

CORRESPONDENCE: REPLY TO CHRIS HANN

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Professor Chris Hann has published several books and articles on Central and Eastern Europe. No wonder that I have referred to them, particularly those concerned with Poland that I picked as an exemplary case of a vaguely defined 'socialist and postsocialist studies.' In his reply he offers a straightforward discussion, but regretfully he relapses into an *ad personam* style that I did not use at all. I have a hunch that this is so because he has misread most of my arguments.

I could have reduced my response to a few points, but will, after reflection, offer a more thorough discussion. First, I did not say that western anthropological production on CEE is wrong, dire, or insignificant. On the contrary, I consider it valuable and inspiring. I just attempted to examine the relationship between different traditions in anthropological studies of the so-called socialist and postsocialist societies, the fact that these traditions hardly overlap, and that certain hierarchies of knowledge exist. Professor Hann reads it as an assault on the work of western anthropologists in general, and his own work in particular. His understanding is simply inaccurate. Second, at no point did I blame anybody personally or collectively for the existing state of affairs. I merely described this phenomenon and tried to analyze its causes. Third, I did not have the nerve to impose any orthodoxy. Chris Hann's reply, on the other hand, is brimming with advice on what CEEans should do in order to become 'western-style' anthropologists. His is an openly patronizing style that, frankly, does not fit my image of Professor Hann as a sensitive and prominent scholar. There is a thin, although extremely important, line between critical polemicising and scorning. Fourth, being even more condescending, Professor Hann wages a bold attack both on my CEEan colleagues and on myself by calling us 'intellectual pyrotechnicians,' our fieldwork shallow, and our anthropology unsophisticated. At this

point I should follow the ultimate postmodernist advice (as well as Jacques Chirac's) and fall silent. However, I hold the work of Chris Hann in high esteem, therefore I will elaborate further. I am convinced that our friendship will survive simply because we discuss issues, not persons.

Ad.1. Definitely, I did not blame anybody for the 'hierarchies of languages' that privileges English. This is beyond our control and the only thing that we, non-native speakers of English can do is to do our best to communicate on the international bazaar of scholars by excelling in our proficiency in this modern *lingua franca*. Also, our English-speaking fellow-anthropologists have been helping us to meet a plea of Chris Hann: "please try to arrange for editing by a native speaker." I, in turn, have a plea to foreign scholars who adorn their texts with words and phrases in local vernaculars: please try to arrange to have them reviewed by a native speakers because frequently, they are rendered incorrectly.

Ad.2. The invention of any field of study means that it is defined in scholarly and other discourses. In support of this, let me cite a statement from the book edited by Chris Hann: "postsocialism is certainly a construct of the academy." And, as Caroline Humphrey goes to say further, "it is not ours alone, and it does correspond to certain historical conditions 'out there'" (2001: 12). In other words, I share the view that in CEE, and elsewhere, there live real people in real societies with real histories. However, I also recognize the fact that our images of these places and people are shaped by our concepts. Anthropological insights are among those that inform these representations, and are helpful in deconstructing the commonsensical and the obvious, and in constructing more nuanced pictures of the world, thus providing both

more ‘deorientalized’ and ‘deoccidentalized’ interpretations of human practices. Sound anthropological accounts of CEE (written by both ‘Westerners’ and non-Westerners!) have also fulfilled this objective.

Ad.3. By writing about the disproportion in citations, references made and ideas referred to between Western and Eastern ethnographic monographs, particularly in Western anthropologists’ publications, I am not blaming their authors for this state of affairs. Having stated this, I tried to tackle the following issue: how did it happen that the two scholarly discourses do not really overlap? On the one hand, this supports my above argument that in scholarly discourses we actually create different realities because we happen to live in different societies, and are all individuals with our own life trajectories. When Chris Hann went to the south-eastern mountains in Poland in the 1970s, he created an image of the community there that was generated from his interests shaped during his academic education in the UK. The two students he mentions got interested in different issues not because the reality there was different, but because their conceptual categories and research interests were differently shaped. On the other hand, my arguments, and Chris Hann’s observations, confirm that such a split in perspectives still exists, and that it is a matter of concern for all those who would like to combine traditions – and inspect them for the constructions that they all are. I assume that we all should work towards this end. Professor Hann, in turns, states that he and his western peers have ‘always already’ had it right!? The argument that in mid-1980s, while in Cambridge, I was interested in rationality and shamanism and discussed them with Ernest Gellner and Stephen Hughes-Jones seems to me entirely beside the point. I could easily retort that Chris Hann was not interested in the issues I studied then.

Ad.4. I cannot find any assertion in any of my texts that “the MPI in Halle... is discriminating against CEE scholars and privileging the work of Westerners.”

Perhaps one can read between the lines of my AEER text that virtually all scholars in the volume on *Postsocialism* published as proceedings from the conference held at MPI in Halle are Westerners – if so, that was definitely not my intention. This volume was just one in the series of publications that illustrate my point about the predominance of ‘Westerners’ in writings on CEE. The statistics I provided are, I think, sound. Again, I do not hold Chris Hann or the entire Western anthropological academia responsible for this. I tried to answer a simple question: Why? Many answers are possible - I merely indicated a few paths in which our inquiries might go, but I have searched for the reasons on both sides of this mental iron curtain that is but gradually melting.

Ad.5. Of course, training PhD students is vital for any discipline. No doubt, the Institute co-headed by Chris Hann is well funded and functioning in this respect. At this point, Chris Hann is turning very personal in his arguments; answering them, I cannot help doing the same. He writes that long-lasting fieldwork is the divide between ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ kinds of anthropology. He may be right, but in this perspective, local scholars’ ethnographies are feeble. Definitely, there are researchers who have done much better fieldwork than I have ever done. However, I wonder what makes Professor Hann so certain that my fieldwork materials, collected during my sixth-months stay in the community, and intermittent research I have conducted for ten years, is thin. What makes him so sure that any fieldwork done in a manner different from his is less insightful? Chris Hann also suggests that I complain about not being included into the volume on *Postsocialism*. I have no clue why he says so. I find the book in question competent and useful, and I use it as an example when illustrating the point that in Western anthropological publications, non-Western authors (not me personally!) have been all but absent.

Ad.6. It is true that I did my fieldwork in the community that speaks more or less the same language I learned at home and at school, and it facilitates my understanding of this people's narratives. For Chris Hann, this is evidently a vice. I could argue that apart from their spoken language, these people were as alien to me as any other in any other community I ever entered for the first time, 'somewhere, anywhere,' as Hann writes. His view of anthropology is not universal and in many corners of the world anthropologists are also advised to study at home, and there are fields of research that in point of fact exclude such an immersion in one community as Hann advocates.

Anthropology today is nothing if not diversified and follows multiple tracks. Fieldwork is one of the issues that I tried to raise by indicating that 'we, CEEans' should constantly rethink our practices and meet high standards of decent scholarship without any further adjectives like 'Western,' 'Eastern,' or 'Hallean.' Chris Hann eagerly admits it, but at the same time leaves his own position intact or even presents it as the touchstone. Indeed, I am an advocate of the 'anthropologization' of the CEE ethno-anthropological or anthro-ethnological enterprise. Professor Hann states that: "Even though much has changed in recent years, including new forms of fieldwork by CEE scholars, it seems premature to speak of full disciplinary convergence." For him convergence means adjustment of others to his own standards. He seems to tell us: 'You will transform into full-fledged anthropologist only after you have done things the way I do it.' This is not exactly what I understand by convergence of any intellectual traditions.

Ad.7. It is not my foremost desire to be so widely read and to compete on the markets. I do not think about anthropology in terms of contest, rivalry, and 'sectors in the market.' These are neo-liberal terms, otherwise scorned by Chris Hann, that clearly frame some Western anthropological thinking, but (luckily) still did not invade many of my CEE colleagues. I also did not

complain that Western voices are louder. Let me repeat, I merely said that in Western studies on CEE, one can hardly find anthropological ideas, much less theories, produced by local anthropologists and that Western scholars refer almost solely to other 'Westerners' as theoretically entitled. The same, although reversed, applies to the majority of scholars who are based in the East and study postsocialist societies. Chris Hann says that in order to become proper anthropologists we should go abroad first – with hopes that this experience would enable us to do in-depth studies in our own countries. I beg to disagree.

Ad.8. I for one do not dare to issue prescriptions for proper science. Visits to academic institutions seem to me equally important as fieldwork, but Chris Hann suggest that it is a flaw in my and my colleagues' professional careers. I have indeed accepted several such invitations, and I believe it was an enriching experience both for me, my foreign colleagues, and the students.

Ad.9. Professor Hann continues his lecture on proper anthropology and this time gives us a 'cultural hero story' to be followed, namely Yuli Konstantinov. I am unsure that this is entirely correct, especially towards the colleague thus named.

After reading points 6-9 of Chris Hann's reply, the reader can get an impression that anyone coming from CEE has to do what people in MPI in Halle do in order to be awarded the noble title of an anthropologist. As anonymous students that Hann quotes authoritatively say, we would have done better to keep with teaching folklore. Perhaps Professor Hann needs to tell us quite simply: how much homework do we CEEans still have to do before we become 'us?'

Reference Cited:

Humphrey, Caroline. 2001. Does the Category "Postsocialist" Still Make Sense? In: C.M. Hann, (ed.), *Postsocialism*, pp. 12-15. New York: Routledge.