Anthropology, Science and Politics: Renewing the Vocation

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Abstract. In Germany, the discipline known traditionally as *Völkerkunde* or *Ethnologie* is currently (as a result of Anglophone dominance) being rebranded as *Sozial-* und *Kulturanthropologie*. Irrespective of the name, as a holistic field of enquiry, anthropology exemplifies the difficulties involved in demarcating boundaries between the humanities and the social and natural sciences. In the German language, all three are forms of science (*Wissenschaft*). Following these preliminaries, this paper draws on the celebrated 'vocation' lectures of Max Weber to probe the political dimensions of anthropological research. The possibility of a value-free science was precluded in socialist ideology, and it is again unfashionable nowadays wherever 'activism' supplants 'academic' agendas. In defending the Weberian ideal that stipulates the separation of the scholar from the politician, the chapter draws examples from various locations in Eurasia: Gypsies in Hungary, Uyghurs in China (Xinjiang), and finally Ukraine. It is important to maintain a dialogue with 'local scholars' subject to political constraints. Joint projects to test an agreed hypothesis may be an appropriate way to maintain conversations and advance knowledge. The chapter concludes with a personal note about the difficulties which arise in socialist and postsocialist Eurasia for a researcher from the West who is sympathetic to socialist ideals.

Keywords: Hungary, Max Weber, politics, science, Ukraine, Xinjiang, values, value-free.

Introduction

The anthropological field is a curious playground of research traditions, imperfectly reflected in confusing nomenclature, even within one and the same language. *American Ethnologist* is a highly competitive cutting-edge journal, yet where I come from in the UK the term 'ethnology' reeks of nineteenth century expeditions, antiquarian classifications, and museum collections. When Günther Schlee and I started the new Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle in 1999, we were advised that a more appropriate German name would be *Max Planck Institut für ethnologische Forschung*. Not being very familiar with either the language or the disciplinary traditions in German, I accepted the reassurance I received that *Eth-*

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nologie was the appropriate contemporary term. However, the professional association I joined soon after my arrival was called *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde*, the name that was more familiar to the general public. A few years ago, without any suggestion that the nature of activities should be modified, this association decided to rename itself the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie*. I voted against this change, which seemed to me to be an example of the global dominance of English of which our discipline should be especially wary.

The Max Planck Society devotes most of its resources to the 'hard sciences'. English is the dominant language of communication. Institutes in the humanities and social sciences are lumped together with several legal institutes, some of which do operate primarily in German because of the nature of their research. What we have in common is that we all aspire to science, at least in the sense that the standard term for the humanities in German is *Geisteswissenschaften*, literally, 'spiritual sciences'. I shall not be concerned with the history of art, or law, or science, all fields in which the *Society* is very productive nowadays. I take it for granted that social anthropology belongs in the social sciences rather than in the humanities (though it is still housed in the latter in many German universities). I shall argue that the knowledge we produce should be assessed by the same basic rules as those applied in the so-called natural sciences. At the same time, we must accept that our discipline is less likely to advance through technological innovation than some of those we have worked closely alongside in the past. We may, for example, be able to do many things more efficiently through the application of computers or the use of new recording equipment. But it is unrealistic to imagine that anthropology can ever be transformed overnight in the way that, for example, carbon dating and chemical advances have made archaeology a more rigorous scientific endeavour than it had been previously. We must accept that our science advances differently, and that it is legitimate to look back to classical social theorists to outline our epistemology and our methods.

In the first section of this paper, I shall explain why Max Weber has often been criticized for asserting that the social sciences (in his case, sociology, but here there is no significant difference to anthropology) must remain *wertfrei* (value-free). Closer inspection reveals Weber's historical sociology to be shot through with Eurocentric prejudice. He was a conservative nationalist who admired charismatic leaders (it is perhaps just as well that he passed away more than a decade before Hitler came to power). Contemporary anthropologists are likely to hold very different values. They frequently investigate politically sensitive, socially controversial topics. Is a progressive, 'public' or 'activist' anthropology consistent with the mantle of science? Does postcolonial or decolonizing critique

still have a long way to go before the production of knowledge in our field is truly emancipated from the poisons of imperial legacies? Or has the self-critique already been overcooked to the point that we can no longer recognize the achievements of the past and paralyse ourselves in the present?

After exploring these perennial issues in the philosophy of social science and reviewing lively contemporary debates with reference to Gypsies in Hungary, in the second half of the paper, I shall illustrate the issues empirically. I turn first to Xinjiang, also known as Eastern Turkestan, a large region of Northwest China in which I have fieldwork experience dating back to the mid-1980s, but which I am no longer able to visit due to the repressive policies of the government in Beijing. Finally, in the heart of Europe, I imagine how a *wertfrei* anthropological project might shed light on the ghastly war that has been unfolding before our eyes in Ukraine in the year 2022.[1]

Science

In two celebrated lectures given in Munich at the end of the First World War, Max Weber addressed student audiences on *Science as a vocation* and *Politics as a vocation* (Weber 2004). The key is to maintain the separation of the one domain from the other. The task of the scientific historical sociologist (for that is the principal field in which Weber worked) had been elaborated in earlier years. The method depends very largely on the construction of ideal types that do not reflect any specific empirical reality but which nonetheless, if the components are appropriately selected, facilitate the formulation of hypotheses, empirical testing, and generalizations about cause and effect.

This framing of causal explanation sounds simple enough, perhaps resembling a naïve positivism. At the same time, Weber is steeped in German idealist philosophy. The causal variables that interest him most are the ideas people have in their heads, rather than economic trends or political convulsions. The key word is *Kultur*. The task is to understand (*verstehen*) other mental worlds, since only by correct interpretation of subjective states of mind can we explain the actors' behaviour.[2] In recent times, such ideas have been called memes and theorized in

1 This is an expanded version of a lecture delivered in Vilnius in the *Aula Parva* of the University on the 16th of June, 2022. Notes and references have been added for the present publication. I extend sincere thanks to Victor de Munck and Kristina Garalytė for their invitation, and for hospitality and thoughtful organization in Vilnius.

2 In contemporary German political discourse, the verb *verstehen* has come to be associated with 'excusing', especially when it comes to President Vladimir Putin.

terms of selection and adaptation. Max Weber did not use this vocabulary. His historical sociology does not engage with Darwinian evolutionist theory and will be perceived as suspect by all those for whom this is the litmus test of a scientific approach.

Nor (as far as I am aware) did Weber pay attention to the work of the ethnologists of his day, though he wrote in the decades in which the great wave of diffusionist theory was taking shape. The obvious reason for this neglect is that the early ethnologists were busy investigating the enchanted worlds of primitive tribal societies in remote places, whereas Weber wanted to understand the great literate civilizations (*Kulturwelten*) of Eurasia. In particular, he wanted to explain how disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) had become a dominant characteristic of the Western Christian world in which he lived.

Whether Weber lived up to his own methodological precepts concerning value neutrality in these comparative explorations is very doubtful (a case for the defence is made by Runciman (2013)). His most famous project hypothesized a link between a distinctive Protestant ethic, that is to say ascetic beliefs sincerely internalized, and the economic behaviour that catalysed the transformations we refer to as capitalist modernity. A century later, few historians or social scientists anywhere will defend this argument in its original form. Weber's focus on Calvinism was not backed up by evidence. His devaluing of Orthodox Christianity and Roman Catholicism and flaws in his analyses of the other great religious traditions of Eurasia reveal his prejudices, above all the Eurocentrism that was still so widespread in his age. To argue that there was something intrinsic to Protestant ideas that equipped their holders to be more successful capitalists than, say, Jewish or Armenian entrepreneurs, was to neglect more concrete economic and institutional conditions, such as the limitations imposed by Christian power holders on Jewish communities through the centuries. For all of these reasons, scholars such as Jack Goody rejected Weberian claims that postulate a "European miracle" based on inner-worldly asceticism and new processes of rationality (Goody 1996; 2010). Goody went so far as to dismiss the significance of religion altogether in his analyses of "alternating leadership" between Europe and East Asia over millennia. He was sympathetic to the California school of historians who date a "great divergence" between China and Europe only from the early nineteenth century (Pomeranz 2000). And if Goody were still alive today (he passed away in 2015), he would no doubt see the rise of China as a resumption of the East-West pendulum that he identified in numerous late publications.

I should disclose that Goody was my supervisor in Cambridge in the 1970s. At this time, a certain wind was beginning to blow against taken-for-granted

methods and theory building in anthropology. The interpretive approach of Geertz, emphasizing webs of meaning with more than a nod to Weber, was popular on both sides of the Atlantic. The structuralism of Edmund Leach encouraged making connections on the basis of inspired guesswork, rather than rigorous comparison. Leach explicitly decried the comparative method, arguing that the units were inevitably incoherent. Jack Goody disagreed and made use of the *Ethnographic Atlas* to support his comparative analysis (Goody 1976). By this time, such synoptic projects were already very exceptional. The Anglophone discipline was dominated on both sides of the Atlantic by particularist case studies and the specification of localized cultural knowledge.

I have no space to review methodological debates in all the different branches of our field. At one end of the spectrum, the rigor of the natural scientist must be precisely followed if results are to have credibility. We can draw on innovations in other fields and apply them to provide better answers to questions that are distinctively anthropological. For example, new knowledge in archaeogenetics may shed fresh light on household organization and kinship in prehistoric societies. But the great majority of socio-cultural anthropologists are no longer interested in testing hypotheses to validate comparative generalizations. They emphasize subjective dimensions, the *Verstehen* of Weber and Geertz, but they seldom test for causation and generalize their results. Explanation cedes place to culturalist accounts in which narrative devices are more important than attempts to quantify and correlate variables. The line separating work of this kind from work undertaken in cultural studies has long been fuzzy.

I think this is a shame. We might regain our scientific vocation if we looked once again at the old Weberian procedure of ideal types, irrespective of whether he himself was successful in formulating them. We should also revisit comparative methods. This might be helpful if we wish to make ourselves heard in public political debates, a topic to which I turn in the next section.[3]

3 A reassessment of comparative methods was undertaken some twenty years ago by Richard Fox and Andre Gingrich. It resulted in an interesting collection (Gingrich and Fox 2002), but it has had little impact on practice in our field. I would particularly commend the historical chapter by Gingrich himself in which he coins the notion of "dethroned majority" to set about comparing the excesses of nationalist sentiment when empires collapse and many members of the formerly dominant people are now left outside the boundaries of their shrunken state. The cases explored by Gingrich are the empires of Ottoman Turkey and Austria-Hungary, but he also has a section analysing the disintegration of federal Yugoslavia in the 1990s. It is regrettable that models and comparative perspectives from our discipline are largely missing in current analysis of the Ukrainian war to supplement the accounts of political scientists, international lawyers, etc.

Politics

It goes without saying that the anthropologist as a citizen can take a public stand on political issues. If the scholar is famous and can invoke the results of scientific work to support the political commitment: so much the better! The archetypal case is the elderly Franz Boas marching to protest the rise of Nazi power in 1930s Germany. For contemporary possibilities we might think of protests against the likes of Trump and Johnson, with their blatant disregard for factual accuracy and for the law of the land. But with so many notions of populism swirling around, it will not be easy to construct an ideal type that would serve comparative analysis in the Weberian fashion.

I have engaged a little with the case of Hungary's Viktor Orbán, who launched his career in the late 1980s as a liberal critic of Communist domination but is nowadays the supreme leader of another one-party system. Orbán and his party dominate the national media, just as the Communist Party did when I worked in Hungary in the 1970s. If I were resident in the country, I am sure I would sign protests and turn up on the streets to signal my disapproval of this government. But I would do this on the basis of my personal values, not on the basis of my on-going research in provincial Hungary. The great majority of rural Hungarians deplored collectivization in 1959–61, even though they profited from the ensuing symbiosis between the socialist cooperative and the household plot in the last decades of the socialist rule.[4] In the depressed economic climate of the new century, they find Orbán's conservative (in my opinion, often demagogic) messages attractive. They much prefer him to the nominally socialist governments they had in the 2000s, and to any of the opposition parties which challenge his power nowadays. Given these circumstances, I am obliged to try to keep my political preferences separate from my ethnographic observations and analysis. It would be an injustice to decent intelligent people I have known for decades to insinuate that they only vote for Orbán because he has brainwashed them through his media monopoly and primitive appeal to nationalist sentiments. Rather, my research has to be bracketed apart from my politics in the Weberian fashion, however difficult this is in practice. This allows me to emulate his *Verstehen* approach, for example by exploring the symbols and the emotions that

4 Since the 1990s, I have noted that increasing numbers of rural citizens have come to regret the way in which decollectivization was implemented, and to see the dynamic decades of household accumulation before 1990 in a much more positive light; see Hann 2015.

Orbán and his party manipulate so effectively. More comprehensive explanations will require engaging with concrete variables, such as institutional mechanisms for job creation and the funding of public goods. Ultimately, it is necessary to consider the entire neoliberal political economy, with its mix of transnational investment (mainly German car-makers), subsidies from the European Union, and simultaneous rapid formation of a national bourgeoisie. These tasks of understanding and explaining must be kept logically apart from evaluation and political activism. Max Weber ranted against professors who sought to impose their own values on impressionable students (though, again, he arguably fell into precisely this trap in his theorizing of politics, when elaborating his personal preference for the charismatic *Führer* and highlighting the dangers that he took to be inherent in over-bureaucratized electoral democracies).

This brings me to a consideration of current political trends within the anthropological field and the kind of knowledge we produce. Beginning in the last century with movements described loosely as postmodern, continuing somewhat more precisely in postcolonial theory, and later with terms such as intersectionality, the epistemological foundations of socio-cultural anthropology have been radically challenged. It is no longer a question of coming to terms with the inequalities in power that characterized European colonialism, and which gave rise to 'Orientalist' distortions even in cases where no formal empire existed. These problems were already widely debated when I was a graduate student. Marshall Sahlins commented wryly in 1993:

> "[…] in America many graduate students are totally uninterested in other times and places. They say we should study our own current problems, all other ethnography being impossible anyhow, as it is just our "construction of the other." So if they get their way, and this becomes the principle of anthropological research, fifty years hence no-one will pay the slightest attention to the work they're doing now. Maybe they're on to something."

The late Marshall Sahlins was one of the giants of our field for more than half a century, but 30 years ago he was already worrying about the future of our discipline as an accumulative body of knowledge. The mature Sahlins gave up his early evolutionist interests, polemicized against the sociobiologists, and was not the sort of anthropologist to care too much about the mantle of science. But, by the 1990s, even he was concerned about the way things were going.

The pressure today to pursue the decolonization of our discipline rides roughshod over what is perceived now to be a reactionary distinction between

science and politics. One recent manifestation of this juggernaut came when Akil Gupta, President of the American Anthropological Association, invited members in 2021 to consider a counterfactual past in which anthropologists did not buy in to the system and adhered instead to the values of decoloniality as understood today. This infuriated many, mostly senior scholars who felt that this radicalism was an insult to the motivations and solid accomplishments of generations of US anthropologists working in the traditions conventionally traced back to Boas (who, we should recall, like his contemporary Weber, was steeped in German idealist traditions).[5]

These polemical debates have implications for the work we do on the ground. It would not surprise me to hear that more dissertations in socio-cultural anthropology are prepared nowadays on the basis of activism in the framework of an NGO than on the basis of studying ordinary villagers in the way I worked in Hungary in the 1970s. Ethical guidance nowadays inhibits 'hanging out' because of the expectation that consent forms be signed, thus making every ethnographic interaction resemble an interview. The best defence for qualitative methods is the access they offer to informal 'backstage' relationships, to jokes and gossip, to all the richness of human sociality that other disciplines cannot hope to penetrate. We give up a great deal if we abandon all this.

Let me offer a brief illustration from Hungary. Michael Stewart worked among Vlach-speaking Gypsies in the 1980s, and his monograph is one of the richest accounts of their communities (Stewart 1997). Later in his career, as an academic based at University College, London, he trained many young Roma (in particular, at summer schools organized in Budapest by the Central European University). But the new generation is infected by the vogue for activist political engagement and sceptical of the academic standards upheld by Stewart (2017). This is problematic for numerous reasons. One is the simple fact that concrete phenomena in the real world are not being investigated and explained as they would be if the earlier ethnographic standards still prevailed. Another is the fact that political activism in the cause of 'Roma rights' tends to flatten and homogenize very different kinds of Gypsy community, thereby constraining the freedoms and creativity of their members.

Like Michael Stewart, I think that a renewal of our vocation as anthropologists practising a cumulative science can help us avoid these problems. In the long run,

5 For more on these current debates, see the event organized at Vilnius University in February 2022: https://consent.youtube.com/m?continue=https://www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DgeljKqVxoO4%26cbrd%3D1&gl=GB&m=0&pc=yt&uxe=eomty&hl=en&src=1

we are more likely to make a difference politically if we abstain from short-term campaigning and get back to the basics of our ethnography-based discipline. This seems to me especially important in the early phases of an anthropological career. Political activism should be postponed until the point when it can be supported by one's own ethnographic materials and comparative analysis carried out dispassionately and professionally (so that it would have to be accepted by any other observer/analyst, including rivals with different values and political preferences). I now turn to illustrate these principles and their concomitant challenges in two very different locations of Eurasia.

Research cooperation in Xinjiang

Ildikó Bellér-Hann and I have worked intermittently in North-West China since the mid-1980s. There is no consensus on the history of the territory known officially (since 1955) as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Uyghurs were the dominant people here until the socialist era. Over 80% of the population in the 1940s, they have long become a minority in their homeland (which they would prefer to call Eastern Turkestan). Today, immigrant Han Chinese dominate numerically as well as politically. Uyghurs have been accused of 'splittism' and religious fundamentalism. The latest phase in Chinese assimilation policy is to incarcerate vast numbers of Uyghurs in the so-called 're-education centres'. Although I have maintained cordial relations to scholars at the *Minzu* University in Beijing ever since the 1980s, it has been impossible for my wife and me to visit this region since 2013. Our principal partners in the region are in the centres or in prison.

Ethnographic fieldwork, even when it was still possible, was never easy. Even if they have some form of research permit, foreigners are not able to hang out freely, especially once they leave the major cities. We wanted to work in the countryside. In the 1990s, Ildikó had a number of projects that combined manuscript research in European archives with fieldwork. We spent some time in the oasis of Kucha, but had to leave at short notice due to ethnic antagonisms in that region. We were directed instead to the larger city of Kashgar and obliged to live on the campus of a teachers' training college, from which Ildikó would cycle out daily to the villages of the hinterland. She was accompanied by a Han Chinese, actually a professor of literature, but one of the few Han in Xinjiang whose Uyghur was good enough to be able to monitor our research. Imagine how villagers felt when a European knocked on the door of their home, accompanied by her Chinese

monitor. After a couple of months, the tensions boiled over. When I joined the daily research trips to the village, I noticed that Professor Fang was secretly recording the conversations on a simple recorder hidden in his pocket. When we protested that this was unethical, he responded vehemently: "You ask the same question in every house; you don't write down the answers; this is unscientific!"

In the 2000s, we were not allowed to return to southern Xinjiang due to escalating ethnic violence. Instead, we were granted permission to spend the best part of a year in the eastern oasis of Qumul. Here, too, we were carefully monitored; but, in spite of many minor frustrations, we were able to work for several months without daily supervision in two mountain villages. This was the most satisfying part of the research. As in earlier projects in Eastern Europe and Turkey, I used a questionnaire to gather basic quantitative data (local census, farming and other data on production and incomes) and to pose specific questions on cooperation and social support, which was the principal theme of the project. I combined this with 'hanging out' and followed up all kinds of threads originating in unscripted, informal conversations. This mixture of pre-planned lines of enquiry and taking advantage of serendipitous opportunities that could not have been predicted in advance enabled us to contribute to general discussions about kinship and social support in the cluster we organized at the Halle institute (see Endres and Hann 2017). But we also explored the production of local history, cultural heritage, ritual and religion, and other topics that had not figured at all in the project outline we had submitted, but for which we gathered materials almost effortlessly as the research unfolded (Bellér-Hann and Hann 2020).

We took the precaution of changing some personal names, and we avoided using photographs that would have identified individuals. Nothing in our book can be considered subversive by the Chinese state, but there is confirmation of the conclusions emerging from the research of other social scientists into the deeper causes of the spiralling antagonisms of recent years. Uyghur discontent has causes in political economy, and, more specifically, in the disadvantages experienced by Uyghur rural youth when seeking jobs in competitive labour markets. But institutional variables aside, through fieldwork, Ildikó Bellér-Hann and I have broached the *Verstehen* that was so important for Max Weber: if you understand the importance of Muslim ritual for the everyday life of the household, you will have a better grasp of why people feel so strongly when it is repressed. If you probe the resentment that is bound to arise when closely related peoples of the former Soviet Union became sovereign states, while your own people are locked into ever more oppressive relations with the dominant Han, then you can add a valuable subjective dimension to the work of other social

scientists. It is also possible, stepping back from the fieldwork materials, to place the case of Chinese settler colonialism in Central Asia in a wider comparative framework. China's decision in the 1950s not to emulate the USSR by opting for a federal constitution reflects its history over millennia as a 'civilizational state' (Arnason 2020).

This Xinjiang example shows that it is possible to combine the micro level of fieldwork in the present with archival research and with more speculative macro-level comparative explorations of the *longue durée*. That is the scientific side. As for the politics, although I have always found public anthropology attractive in principle, problems arise in its implementation. An international debate about Beijing's policies in Xinjiang has been raging for several years. The government initially denied the existence of the institutions in which more than a million Uyghurs have been incarcerated since 2017. When the evidence became incontrovertible, it switched its stance and presented these institutions euphemistically as "re-education centres." Foreigners, not just the Uyghur diaspora and their supporters in the Turkic-speaking world, but also the international scholarly community in Xinjiang Studies, liken them to concentration camps. The official view of the USA since Donald Trump's presidency is that a genocide is taking place, while the world looks on ineffectually. This is one area of policy where President Biden has followed his predecessor.

How should the anthropologist position himself in this minefield? For a long time, it was of primary importance for me to keep academic contacts alive. After all, without the support of Han Chinese colleagues, Ildikó Bellér-Hann and I would not have been able to live in rural Qumul as we did. We wanted to go back there and wrap up our research in a more satisfactory fashion. It has become hard to maintain this stance when all prospect of a return to the field disappears, and our Uyghur research partners have been placed in prisons or camps. I have therefore joined the international campaign for the release of Rahile Dawut, for long the principal gatekeeper for foreign anthropologists working in the region. Rahile is an internationally distinguished folklorist, and her imprisonment on trumped-up charges is an absolute scandal. Her family has appealed for international support, and Ildikó Bellér-Hann and I have signed up. In other cases, however, we are fearful of signing petitions and naming individuals, for fear that this might only lead to further sinister sanctions and reprisals against persons whose only crime was to assist us in the course of our long-term research in this region.

There are other reasons why I hesitate to endorse Trump's condemnations and to use the most explosive emotional terms available to us, such as 'concentration

camp' and 'genocide'. Many Han, scholars among them, argue in good faith that their state's investments in this region are acts of enlightened benevolence which bring development that is in the interests of the rural Uyghurs themselves. There is continuity here with the long-term civilizing mission of the Chinese state. Similar justifications can be put forward to support at least some aspects of the language policy: after all, it is truly in the interests of Uyghurs as Chinese citizens to acquire full competence in the language of the state, especially if they wish to compete on labour markets more effectively. Foreigners need to appreciate these factors and be able to practice *Verstehen* on both sides of the conflict.

My stance is that one should be able to debate such issues, to assess the evidence gathered by researchers like ourselves, and to prepare reports for policy makers in addition to articles for scholarly journals. Joint publishing with Han colleagues and consensus recommendations are unlikely, but severance of academic contact seems to me unhelpful. It is important to maintain some kind of dialogue in which one takes opportunities to question the nationalist view of Chinese history and calls for more attention to the aspirations of the Uyghurs themselves. Because I do not endorse every petition that is drawn to my attention, I am probably considered a spineless *Schleimer* by some scholar-activists. "How can you cooperate with and respect such a despicable regime?" is the sort of question I have to put up with. But, of course, I am not defending the repressive policies that have now been pursued for decades. It is just that I do not believe that the situation of the Uyghurs will be improved if I were to become a vociferous activist. At an institution such as the Max Planck Institute, dedicated to basic research, I tried to keep diplomatic doors open, and to amass evidence through research projects like the one I have talked about in this section, which reach deeper into the changing conditions of Uyghur civilization than any foreign journalist or non-anthropologist social scientist can penetrate.

Familial well-being in Ukraine

How would the pragmatism that I have outlined with respect to China and Xinjiang translate to the case of the Russian Federation and Ukraine in these months of extreme violence in 2022? I have not carried out fieldwork in either of these countries, nor do I have the linguistic ability to do so. I do, however, have fieldwork experience on the Polish side of this border. This project began in 1979 in the Lower Beskids section of the Carpathians, among people traditionally classified by Polish ethnographers as Lemkos. In the socialist decades, they were

classified by both the Polish state and the Soviet state as forming part of Poland's Ukrainian minority. In the course of my research, I learned about the deportations of the great majority of the indigenous inhabitants in 1947 (*Akcja Wisła*). This was the government's emphatic response to several years of 'terrorist' activity by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, led by Stepan Bandera. Some of the old people I knew in the village of Wisłok Wielki recalled those events with bitterness. Some had participated in them, and lost family members to the Polish army. None had found it easy to return to their native community after years of exile. By the time of my work there, most inhabitants of Wisłok Wielki were Polish colonists. My project focused on their socio-economic conditions. I devoted an early chapter to the complex ethnic history of the Lemko-Ukrainians of this region, but the minority did not figure prominently in the main body of the book (Hann 1985).

During the 1990s, in the immediate wake of the collapse of socialism, I returned to the region. This time, I focused on the border city of Przemyśl (Ukrainian: Peremyshl), located north of the mountains on the San river, less than an hour away from L'viv. I was interested in how the new freedoms were impacting on inter-ethnic relations. One sacred building in Przemyśl was especially contentious. Ukrainian Greek Catholics, who formed a sizeable minority in the city, looked forward eagerly to the restitution of their cathedral, located on a prominent central hilltop, which had been appropriated in 1946 when the Greek Catholic Church was repressed (following the model of the USSR). Pope John Paul II himself urged that the building be returned from Roman Catholic stewardship to its historic owners. However, conservative clerical forces combined with secular nationalists to defend "the Polish character of the city." It was argued that the building had in fact originally belonged to Western Christians, and that it was right that it should remain in the hands of the Roman Catholic Carmelites. After numerous protests and violent incidents, this is indeed what came to pass. The Greek Catholics had to content themselves with a replacement building of less symbolic significance. The dome of their cathedral was dismantled and replaced by an elegant spire intended to emphasize the Western character of the city skyline (Hann 1998a).

In these years, then, relations between the majority and the minority in Przemyśl were highly antagonistic. Negative stereotypes of Ukrainians were widespread in virtually all sections of Polish society. Activists (many of them veterans who referred back to the violence of the 1940s) campaigned against the extension of new socio-cultural rights to the minority. They looked with disdain at the petty traders who flocked in during these years, driven by poverty in their native communities. Historical memories of Ukrainian 'terrorist' activity

that was a reaction to authoritarian Polish rule in the inter-war decades were cultivated in popular literature during the socialist decades. They were now supplemented by negative perceptions of Greek Catholic aspirations and 'dirty traders' (Hann 1998b).

In the light of these personal research experiences in the last century, I would not have predicted the strongly pro-Ukrainian sentiment of the media and virtually all political parties in Poland since President Putin's forces invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Inter-ethnic relations in Przemyśl began to improve in the first decade of the new century, not least because entrepreneurs (irrespective of ethnicity) realised that to rediscover the ethnic and religious diversity of this beautiful region would attract tourists and contribute to economic prosperity (Buzalka 2006). In the country as a whole, perceptions of Ukrainians improved as large numbers crossed the border to work in Poland, especially in the care sector. When Poland joined the EU and huge numbers migrated in search of opportunities in the West (especially in the UK), some of the gaps left in local labour markets and in families were filled by eastern neighbours (Follis 2012). Leaving aside all the contested questions of politics and geopolitical strategizing, the massive surge of goodwill that we have seen on the part of ordinary Poles towards Ukrainians in 2022 may owe a great deal to the familiarity bred by these intensified economic links.

I put this forward as a hypothesis which could be tested through anthropological research. After all, the most important methodological feature of what we do is the collection and direct reporting of qualitative data from the field. This is seldom sufficient to obtain funding. We are usually expected to formulate either a testable hypothesis or at least some *Leitfragen* ('leading questions'). These may secrete bias (the values of the investigator, or perhaps those s/he take to be the values of the committee members who will make the decision on the grant). But, irrespective of the working hypothesis, the anthropologist as ethnographer always ends up uncovering a great deal more material. The challenge is to make sense of it all. If the analyst clings to a position that is inconsistent with the data presented, the reader should be able to spot this. Values and positions on key issues may be nuanced throughout a population; or they may be entrenched in quite extreme ways in different segments of the population; this needs to be made clear in the analyst's publications. It ought to be possible to investigate Polish attitudes to Ukraine in 2022 in objective ways, irrespective of the investigator's own opinions.

Let me close this discussion by suggesting how a team of anthropologists might accomplish useful research tasks inside Ukraine, even as it burns. It is perhaps

no more likely that a team of foreign anthropologists would be able to work there in the immediate future than it is that Ildikó Bellér-Hann will be able to resume our research in Xinjiang. But, for the sake of the argument, let us dream. Let us also dream that the results of this research could be debated by Ukrainian and Russian scholars and politicians, alongside those of other countries.

My Weberian proposal would be to construct an ideal type of *familial well-being* and to operationalize this through fieldwork in at least six regions of Ukraine (more, if money and qualified researchers were available!). The research would have to start with a consideration of the semantic fields of Ukrainian terms such as *dobrobyt* and *blahopoluchchya*. Data collection would be undertaken in a selection of settlements roughly comparable in size. Yaroslav Hrytsak carried out valuable comparisons between L'viv and Donets'k in the first postsocialist decade, which demonstrated significant differences in self-identification and collective memory (Hrytsak 2000). It would be instructive to see what has changed in these two cities in the intervening decades, one a stronghold of national sentiment, and the other a major centre for the "dethroned majority" (Gingrich 2002). The remaining locations of this comparative anthropological project should be smaller, since the majority of Ukrainians reside in small and medium-sized towns. The dimensions to be investigated should include language and religion, where much research has been carried out already. National sentiment has tended to be strong among Greek Catholics, whose Church is concentrated regionally in the former Galician districts and could only emerge "from the catacombs" in the 1990s. But neither religion nor language determines allegiance to a national community in any mechanical way. Bilingualism and more or less systematic patterns of switching complicate the situation on the ground, where fluid accommodations are the norm in practice. It would be instructive to investigate what has changed in this regard since the pioneering fieldwork carried out by Catherine Wanner before the *Maidan* (Wanner 2014).

It would be plausible to assume that people experience the opposite of well-being (discomfort and anxiety, *Unbehagen*) when their existential securities are being threatened. Whether this influences their sense of belonging to a nation is a question that should be left open. For example, the residents of a town that has already lost a high proportion of its young people due to out-migration following the collapse of local industries might be keen to join the EU as rapidly as possible, in the hope of rebuilding with the help of transfers and new investments from the West. But others might prefer to try to avoid this disintegration in the first place, e.g. if their conurbation is integrated into some sector of the Russian economy,

and that this has enabled greater continuity in the lives of families and local communities.[6]

One might expect significant changes as the war continues, e.g. hatred of the enemy among those who have lost family members, reduced socializing across a newly salient ethnic divide, fewer 'mixed marriages', and further shifts away from the Russian Orthodox Church. But this anthropological research, according to Weberian principles, might also throw up surprises. It might reveal aspirations to both social and geographical mobility, especially on the part of young people; but, at the same time (and partially conflicting with such aspirations), a high valuation of local solidarities, e.g. being able to visit kin regularly because they work and live close by, and are not obliged to make their living in Poland or the UK. It might reveal as much mistrust of supposedly more transparent institutions in the European Union as that felt towards the 'oligarchs' who have hitherto dominated in Ukraine and Russia alike.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to defend the Weberian ideal of a value-free social science. This has become unfashionable in much of academe, but it seems to me more important than ever in an era in which notions of truth and evidence cede to 'fake news' and the proliferation of conspiracy theories and propaganda. It is possible to investigate even the most sensitive topics in objective ways, irrespective of the anthropologist's own values, such that the results will be recognized as valid by others whose evaluations differ. This critical objectivity is especially important when it comes to the assertion of values by the holders of power (as in 'European values') to justify behaviour by laying claim to the moral high ground.

This commitment to objectivity does not mean that our own values become irrelevant. My personal values have not changed significantly in the course of the years. Now, as during my years as a doctoral student (when ethical codes and human subject protocols did not yet exist), it is self-evident to me that the prime concern of the anthropologist must be the well-being of the people

6 Drawing on the work of economist Yuri M. Zhukov (2016), Gábor Scheiring (2022) has argued that, in the post-Maidan Donbas, "[…] local economic factors were stronger predictors of rebel violence than Russian ethnicity or language. Municipalities where the local population was highly vulnerable to trade disruptions with Russia induced by austerity and the E.U. free trade agreement were more likely to revolt and fell under rebel control earlier."

under investigation. In my student days, without subscribing to any simple notion of 'false consciousness', I was confident that certain elites could form a better understanding of how to promote that well-being than ordinary citizens left to themselves. Did that mean I turned a blind eye to the inefficiencies and hypocrisies of Marxist-Leninist domination? Not at all. Readers of my early monographs will find plenty of evidence of the abuse of power at the local level, and of the dissatisfaction felt by the majority of villagers towards their socialist rulers. In Hungary, this was due to the perceived injustices of collectivization. In Poland, it was because peasants lacked the material benefits that collectivization eventually brought to their Hungarian counterparts. These contrasting realities on the ground reinforced my fundamental value-based conviction that some form of socialist mixed economy and a pluralist, tolerant society was in the best interests of Eastern European populations.

It has never been easy for Western scholars to elaborate arguments about Eastern Europe rooted in left-of-centre sympathies. One is usually reviled in diaspora communities. Mainstream academics in one's home country look askance and diagnose political naivety, a failure to overcome the jejune anti-Americanism that was so fashionable during the last decades of socialism. Anthropologists, whether native or foreign, will question the arrogance of any investigator who appears to second-guess local preferences, such as those of Hungarian villagers who voted overwhelmingly for the Independent Smallholders' Party in the 1990s, and who vote *en masse* for Viktor Orbán today. My position is that we can understand these sentiments by approaching them in their historical context; we can explain them best if we proceed to introduce a range of what I have been calling institutional variables, reaching up to the level of EU membership and global political economy.

If the vocation of socio-cultural anthropologists is to understand 'the people', this does not mean that we embrace and endorse values we consider abhorrent. When the climate deteriorates to the extent that it has in Orbán's Hungary, we need to look very carefully at those institutional variables and the role of elites at multiple levels (from regional oligarchs to foreign Presidents, Prime Ministers and Chancellors) in order to specify the chains of causality. This combination of field research and attention to institutional contexts is the basis of our Weberian claim to the mantle of science, which is the mission of the Max Planck Society. Additionally, I have argued that we need to hold on to the qualitative methods that have served us well in the past, and to comparison at multiple levels. We should not be afraid to join public debates about such sensitive topics as human rights and cultural genocide, drawing on the data we collect whenever appropriate. We

should show respect for the full spectrum of our contacts in the countries where we work, and refrain from writing judgementally on the basis of a prior set of values that we hold as citizens of another country, which we may operationalize more freely at home, both inside and outside academic communities.

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