

FORMER DEPARTMENT 'RESILIENCE AND TRANSFORMATION IN EURASIA'

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR EMERITUS

CHRIS HANN

CLOSING DOWN: REFLECTIONS ON THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL LIFE COURSE (REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES, 2023-2025)

INTRODUCTION

I retired in August 2021 and have lived in Cambridge (UK) since the end of that year. Liberation from the leadership of research groups and administrative responsibilities has been exhilarating. I have avoided large conferences and intercontinental flights. I am no longer an active Fellow at Corpus Christi College. Some of the space freed up has been filled by my daughter's twins (born one month before my retirement). But I have also managed to deposit historic ethnographic materials in various archives and to remain scientifically active in numerous ways: as an author, editor, and even as a fieldworker. In addition, despite the title of this report (and sometimes contrary to best intentions), new vistas in the historical social sciences have continued to pop up. In short, I believe I have fulfilled the expectations of an "active" emeritus, i.e. one to whom his former employer continues to extend generous support.

PUBLICATIONS

The major publications in this review period were the two edited volumes which appeared in 2024, both in book series associated with the department I used to head. These emerged from initiatives taken before my 2021 retirement. *One Hundred Years of Argonauts* was published as Volume 13 in the Berghahn series Max Planck Studies in Anthropology and Economy, established in 2015 by Stephen Gudeman and myself.¹ Co-edited with Deborah James of the London School of Economics, this volume contains the papers presented at a workshop in London in July 2022 to mark the centenary of Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, his first monograph on the Trobriand Islanders. This work has had a lasting impact on many branches of anthropology, economic anthropology in particular. It is still widely perceived as inaugurating a paradigm shift in theory and method, and the launching of a unique British school. Contributors to the book assess such claims and develop various themes on the basis of materials from contemporary Oceania and elsewhere. Some chapters scrutinize the persona of Malinowski and the writing of this particular work. Book launches were organized at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow (Malinowski's alma mater and birthplace)² and at the London School of Economics (where he was the first Professor of Social Anthropology and chaired a famous seminar in the inter-war decades). An affordable paperback edition was published in Spring 2025. Thanks to the generosity of the current directors of the Halle institute, all thirteen volumes in our Berghahn series are now available via Open Access: <https://www.berghahnbooks.com/series/max-planck>

¹ This series continues. Potential contributors are encouraged to follow the guidelines supplied at the publisher's website (and/or to consult Stephen Gudeman and myself directly).
² This launch took the form of a double celebration. It was organized by Professor Grażyna Kubica, who was a contributor to our volume and co-editor of another rich collection of studies devoted to Bronislaw Malinowski and his oeuvre, published simultaneously. See Kubica and Brzeziński (2024).

The book launch dedicated to two volumes about Bronislaw Malinowski



In both volumes, the life and work of Bronislaw Malinowski have been analysed and reinterpreted in relation to contemporary orientations in the social sciences and humanities. The chapters in the volumes reveal new interpretations of Malinowski's work, highlighting what relevance it may have in the 21st century.

Both volumes were published to celebrate the centenary of the publication of *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, one of the books that has had the greatest impact on the development of anthropology and sociology.

At the meeting, the editors will discuss their work on the volumes, and guest speakers will share insights into their content.

We will also show a fragment of Peter Skalnik's film "Tracing Malinowski in Kiriwina" (1989).

Invitation by:
Prof. Chris Hann, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Director Emeritus)
Prof. Grażyna Kubica-Heller, Institute of Sociology of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow
Dr hab. Dariusz Brzeziński, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences

Institute of Sociology, 52 Grodzka Street | Reading Room 63, 1st floor
30th September 2024 | 7:00 pm

Patrons:
Institute of Sociology, Jagiellonian University, Polish Academy of Sciences, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology



Chris Hann speaking at the launch event for *One Hundred Years of Argonauts*, Institute of Sociology, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, 30th September 2024. From the left, Dariusz Brzeziński, Grażyna Kubica, Aleksandar Bošković (Discussant) and Chris Hann. (Photo by Olga Maciejewska)

Jack Goody between Social Anthropology and World History was also published in 2024, as the fiftieth and final volume of the department's series with Lit Verlag, *Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia*. Our institute's debt to Goody is very great. It is both intellectual and institutional, in the sense that he played a significant role in our establishment in the 1990s. The volume was co-edited with Han F. Vermeulen, a Research Associate of the institute, best known for his work on the roots of anthropology/ethnology in the German Enlightenment. It opens with an unpublished lecture by Goody himself, given during a visit to Halle in 2004. Part Two consists of twelve Goody Lectures delivered at the MPI between 2011 and 2022, the last of which was simultaneously my own valedictory lecture. Drawing on a series of personal encounters with colonial situations, my lecture consisted largely of sceptical reflections on recent over-extensions of the concept of decolonization and their implications for theory and method (Hann 2024a). The volume closes with appreciations and evaluations of Goody's work by the editors; and with a comprehensive bibliography compiled by Han F. Vermeulen. In January-February 2025, it was presented to audiences at the MPI in Halle and at St John's College, Cambridge.

Over more than twenty years, this series has been a prime outlet for research undertaken in the department. It embodies our history, from the early projects on the "postsocialist agrarian question" and the "post-socialist religion question" to a series of monographs deriving from our ERC project, "Realising Eurasia." Half of the volumes published were doctoral dissertations, most of them defended at the Martin Luther University in Halle and then revised for publication in the light of examiners' reports and advice. The other half included monographs by more senior anthropologists and a range of collective publications, often deriving from workshops at the institute or conference panels. Five were devoted to the history of anthropology in different regions of Eastern Europe and the Russian/Soviet Empire. All fifty volumes of the series, with its distinctive logo depicting the salt crystal that has long been the symbol of the city of Halle, are now available via Open Access: <https://lit-verlag.de/produkt-kategorie/reihen/halles/>



Chris Hann and Han F. Vermeulen (eds.)

JACK GOODY BETWEEN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND WORLD HISTORY

LIT Verlag 2024

HSAE Volume 50

A giant of British social anthropology, Jack Goody (1919–2015) laboured for sixty years to transcend the view that anthropology was the study of "other cultures". He wanted to move it in the direction of a more sociological, postcolonial, comparative social science. The most important precondition for this science was the freeing of world history from centuries of Eurocentric bias. From his base in Cambridge, Goody's influence and inspiration spread out internationally. In Germany, as a long-term adviser to the Max Planck Society, he played a key role in the establishment of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Saale) in 1999. This volume presents twelve Goody Lectures delivered in Halle between 2011 and 2022, together with an unpublished lecture given in 2004 by Goody himself and biographical and bibliographical essays by the editors.

BOOK LAUNCH

19 FEB 2025

6.00pm–7.30pm

This volume celebrates his life and work of Jack Goody, who was admitted to St John's College in 1938 to read English and became Fellow in Social Anthropology in 1961. He was William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology between 1973 and his retirement in 1984.

ORGANISERS: Chris Hann and Helen Watson

LOCATION: Old Music Room, St John's College

Among my other publications, three substantial journal articles and two book chapters (one in Hungarian, Hann 2025a) were based on recent fieldwork in and around Kiskunhalas, south-central Hungary. The orientation of these pieces remained essentially Polyanian but I continued to expand both theoretical interests (e.g. to include ecology and taxation, Hann 2023a and 2024b) and ethnographic coverage (e.g. to include local Gypsies, Hann 2024c). My general goal in ongoing field research in Hungary is to investigate the links between populism (or "illiberal democracy" in the terminology of Viktor Orbán), the domination of the market principle (in Polanyi's sense), and new forms of interventionist (and corrupt) governance.

I have never undertaken fieldwork in Ukraine. My excuse for publishing papers and op-eds on the war that began with the Russian invasion in February 2022 is that I am less ignorant and naïve than most other commentators I read – in academic journals as well as in mainstream media, not to mention our politicians (Hann 2023b; 2024d; 2025b). Of course, the violence did not begin in 2022. The history is complex and the topic raises numerous theoretical and ethical issues. I outlined my position (starting from the Weberian insistence on separating the "vocation" of the scientist from that of the politician) in a keynote lecture delivered at Vilnius University in June 2022 (Hann 2024e). On the larger political questions, I continue to argue that fundamental definitions of (national) sovereignty need to take account of anthropological knowledge concerning peoplehood and the tolerance of diversity. For several decades, western policies toward Russia were driven by hubris (Haslam 2024). Encouragement and support for those sections of Ukraine's political classes determined to yank their country into the western "liberal" orbit (NATO as well as the EU) were irresponsible.



Chris Hann (left) with Berit Eckert (series manager) and Veit D. Hopf (publisher) at the launch of the last volume of the series *Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia*. Halle, January 2025. (Photo by Han F. Vermeulen (co-editor)).

However, for the first time in over four decades of writing about eastern European affairs, my efforts to publish evidence-based arguments in English-language publications have been hampered by censorship.³

Ukraine itself has paid the highest price, in terms of citizens killed and property destroyed. But the consequences reach much further. The admission of an emphatically ethno-nationalist Ukraine to the EU, already experiencing deep crisis in its governmental institutions, will weaken its coherence still further. Meanwhile the rhetoric of “unprovoked invasion” is clearly false, a mystification, along with the sacralization of “sovereignty” (Hann 2023b; 2025c). The stance taken by the western European establishment is incompatible with the political realities of a multipolar world – and also with the ethical foundations of anthropological research, since Ukraine is a nationalizing state that has been trampling upon the human rights of individuals and communities for many years. Anthropologists report from the grass roots (as I have done in my blogs about public opinion in Poland and Hungary, Hann 2024f, 2025d). On the basis of historical as well as contemporary analysis, they may also evaluate and critique the actions of both internal and external powerholders, especially when these lead to catastrophic violence. This war has intensified nationalism on both sides. It has strengthened the most deplorable elements in Russia’s political culture and set back the causes of Mikhail Gorbachev’s “common European homeland” and of freedom itself, by which I mean substantive democratization and tolerant pluralism in multi-ethnic polities, by a generation at least.

Other publications included two articles touching on China, one contrasting “imaginaries” of two very different Muslim minorities within the present state (Hann 2023c) and the other considering China “imagined” as a component of a Eurasian landmass with reference to the long-term history of Jack Goody and the civilizational analysis of Jóhann Árnason (Hann 2025e). In addition to Goody, I have also published on the legacy of his successor in Cambridge Ernest Gellner (the occasion being the centenary of his birth in December 2025) (Hann 2025f). In the context of ongoing concerns with hierarchies of knowledge in the discipline, further arguments based on the accomplishments of a realist, non-imperialist, comparative social science as practised by scholars such as Goody and Gellner in the last century will be presented at the July 2026 conference of the European Association for Social Anthropology in Poznań.

In the present review period I have also prepared several contributions to newsletters, book reviews, recollections of teachers, and obituaries.

³ Some of my contributions have attracted critical attention in the region. When I pointed out that many Polish citizens did not share their own government’s unconditional support for the government in Kyiv (Hann 2024f), a right-wing newspaper in Warsaw ran a headline proclaiming that a “German scholar” was promoting illusionary divisions. The “shocking” story was quickly dropped, perhaps because the editors, having realised the accuracy of my analysis, did not wish to give it further publicity. See: <https://wpolityce.pl/swiat/710502-szokujacy-tekst-niemieckiego-naukowca-o-podkarpaciu>

OTHER ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

Though I continue to take an interest in the programmes and activities of the Max Planck Society and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, I rarely attend meetings. Nor do I participate in any Advisory Boards, or help Foundations to allocate their grants, or play an active role in the management of journals. I no longer supervise students and I have examined only one doctoral thesis in this review period (that of Márk Vangel at the University of Pécs, whose project was supported in an earlier phase by our *Visegrád Anthropologists’ Network*). I have cut back considerably on international conference participation but accepted invitations to lecture, read papers and/or serve as a discussant and/or presenter at several meetings in Cambridge and also in Central Europe (Cracow, Luzern, Olomouc, Pécs and Warsaw). At the “Building Bridges” conference of Academia Europea in October 2025 in Barcelona I tried to demonstrate the importance of anthropological research for understanding political, economic and ecological crises – and explaining their interconnections. I have served on a professorial appointment committee and assisted various national and international bodies in peer reviewing, while tending to define my fields of competence ever more narrowly. In summer 2024, as part of a far-ranging evaluation of the Hungarian research network HUNREN, I participated in site visits to a dozen institutes in the humanities and the social sciences. In 2024 and 2025 I chaired the panel of the Hungarian National Research Development and Innovation Office responsible for recommending research grants in the humanities (including ethnology/anthropology). In September 2025 I was elected a Trustee of the Royal Anthropological Institute.



Formal admission of Chris Hann to the Fellowship of the Learned Society of Wales by its President, Professor Hywel Thomas. (Cardiff, May 2023, photo courtesy of the LSW)

ON REVISITING OLD FIELD SITES

Revisiting long-established field sites has been a source of great satisfaction in recent years. This is inevitably mingled with sadness as many good friends from the original research are now deceased. I have taken many photographs of gravestones. But those who remain are generally glad to recall bygone days, and to discuss how the world has changed since we last met. Returning to the east Black Sea coast in May-June 2023, more than forty years after beginning to study the impact of tea production on a previously very poor region of Türkiye, brought many new insights.⁴ The town of Rize has morphed into a city, now endowed with a university named after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose family hails from here. It was good to learn that our work (Bellér-Hann and Hann 2000) is known and taught by local social scientists.⁵



Election poster in Rize: President Erdoğan together with the candidates of his party in the parliamentary election. (Photo by Chris Hann, May 2023)

Like most of this region, Rize and its hinterland are predominantly conservative, pious and nationalist, though Erdoğan's party suffered setbacks in the elections that coincided with our visit. Further east, toward the border with Georgia, the secular ideals of Kemalism are vigorously upheld and this diversity is born out in electoral results (Hann 2023d). We found that NGOs promoting the causes of nature conservation and ethnic diversity are tolerated. Tea remains the backbone of the regional economy but other sectors have expanded, including tourism. Banks and cash machines are ubiquitous.

Revisits raise matters of theoretical interest for anthropologists. A common criticism of the school established by Malinowski is that his functionalist approach offers no help in grasping the dynamics of history. A talented fieldworker might collect interesting data to write up for his/her PhD, but this can never be more than a "snapshot". How could such a fieldworker write authoritatively about changes in societal institutions, or even about life courses playing out in the domestic domain? Of course, the interaction with a retired professor who arrives in a brand-new hired car is very different from the encounter with a young student or postdoc. The latter can play the cards of ignorance, naivety and linguistic inadequacy to encourage interlocutors to divulge more than they perhaps really want to (often much more than the student can digest). But the senior citizen also has a few cards at his disposal. For example, when the conversation in provincial Türkiye touches on aspects of governance under President Erdoğan, he can suggest comparisons with the crisis of the early 1980s, of which his recall is as good as that of any local. In short, quite apart from the pleasure to be found in sharing photographs of the grandchildren between good friends, returning to an old field site can both open up rich new lines of enquiry into contemporary social dynamics and deepen understanding of the direction of long-term historical change.

However, revisits do not solve the basic methodological problem. Theses have to be submitted, books and journal articles published, in order to build an anthropological career. There is a tension (or perhaps an elective affinity) between anthropological methodology and the structure of the academic life course. No science can allow its practitioners 30 or 40 years to monitor and reflect before results are published (however desirable this might be in certain other subjects as well). Malinowski never went back to the Trobriand Islands. But his student Raymond Firth did carry out a restudy of Tikopia decades later, which complemented the celebrated original ethnography (Firth 1959). Since then, many others have done the same, including Paul Stirling, who went back two decades later to the Anatolian villages he had studied for his dissertation. Stirling only published one monograph (1965). But in shorter works he spent the rest of his life trying to puzzle out causalities via complex models of social change, including variables such as education, social

⁴ As in the other visits discussed in this report, I travelled with Ildikó Bellér-Hann, who has her own intimate knowledge of all of the sites discussed. My first project in the Rize region was focused on the introduction of tea as a cash crop and its impact on the lives of smallholder growers. It included several months in the village of Sümer in 1983 and a follow-up visit in 1988 (Hann 1990). Further fieldwork in 1992 was based in the town of Pazar and carried out jointly. By the time our monograph was published (Bellér-Hann and Hann 2000) we had already built up more time depth than most studies. Sojourns in the region in 2003 and 2013 were brief, as was the 2023 visit.

In May 2025 I reflected on the projects undertaken in the last century and explored connections with contemporary political economy in an extended interview with the editors of *New Perspectives on Turkey*. This has since been published: *Tea, Ethnography, and Social Change: a conversation with Chris Hann*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2025.10065>

⁵ Unlike the monographs on Hungary and Poland, which have not been available in translation, *Turkish Region* was quickly translated into Turkish (*İki Buçuk Yaprak Çay. Doğu Karadeniz'de Devlet, Piyasa, Kimlik*. Istanbul: İletişim, 2003; third printing, 2018).

knowledge and cognition. The baseline was always his original ethnography from 1949-50 (Stirling 1971; 1993).⁶

With this paean to so-called longitudinal studies I do not suggest displacing the Malinowskian model. Some of the deficiencies of the snapshot approach can be mitigated more easily nowadays thanks to vastly improved modes of transport and communication. Most projects do not have holistic ambition but concentrate on specific hypotheses for which it may not be of great importance to grasp the movement of the entire community through time. In many anthropological projects nowadays there is no localized community at all. Nonetheless, I think funding bodies should look favorably on applications to carry out restudies: they provide value for money! It is both scientifically and economically rational for employers such as the Max Planck Institute to encourage their senior staff (including emeriti!) to return to the places they already know well. Junior researchers typically spend extended periods in the field to learn local languages and establish the base on which they will draw throughout their careers. Older researchers often find it possible and more practical to pay shorter visits. Brief trips such as my recent visits build upon a cumulative knowledge base. In addition to new scholarly contributions, perhaps correcting some aspects of earlier work, the anthropologist who has followed a local community over decades is well qualified to offer insights from that perspective into current affairs at national and international levels. Op-ed contributions are not to be confused with scholarship; but reporting on current conflicts in the light of long-term ethnography and knowledge of regional history may be a valuable corrective to the simplifying accounts of foreign journalists who seldom venture outside the capital city.

These issues struck me again a year later during a visit to Poland. Short stays in Cracow and Warsaw revealed amazing transformations since I lived in these cities while learning Polish in 1978-81. Compared to the Türkiye trip, I experienced a different sense of closure during the week I spent re-visiting old field sites in Southeast Poland in late September 2024. My monograph of the village of Wisłok Wielki (Hann 1985; see also Hann 2016) was based largely on fieldnotes, in the Malinowskian tradition. I also consulted historical sources and wrote a chapter on the history of the settlement (deep in the Carpathians, adjacent to the border with Slovakia and not far from what is now the border to Ukraine). The

⁶ On Stirling, see Hann 2023e. Other forms of long-term engagement are also possible. Of particular interest on the east Black Sea coast is the work of Michael Meeker, who did fieldwork in Of in the mid-1960s. His dissertation at the University of Chicago was an investigation of marriage patterns, which he chose not to publish. In the new century, without revisiting the town, Meeker felt ready to publish a historical study that went far beyond “snapshot” ethnography. His roman fleuve (as it was described by one early reader) *A Nation of Empire* explored the emergence of the modern Turkish republic from the Ottoman Empire by focusing on continuities in modes of governance at the local level (Meeker 2002).

multi-ethnic, multi-religious character of this corner of Poland was the scene of bitter fighting during the First World War between Russia and Austria-Hungary. A generation later, the region was changed forever by the Second World War and its aftermath. In the upper valley of the Wisłok river, the indigenous east Slav population was deported either to Ukraine (in 1945) or to remote regions within Poland that had previously belonged to Germany (in 1947). This was a case of ethnic cleansing, unlike anything I have encountered in any other field site. Repression continued in the socialist decades: Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was interned in a nearby monastery in 1955-56, and leaders of *Solidarity* in another neighbouring settlement in 1981-2, shortly after my original fieldwork was completed.

Returning for the first time in many years, I was struck by continuities. The state farms have been privatized but production has not increased in the brave new world of European Union agricultural subsidies. Cars have become plentiful – and they are needed because, although the residents of Wisłok Wielki now have their own Roman Catholic parish, they no longer have a shop in their village. They have to drive over 30 kilometres to find a supermarket (one option unavailable to them in earlier decades is across the border in Slovakia) and a cash machine (there used to be one in neighbouring Komańcza but it disappeared following the collapse of the regional cooperative bank).



The cemetery of the destroyed cerkiew in Upper Wisłok. (Photo by Chris Hann, September 2024)

Both in the countryside and in the stagnating market towns I found the tragic history of violence and genocide much more visible in public space than it had been in socialist decades. The military cemeteries of the First World War have been restored and are now visited by tourists. Jews and Ukrainians were not the only victims of the ethnic cleansing of the 1940s: I learned for the first time that the Roma minority of Komańcza was liquidated in 1943. The cemetery in Upper Wisłok, adjacent to a Greek Catholic church (*cerkiew*) destroyed by state farm workers in the 1950s, is still a desolate tangle of metal crosses and gravestones amidst mounds of



An icon of Saint Onufry in the parish church of Wistok Wielki.
(Photo by Chris Hann, September 2024)

earth; but since the end of socialist rule, a few families have again buried their dead here. In the lower village, ethnic Poles use the old wooden church of Saint Onufry and pray to eastern icons (including that of the original patron). The colonists have not changed the name of the church but they have established their own cemetery, separate from the old graves of the indigenous Greek Catholics.

Of course, ethnic Poles also suffered heavy losses, in this Carpathian region as throughout the country. Commemoration of Poland's tragedies (for example, the murder of thousands of army officers by the Soviets in distant Katyn) dominates the contemporary public sphere. Even tiny settlements now have sparkling new Roman Catholic shrines and churches (*kościóły*), while hundreds of Greek Catholic and Orthodox *cerkwie* have been lost (though efforts are now being made to restore those that remain and the exceptionally impressive edifice at nearby Turzańsk now enjoys UNESCO recognition). Anti-Ukrainian sentiment is still deeply engrained in many families. Poles who lost family members due to the violence of Ukrainian nationalists tend not to support their government's pro-Ukrainian policies since the Russian invasion of February 2022 (Hann 2024f).

Given this dramatic backcloth, I wondered in 2024 (with war in neighbouring Ukraine raging) how I had been able forty-five years earlier to write a basically presentist account about how new colonists in the upper Wisłok valley were struggling to make a success of small-scale farming in socialist con-

ditions. Their goal was to create a new community that was Polish and Roman Catholic. The indigenous population had become a small minority by the 1970s (by 2024 only one family remained). My monograph included a few fragments to illustrate how local Ukrainians recalled the tragic events that had taken place during their lifetimes. I discussed ethnic relations as I observed them in socialist conditions. But I had nothing to say about the past of the Polish settlers and I drew no general conclusions concerning peoplehood and governance in this region at the heart of Europe. This cannot be theorized simplistically in terms of the triumph of the nation-state at the expense of previously distinct "cultures": historically and today, Radcliffe-Brown's concepts of "social structure" and "social field" are superior to the Malinowskian imagination of a world consisting of bounded cultures (see Radcliffe-Brown 1940; see also Niehaus 2024).

On the other side of the mountains, Hungary also experienced strong nationalizing policies in the first half of the twentieth century. In the settlement of Tázlár, I found that perhaps one half of the population had changed their surnames from the original German or Slovak to a name that sounded more Magyar. Here too the past is nowadays more conspicuous in the public sphere than it was in socialist times (especially when it comes to commemorating the victims of Soviet repression). One of my excuses for focusing on the present in my 1970s research was the fact that most villagers themselves were concerned with the present and the immediate future: with economic prosperity and modernization. The Hungarian case is a very different one for me because I have revisited the village of my first field research very frequently for almost half a century now. In the 2020s I can walk unannounced into the mayor's office for an informal update on his most recent initiatives, or details of the houses currently up for sale, or the results of local elections. I can then proceed to call on my closest friends for accounts that sometimes deviate significantly from those of their mayor. This procedure may not satisfy purists in quantitative methods, but I have never claimed that Tázlár was statistically representative in any way. Many of my conversations are personal in nature, with no obvious research dividend. But anthropological antennae are never entirely absent. With the "illiberal democracy" of Viktor Orbán in the news constantly and the subject of countless academic studies, insights at the micro-level of society complement the discourses at other levels. For example, in earlier work I have demonstrated that in Tázlár "public work" (workfare) is not necessarily perceived as degrading or exploitative, though this is almost taken for granted in much of the social science literature (Hann 2018).

There is no affection for Vladimir Putin in rural Hungary. A new memorial plaque was recently installed in Tázlár's central park, listing the names of villagers deported to labour camps in the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War (see



New memorial commemorating Tázlár villagers taken as political prisoners and deported to labour camps by Soviet forces in 1944–45. (Photo by Chris Hann, August 2023)

photo). Some of them never returned. But Ukrainian nationalists fighting against Russia are not looked upon favourably either. The dumping of Ukrainian agricultural products (of uncertain quality) on EU markets is perceived as a threat to the livelihoods of Hungarian farmers (Hann 2025c).

Occasionally I take the initiative by asking more focused questions. For example, in the years after the Halle department had a series of projects on religion after socialism, I probed the transfer of the village school into the hands of the Roman Catholic Church. It might have been supposed that this move reflected the intensification of popular religiosity in a country whose secular leaders nowadays make much of the nation's Christian heritage. But I found that, irrespective of their religious commitments, in Tázlár church ownership of the village school was welcomed by most interlocutors as a pragmatic security against the threat of closure (Hann 2015).

When the village context in Tázlár began to seem too small, I redirected my attention to the market town of Kiskunhalas. Like small towns in Türkiye and Poland, it has been bleeding population in recent decades. Here too, regional savings banks collapsed due to ineffective postsocialist regulation; but the gap has been filled by Austrian and German-owned banks, so there is no shortage of cash machines in provincial Hungary; even Tázlár has one. I was able to conduct enquiries into family businesses and thereby to connect with the main empirical focus of my European Research Council grant (REALEUR-ASIA, 2014-2020; Hann 2024b is a product of this work). The time spent in Kiskunhalas has been productive in many other ways as well, thanks in large part to the support I have received from Aurél Szakál, director of the town's museum.

Whereas the trips to Poland and Türkiye brought a sense of closure (in different forms), this is hardly possible in the case of Hungary. I shall continue to visit, though the grounds for classifying my visits as fieldwork are likely to become ever weaker. Having begun with a village study and then moved on to investigate a market town, I should like in future to assess the transformations of half a century on a larger scale using different methods. One possibility is to investigate the entire Danube-Tisza interfluve, on which a great deal has already been written in Hungarian. Or perhaps the entire Carpathian basin. Or perhaps "the Danubian lands", from the river's source in Central Europe to its delta in the Black Sea. Irrespective of the scale I choose, I shall need to get to grips with rich historical literatures and connect them to the successive phases of political and economic transformation I have witnessed as an ethnographer. I shall also need to probe connections to larger debates, e.g. about socialism.

Socialism can be defined in a great variety of ways. For some, including many who lived in the so-called People's Democracies of Eastern Europe before 1990, it is a synonym for communism; both terms are commonly used pejoratively. In contrast, for Jack Goody socialism can be stretched to include an egalitarian, redistributive impulse found in many African societies, where it takes the form of sorcery accusations, and also the democratic welfare states of western Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, a form termed by Goody "electoral socialism" (Goody 2003). I prefer to retain the Marxist emphasis on the means of production.



Chris Hann pictured with old friends István and Anna Gulyás in Tázlár, circa 2003 (photographer unknown; the name of this family was formerly Gutgesell, but it was magyarized to Gulyás in the 1940s).

Drastic interventions in the first decade of Hungarian socialism brought the land and capital equipment into public ownership or control (often in the guise of involuntary cooperatives). By the mid-1970s, it was not difficult to identify backsliding: some land was to all intents and purposes privately held and farmed, and some poorer villagers toiled as day labourers for their wealthy neighbours at harvest time. One contentious issue (which I witnessed daily in the yard of the house where I lived) was whether tractors that would otherwise be scrapped by a socialist institution might be purchased and restored for use by private entrepreneurs. After some hesitation, it was decided that this measure would facilitate production in the private sector, and it was allowed. My neighbour went on to purchase a combine harvester a few years later and to become a very wealthy man, even before the collapse of the socialist regime at the end of the 1980s. Despite these trends, strict limits on the private employment of labour and on land ownership (the primary “fictitious commodities” of Karl Polanyi) remained in place until their abolition in the new capitalist market economy.



This postsocialist monument in the village park commemorates the 1956 revolution; the flags were placed by schoolchildren on the eve of the holiday to mark its 69th anniversary. (Photo by Chris Hann, October 2025)

One hypothesis that I should like to investigate would be that the distinctive relations of production and property which prevailed in the socialist decades were, despite their imperfect implementation and economic contradictions, experienced as *morally* superior to those of both earlier and later epochs; and this in spite of all the ethical problems associated with socialism almost everywhere, from the denunciation of neighbours and co-workers to the repression of entire classes and peoples.

Perhaps the attempts to refashion Marxist-Leninist socialism in Hungary after 1956, though they did not last, carry deeper lessons for humanity.

This hypothesis emerges from my own subjective memories and perhaps also from the contingent fact that Hungary was the scene of my first field research. As some of my interlocutors who take a less charitable view of the “Kádár system” like to point out, this took place in the 1970s, a decade when the mood of the population was more positive than it had been before and would be a few years later. When considering the ethical dimension, it is worth noting that, unlike the Orbán system of the new century, the supreme leader in the Kádár system was a modest man who lived puritanically and set norms that other power holders were compelled to respect. Certainly the regime was rejected when democratic elections were held in 1990. But the reformed communist party, now calling itself the Hungarian Socialist Party, won decisive victories at the polls in 1994, and again in the new century (2002 and 2006). Only after it had embraced the principles of neoliberal management and privatization did the party’s support in the population collapse.

In addition to making last visits to field sites, closure also means rummaging in dusty boxes and the classification of many kinds of documents and images. In Hungary, Poland and Türkiye I have deposited data, including hundreds of photographs dating back to the 1970s, in locations where they will be accessible to future researchers.⁷ In the Hungarian case, Aurél Szakál and I are cooperating in the production of a volume that will contain about 300 black and white photographs taken in Tázlár in 1976-7 (with a lengthy introduction in Hungarian and summaries in English, French and German). Intended for the general public as well as academic specialists in rural change, this book will be published locally (with the help of sponsors) in 2026 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of my arrival in this village.

⁷ Materials pertaining to my fieldwork in the village of Tázlár in the socialist era have been deposited at the Thorma János Múzeum in Kiskunhalas. I am grateful to its former Director Aurél Szakál for expediting this, and to his successor Kocsisné Varga Zsuzsanna for her invitation to contribute to the museum’s recent Yearbook (Hann 2025a).

In Poland, following an invitation from Professor Marcin Brocki, photographs, publications and other materials deriving from my work in Wisłok Wielki from 1979 were deposited in the archive maintained by the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Jagiellonian University, Cracow.

In the case of Türkiye, Ildikó Bellér-Hann and I have been fortunate to establish cooperation with Özlem Şendeniz and her colleagues at GOLA in Fındıklı. In Spring 2026 this NGO is planning an exhibition to document the impact of the tea industry on Rize province, with the help of my early photographs. All photographs and slides worth preserving, spanning four decades, will find a permanent home with GOLA. A digital copy will be available at Taksim Atatürk Library (Istanbul). Copies will also be offered to the Royal Anthropological Institute in London (Turkey is a particular focus of interest of the director, David Shankland) and to the repository of the British Institute at Ankara.



Chris Hann and Ildikó Bellér-Hann during a joint presentation about the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, 18th October 2024, University of Pécs. (Photo by Gábor Vargyas)

A SPECIAL CASE

It is one thing to close down long-term field research due to the inevitabilities of one's own life course. Having one's field site closed off by the state is something quite different. Ildikó Bellér-Hann and I would very much like to revisit a fourth region where we have conducted research intermittently since 1986 (all of the projects discussed in this report were begun in the 1970s and 1980s). We had hoped to be able to follow up on the detailed local census we took in two mountain communities of Qumul province in 2007, in order to probe urban migration patterns and new forms of differentiation in the villages. But the prospects of obtaining permission for an unmonitored field visit to the Uyghurs of rural Xinjiang are gloomy. Rural Uyghur society has been sealed off for many years, to researchers who are citizens of China as well as to foreigners. The book we compiled on the basis of earlier papers in 2020 is therefore likely to be our last publication on this region (Bellér-Hann and Hann 2020). Research cooperation with the People's Republic of China has been a sensitive subject at the highest levels of the Max Planck Society (and other organizations) for many years. The research in question usually falls in some field of natural science and technology. The case of the social anthropologist differs because unimpeded access to the field remains the *sine qua non* of the discipline. There is nothing to be gained from scientific diplomacy in the capital city when one's key research partners in a distant province continue to experience severe sanctions. Many of our friends and colleagues, including one who studied for his doctorate at our institute, have been incarcerated. The internationally renowned folklorist Rahile Dawut, who visited Halle in 2011, has been imprisoned on

trumped-up charges since 2017. Until she regains her freedom and resumes her career as a professor at Xinjiang University, anthropological research in China is out of the question for us.

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