

## Moral Dispossession

*Chris Hann*

### Introduction: The two Karls<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about the events of 1989-1991 and the ensuing transformations in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Like other researchers, we at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology have tried to tease out continuities as well as assess the impact of ruptures. As socialism receded into the past, the utility of the label »post-socialist« seemed inevitably to diminish, and we abandoned this term in designating the research programme of my department. Young social anthropologists going to the field today find that only older informants can narrate direct recollections of life under socialism. Yet the importance of those *Wende* years, in Germany as elsewhere in the region, seems not to diminish at all. In hindsight, it seems increasingly clear that we are indeed dealing with a caesura and the consequent formation of a social generation whose members will shape social change for decades to come. The generational focus of this interdisciplinary workshop at the

---

1 This paper is an expanded version of a lecture given at the opening of the workshop »Generations of Change: Understanding Postsocialism and Transition Processes from a Generational Perspective« in Bielefeld, 25-27<sup>th</sup> November 2010 (revised in summer 2011). I thank all my hosts at the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology, and especially the workshop organizers Caterina Rohde and Jeanette Prochnow. Thanks also to Gareth Dale for sharing his notes from the Karl Polanyi Archive (this is where I discovered that Karl Polanyi listed Karl Mannheim as a referee in the 1930s). The paper bears the mark of many team projects at the Max Planck Institute in Halle. I also thank James Carrier, Gerald Creed, Keith Hart, Don Kalb and Mihály Sárkány, all of them recent visitors and active participants in our economic anthropology debates. Special thanks to Stephen Gudeman, my partner in the ongoing »Economy and Ritual« project.

University of Bielefeld is therefore highly welcome. In this contribution I shall offer a brief, necessarily selective review of some anthropological contributions to what I term ›moral dispossession‹, with particular reference to rural communities. This requires some preliminary discussion of the vexed question of socialism as a moral order. Before clarifying my own position and presenting some empirical cases, let me introduce my themes with reference to two scholars of a common social generation formed in Central Europe roughly a century ago.

A generational approach to the changes set in train in 1989 can hardly avoid an engagement with the theories originally put forward by Karl Mannheim in 1928. I shall not elaborate on those ideas, but instead invite you to recall Mannheim's biography. He was born in 1893 in Budapest, where he grew up as a member of a generation that included Karl Polanyi, not to mention Oskar Jaszi, Georg Lukacs and many others who went on to make their mark on scholarly and political life in different parts of the world in the course of the twentieth century. For reasons that will become obvious, I shall concentrate on the figure of Polanyi, born in 1886.

Let me make it clear that I am not postulating any close affinity between these two Karls; as with the other pairs I shall consider later, I emphasize diversity as well as commonalities within the cohort. I do not know how well they knew each other, though they probably interacted in associations of the ›progressive‹ intelligentsia and at literary salons such as that of Polanyi's mother Cecilia, one of the most celebrated salons of the day. Much later, in London in the 1930s, it seems that the younger Karl served as a referee for his impecunious fellow-immigrant. Their philosophical and political instincts were very different. Mannheim looked with disdain on the scientific positivism attractive to Polanyi and other bourgeois radicals such as Jaszi in the years before the First World War. Like his mentor Lukacs, Mannheim preferred to look to German ›metaphysical idealism‹ for theoretical inspiration, though he was more reluctant than Lukacs to engage in politics. Polanyi was more attracted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and to Émile Durkheim. While working on his masterpiece *The Great Transformation* he returned repeatedly to what he saw as

the central problem of the modern world, namely how to protect individual freedom in a non-traditional, ›complex society‹. Some years after Mannheim's death in 1947, Polanyi praised the work of his compatriot while at the same time criticizing him for paying insufficient attention to the faith that was essential to bind a community.<sup>2</sup>

Student associations and literary salons hardly suffice as a basis for a ›Generation‹ in the expansive Mannheimian sense. These circles were hardly representative of the Hungarian half of the ›dual monarchy‹ before 1914, in which Jews played a prominent role in scholarship as well as in commerce and industry. The generational unity of these intellectuals became evident only in retrospect, after the bloodshed of the First World War, and more emphatically when the failure of the ›Republic of Councils‹ in 1919 had pushed most survivors into foreign exile. The wartime experiences of the two Karls were completely different: Mannheim continued to attend the salons and to work on his dissertation *Structural Analysis of Epistemology*, while Karl Polanyi experienced trauma on the Russian front. The founder of the sociology of knowledge went on to make his name with a dazzling career in Germany, before relocating to England and a lectureship at the London School of Economics after he was ousted from his chair in Frankfurt in 1933. Polanyi's trajectory westwards had superficial similarities, but the reality was very different. He spent most of the 1920s working as an economic journalist in Vienna, where he obtained intimate knowledge of financial markets and the materiality of the real economy. He supported socialist oppositional activi-

---

2 Abraham Rotstein had extended conversations with Karl Polanyi between 1956 and 1958. He recalled Polanyi opining »Mannheim's book is v. impressive but he suffers from assumption of a world without faith and belief« (Karl Polanyi Archive, Container 45-13, Notes of Weekend XVIII with Karl Polanyi). Yet we know that Mannheim became very concerned with matters of »faith and belief« after his move to England, interacting with both Karl and Michael Polanyi at Christian socialist meetings. A convergence of the two Karls is evident in their key works of this period: *The Great Transformation* was subtitled *The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, while Mannheim published his own *Diagnosis of Our Time* in 1943, cf. Remmling 1975.

ties; but though his wife Ilona Duczynska was a loyal member of the Communist Party, Karl Polanyi himself did not join. Like Mannheim, he repeatedly distanced himself from Marxism, which he saw as marred by economic determinism. Eventually Polanyi too was obliged to relocate to England, where his path crossed with that of Mannheim in left-wing Christian discussion groups. Polanyi gave lectures for the Workers Educational Association while working intensively on the book that was finally published in 1944 in the United States, *The Great Transformation*. On the basis of this work he at last managed to salvage an academic career in New York in the last decades of his life (Dale 2010).

My premise is that the world view and intellectual commitments of the authors of *Ideology and Utopia* and *The Great Transformation* were decisively shaped by their common experiences as young men in Budapest. The Hungarian capital was probably the fastest growing industrial city in Europe at the time; but it was also the second city of an empire still rife with feudal anachronisms. Polanyi wrote presciently of the dangers of this concatenation in the years before the First World War. His standpoint in *The Great Transformation* was doubtless influenced both by his experiences of Red Vienna in the 1920s and by the effects of the Great Depression on British workers in the 1930s. But I think Gareth Dale is right to suggest that the cataclysm of 1914 was the »great divide« that inspired the ambitious historical panorama of Polanyi's magnum opus. It was the rise of »market society« over the entire course of the nineteenth century, especially in Britain, which was responsible for the tragedies of the first half of the twentieth century. British industrial capitalism had, for the first time in history according to Polanyi, broken with traditional forms of integrating economy and society in favour of an untrammelled reliance on »the market«.

There is no space here to elaborate this diagnosis and discuss its many critics. Suffice it to note that that Karl Polanyi is enjoying a new wave of popularity in an era of neoliberalism and on-going financial crisis (Hann & Hart 2009). His economic and sociological analyses seem more topical today than they were in the last decades of his life, when Social Democracy, or Keynesianism or »embedded liberalism« (the exact label is not

important here) seemed to have laid the foundations for a new era of global stability. In this paper I want to emphasize the ›moral‹ inspiration of Polanyi's critique of the market. We know that he was greatly influenced by ›guild socialism‹ during the inter-war decades. His impassioned rhetoric and subtle reflections on ›freedom in a complex society‹ reflect this moral positioning. Polanyi did not actually use the phrase ›moral economy, but it is not surprising that many people seem to think he did, long before this term was rendered popular through the writings of E. P. Thompson, James Scott and others.

Polanyi's relationship to Karl Marx, Marxism and ›actually existing socialisms‹ was complex – not always edifying, but too complex to probe further here. My purpose is to consider postsocialist transformations after 1989 in the light of Polanyi's analysis of the dramatic impact of the utopia of the self-regulating market in the previous century. In both cases, or so it would seem at first glance, an established moral economy is torn asunder. Many aspects of the most recent destruction have been documented in ethnographic case studies over the last two decades. Before turning to some examples, I would like to introduce the synthesizing concept of moral dispossession and to explain what I consider distinctive about socialism as a moral order in the Rousseau-Durkheimian sense.

### **Moral dispossession**

Let me start with the concept of dispossession, which usually has brute material referents, notably in Marxist analysis of the first stages of industrial capitalism. In the archetypal analysis, peasants are dispossessed of their means of subsistence through enclosures. In the twentieth century it can be argued that the socialist collectivization of agriculture was a comparable appropriation. In both cases, millions of smallholders are effectively compelled to swell the ranks of the urban proletariat. By extension (contrary to the expectations of Marx), if those industrial workers in turn acquire significant resources and entitlements, they too can be dispossessed, notably of their jobs and of any semblance of security in their lives. David Harvey's (2003) analyses of »accumulation through

dispossession« have explored this phenomenon in neoliberal political economies. In today's globalized capitalism, these tendencies can also be found in many former socialist countries, wherever the winds of market competition are allowed to blow. Don Kalb, for example, has written of the effects of the dispossession of the Polish working class by the post-socialist state. As a result, the generation which was mobilized in the Solidarity movement to campaign against an unpopular communist government is nowadays more readily mobilized by right-wing populists. In Kalb's example, dispossession has a very concrete focus when the state moves to eliminate management and ownership by skilled and semi-skilled workers; but this anthropologist extends the notion to include a more diffuse »process of cultural dispossession that accompanied, deepened, and smoothed the material process of dispossession simultaneously taking place« (Kalb 2009: 214).

Working independently along similar lines, Gerald Creed has elaborated a concept of cultural dispossession for the case of rural Bulgaria, where the liquidation of cooperative farms was highly politicized in the 1990s (Creed 1997; 2011). He argues that the overall effect of postsocialist transformation in the Bulgarian countryside has been »a radical restructuring of village social relations in both practice and meaning«. Creed continues as follows:

I am not speaking simply of people losing some relationships and having to develop new ones, rather I'm suggesting that the very nature of various relations was transformed. Relations between genders, between ethnic groups, and between fellow villagers were all redefined. Different understandings of these relations were characteristic of socialism; some of these were problematic for the transition and others completely disconnected. There was no design for these changes, as the differences were hardly appreciated or recognized by those drawing the transition blueprints (Creed 2011: 10).

In Creed's account, the breaking up of socialist farms exemplifies the more general obliteration of complex forms of living in society. All were abruptly required to conform to a new Western template, so that the

country would qualify for full membership in the European Union. Creed's new book sheds fascinating light on how villagers reacted to this cultural dispossession. He focuses on *kukeri*, traditional mumming performances which were promoted in the socialist era and have retained their popularity in recent years. Through ironic forms of ›ritual re-enchantment‹ actors cope with and comment critically on the reversal of the socialist ideologies of progress with which they were brought up.

From the ›cultural dispossession‹ of Don Kalb and Gerald Creed, it is just a short step to my own coinage. What do I mean by ›moral‹? Unfortunately the usage of this term by philosophers and social scientists is far from consistent, not to mention the diverse understandings of wider publics. Morality refers to questions of right and wrong, including the ethical judgments of individuals in their everyday lives. Much of the recent literature in the ›anthropology of morality‹ is concerned with the individual's freedom to make such judgments, and thus with the crafting of a particular form of ›person‹. But at another level, that of the Durkheimian sociological tradition – which can be traced back to Rousseau – every society is a moral order. By definition, the dramatic collapse of Soviet socialism meant the end of a moral order in this sense, comprising both the termination of practical ways of life and the sudden calling into question of a *Weltanschauung*, of most people's taken-for-granted knowledge of the world in which they lived. The certainties and calculable risks of the late socialist environment were replaced by massive uncertainty and incalculability.

The new mechanisms of the market, which people associated with greater uncertainty, were predicated on the ›calculative reason‹ of short-term individual advantage (Gudeman 2008). However, as Gudeman shows in his most recent work, market society must itself be considered as a moral order, albeit a very different morality from that of socialism (Gudeman forthcoming). The capitalist market is in principle open-ended, universalist and inclusionary. Its moral underpinnings are complex, in both the expansive Durkheimian sense and in the narrower usage that ties morality to ethics and the crafting of the person. Adam Smith is still regularly invoked by the ideologists of neoliberalism as the founding father

who held that the ›invisible hand‹ of the market would suffice to ensure that each individual's pursuit of self-interest was conducive to the good of society. In fact, Smith was by no means unsympathetic to regulation when the interests of an economic sector or an entire country warranted such intervention. Long before he wrote *The Wealth of Nations* [1776] he had shown in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759] that human behaviour was predicated on ›sympathy‹ and fellow-feeling with others, rather than on egoistic utility maximization. In this he was very close to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* he reviewed in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1756. Although Smith's book review was also critical, he and Rousseau belonged to the same Enlightenment generation. They addressed the same basic dilemma of how to legitimise Europe's emerging ›commercial society‹ and were equally unconvinced by Mandeville's portrayal of human nature in *The Fable of the Bees*. Of course their positions differed, as did those of Mannheim and Polanyi. While Rousseau doubted that the advance of civilization could be reconciled with virtuous communities, Smith eventually endorsed commercial society. He did so on moral grounds, because in his view the expansion of exchange through the division of labour was conducive to diligence and social stability via interpersonal emulation, and not because he considered selfish accumulation to be a value in itself; still less should it be viewed as the ultimate determinant of human action (Force 2003).

If Polanyi was inclined to dismiss ›disembedded‹ market society as being devoid of moral foundation, the encompassing socialist moral order has been similarly misrecognized by its critics. The problems of these moral orders were often self-made: we must remember the polarized climate of the Cold War era, in which Western representations of the Iron Curtain emphasized lawlessness, the arbitrariness of power holders, the absence not only of secure property rights but of fundamental freedoms. Such images are maintained in history books, in countless museums and exhibitions and in commemorations of appropriate anniversaries. Nowhere are these memories cultivated more vigorously than in Germany. If at the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the erection of the Berlin Wall, the members of a contemporary left-wing political party refuse to



join in a ceremony to mark the ensuing loss of life, it gives rise to a scandal because the moral issue seems so unambiguous.

Yet the socialist power holders who eventually authorized the construction of that wall also invoked moral principles, namely building a more just, more egalitarian society. The extent to which they succeeded in doing so is not the issue here. What matters is that, precisely because they lacked the legitimacy conferred by multi-party competition at the ballot box, socialist regimes were compelled to maintain a vigorous moral rhetoric to justify their exercise of power. They could make certain compromises, notably by relaxing economic controls and giving more scope to market forces in order to increase consumer satisfaction – a critical source of complicity if not of ethical legitimacy. But this strategy was risky, because ›market socialism‹ led to hodge-podge mixtures which inevitably cut into the moral foundations without ever being able to match fully capitalist markets in terms of economic efficiency. Hungary, the homeland of the two Karls, is the best illustration: the success of ›goulash communism‹ after the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism in 1968 did not prevent the great majority of Hungarians from voting the socialist party out of power as soon as they had an opportunity to do so, in 1990. On the other hand, the fact that this party, in spite of the disasters of Stalinism and 1956, survived and was actually voted back into power in 1994, 2002 and 2006 suggests that, at least in this country, the pursuit of certain socialist ideals in a moderate, pragmatic spirit was attractive to many.

Let us not forget that socialism was opposed on moral grounds by countless opposition activists, from isolated dissidents who in the end opted for ›internal emigration‹ to Soviet scientists with the courage of Andrei Sakharov, GDR *Bürgerrechtler* and a Polish electrician called Lech Wałęsa whose rhetorical skills far exceeded those of any intellectual. But the Solidarity movement proved to be ephemeral. Even in 1980 I noticed that it did not have much respect among Polish farmers, and it had broken up into competing factions well before the changes of 1989, in part because of its inability to retain the ›moral high ground‹. What is striking to me after two decades of ›postsocialism‹ is the abundant evi-

dence that vast numbers of ordinary people, citizens usually perceived in Western countries as the victims of socialist power, consider the *ancien régime* to have been more just (ethically defensible) than any of the successor regimes. Who would have expected this twenty years ago?

Of course such statements, as with all memories of the socialist past, reflect the respondents' present-day situation: their disillusionment with corruption, and the hardship they experience, or notice others experiencing. Even without expert analyses of rising Gini coefficients, most people in most postsocialist countries seem to feel that differentials have greatly widened, and that this is a bad thing. Moreover they feel – and have good grounds for feeling – that the new inequalities are less transparent than those of the old *nomenklatura*. I used to know people in 1970s Hungary who, in spite of the regime's origins in the violence which eventually brought János Kádár to power in 1956, still *believed* in socialism. A few (including Kádár himself) attempted to act out its moral principles in an almost Weberian spirit of *innerweltliche Askese*, defying the consumerist trends of the last decades of socialist power. They were a minority, for sure. But the larger number of citizens who showed no strong signs of internal moral conviction could still be held to account by the prevailing socialist moral norms, even when these were often held up as the object of irony, cynicism and even scorn. By contrast, there seems to be widespread agreement that the ›market society‹ which dominates today, and which has in recent years engulfed the socialist party itself, does not even pretend to have a moral foundation. In the popular perception, shaped by the continuing uncertainties of world financial markets as well as the discourses of socialism and many much older currents, the market stands only for short-term profit-making; the antithesis of morality. We could call this grassroots Polanyi-ism, though the anti-market sentiment can be traced back at least as far as Aristotle.

### Bringing capitalism to the socialist countryside

Let me now turn to illustrate this »moral dispossession« with reference to our projects at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.<sup>3</sup> Western anthropologists have worked more in the countryside than in industrial settings such as that considered by Don Kalb. As Creed and others have shown, the policies characterized as decollectivization or privatization turn out to have been more or less devastating processes of dispossession, arguably more destructive than the original interventions to collectivize, and comparable in their effects to the enclosure movement of preindustrial Britain (Hann et al. 2003). The great advantage of investigating these processes in a face-to-face community is that one can study the full complexity of the changes in a manageable setting in a way that is impossible in the city. Kalb solves the problem by focusing creatively on a single individual, but the village researcher is ideally able to trace and follow through tangled networks. She can combine sources of information to produce a satisfying holistic account, without neglecting intra-community differentiation, including diverging moral evaluations. Another justification for studying the countryside is the simple fact that, in addition to maintaining a larger farm labour force than found in capitalist countries, due to under-urbanisation many factory workers under socialism were constrained to live in villages and commute to their workplaces.

Collectivization had resulted most commonly in some form of »producers' cooperative« based on the Soviet *kollehoz*. This institution exemplified socialism in the rural sphere, although ideologically state farms were considered to be a higher form of ownership. From their inception, the new socialist forms were central to the local moral order, albeit often exposed to strong moral critique. The spectrum of decollectivization ranges from the rather benign methods used to integrate the LPGs (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften*, agricultural production coop-

---

3 For more details of the projects of this Focus Group see the final report »Property Relations«: [www.eth.mpg.de/cms/en/publications/reports/pdf/Depart\\_II\\_2005\\_Property\\_Relations.pdf](http://www.eth.mpg.de/cms/en/publications/reports/pdf/Depart_II_2005_Property_Relations.pdf).

eratives) of the *neue Bundesländer* into the institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Union (Buechler & Buechler 2002) to the brutal methods used by postsocialist *ferмеры* and their urban patrons in Uzbekistan to set up their own private farms at the expense of the mass of former *kolkhoz* members (Trevisani 2010). In most parts of the former Soviet Union, the distribution of individualized shares did not enable any effective empowerment. Many did not even bother to ascertain where their share might be, since they had no realistic prospect of farming it as a household enterprise (cf. Yalçın-Heckmann 2010). The terms of trade between town and countryside have, from the point of view of the latter, generally deteriorated; within the countryside, inequalities of income and ownership have greatly increased. Very large numbers of villagers lost their jobs and have been forced to migrate and/or to eke out a living through subsistence farming on the household plot, which has become their major asset.

Beyond national and regional differences, closer inspection reveals considerable variation, even within individual communities. In this respect the Hungarian village of Tázlár, which I have studied since the mid-1970s, is no exception. Indeed, social inequalities here were unusually marked due to the settlement history. This region of the Great Plain was repopulated from the late nineteenth century onwards by migrants with very different endowments, though all had been affected by population expansion and economic pressures in their native communities (Hann 1980; Juhász 1997). Socialism brought new dimensions of inequality, without ever entirely eliminating the older ones. I selected this region between the rivers Danube and Tisza because of the prevalence here of a loose form of cooperative, which had attracted my attention in the academic literature. The essence of this cooperative, in comparison with the standard *kolkhoz*, was the unusually wide scope it gave for the persistence of family farming on one's own plots, including viticulture. Most villagers in the 1970s spent little or no time working for the collective sector of the cooperative; but their membership entitled them to draw on its assistance in obtaining inputs and in marketing their products. This large measure of continuity with the peasant past helped to explain the

strength of the Independent Smallholders' Party after 1989 and the distinct lack of sympathy for collectivist ideals, even though Tázlár villagers had profited greatly in material terms from their flexible form of cooperative and the market-oriented policies pursued by the socialist regime after 1968.

The postsocialist years brought new inequalities, which again evolved in complex ways on the basis of past differentiation. Of course, many of the people I knew well in the 1970s and 1980s are long deceased. My longest stay in the postsocialist era was a sojourn of two months in 2001, but this was insufficient for a comprehensive restudy (Hann 2006). The friendships I maintain tend to be with people of my own age or a little older who helped me in one way or another during the original fieldwork. I do not know the ›generation‹ of the *rendszer váltás* (*Wende*, ›system change‹), except indirectly through their parents. Even if I had more adequate data, there is no space in this paper to attempt a more global assessment. On the other hand to focus on a single individual, as does Kalb, would be to obliterate the variation. I therefore wish to share some impressions gleaned during my most recent visit to Tázlár (September 2008) by focusing on two individuals who represent two poles of the generation of market socialism.

It was thanks to Sanyi that I selected Tázlár as my field site in the first place. In May 1976, I was walking around the district for the first time and he picked me up in his Trabant in the late afternoon of my first visit to this settlement. He was the ideal person to help me to understand the tensions of this unusual form of cooperative, and to mediate my residence and research in the village. Sanyi worked as an agronomist, employed by the cooperative to facilitate the independent household farming of its members; he was not involved at all with its (rather limited) collective activities. However, he had not grown up on a farm, but in small towns where his father was a watchmaker. Sanyi was a member of the Communist Party, having joined not for careerist reasons but because he was a *believer* in socialist ideals, in the sense noted in the previous section. This may well have played a role in obtaining the necessary political authorization for my project at a higher lever (the chairman of

the local council made it plain that he did not wish to have a young foreigner in the village, but acquiesced in the face of my letters of recommendation from the Academy of Sciences in Budapest and the support of the cooperative leadership, which Sanyi arranged for me in his usual bluff, straightforward fashion).

Sanyi was my principal companion during my ten months in the village. His own role changed in the last decade of socialism: he became the first full-time secretary of the local cell of the Communist Party, thereby giving up his role as an adviser to smallholder producers. However he remained a member of the cooperative and helped to ensure that it continued to pursue flexible policies that would benefit its members. He played the leading role in managing a small »auxiliary economic unit« devoted to the manufacture of shoe uppers, an initiative that helped to create jobs (mainly for women) and to keep the cooperative financially healthy during the last years of socialism. Meanwhile, like almost everyone else in Hungary, he worked on his own plots in his spare time (it was thanks to this additional income – mainly from vineyards – that he was able to modernize his house in the market centre, and to purchase his Trabant).

The end of socialism was a catastrophe for Sanyi. It coincided with the breakup of his first marriage, which obliged him to give up his urban home and private vineyards. By the time he remarried he had lost his job and main source of income. He was not the only cooperative leader to suffer in this way, but Sanyi's case was much more serious because, having transferred virtually all his assets to his ex-wife, he needed to accumulate afresh. For some years he and his new wife had to endure atrocious unhygienic conditions while living at the cooperative's central hog facility. Eventually, with the health of his infant children as justification, the postsocialist council helped him to construct a new house. He was never able to finish the building properly. In 2008, his house and yard still stood out for their untidiness and obvious signs of poverty. Some villagers would comment on this as evidence of moral failure, and project a mysterious connection between the breakdown of his first marriage and his loyalty to the Communist Party. But my impression over

the years is that a large majority sympathizes with him as a victim of the transition; villagers respect the fact that he is one of the few former Party members who has not switched allegiance, but remained committed to the party known since 1990 as the Hungarian Socialist Party. His previous record of assistance to small farmers is not forgotten and his continued civil engagement, in particular with pensioner groups, is widely appreciated.

In 2008 Sanyi was almost 65 and about to become an old age pensioner himself. After 1990 the principal source of income in his household had in any case been transfers from the state, mainly in the form of child allowances. To make ends meet he has pursued a range of small-scale farming activities, butchered pigs and undertaken other casual jobs for neighbours. One key element in his retirement strategy was to hold on to the shares he received in the cooperative when it was restructured in the early 1990s. Indeed he and his wife bought up shares disposed of by others as cooperative membership shrank. They were convinced that the real estate held by the institution, including the auxiliary economic units established at the end of the socialist era, would secure their investment. However, and this was the main news Sanyi had to tell me during my 2008 visit, long, drawn-out litigation instigated by the former Chief Agronomist had resulted in a compensation award that effectively nullified the value of his shares. The cooperative was defunct and its last remaining properties would be sold to pay off the major creditor, the state. With this, almost two decades after the collapse of socialism, the material dispossession of those ideologically sympathetic to the cooperative was complete.

Sanyi is clearly a victim; indeed it is hard to imagine a more dramatic case. He has lost much of the ebullience I recall from the socialist era. Occasionally he attaches blame to particular individuals, notably the cooperative chairman who chose not to rehire him as an agronomist when it theoretically would have been possible to do so in 1990. He does not indulge in self-pity and I have never heard him or anyone else in the village use the terms victim or scapegoat; but that is how I see him myself. I admire the fact that he has stuck to his principles. Then as now, he

genuinely believes that socialist ideals are the key to a more just society. However, unlike the children of his first marriage, those of the second (primarily because of the enthusiasm of their mother) go to church regularly and have gone through the standard Catholic life-cycle rituals. He does not need to show up regularly himself in order to hold on to his place in the moral community.

After leaving Sanyi I went to call on Feri, whose luxurious house adjacent to the main road, with its well tended garden and tidy yard, is immediately indicative of the stark contrast between these two men. Feri is some five years younger than Sanyi, but I classify him in the same social generation. At the time of my first fieldwork in 1976 to 1977 he shared a yard with his grandmother, who was my landlady. They were descendants of one of the first families to resettle the *puszta* of Tázlár in the nineteenth century. The family had accumulated substantial acreage, and then lost most of it after being branded *kulák* in the 1950s. My landlady was a staunch anti-communist who attended mass in the Catholic church daily. Feri did not go to church regularly, but he shared her basic political views and had also inherited something of the family's entrepreneurial values. After completing vocational school, he set about applying his skills as a mechanic to profit from the opportunities available in the relaxed climate of the time. It was relatively easy to acquire a private tractor and the additional equipment necessary to provide a full range of farming services, which Feri was able to offer more promptly and efficiently than the tractor drivers of the cooperative with whom he competed. Later he added a combine harvester to his personal machine park. This dynamic success continued after the end of communism when Feri opened the village's first (and only) petrol station and acquired a haulage fleet for long-distance freight transport. When the cooperative began to dispose of its assets, he used his shares and those of his grandmother to buy a bus for a knockdown price, reselling it at once at a substantial profit. In the early 1990s he was the ultimate market entrepreneur, rejoicing in the demise of the cooperative and the definitive privatization of all its farmland.



On the face of it, Feri is a »winner« of the Hungarian *rendszer*váltás, though in his case the very notion of a rupture is problematic. There was perhaps a slight acceleration in the early 1990s, but his capital accumulation had its roots in the market socialism of the 1970s. Feri was a nominal member of the cooperative (like his grandmother), but even in those years when the cooperative required its members to provide labour inputs (the maximum was six days per year), he preferred to pay a small financial penalty instead. He employed others to work for him, mainly as drivers. This was initially part of the »black« economy, since it obviously contradicted the socialist norm, though by the time of my fieldwork it was tolerated. In the 1990s, however, his chief assistant and drivers had been fully legalized: Feri conscientiously paid the employer's prescribed insurance and pension contributions. He never played any significant role in politics or the public sphere in the village, but he certainly had friends and his material success commanded respect. With Sanyi, the former Party Secretary, I recall he had a teasing, joking relationship in the 1970s. Feri, like his grandmother, made no secret of his distaste for socialist bureaucracy. Sanyi countered with banter, nicknaming him *sumák*, a term that implied a moral rebuke for avarice, with implications of cheating.

During my visit in 2008 I could not help but see obvious changes in Feri's lifestyle, compared to the assertive entrepreneur I had known previously. The change had begun in the late 1990s and was closely linked to the sudden loss of his wife through leukaemia in 1999. Since then he has lived alone in his large house and gone to church more often. One daughter lives and works in Budapest. Another, who has married and given him grandchildren, lives in a nearby market town; she visits regularly and assists him with his tax records. Rumour has it that his daughters have been unsympathetic to the idea of a remarriage. In 2008 we did not talk about such intimate matters but about his business interests and the general social and political climate. He complained that the haulage market was saturated, and that for several years it had been an uphill struggle to balance the books. When he ventured more sweeping generalizations about the era of *demokrácia*, comparing it unfavourably to the

late socialist era, I made the obvious riposte. I suggested that he, of course, had rosy memories of the Kádár years because he had been one of the first in the region to exploit new economic niches. Now such opportunities were few and far between, because there was market competition in all sectors; but surely he had to concede that this consolidation of the market was a good thing, even though it made future windfall profits for himself less likely?

No, no, no, he explained. I had misunderstood. In his opinion, the economic society of the late socialist era was still fundamentally humane in a way that the cutthroat competition of today's market society was not. Mistrust was now far more prevalent, the opportunities for village youth had been greatly reduced, and the high incidence of unemployment was tragic. Feri's ethical judgement was emphatically social, articulated in terms of the diminished opportunities open to others. To put it in the terms of Polanyi and Creed, Feri was offering me a narrative of disembedding, in which the very nature of human relations had been transformed. Despite Feri's very different family background, values and politico-economic profile in the community, his views about the socialist era seemed quite similar to those held by Sanyi. Winner and loser alike held Kádár's version of socialism (despite the shabby origins of that regime) to be basically decent, though their own positions in that system had been utterly different. This, I suggest, is evidence of a widespread, collectively held or social memory among Hungarian villagers. I do not claim that such representations were evenly distributed throughout the community. But even some of the most vociferous detractors of socialism, those who were most active in the Independent Smallholders' Party until its ignominious collapse in 2002, who were ideologically opposed to any form of cooperative – even these villagers concede that socialist job security and support policies for agriculture compare favourably with the situation today. Many of these villagers are now active supporters of an extreme right-wing political party (*Jobbik*) that promotes Hungarian nationalism and is fiercely critical of other groups, especially Gypsies.

I am arguing that we need to recognize social transformation. An ›anthropology of morality‹ which places the main emphasis on transformations of the self is poorly equipped to deal with the world-historical significance of the end of the socialist moral order. Of course, remembrances occur in individual heads and they are also affected by countless personal circumstances. I hinted at the significance of domestic misfortune in the cases of both Sanyi and Feri. Their children certainly see some matters quite differently (as noted, Feri's daughters have left the village, while Sanyi's five children from his second wife all remain in Tázlár and have little prospect of geographical or social mobility). But it seems to me that both generations have experienced what I theorized in my introduction to our collective volume (Hann et al. 2003) as the destruction of the socialist moral economy, and what I am now terming moral dispossession. Although the loose form of cooperative in Tázlár was very different from the standard models of socialist agriculture, the end of the old moral order was very much the same as that which our Focus Group documented elsewhere in the former Soviet bloc. These patterns can be compared and contrasted with the reforms of collectivized agriculture in China from the late 1970s. Here the villagers were not dispossessed materially but allocated land in egalitarian plots, which they hold with long-term leases. In China the ›household responsibility‹ system was experienced as a return to the older local moral economy, despite the increasing penetration of the market in recent decades. By contrast, decollectivization in the Soviet bloc has generally been experienced as moral dispossession. The sudden penetration of capitalism has born out Rousseau's critique, rather than the Adam Smith's more optimistic prognosis for commercial society.

### **Morality, religion, rupture**

In the previous section I have argued that the destruction of socialist farming institutions helped to cement grave moral uncertainty, even in locations where collective farms had been vigorously opposed at their introduction and later greatly attenuated in their actual workings. It might be objected that the face-to-face character of the village makes a crucial difference. The big city equivalents of Sanyi and Feri would be

unlikely to run into each other regularly at local events; they would have more economic as well as social opportunities open to them; and so their sense of moral change might be weaker.

Although the village certainly does differ from the conurbation and cannot be considered representative of the whole society (any more than one village can be considered representative of the entire rural sector), I argue that in certain ways the rural setting sheds more concentrated light on processes central to the larger picture. To understand these better, I find it useful to return to Polanyi. His theorizing of a great transformation hinged on the Speenhamland system amending the Poor Law in the late eighteenth century. But was the impact of this legislation any more dramatic than the Black Act at the beginning of the century, which also provoked widespread protest and unrest (Thompson 1975)? It seems to me that, contrary to Polanyi, the processes of both moral and institutional change in English society have been overwhelmingly gradualist – right down to 2011, when a conservative Prime Minister attributes urban riots and looting to the moral shortcomings of a 'broken society'. There seems to be widespread agreement that the moral order of twenty-first century Britain is that of a brash consumerism, which is to say that its market society is effectively devoid of morality in the narrower, popular sense; and that this consumerism, far from propagating the virtues of honest labour and social stability upheld by Adam Smith, undermines them both.

In comparison, in Eastern Europe collectivization and decollectivization caused both institutional and moral caesurae. The moral rupture was significant because Marxist ideology aspired to create a secular public morality. It did so in a novel way but, especially where this could be grafted on to earlier traditions as seems eventually to have happened in much of the Soviet countryside, upheaval was mitigated. For example, a Party Secretary and an Orthodox priest might disagree on many details, but some form of local solidarity and hard work as the basic source of value were central principles for both. By contrast, the rupture of the early 1990s was more truly dramatic because no plausible public morality at all was on offer. In the West, religious belief and participation in

church activities declined gradually over centuries. In socialist countries these traditional bastions of moral values had been explicitly attacked in the name of »scientific atheism«. But even where these policies proved counter-productive, as in Poland, socialism in a sense competed with religion by trying to project itself as a moral order. With the collapse of the regime that, so to speak, wore its morality on its sleeve, something like a vacuum ensued in this domain. This is a dubious metaphor, since human beings can never be entirely devoid of moral ideas. The proponents of shock therapy in the economic domain usually leavened their message with simultaneous proclamation of the virtues of »civil society«. But as a source of ultimate values, this was never convincing beyond small circles of urban intellectuals. And this helps us to understand why so many people turned instead to other, contradictory sources, such as the populist nationalism analysed by Don Kalb in Poland, or the folkloric re-enchantment documented by Gerald Creed in Bulgaria.

The failure of the socialist faith led many to look again at other forms of absolute commitment, both traditional and new, which took the sensible precaution of promising salvation not on this earth, but in some other world. In the wake of the investigations of rural property relations described above, between 2006 and 2009 my department at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology organized projects focusing specifically on the links between morality and religion.<sup>4</sup> These too were widely distributed across the landmass of Eurasia, between Eastern Germany and East Asia. The *neue Bundesländer* are one of the most secularized regions of the continent. Sociological data indicate that this has not changed very much in the two decades since the *Wende*. Nevertheless, some of our projects suggested that religion might be playing a more important role in moral education (Birgit Huber), in prisoner rehabilitation (Irene Becci) and even in business life (Esther Peperkamp) than is usually recognized. In European Russia we found more dramatic changes. The Russian Or-

---

4 See for example Heintz 2009; Tocheva 2011; Zigon 2008; 2011. For more details of the projects of the Focus Group cf. the final report »Religion, Identities, Postsocialism«: [www.eth.mpg.de/cms/en/publications/reports/pdf/religion\\_report\\_2010.pdf](http://www.eth.mpg.de/cms/en/publications/reports/pdf/religion_report_2010.pdf).

thodox Church has offered many former Communists an opportunity to refashion their faith and their organisational skills. For example, in her work in a parish near St. Petersburg, Detelina Tocheva has found that a core group of activists continues to emphasize the moral value of hard work. She describes this in terms of a secular asceticism, because it seems unrelated to soteriological convictions. The influence of church membership, or the practice of rituals and pilgrimage without joining a parish, on the moral behaviour of individuals was generally hard to detect. Much more conspicuous in the results of our Russian projects, but also in the work in Central Asia and South-East Asia, was the tight link between religious affiliation and national identity. Power holders such as Vladimir Putin have instrumentalized churches by in effect (re)nationalizing them. The outcome is that instead of a more effective revival of traditional Christian values, which might include moral criticism of financial *spekulacija* and reveal common ground with socialist discourses, the ultimate sources of collective identity, or the general will or the Durkheimian moral order are now sought in the nation. Analogous to Kalb's analysis of the populism of the Kaczynski brothers in Poland, the values of an increasingly exclusive and intolerant patriotism replace those of socialist brotherhood.

Moral dispossession is perhaps best demonstrated in the conspicuous phenomenon of religious conversion (cf. Pelkmans 2009). Many foreign churches have proselytized successfully in postsocialist countries, in spite of the efforts of most regimes to repress and exclude missionaries. Local Baptists have succeeded in rejuvenating an older congregation in Tázlár, the Hungarian village described in the previous section. The case of the Gypsies, one of the major casualties of postsocialist dispossession in all its dimensions, has been addressed by László Fosztó in Transylvania (2008), where many have converted to Pentecostalism. The popularity of New Age forms of spirituality, especially among younger people, and of neo-Shamanism in much of Central Asia, also owes much to deep moral uncertainties. It would be instructive to subject changing patterns of religious affiliation, including ›conversion‹ to the religion of one's athe-

ist/secularized forefathers, to a rigorous comparative cohort analysis; but to the best of my knowledge this has not yet been undertaken.

### Conclusion

In this paper I have taken most of my illustrations from research projects at my own Institute, but there is now a significant body of work that we might characterize as the ›anthropology of postsocialism‹. Some of its most influential representatives have expressed their discomfort with carving out a new sub-field. It would surely be preferable to integrate the study of postsocialist changes into a more general theory of social change, but few socio-cultural anthropologists have come forward with new ideas at this level. The end of Soviet socialism provided us with a great opportunity to raise our game; but the timing was unfortunate in the sense that the *Wende* came at the end of a century in which most anthropologists came to define their discipline in terms of the ethnographic method. Boas, Malinowski and their students had good reason for abandoning simplistic theories of evolution and ›survivals‹, but it is unfortunate that the synchronism of fieldwork has largely occluded a concern with the ›big picture‹ of world history. It is similarly unfortunate that recent trends in the anthropological study of morality, emphasizing work on the self, the crafting of the person, reflect the individualist ideology of the neoliberal era; they impede recognition of the social transformation of the moral order which has occurred in places like Tázlár.

Postsocialist anthropology has been largely characterized by localized case studies. We have numerous accounts of how people have struggled to cope in their ›everyday economies‹, e.g. practising reciprocity in informal networks, or benefiting from the redistribution carried out by faith-based NGO soup-kitchens, or participating in irregular markets and selling one's labour in the transnational ›care‹ sector, to mention just a few of the topics that would certainly have attracted the attention of Karl Polanyi. But we lack scholars with his vision, let alone that of Lewis H. Morgan and Friedrich Engels, to analyze what the end of socialist regimes has meant for the women and men of Eurasia in the *longue durée* of history. The abandoning of ›scientific atheism‹ and the resurgence of

religion in the public sphere of many ex-socialist countries have not been integrated into general theories of secularization and multiple modernities. It seems to me that anthropologists have failed to build on the nineteenth century foundations of their discipline. They have given up on the truly crucial questions, such as the problems of freedom and responsibility in a complex industrial society as posed by Rousseau and addressed by Karl Polanyi at the end of *The Great Transformation*. Instead, they have allowed the initiative to pass to other fields. Specialists in game theory and experimental economics have comprehensively demolished simplistic models of *homo economicus*. Social anthropologists are now learning from them what should have been clear all along: that human agents are motivated by considerations of equity and judgments of fairness as well as by selfish accumulation. The real-life economies of the postsocialist countries are surely just as instructive a setting to explore these issues as the laboratory of the game theorist.

Karl Mannheim and Karl Polanyi were among the leading members of a social generation which, in very different ways, rejected the utilitarianism of the nineteenth century and set out in search of a new moral vision. Lukacs and many others found a satisfying answer by embracing Marxism and joining the Communist Party. Neither Mannheim nor Polanyi was able to take this step, though each of these Jewish scholars went through a phase in which he took seriously the role of Christianity in providing the moral foundation for Western civilization. The inadequacies of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist socialism in practice were exposed well before 1989. But that effort was not entirely empty and the abruptness of the arrival of the market has proved deeply distasteful to many citizens. In reality, as Polanyi taught in his critique of utopianism, markets are always enabled by specific political and legal institutions, above all by the state. In this sense the economy can never be disembedded. What Polanyi drew attention to in nineteenth century Britain, and what the literature on much of postsocialist Eurasia in the last two decades confirms, can be summed up as moral disembedding or dispossession.



But Polanyi exaggerated the abruptness of the original great transformation. Western capitalist states have undergone more or less gradualist transition processes since the onset of industrialization, and these continue in the era of neoliberalism. Even if there was in some sense a Speenhamland ›generation‹ (which I doubt), moral justifications (such as the obligation to aid only ›deserving poor‹) have undergone continuous modification rather than radical upheaval. By contrast, the attempts to first impose socialism and then later, within the memory of its first generations, to dismantle it in favour of capitalist markets, have resulted in a kind of cognitive chaos, evident even at the micro-scale in the village community. The dissonance would be vast enough if it were restricted to a simple story of winners and losers. The new unemployed might be expected to bemoan the abandonment of socialist values, while the upwardly mobile might be expected to impugn socialist morality and, if they felt a need for justification, to find it in forms of religion, or in the rhetoric of civil society, or that of the nation. But the reality is far more complex. Losers, too, are attracted to populist nationalism in both town and countryside, while generational effects may hinder social coherence for many decades.

I am convinced that a generational approach can shed valuable light on these dynamics in periods during which social change somehow ›accelerates‹; it can help us to understand why change is so uneven, more ›sticky‹ and less complete in some domains than in others. In an academic world in which the pressures toward specialization often seem overwhelming, interdisciplinary cooperation is the only way to address these big questions; and the biggest question of all is the abiding problem of human society as a moral order.

### References

- Buechler, Hans and Judith-Maria Buechler 2002: *Contesting agriculture. Cooperativism and privatization in the New Eastern Germany*. New York
- Creed, Gerald 1997: *Domesticating revolution. From socialist reform to ambivalent transition in a Bulgarian village*. University Park Pa.
- Creed, Gerald 2011: *Masquerade and postsocialism. Ritual and cultural dispossession in Bulgaria*. Bloomington
- Dale, Gareth 2010: *Karl Polanyi. The limits of the market*. Cambridge
- Force, Pierre 2003: *Self-interest before Adam Smith. A genealogy of economic science*. Cambridge
- Fosztó, László 2009: *Ritual revitalisation after socialism. Community, personhood, and conversion among Roma in a Transylvanian village*. Berlin
- Gudeman, Stephen 2008: *Economy's Tension. The dialectics of community and market*. New York
- Gudeman, Stephen (forthcoming): Conclusions. *Markets and moralities. Anthropological engagements with economics and economies*. Edited by Edward F. Fisher
- Hann, Chris 1980: *Tázlár. A village in Hungary*. Cambridge
- Hann, Chris 2006: »Not the horse we wanted!« *Postsocialism, neoliberalism, and Eurasia*. Münster
- Hann, Chris et al. 2003: *The postsocialist agrarian question. Property relations and the rural condition*. Münster
- Hann, Chris and Keith Hart (eds.) 2009: *Market and Society. The great transformation today*. Cambridge
- Harvey, David 2003: *The new imperialism*. Oxford
- Heintz, Monica (ed.) 2009: *The anthropology of moralities*. Oxford
- Juhász, Antal 1997: Tázlár puszta benépesedése. *Migráció és település a Duna-Tisza közén* 2. Szeged, edited by idem: 37-69
- Kalb, Don 2009: Conversations with a polish populist: Tracing hidden histories of globalization, class, and dispossession in Postsocialism (and beyond). *American Ethnologist* (36) Issue 2: 207-223

- Mannheim, Karl 1952 [originally 1928]: The problem of generations. *Karl Mannheim. Essays on the sociology of knowledge*. London, edited by Paul Kecskemeti: 276-320
- Pelkmans, Mathijs (ed.) 2009: *Conversion after socialism. Disruptions, modernisms and technologies of faith in the former Soviet Union*. New York
- Polanyi, Karl 2001 [originally 1944]: *The great transformation. The political and economic origins of our time*. Boston
- Remmling, Gunter W. 1975: *The sociology of Karl Mannheim*. London
- Tocheva, Detelina 2011: Crafting ethics: the dilemma of almsgiving in Russian Orthodox churches. *Anthropological Quarterly* 84 (4): 1011-1034
- Thompson, Edward P. 1975: *Whigs and hunters. The origin of the Black Act*. London
- Trevisani, Tommaso 2010: *Land and power in Khorezm. Farmers, communities, and the state in Uzbekistan's decollectivisation*. Berlin
- Yalçın-Heckmann, Lale 2010: *The return of private property. Rural life after agrarian reform in the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Berlin
- Zigon, Jarrett 2008: *Morality. An anthropological perspective*. Oxford
- Zigon, Jarrett (ed.) 2011: *Multiple moralities in Russia*. Oxford