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ANTHROPOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION

From Europe to Asia and Back

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR CHRIS HANN

Cover image: Lenin mural, House of Culture, Temirtau, Kazakhstan (2014). Photo by Tommaso Trevisani. Cover design by Katy Saunders.

Introduction

Juraj Buzalka and Agnieszka Pasieka

It has been more than thirty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communist regimes in numerous countries. A watershed moment, the developments in 1989 and thereafter were—quite unsurprisingly—studied and analysed by numerous scholars. Much of this research had a very practical orientation, as it aimed at providing tools for "dealing" with socio-political transformation and addressing the issues of apparent change. For socio-cultural anthropologists, however, ethnographic studies conducted in the period of post-socialist transformation meant both an engagement with issues that have long been at the heart of the discipline and an opportunity to shed a new light on those matters. These were, among others, questions about the relation between morality and other spheres of social life; the everyday operation of political and economic institutions; people's agency and their ways of dealing with social changes; grassroots political and civic activism, as well as the manifold continuities and validity of a *longue-durée* approach to the post-socialist transformation, sharply contrasting with the emphasis on dramatic rupture brought by the 1989 transition.

In short, the anthropological investigations of the micro-level transformations provided a perspective on an alternative model of modernity, different from the capitalist one that had dominated the scholarship for decades. It is a perspective that continues to inspire comparative research. To name but a few recent examples, the societal reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic, responses to the refugee crisis and the rise of right-wing populism in Eastern Europe so tragically materialised in Putin's Russia's aggression on Ukraine can be productively analysed in the broader context of post-socialist transformation. Questions of "capitalism without liberalism" (as

emblematically developed in China) and the dynamics of neoliberal politics after state socialism open space for a productive discussion about the deeper layers of transformations of former state-socialist societies. Yet another example is the socio-religious landscape: religions have re-emerged as powerful public actors in the aftermath of one-party states that themselves often appeared as religious regimes in their own right. The religious-national conflicts in the region have been explained as having their own socialist, as well as post-socialist, trajectories.

This volume offers a social anthropological perspective on the vast region that Professor Chris Hann, prominent figure in the research and theorisation of post-socialism, designates as Eurasia. Director for over two decades at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (MPISA) in Halle/Saale, Germany, Professor Hann supported and supervised several generations of socio-cultural anthropologists carrying out fieldwork in numerous countries across Eurasia. Building upon Chris Hann's life-long, fieldwork-based familiarity with regions as different as Central and Eastern Europe, Turkey, and the Chinese north-west, this collection of essays represents a joint effort by his former doctoral students to reflect upon his work in light of their own. Since the establishment of the MPISA in the late 1990s, doctoral training has been a fundamental aspect of the advancement of its research agenda. Thanks to the opportunities for PhD students to conduct long-term fieldwork and develop their work in conversation with senior researchers, whether fellows of the institute or prominent visiting scholars, a visible generation of specialists in former state-socialist countries has formed. After graduating, they have found employment in different academic settings in Europe and North America, successfully carrying on the legacy of a particular—ethnographic, comparative and historically informed—perspective on complex transformations within and beyond the post-socialist realms. Without Chris Hann's ambitious plan and tenacious work, MPISA's contribution to the academic world would not have had the same impact on academic discussions.

This book *is not* a collection of conference papers. It aims at engaging with enduring questions in Chris Hann's work, identifying those issues which were at once most prominent in his scholarship, and which have had the biggest impact on his students' work and their scholarly trajectories. This book thus ought to be seen as a multivocal conversation between the mentor, his students, and numerous other scholars who

have critically engaged with his work. Each author takes Hann's ideas as the starting point of his or her consideration, and then polemically expands them through their own ethnographic insights. Indeed, the volume's biggest strength is the fact that all of the contributors draw on long-term ethnographic research, providing a novel perspective on the post-socialist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the former Soviet Union, as well as globally. The volume thus addresses political, economic and religious questions provoked by the thirty-year anniversary of the 1989 revolution, illustrating the inter-disciplinary and inter-generational dialogue generated by the study of post-socialist transformation, productively expanded and inspired by Chris Hann's work.

In the following, we describe in more detail the themes we have chosen for this "conversation" and briefly summarise the structure of the volume. Rather than trying to systematically cover Hann's impressive scholarship—something our senior colleagues have already successfully attempted in another volume (Kaneff and Endres 2021)—our aim has been to engage with those topics we find most appropriate for telling a story about *scholars*, *scholarship* and *mentoring*. We have singled out a few important ideas Hann proposed along the years, the focus on which allows us to demonstrate not only some *final* "products"—be it articles, book chapters or new concepts—but products in the *making:* a story of interactions, exchanges, and inspirations that led to the final works. For this purpose, we have decided to foreground two of Hann's contributions, his 2011 Erfurt lecture "Eastern Christianity and Western Social Theory" and a relatively recent (2018) article "Moral(ity and) Economy. Work, Workfare, and Fairness in Provincial Hungary," relating them to Hann's broader vision of an anthropology of transformation in Eurasia.

Key Terms, or: The Title of the Volume Explained

At a time when disciplinary canons are being reconsidered and the boundaries between disciplines contested, it is important to ask: what do we understand by **"anthropology"**? At the MPI for Social and Cultural Anthropology, the answer to this question has been rather straightforward. Hann's conviction of the value of long-term ethnographic fieldwork can be said to be the core *creed* transmitted

to generations of his students. This academic ethos grew from the empiricist tradition of British social anthropology and motivated his own long-term ethnographic studies in four countries (in Hungary, Poland, Turkey, and China). Hann kept returning to his various fieldsites over the years and, despite embarking on new projects, remained vividly interested in developments in the areas of which he had deep knowledge. Moreover, the quality of ethnographic material—that is, ethnography that gives insights into lived realities and which leads to new theoretical insights—has always been the key criterion through which he valued his students' work.

Hann's work has always been ethnographically grounded; "Moral(ity and) Economy" is a superb example of this approach. Drawing on field research in a Hungarian village he has known for over forty years, Hann critically engages with recent attempts to "expand" the concept of moral economy. The (over)emphasis on "tensions" and "contradictions" which supposedly characterise moral economies leads, in his view, to a downplaying of the economic dimension and ultimately weakens the very concept of "moral economy." Hann highlights instead long-term, collectively held values—such as the value of work as an object of moral sentiment—a "dimension" he was able to observe and theorise precisely due to his long-term engagement with a specific locality, ethnographic "revisits" and close contacts with several generations of inhabitants. Notably, the works he engages with to corroborate his arguments are likewise products of intense field research (e.g. Lampland 1995).

In arguing against the "lumpish" concept of moral economy, Hann suggests that it is unhelpful in grasping the post-socialist transformation. As mentioned above, he argues that in recent reiterations the concept has not made space for engaging with "embedded moral values" and especially the resilience of "work as value." These points well illustrate an approach Hann has persistently put forward and propagated— tracing "dominant values" through history and connecting them to their "concrete enactments" in social relations observed in the field.

The question of embeddedness—inspired by the seminal work of Karl Polanyi (Polanyi 1978[1944]), which Hann considers to be one of his key inspirations—leads to the second key term, "transformation." Hann's research experience in socialist countries made it possible for him to conduct a series of inspiring studies on complex, socio-political changes that have been taking place since the 1980s. Stressing the

social costs of transformations, Hann, like his fellow anthropologists, critically engaged with the teleological narrative on the transition from communism to liberal democracy (for an overview, see Hann, Humphrey and Verdery 2001). The common feature of anthropological studies of socialism and post-socialism has been their stress on the distinctive character of the socialist regime and the legacies of state-socialist and pre-socialist regimes for contemporary socio-political developments (Hann et al. 2001).

Hann et al.'s (2001) focus on economic transformation (with a special emphasis on the transition from socialist to capitalist economy) is of course but one of his engagements with the question of transformation. He has also written a series of highly inspiring works on religion, nationalism and ethnicity, demonstrating once again how an ethnographically grounded perspective and attention to history enables us to examine complex processes of collective identity formation and, indeed, social-political transformation (see Hann 1998; Hann 2000; Hann and Pelkmans 2009). His work on Eastern and Western Christianity (Hann and Goltz 2010) emphasised a long history of interactions, mutual influences and related "hybridisation" of religious traditions beyond nation-state borders. These observations allowed him to make a series of strong arguments against the reified concept of "culture," whether used in ethno-nationalist exclusionary discourses or the supposedly benign discourse of multiculturalism (see Hann 2002)

Moreover, his long-standing interest in the in-betweenness of Greek Catholics in CEE and Eastern Christianity more broadly led to another fundamental contribution to the study of transformation, namely an encouragement to rethink the genealogies of modernity. Hann's Erfurt lecture (2011) is a *tour de force* which exposes the ethnocentrism of social theory that constructs its vision of modernity in "Western" terms. In exemplifying this problem through scholarship on religion and the Protestant bias characterising the anthropology of Christianity, Hann demonstrates the ways in which this mode of theorising ends up portraying Eastern Christianity as non-modern and immutable. Importantly, and reflecting Hann's vision of anthropology mentioned above, his call to challenge this bias simultaneously indicates the need for a more thorough ethnographic engagement. Quite tellingly, the section of the lecture which best exposes a more complex understanding of Western and Eastern Christianity is titled "Enter the ethnographers".

In his Erfurt lecture, Hann refers to yet another scholar who, in addition to Polanyi, has been one of his most important sources of inspiration: Jack Goody. Hann draws on Goody's criticism of Weber's Eurocentric approach and his understanding of Eurasia. For Hann, as for Goody, the adoption of the term "Eurasia" is not only a way to challenge Western exclusivist conceptions of modernity and change, but also a means to highlight connections, interactions, and exchanges between Europe and Asia. In other words, the concept of Eurasia is an answer to an epistemological question: a commitment to understand the complexities of societies inhabiting the "supercontinent" through a focus on interconnections and commonalities (rather than taking as a point of departure demarcations and differences between the two continents). As such, this idea perfectly illustrates what lay at the heart of Hann's key contributions over the years, whether devoted to religion, populism, agrarian economy or ethnic identities. Hann developed his concept of Eurasia to go beyond Eurocentrism, which envisioned "Europe" as unique and distinct, and to provide normative frameworks and frames of comparison.

To sum up, Hann's critical engagement with the reified notions of culture and modernity, attention to history and emphasis on exchanges/interactions demonstrate his position among the scholars of (post-socialist) transformation as one who vehemently challenged the West/East binary. Fundamentally, this criticism, as well as his broader theory, is built from in-depth ethnographic studies; ethnographic observations—whether his own or those of scholars who inspired him—have always been the most fruitful sources of his theoretical and empirical engagements. It is an approach shared by the authors of this volume, as the short summary below demonstrates.

The book opens with a chapter by Davide Torsello, the first PhD graduate of Chris Hann after the opening of the MPI in Halle. Torsello argues, through examples from southern Italy and East Central Europe, that the complexity brought about by high social uncertainty and marginalisation requires actors to invest in forms of trust which can continuously and efficiently be re-negotiated and rendered impermanent. These forms not only include strategic resorts to trust and distrust, but also the blurring of the boundary between interpersonal and institutional trust.

Carolin Leutloff-Grandits links the question of property to the post-war transformation of Croatia and the ongoing ethno-nationalism under the post-socialist transformation. Inspired by Chris Hann´s conceptualisation of property contrasting with the dominant individualist private property preferences of the international actors, she discusses the housing property and explores in which way this housing property is embedded in forms of community and socialising which reach back to socialist and pre-socialist times, creating not only a roof over one's head, but identity and belonging, which are embedded into specific forms of livelihood, and social security, which is also closely linked to the workplace.

The chapter by Julie McBrien and Vlad Naumescu revisits the 'post-socialist religious question' twenty years later, reflecting on its theoretical import and contribution to broader debates on religion, modernity and social transformation. It draws on the comparative work produced by the MPISA research group on 'Religion and Civil Society' focused on the 'religious revivals' in CEE and Central Asia. The authors argue that while some of the trends identified by this group were ephemeral products of the 'transition period,' others proved more durable, like the thorny ethno-national-religious knot and its impact on regional, national and global politics. Moreover, they demonstrate that the Civil Religion Group's attempt to answer the post-socialist religious question proved that the post-socialist context was a laboratory for anthropological thought which still bears on contemporary issues.

Agata Ładykowska's chapter follows Hann's critical reflection on how religious ideas are being invoked to explain changes in societal organisation, at least since Weber (Hann 2012). Hann's preoccupation with the Eastern Christian perspective (e.g. Hann and Goltz 2010; Hann 2011; 2012) allowed for a critique of unidirectional models of modernity that was grounded in an interweaving of secularity, individualism and the spread of capitalism. His work paved the way for an anthropological search for alternative notions of modernity, secularity and identity at play, which has been Ładykowska's main research question.

The chapter by Tommaso Trevisani looks at the transformation of Uzbek society by investigating the changing nature of authoritarianism from a moral economy perspective. The focus of his analysis is on the relationship between informal economy and authoritarianism in

Uzbekistan. The chapter takes inspiration from Hann's (2018) approach to moral economy, in which the study of the transformation of social values across history figures prominently and it explicitly compares the Uzbekistan case study with his Hungarian case study.

Katerina Ivanova, who completed her PhD studies at MPI around the time of Hann´s official retirement, focuses on unemployment and the different values, meanings and morals associated with it in Zwickau, an industrial city in eastern Germany. In her approach, she follows Chris Hann's (2016: 7) recognition of "a moral dimension in the sense of a collective and systemic basis in long-term shared values", which captures both the dynamic nature of morality and economy, and the resilience of some long-term dominant values.

László Fosztó argues that our ability to understand and address xenophobia and anti-Gypsyism will be greatly enhanced if we look beyond legal definitions of human rights, without falling back on cultural explanations, or simply blaming racist attitudes. Addressing themes frequently discussed by Chris Hann, Fosztó shows how ethnic diversity is embedding economic relationships. Ethnicity, in his view, provides local modes for interaction which buffer local communities, reducing the impact of exclusionary political rhetoric and exacerbating xenophobia.

Juraj Buzalka´s chapter follows Chris Hann's long-term interest in peasants and their transformations. It complements Hann's perspective on the introduction of post-socialist liberalism in Hungary by presenting some arguments about socialist and post-socialist politics in Slovakia. Chris Hann has pointed to the consolidation of reactionary right-wing populism under the leadership of national bourgeoisie as a consequence of the introduction of free-market liberalism and the state's reduced provision of social welfare for the Hungarian population. However, the Slovak case shows that one ought to pay equal attention to the values represented in rural progressivism—a kind of autochthonous liberalism—as an important component of social and political emancipation, complementing reactionary post-peasant populism.

Agnieszka Pasieka's contribution engages with Hann's recent work on right-wing populism in Hungary by discussing the activism of a Polish "national socialist" movement. A discussion of young activists' views on the economy, Europe, the place and role of the nation-state is for her a point of departure for considering broader developments as

well as the role of anthropology in studying the far right and right-wing populism.

Edyta Roszko's chapter engages with Chris Hann's concept of Eurasia. Emphasising the interconnected singularity of the ocean (rather than the Eurasian supercontinent) for an understanding of non-Eurocentric connectivities, she proposes a new paradigm—Transoceania. Transoceania foregrounds the seafaring peoples who have always been mobile, thereby connecting various continents and ocean basins beyond territorially bounded nation-states and homogeneous national histories.

Chris Hann's School of Anthropology

In this second part of this introduction, we reflect on Chris Hann's influence on the intellectual and professional trajectories of his students, whose work, under his supervision, was shaped by post-Cold War conditions and European integration. We believe that the generations of academics born between the 1970s and 1990s—the cohort of Chris Hann´s students predominantly represented in this volume—have benefited greatly from post-socialist changes, as opportunities to study formerly state-socialist societies abounded and worldwide academic interest in post-socialism dramatically increased. An important legacy of Chris Hann's work at the MPISA are the research groups he led for almost twenty years. These included a mix of PhD students and postdocs, organised in regional and thematic clusters. The contributors to this volume were hired as PhD students in the first focus groups, 'Property Relations' (2000–2005) and 'Religion, Identity, Postsocialism' (2003–2010), the latter of which evolved in two consecutive stages with strong continuities between them: 'Religion and Civil Society' and 'Religion and Morality'. Besides shaping their members' academic output, these groups also formed these students' intellectual and professional development. This distinguished their training from other PhD programmes in anthropology, placing it somewhere between the Anglo-American model and the Eastern European ethnographic tradition of collective fieldwork. While long-term ethnographic fieldwork is central to anthropological training and research, undertaking it in a team is less common. Field trips and workshops were an important part of this process, in which teams came together to discuss points of comparison and to mark individual progress at each site. Workshops also fulfilled

an important emotional and pedagogical function which, even if it was not articulated explicitly, played a big role especially for the CEE cluster whose work to a certain extent followed Hann's earlier research in the region.

Many of Chris Hann's students came from post-socialist countries and, when they returned home, contributed to improving the cosmopolitan profile of their respective national traditions of anthropology. Others, students of anthropology from Western Europe or the US, contributed to the spread of analyses of the former Soviet bloc, thus de-orientalising the dominant perspective of scholars in the West about tribal, ethnic, or autocratic legacies of the East. This educational trend reflected Hann's long-term interest in the different national traditions and his hope to create a dialogue between these traditions and the Anglo-American anthropology his students learned (Barth et al. 2010). His preference for a plural history and promotion of a more diverse anthropology of transformation (Boskovic and Hann 2014; Hann, Sarkany, and Skalník 2005; Mihailescu, Iliev, and Naumovic 2008), has not always been fully acknowledged by his contemporaries but it has borne fruits in the ongoing generational takeover in East European academia. Various regional clusters were created during this time and the institute brought together scholars working on Siberia, Central Asia, the Caucasus and former socialist states like the GDR, China or Vietnam. These groups included PhD students, some of whom are also represented in this volume. In retrospect, MPISA in Halle was an extraordinary place for PhD students. From the institute's inception, it had a reputation of being one of the largest and most prestigious centres for anthropological research. It was equipped with the best technology available for fieldwork at the time, resources for travelling and conferences, and an excellent anthropological library which could deliver any book or text requested. Moreover, the steady rotation of top scholars in the fields of social and cultural anthropology, sociology or history who visited the institute, often for extended periods, and with whom it was easy to talk in the corridors or the pubs around Reileck, the urban hub near the institute, all made MPISA a haven for doctoral studies. The departmental routines were marked by Hann's rather intimidating work ethic. Hann arrived early in the morning, taking a frugal lunch— usually eating a sandwich he made at home—and not wasting time with small talk or after-work socialising. Still, he was fully attentive to our

work, responding promptly to emails—the almost exclusive means of communication between offices—and sending detailed comments on entire chapters or abstracts in no time.

While informal exchanges about work took place at *kaffeeklatschen* in Chris Hann's winter garden next to his spacious office, the forum for organised discussion and feedback on our work was the Tuesday weekly seminar which Chris Hann attentively led and expected everyone to attend. He was evidently regretful when he could not make it to the seminar, and usually asked one of his senior colleagues such as Frances Pine or Lale Yalcin-Heckmann to lead the event, in an effort to stick to the schedule and rhythm it imposed on us. Both PhD students and postdocs were expected to present their work; initially just their pre-fieldwork projects, then after returning from the field they would present more frequently, sharing chapter by chapter to receive constructive criticism from colleagues. Preparing for the seminar was stressful and time-consuming work that took several weeks, but the discussion and colleagues' help were highly beneficial. Many senior researchers read our ethnographies closely, and made detailed comments on our written work. But the main event was the collective discussion that followed the thirty- or forty-minute presentation. Hann would always conclude the session punctually after one hour and a half, so everybody knew that they had to make their point in time. There were also plenary sessions at the institute where students learned to become conversant in intellectual debates and academic performance. The ironic or controversial comments of academic stars—frequent guests of the institute—were especially appreciated and welcomed, and these meetings cultivated a familiarity that was not to be found in formal events or conferences. This mode of socialising between junior and senior researchers, PhD students and the big men and women of anthropology was central to MPISA's culture while still maintaining unspoken hierarchies.

And then there was a *Stammtisch*—a weekly fixed meeting over a beer—where informal, social news was exchanged. Enlarging the circle to include colleagues across the street, from the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Martin-Luther University, this was a more casual event where one could learn about different opportunities, and find out more about how the German academic system worked (here, as in most MPIs, our life was somewhat sheltered from the everyday practices of German institutions). Post-conference socialising was

another highlight, albeit always in the German Protestant style of moderation. It was nevertheless made clear that guests should not provoke the generosity of German taxpayers, as the director usually put it. There was rigorous auditing of costs per person per day, which continues up to the present day when events within the Visegrad Anthropologists' Network are organised outside of the institute. All of these rituals, big and small, enabled PhD candidates to mature into anthropology professionals within an almost monastic culture of well-kept academic estate, to use a metaphor that would probably resonate with Professor Hann.

On Method

Hann was very particular about long-term, uninterrupted ethnographic fieldwork for a duration of at least one year and did not favour multi-sited fieldwork, which was in vogue during the globalising liberalism of the 1990s and 2000s. He advised his students to stay in one community, immersing themselves in people's lives, conducting participant observation and writing systematic fieldnotes. Other methods such as household surveys or archival research were also advised, to ensure a better grasp of the socio-historical context and a familiarity with the particular histories of respective communities. This was especially important for comparing the post-socialist present with the socialist past, which was essential for understanding social transformation. Chris Hann´s close engagement in supervising his students' fieldwork also manifested in a series of workshops and group field trips to fieldsites. Among others, he visited Carolin Leutloff-Grandits in Croatia and Davide Torsello in Slovakia, Julie McBrian and Mathijs Pelkmans in Kyrgyzstan, Katerina Ivanona in East Germany, and (with the whole Civil Religion group) Hann also visited Laszlo Fosztó in his Transylvanian fieldsite and Juraj Buzalka in Przemyśl, Poland. When visiting, Hann stayed with his students' host families, walked around with them and met their informants, asking questions and making astute observations on their research sites.

Hann's insights bore different weight in each case since his relationship with the fieldsites of those working in CEE was somewhat different than with those working in Central Asia or other regions where he had never lived or conducted research. His intimate knowledge of

CEE and long-term ethnographic and intellectual engagement with the region and its sociological tradition was bound to shape his students' research. Not only did he generate the theme for each research cluster, but Hann also invited his PhD students and postdoctoral researchers to visit his own fieldsites in Hungary (Tázlár) and Poland (Przemyśl/ Wisłok Wielki). This was an ingenious way of familiarising them with the region and the ethnographic grounding of his ideas about post-socialist transformation, expounded upon in his numerous books and articles which they had already read. Some of his students, like Juraj Buzalka, were invited to follow in his steps and revisit these sites years later to pursue their own ethnographic studies. Buzalka arrived in 2003 in Przemyśl, a border city not far away from his major fieldsite in Wisłok Wielki (Hann 1985) to observe the same Greek Catholic Jordan ceremony Hann had described in the 1980s (Hann 1988). Buzalka and a few other colleagues—especially his fellow PhD candidate working across the border in Lviv, Vlad Naumescu (2007)—were part of a research cluster focused on Greek Catholics that was sparked by Hann's own interest in the subject. Taking up Hann's initial observations on post-socialist deprivatisation of religion and his critique of liberal multiculturalism, Buzalka went on to produce a nuanced portrayal of post-socialist transformation in Poland and the emergence of post-peasant populism in the region (2007).

In a similar vein, also working in a region close to Hann's Polish fieldsite, Pasieka conducted research on the grassroots production of pluralism (2015). The others pursued similar questions in different localities in the region (Mahieu and Naumescu 2008) and the whole cluster met halfway through their fieldwork in March 2004 for a field workshop in Cluj, Transylvania. Similarly, a larger, post-fieldwork workshop took place in Przemyśl in 2005 when all the members of the Religion & Civil Society group travelled by train from Halle through Berlin and Kraków to Przemyśl, in south-east Poland to work together on a comparative CEE-Central Asia volume (Hann at al. 2006). While group field trips in Central Asia, where several members of the group worked, were impossible, Hann did have at least one opportunity to practice his fieldwork pedagogy in the region. An academic exchange brought him and Ildiko Beller-Hann to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in summer 2003, just as researchers from the Central Asia Cluster were settling into their fieldsites around the region. On that occasion, he seized the

opportunity to travel with Julie McBrien to "her village", in southern Kyrgyzstan. McBrien served as translator to Hann's never-ending stream of questions for every guest-house owner, shrine guardian, market seller, taxi-driver, and waiter they encountered along the way, including for many residents of the small town that would become McBrien's fieldsite. His perseverance during that very short visit in learning as much as he could about a new region from those living in it served as a mini-lesson in the kind of fieldwork he encouraged his students to pursue. At MPISA research was not only geographically coordinated to allow for meaningful comparisons but also temporally synchronised, with all researchers in a given cluster leaving for fieldwork at the same time and returning together after fifteen months. Once back from the field, Hann advised his students not to return there, attend conferences, give classes at the university, or commit to collective publications, but to concentrate solely on writing their dissertations.

This aside, he did not push his students to adopt a particular approach in their work or to pursue his ideas, yet he made a point of testing them on every hypothesis they presented and offering critical, yet generous comments and reading suggestions. He was a very thorough supervisor, closely reading and commenting on all drafts sent to him, demanding timely presentations of empirical findings at the Tuesday seminars and an individual contribution to the final conference that marked the end of a three-year research cycle. The tight schedule meant that everyone finished their PhD thesis (more or less) on time. Moreover, his mentoring extended beyond this point, and he guided most of his students through the process of turning their theses into monographs to be published in Lit Verlag's Halle Series in the Anthropology of Eurasia. He also committed himself to assist the work of one of his students and our dear colleague, Irene Hilgers, whose life ended unexpectedly while visiting her friend in Uzbekistan. This assistance resulted in the publication of a joint research monograph (Hann and Hilgers 2009). Hann established this ambitious series in 2003 to promote original research produced in his department. The number of monographs published in the series since then testifies to the great productivity of the research groups he led for over thirty years, as do the multiple monographs and edited volumes originating from research conducted at the MPISA but published with other prestigious university presses. As this volume testifies, these conversations on social transformation in Eurasia, which began at the MPISA, have continued

over the years. Hann continues to cultivate these dialogues and to create new spaces for them to take root.[1] We are grateful for a further opportunity to contribute to this ongoing conversation with this volume.

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1   An important legacy of his vision and pedagogical work matured in the Visegrad Anthropologists' Network, established in 2017, whose members come from the Halle school of anthropology and affiliates of the institution led by Chris Hann until 2021, https://www.eth.mpg.de/4638135/Visegrad_Network.

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