Response to Our Critics (and to Our Supporters)

György Csepeli, Antal Örkény, Kim Lane Scheppele

We are very grateful for the seriousness of the debate which our impressionistic essay has generated. A wide group of sociologists and other social scientists has taken up the call to think critically about the relationship between "Eastern"and "Western" social science, not only in the papers printed here as a public response, but also in many conversations we have had over the year since our paper was written. What we described as a series of dangerous and disadvantageous tendencies in the East-West relationship are not written already into stone; the sorts of debates that our article seems to have generated we believe will go a long way toward keeping the worst of these practices from continuing into the future. Our article was written with a wide sweep in deliberately provocative terms, hoping to stoke the fires of debate. So now that the debate is raging, we come away from these articles with many reasons for hope.

1. Quality and Generality

First, we are very pleased to praise the extraordinary range of fine social science writings from and about this region cited in these papers. You can see these citations in the commentaries by Rudolf Andorka, Zuzana Kusá, and Alaina Lemon and David Altschuler. We could not agree more that there are substantial and noteworthy accomplishments of social theorists, anthropologists, economic sociologists and social scientists of a broad spectrum of specialities in the region, both among those who are originally from this region (those who stayed as well as those who left) and those from outside the region who have been working here in a sustained way. Our lists of important figures in social science writing about this region would in large measure parallel those of our commentators. In fact, it is the quality and range of work being done from and about the region that made us want to engage this debate in the first place. We were worried that the declining conditions for social science research would endanger the very work that we all want to preserve and continue, and we were worried also that the growing field of "transitology" would swamp other topics and other research agendas.

We plead guilty to the charges from Alaina Lemon and David Altschuler that we focused in our essay primarily on sociology and political science in Hungary (though we were pleased that Zuzana Kusá took up the challenge to think about whether these

observations applied also in Slovakia). But the fields of sociology and political science in Hungary specifically can demonstrate what we think is a broader point: even though the intellectual accomplishments of many Hungarian social scientists are world-class both in theory and in empirical work, they have not received world-class credit, material benefits and recognition. Only if these scholars have migrated to the West or attached themselves to Western institutions and co-authors, and published in that identity, do they begin to achieve some of this level of recognition. It is certainly plausible that other world-class scholars in other countries of the region are getting similiarly slighted. György Lengyel's exposition of the economic sociology of Lajos Leopold and Ferenc Erdei makes the point quite well (see in this volume). From his account of the theories of these two figures, it is clear that they were making substantial, original and general contributions to the most important social-theoretical debates of their times. But who outside of Hungary has heard of them or read them? Perhaps Jenő Szűcs or István Bibó are a bit better known because they have been translated into English, though why Oszkár Jászi remains so unappreciated outside a circle of Hungarian specialists remains a puzzle.

Still, one wonders about the effect of the place from which these writers were writing on the reception of their work outside of the region, independent of the quality of what they were writing. Why are scholars of these accomplishments called Hungarian political theorists or Hungarian social historians or Hungarian economic sociologists even though their work sweeps more broadly and aspires to general theory? A similar thing happens with those living in the East writing today who are of at least equal stature to those writing on similar topics in the West. The question we wanted to pose is this: If scholars of equivalent perceptiveness had been writing from England, France, Germany or the United States, wouldn't these writers have been taken as general figures and not just "regionally interesting" authors?

The point is not just about "Eastern" Europe alone. It's a point about centers and peripheries in the intellectual world. It's about the politics of language – in which English is the dominant language of scholarship in many fields, with German and perhaps French and Italian still in the running. Contributions in other languages count very rarely, even if they are translated. (And try to get a major Western university press to publish a translation of an author who does not already have this star status in one of the recognized-language communities!) It's also about the politics of recognition and credit – in which the Western managers of large grants get the primary credit for the ideas produced in a body of academic work because their names go first on co-authored papers. (Never mind that their co-authors may not have qualified for the grants in the first place because they had the wrong citizenship.) It's also about the politics of the general and specific – how, for example, someone writing only about the American Congress can be considered in all seriousness to be writing general theory, while someone who writes something similar about the Hungarian Parliament is doing a case study. It's also about the politics of expertise – how an American can become recognized even in Hungary as an expert on Hungary, for example, but a Hungarian would have a much harder time being established as a recognized expert on the United States in the United States. Much of the work we are talking about – and that is mentioned as exemplary in the papers of Andorka, and Lemon and Altschuler – features Hungarians (or Poles or Romanians) trying to be certified outside Hungary (or Poland or Romania) as experts on Hungary (or Poland or Romania)! The problems are even greater for those who seek to be certified as a generalist (i.e. a "theorist") or as an expert on some other place.

How widespread is this phenemoneon of ghettoization of scholarly communities such that people from the periphery can only be considered specialists at best on their home territory? We ask our "Eastern" readers: when was the last time you were invited to speak at a conference in the "West" about something other than your country or, perhaps, your region? When were you last considered a writer outside your own region writing about something of general significance even though that was your aim? And we ask our "Western" readers: when did you last turn for "theory" to someone not from your part of the world?

2. Alternative Structures

But there are other reasons for hope. The second reason these responses highlight is that the structures we meant to criticize are not the only structures in place. Lemon and Altschuler discuss the expectations which are clear in the discipline of anthropology and among those institutions that fund anthropological research. It's true that anthropologists are generally expected to know the languages and spend time in the places where the observations will be made, contrary to our overgeneralized claims about "social science" in our essay. It's true that our essay shows a clear bias in favor of such grounded approaches to research in contrast with what is often done in our own home disciplines of sociology and political science (even though all three of us have done survey research at one point or another in our lives). In our view, among Western social scientists, it is often the anthropologists and others using anthropological methods that have often done the most perceptive research about this region. We might also add that historians are also quite admirable in this regard. There too, it's hard for historians to get grants to consult archives if they don't know the languages and the contexts for interpreting the documents that they are likely to find. We happily acknowledge Lemon and Altschuler's argument that not all disciplines in the social sciences suffer equally from these faults. And we are pleased that they have pointed out that alternative structures and models do exist.

But even here there are two problems to which we would like to call attention. First, our criticisms applied primarily to the many Westerners jetting in and out of the region on data safaris, looking to spot and capture the local data with the assistance of local guides. Anthropologists and historians from the West do not tend to proceed in such a way. But when we look at the level of material resources available for research, the funding given to anthropologists and historians is for relatively small-scale single-person research projects. This is dwarfed by the enormous sums spent on large multi-country multi-researcher data-collection enterprises. For example, a large grant in anthropology in the United States might reach $50,000 while a large grant (or interlocking set of grants) in comparative survey research will approach a million U.S. dollars. Partly because of the smaller amount of resources and partly because of the overtly interpretative nature of the research which puts primacy on the sensitivity of the individual observer, anthropologists and historians are much less likely to co-author their research than are those from political science and sociology who do these large scale data-collection

projects. This eliminates a set of possible exploitations. But it also makes it harder to share the wealth, both in material and intellectual terms.

We should then examine also whether the structures in place for supporting this sort of research also provide equal opportunities for Easterners who are also anthropologists and historians. What if someone from Romania wants to do fieldwork on an inner city neighborhood in Detroit – or on political parties in France? Are funds available for this? What if a Hungarian wants to consult an archive in Chicago for a project on Settlement Houses or a Pole wants to look at the documents in Paris on the collapse of the Ancien Régime? Do grants go as easily or as generously to those from the East wanting to do field work or archival research in the West as they do to those from the West wanting to come East? What about those from the East who want to do anthropological or historical research on the East? As long as these resources are not equal, our major criticism about discrimination holds, even if the Westerners who take advantage of the superior opportunities that they have available to them do wonderful work (which we agree they often do).

There are multiple points of comparison in play here – between the money available to those in the East and the West doing the same sort of research, as well as between Big Science and smaller scale research – and we need to distinguish more carefully among them. Lemon and Altschuler's essay helped us to clarify just how we were assuming the comparisons. It was the Behemoths of large-scale quantitative-data-heavy collaborative research that we had particularly in mind, though our article was not always careful to limit our criticisms in this way. Even if our criticisms apply only to this, it's still a large thing that is being attacked. But we worry about equality of funding opportunities across the board regardless of the style of work being done.

3. Things are Bad All Over

It is not exactly a reason for hope that all is not well in the West either. But at least where funding for research is concerned, everyone is losing regardless of East/West status. In our essay, we focused on the comparison of the research opportunities in East and West. Funding for both groups is declining from government research funds, and it is increasingly the case for both groups that creative funding arrangements for research have to be made, with money coming from several sources and with long-term research projects being sacrificed for shorter-term often policy-relevant ones.

Still, though resources are tight and universities are "downsizing" everywhere, many Easterners are still disadvantaged relative to many Westerners, but it depends where in the status hierarchy you are. Professor Andorka acknowledges that the salaries of professors and the money available for basic research in Hungary have both declined radically since the political and economic transformation began for those who already had positions in the system. And he should know since he is now both the Rector of the Budapest University of Economic Sciences and the Director of OTKA, the Hungarian National Research Foundation (roughly equivalent to the NSF in the United States) so he has seen these processes of decline at close range.

But Lemon and Altschuler rightly point to the very real declining standards of American academics and would-be academics as well, an increasing number of whom are

getting pressed out of the American system into temporary, part-time or exploitation-level jobs. It's true – things are bad all over. For people at the bottom of both systems, life as an academic is becoming increasingly difficult if not impossible. At this level Easterners and Westerners are facing similar bleak prospects as universities in both places are subjected to principles of economic rationalization. At the bottom, then, East and West are not very far apart. The "bottom" is a larger group in Hungary, however; since the wave of budget cuts to universities was introduced in the summer of 1995, all part time positions have been eliminated at ELTE, Budapest's main university. That knocked out of the system entirely people who were just hanging on by the skin of their teeth.

Still, in these international collaborations, it is typically people at the top of both structures who are interacting with each other, and it is typically there that the differences between East and West are widest. The typical full professor in the social sciences at an American research university will have an average monthly salary after taxes of $4,500; the average assistant professor will make $2,500. The typical full professor in the social sciences at a Hungarian research university will have an average monthly salary after taxes of $300; the typical assistant professor will make $150. In America, academic "stars" have their salaries set in a process rather like sports figures who use competition among teams (for academics, competitions among universities) to bid up the amount of money they receive. Some of the entrepreneurial collaborators who come to this region from the West might have salaries up to $7,000 per month or more (after taxes). But in Hungary, there is no such bargaining room. Top professors who are internationally recognized experts rarely make more than $400 per month from their university positions. Even though costs of living are different in Hungary and America, the difference isn't more than a factor of 10. And no matter how well one does in Hungary, there are few material rewards that one can expect from one's university position because there is a low ceiling on salaries above which one cannot climb.

Hungarian professors cannot live even modestly on their university salaries, let alone support a family, travel to academic conferences (which their institutions typically don't pay for) or even buy books in their field. "Western" books are about 50% more expensive in Hungary than they are in the United States – and the libraries are not nearly as well equipped as they are in America because they are short on money also. Hungarian academics are, then, always working in two or three other jobs to make ends meet – and this limits time for independent research unless they are getting paid for it. Research is something that must be done on a piece-work basis – and it is very important for researchers from the East to be paid for their research time since their university salaries don't pay enough to give them the luxury to do research as part of their university job. Nonetheless, the research productivity of Hungarian scholars is truly impressive, and not that different from their counterparts in America in terms of publishing rates, at least at the very tops of both groups. So although things are bad all over and there are sectors of American academic life which are reaching desperation levels also, things are disproportionately bad for Easterners at the top of the structure relative to their counterparts in the West. Since the international collaborations typically bring these two groups into contact with each other, the differences are greatest just where the two groups are working on the same projects.

4. Structures and Individuals

Our essay was meant to be more about structures than about individuals. Of course, there are individuals who have overcome the substantial problems we have described to do excellent and recognized work in this area. And these individuals include those from both East and West. But the fact that some people manage nonetheless to do well in this system does not mean that the same opportunities would be available to everyone. For every Rudolf Andorka, whose substantial talents, expertise and knowledge have come to the attention of his Western colleagues with whom he collaborates successfully, there are many others who have collected data for visiting Westerners only to find it grabbed out of their hands with nothing in return but a check for services. It helps in international collaborations, of course, that the areas in which Professor Andorka has made his contributions are precisely those that focus on "transition," issues which are of great interest to Western funding agencies. We do not mean to demean the accomplishments of Professor Andorka – indeed we have a great deal of respect for his work and we share his sense of the importance of these issues – but we only want to point out that the few exceptions of those who have suceeded do not affect our general argument. There are larger structural patterns at work that are unaffected by pointing out that there are still a very few who break through them.

Some might rightly say that we authors of this article also are exceptions – in that all three of us have had a great deal of success with grants and publishing and with moving back and forth between East and West. But many of these opportunities were opened to us, as with Professor Andorka, precisely because there was such an interest in the West to fund research and teaching related to Eastern European transition. Csepeli and Örkény have developed a program at the Institute of Sociology at ELTE with World Bank money to focus on problems of ethnic and national minorities in the post-communist world. Scheppele has been on leave from the University of Michigan for two years, living in Hungary with American National Science Foundation and Austrian government grants to study the processes of constitutional transformation. Our positions of privilege, which we got because we were working on problems in the areas where there was money to support us, give us the ability to speak out against the practices we see around us. We think it would not be so easy for those who have been left out or victimized in this system or whose research agendas took a different shape.

But we still believe, however, that many more scholars from the East could be equal collaborators with researchers from the West. Or scholars in the East could be the lead researcher on large projects instead of assuming the role of local consultant. Instead, many talented scholars from the East are treated like mere research assistants, like graduate students who still need to be trained. One prominent Hungarian sociologist, for example, who told us privately that our article rang very true in his own experience, explained that he had been involved in a collaborative multi-country survey project with a prominent team of American and West European researchers. Our Hungarian colleague – who is himself a world-class scholar well-published in several European languages – supervised the Hungarian data collection of a multicountry survey, only to find that his request for seeing the data from other countries was denied until after the Americans and West Europeans were finished with their

analyses. At that time, the data would be deposited in the InterUniversity Consortium data archive in Michigan and therefore accessible to anyone – and at that point, they said, they would give it to him also. So his work on the project entitled him to be treated like any other outsider to the data. He was able to publish only out of the Hungarian (i.e. case study) data while his alleged partners were able to get a great deal of world visibility and credit by doing comparative analyses of the differences between Eastern and Western Europe.

This is just one story, but we have heard many others like it. For every Rudolf Andorka who has achieved substantial and deserved success, we believe that there are more who also deserved recognition for intellectual contributions and were treated instead like mere data gatherers. We'd welcome empirical analysis on the point to see just how many people are in each category. We are eager and willing to be proved wrong that those who have been abused exceed those who have been rewarded. It's hard to gather accurate data on the point because many of those who are exploited don't want to talk about what they feel to be a great personal embarrassment. It's hard for them, too, to see the structure. One of the greatest tragedies of all in this process is the number of Eastern scholars who feel when they are treated this way by those from the West that they (the Easterners) really aren't good enough. But a great deal of this inequality is structural, not personal.

5. Deconstructing East and West

One important point that Lemon and Altschuler make is about our uses of the ideas of "East" and "West." We do want to problematize this more than we did in our essay. For us, it was a shorthand to express a complex array of things that had a clear referent in most cases. But there are borderline cases, hard to classify people and institutions – and the questions these borderline cases raise affect the usefulness of the concept. For example, are Iván Szelényi, Susan Gal and János Kornai "Easterners" or "Westerners"? Is Central European University an Eastern or Western University? To be at the border is to maintain a foot in each place, to split your time between two affiliations or to construct a setting in which it becomes impossible to separate East from West. We agree completely that this concept needs critical examination. It is significant, for example, that almost all of those who exist at the margins started in the East and moved West rather than the other way around. Some committed fieldworkers like Martha Lampland and Michael Burawoy went the other direction to spent long periods of time in Hungary, for example, and maintain close contacts even now. But when people start giving up tenured positions in America to move to a university position in Hungary, then we'll know that things have really changed and that the main difference we were talking about has ceased to exist.

In addition to the split we seem to use uncritically between East and West, there are obviously wide differences within both the East and West categories. We've tried in this response to internally differentiate both by research styles, and we should do more to differentiate Hungary, which seems to us relatively privileged compared to most places in the "East," from other "Eastern" places where social scientists are even worse off. We agree that our ideas of "East" and "West" are flawed and in need of closer analysis, but they are a shorthand that still has some real meaning.

6. Emphasizing the Positive: The Effects of Transition

We want to agree wholeheartedly with Professor Andorka's comments that there have been many positive aspects of the transition for Hungarian academics. Of course being able to choose one's research agenda and theoretical framework free from political control or anxieties about potential repression is an improvement. A big one. But in some senses, one form of control has been substituted for another. Whereas before Easterners could not get their research funded or approved unless they were working on politically approved topics and approaches, now they cannot get your research funded or approved unless they are working on politically approved topics and approaches – it's just that the politics have changed.

The funding priorities of granting agencies which are themselves often responding to (Western) government or economic pressures are set in diverse ways, but not all of them are independent of political and economic interests. Why is there so much money to study privatization while there is much less to study poverty in Eastern Europe? Why is there such an emphasis on transition to the exclusion of other topics? Of course, saying that these topics themselves reflect a political agenda is not to say that nothing has changed. And it doesn't mean that the topics chosen in this way are not important.

It matters a great deal that there are pluralistic sources of funding, that the pressures that can be invoked are merely the nonawarding of something one wasn't entitled to anyway, rather than threats to liberty or career. Those are big changes. But it is not exactly the case that the researchers themselves are free to work on anything if that "anything" requires material support. And this is where the Western granting agencies who control the material resources have a large effect on the topics to be chosen. We agree with Professor Andorka that transition is important – after all, this is what we ourselves work on. But we worry about the fate of those for whom this is not their first priority from a scientific point of view. Of course, Westerners and Easterners alike are equally subject to the agendas of funding agencies. And research topics tend to travel where the money is.

What we felt was missing was a discussion among those in the East about our own research priorities and ideas, independently of what those from the West want to know about our region. Intellectuals from the East should talk to each other about the new intellectual freedom and what it means for our reseach agendas. We worry about what will happen in the future when the internal financial conditions will be further narrowed. Will the only reaction by academics be: how can I sell my ideas to the West? That's already the survival reaction for many reseachers in the East. And it's the case also in other peripheral countries within Europe – like Greece, for example, where groups are already springing up to figure out how to sell the skills of Greek researchers to West Europeans, particularly to Brussels-oriented foundations. This sort of salesmanship attached to research excludes people whose interests cannot be marketized. But of course this is only to say that East and West may be becoming more alike in this way.

Finally, we do not want to say that Easterners should avoid collaboration with Westerners. We agree because of course our essay, too, is an East-West collaboration. As a personal story we might add here, one of us (Scheppele) who is a political scientist at the University of Michigan was able to get her Hungarian research funded by the American

National Science Foundation (Americans only as principal investigators, please!). But since she planned to spend a year "in the field" in Hungary, her research was first recategorized as "anthropology" by the review panel before it was funded. It was hard for them to imagine that political scientists might do this sort of work!