestra dedicated to St. Nicholas” (Orkiestra pod wezwaniem Świetego Mikołaja).

6Ksiega Ochrzczonych Rzymskokatolickiej Parafii, Archiwum Parafii Rzymskokatolickiej w Komańczy.

7The largest of these were: Komańcz (171), Brelików (111), Jankowce (65), Liszna (56), Ropienka Dolna (255), Stańkowa (159), Wolkowyja (75), Mokre (109 persons), Olchowce (95), and Zagórz (318) (Misiło 1993:410-2, 417-9).

8In February 1946 the latter group organized itself politically and filed two petitions (sent to His Highest Authority the Marshall of Poland) protesting against the military pressure put on the villagers to leave for the Ukraine (Misiło 1999:45-49).


