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Ethnic, National, and Regional Identities: Preliminary Theoretical Considerations

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Recently I participated in a roundtable on the “Global Thought Leader,” organized by a newly created master’s program in Learning and Organizational Change at Northwestern University. The roundtable brought together representatives of multinational corporations, academics, international business consultants, and university administrators with the objective of debating the main set of skills and qualities that a future corporate leader would need to acquire or possess in a global, intercultural environment. Very soon the conversation turned to individual, national and corporate identity, and one of the participants asked me if I saw myself as a Romanian or an American since I had spent well over half of my life in the United States and was a citizen of that country. My immediate answer was that I saw myself as neither. As another participant seemed puzzled and, indeed, offended by my reply (which appeared to threaten his national identity and justified pride in it), I added that I saw myself as neither and both at the same time, and that I had many other identities to boot, depending on the frame of reference that was appropriate in a given situation. In the context of the roundtable, I felt, the identity that was most relevant and appropriate for me to assume was that of a member of the academic community, indeed that of a humanist, since I was the only one “representing” that field in the room.

This example of uneasy exchange, which takes place everyday in a myriad forms and situations all over the world, might be a convenient way of reflecting on the theme of the international colloquium organized at your university this November: “Romanian Identity in the Context of European Identity.” How do we define “Romanian identity,” or “European identity,” for that matter? Do we mean national or cultural identity or both? In which case, would it be more appropriate, perhaps, to speak of Romanian or European *identities*? The answers that we choose to provide to these apparently innocuous, simplistic questions involve important, potentially explosive, political

consequences. So, I would like to pause to discuss the larger assumptions that frame and predetermine both such questions and their answers, in an attempt to provide an alternative, holistic reference frame for them. These larger assumptions pertain in fact to the various views of globalization and global society that are prevalent in our world communities today and involve such ideologically charged notions as globalism, nationalism, regionalism, localism, multiculturalism, and identity politics. Let us then take a closer look at these notions and see if we can transvaluate them in an appropriate and useful manner for our present global circumstance.

I would like to begin by proposing a distinction between *globality* and *globalism* in current theoretical discussions (Spăriosu 2005). I define globality as an infinitely layered network of variously interconnected and interactive actual and possible (or imagined) worlds or localities. At a basic human level, globality involves an aspiration toward (self-)transcendence that expresses itself as ceaseless world making and self-fashioning. Globalism, on the other hand, can be defined as the proper or improper expression of the aspiration toward globality. There are many kinds of globalisms, some proper, some improper, some Western, some not. Most of the improper types of globalism that have so far manifested themselves in human history belong to various mentalities of power that aspire, and compete among themselves, to hold sway over the entire planet. I have called such improper types “globalitarianism” (Spăriosu 2005) to stress their close affinity with the totalitarian political tendencies that were particularly visible in the past century, but that continue to manifest themselves today. Yet, twenty-first century attempts at globalitarianism do not involve solely repressive political regimes or right wing and left wing dictatorships, but also, most alarmingly, the Western democracies. For instance, they include the current economic, political, and military efforts on the part of some Western governments to impose Western-style, neoliberal forms of democracy on the rest of the world.

On the basis of the preceding distinction, we should re-examine the notions of the local and the global with which contemporary Western social sciences have been operating. These notions are usually seen as engaged in a dialectic subsumed under the categories of the universal and the particular. This would not pose a problem if Western theorists did not tacitly assume that the dialectic approach to the interaction

between the global and the local is logically pre-given and universally accepted. Yet no two Westerners, let alone members of other cultures, might agree on their meaning and content. Furthermore, the various forms of dialectics themselves, not to mention binary thinking, are local, rather than universal, logical categories in the first place. Even the Japanese term *glocal*, adopted by Western-style global studies, will always be defined in a local manner, or according to a globally dominant local view. Thus, dialectics (whether Aristotelian, Hegelian, Marxian, or any other kind) might mislead more than help us within a global reference frame. We should not, then, automatically embrace a dialectics of the global and the local or automatically link these terms to a universally homogeneous, philosophical notion of universality and particularity. Instead, we should acknowledge that there is no overarching, crosscultural, concept of globality available to us at this time, but a multitude of them. In other words, we should recognize that all we have are local theories of the global (Featherstone 1995; Spăriosu 2005).

But we also need to reconsider our ideas of the local within an intercultural reference frame. In this regard, it would be useful to draw a distinction between localism and locality. Localism is a mirror image of globalism and can often take improper forms such as ultranationalism, ethnic intolerance, racism, religious and ecological fundamentalism, and so forth. Thus, recent examples of improper localism are not limited to the intolerant, close-minded, attitudes of some monocultural or totalitarian nation-states. Unfortunately, they also include the paranoid, ultranationalist, and racist attitudes that certain Western governments have displayed toward immigrants from Islamic and other so-called Third World countries, as well as toward their own dissenting citizenry, in the wake of September 11 and other terrorist attacks against Western (utilitarian) global interests. Locality, on the other hand, can be defined as the specific geocultural and ecological space in which individual and collective human activities, contacts, and interactions take place. Locality, just like globality, involves multilayered human perspectives and experiences, ranging from those of the tiniest community or organism to those of planet Earth or multiplanetary systems. Since all of our local theories do, however, posit an interdependence of the local and the global, I would like to suggest that this interdependence be seen not in dialectical terms, but as a manifestation

of mutual causality or causal reciprocity. This notion is all the more appropriate in the present context, because it has a long crosscultural history: it can be found, for instance, in contemporary Western general systems theory, as well as in Buddhist, Taoist, and Sufi thinking (Spăriosu 2005). From the perspective of mutual causality, there is a form of interdependence between the local and the global that goes well beyond the linear and binary notions of dialectics. Each intervention at the local level reverberates or resonates throughout the global reference frame, changing its configuration in unexpected and not always ascertainable ways. At the same time, the global is not a summation, nor a subsumption, of all its local instances, but a continuously shifting reference frame that opens up, beyond any and all of these instances, toward larger reference frames. In other words, what appears as global in one frame of reference may appear as local in another, and vice versa.

It is from this holistic perspective that one may judge certain kinds of globalism (and localism) as proper or improper manifestations of the global aspiration. This holistic perspective may be called *global intelligence*. I have defined *global intelligence* as the ability to understand, respond to, and work toward what will benefit all human beings and will support and enrich all life on this planet (Spăriosu 2005). Global intelligence is based on the collective awareness of the interdependence of all localities within a global frame of reference and the enhanced individual responsibilities that result from this interdependence. As no national or supranational authority can predefine or predetermine it, global intelligence involves long-term, collective learning processes and can emerge only from continuing intercultural research, dialogue, and cooperation.

The phrase “what will benefit all human beings” in the preceding paragraph, however, should not be understood in the utilitarian, restricted sense that implies the excessive, materialistic and consumerist mentality currently spreading to many parts of the globe, including Romania. Nor should “human development” be understood primarily in terms of neoliberal, economic development, as is all too often the case in public discourse today. In the long run, such utilitarian and reductive modes of thought and behavior, based on the primacy of material self-interest, will hardly benefit humankind, let alone other forms of life on earth. On the contrary, it will impede, if not completely arrest further human development and will severely impoverish the rich diversity of

the biosphere. From the standpoint of global intelligence, therefore, “benefit” implies the harmonious, sustainable development of both the material and the spiritual aspects of humanity. These aspects should, moreover, be regarded not as independent entities, but as complementary sides of human nature, engaged in a relationship of mutual causality.

Finally, global intelligence implies an ethics grounded in a mentality of peace, defined not in opposition to war, but as an alternative mode of being, thinking, and acting in the world. This mentality, which I have elsewhere defined as “irenic” (Spăriosu 1997), has its own body of values and beliefs, emerging through intercultural research, dialogue, and cooperation, and generates its own reference frames, organized on principles other than power. It is such an irenic mentality that can best nurture further human (self-) development and that should inform not only the ethical stance, but also all other aspects of the concept and practice of global intelligence.

In order to engage effectively the topic of the colloquium, “Romanian identity in the context of European identity”, we also need to examine, in addition to the concepts of globality and locality, the various Western notions of identity and the kinds of identity politics that have resulted from them. First, we may point out that in the social sciences the term “identity” itself is rarely used without a modifier, such as national, ethnic, racial, sexual, religious, political, and so on. This fact underlines the point I made at the beginning of this paper that we ought to speak of *identities*, rather than identity. Nevertheless, most of these forms of identity can be conveniently grouped under the term *cultural* identity or identities, which in turn raises the question of what we understand by “culture”. So it may be useful to explore the current meanings and uses of this term in the social sciences.

One may roughly discern two main concepts of culture in Western-style social science: The first one is an essentialist and substantialist view, tied, no less than the notion of globalism and localism, to the dialectics of the universal and the particular. In this view, culture is a durable, substantial and, ultimately, universal entity that determines the identity, coherence, and solidarity of a larger or a smaller social group. In turn, cultural identity creates cultural differences, which are, as a rule, contingent, insubstantial, and nonessential and can eventually be

resolved or reconciled in a universal culture. The second view of culture is the symmetrical opposite of the first one. It raises cultural difference to an essential status and sees cultural identity as a fluid, unstable, and insubstantial state in the ceaseless play of cultural differences. Above all, it invariably regards this play of differences as a conflictive one. Postmodernist schools generally prefer the second view, whereas modernist and other traditional cultural approaches, such as Marxism, prefer the first one. More often than not, the two concepts of culture engage, in turn, in a contest for cultural authority and thus generate amplifying feedback loops, according to the principle of mutual causality. Of course, one can also find Western theorists who attempt to mediate between the two positions, or subject them to a Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*). This third approach has so far met with little success, however, being usually relegated to the first, universalist position. A good example of an essentialist, but flexible and conciliatory, postmarxist view is that of Terry Eagleton (2000). Arjun Appadurai (1996), on the other hand, represents an intransigent, postmodernist version of the second view, while Samuel Huntington (1996) represents a mixed version of the other two approaches. Let us briefly examine these three positions.

Eagleton, in an essay on "Culture Wars," included in *The Idea of Culture* (2000), rightly deplores the clash between what he calls "Culture" and "culture," which is no longer merely a "battle of definitions," but has turned into "a global conflict." (Eagleton 2000, 51) He shows not only how each of these terms functions separately, but also how the polarity itself frames and controls the entire discourse of Western-style cultural and global studies. But Eagleton equally notes that the distinction between universal Culture and particular cultures is "ultimately deceptive, since pure difference would be indistinguishable from pure identity" (Eagleton 2000, 54). He implicitly acknowledges the functional nature of this distinction when he points out that the two polarities are interchangeable, leading to paradoxical effects in terms of local cultural politics: "What may seem the last word in epistemological radicalism in Paris can end up justifying autocracy elsewhere. In a curious reversal, cultural relativism can come to ratify the most virulent forms of cultural absolutism. In its charitable view that all cultural worlds are as good as each other, it provides a rationale by which any one of them may be absolutized" (Eagleton 2000, 76-77).

Eagleton also usefully notes that whereas culture functions in terms of a dialectics of the universal and the particular, Culture functions in terms of a dialectics of the universal and the individual. From the standpoint of Culture, culture “perversely seizes upon the accidental particulars of existence—gender, ethnicity, nationality, social origin, sexual tendency and the like—and converts them into bearers of necessity” (Eagleton 2000, 55). By contrast, Culture favors not the particular, but the individual, because individuality “is the medium of the universal, while particulars are purely random”. Consequently, Culture regards itself as “the spirit of humanity individuating itself in specific works; and its discourse links the individual and the universal, the quick of the self and the truth of humanity, without the mediation of the historically particular” (Eagleton 2000, 55).

Eagleton’s distinction between Culture as the expression of the individual and culture as the expression of the particular clarifies the Romantic relationship between the nation and the state, which in the modern period has become the hyphenated concept of nation-state. Whereas nationalism involves an organic relationship between individuals and their nation, the state simply appeals to this organic relationship in order to give it a political structure. In turn, contemporary identity politics should be distinguished from nationalism, because it refers to the particular, rather than to the individual, and therefore does not operate on an organismic, but a mimetic principle. According to this principle, group cohesion is formed around conflictive difference (“us against them”), rather than around an identity of cultural affinities. Hence identity politics is inimical to the nation-state and, paradoxically, but not unpredictably, prefers postmodern forms of “cosmopolitanism” to nationalism.

In marked contrast to Eagleton’s complex and reflexive analyses that deftly move in and out of the various cultural positions he brings under consideration, Appadurai deliberately remains within cultural particularism and rejects the universalist presuppositions of Culture out of hand. For instance, he objects to the substantialist and essentialist ways in which the term “culture” has been employed in various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, and philosophy. He further contends that whereas the noun “culture” invokes some type of essentialism, the adjective “cultural” is purely relational. Substantive ideas of culture encourage us to think of actual social groups as cultures,

while the relational character of “cultural” as an adjective “stresses its contextual, heuristic and comparative dimensions and orients us to the idea of culture as difference, especially difference in the realm of group identity” (Appadurai 1996, 13). Culture therefore is “a pervasive dimension of human discourse that exploits difference to generate diverse conceptions of group identity” (Appadurai 1996, 13).

Appadurai also introduces the term “culturalism” to mean the “conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics” (Appadurai 1996, 15). Culturalist movements are self-conscious about identity, culture, and heritage, which they use as instruments in their struggle with nation-states and other culturalist groups. In the age of globalization, under conditions of mass mediation and massive migration, these culturalist movements, such as those of African-Americans in the United States, Algerians in France, Pakistanis in Great Britain, Flemish and Walloons in Belgium, or French speakers in Canada tend to be “counternational and metacultural” (Appadurai 1996, 16); in other words, according to Appadurai, they tend to contribute to the dissolution of the nation-state and a reconfiguration of cultural identities.

Even from this brief account, it is obvious that Appadurai, unlike Eagleton and in typical postmodernist fashion, reduces culture to an agonistic play of differences that creates various identities associated with specific social groups. Despite his disclaimers, he seems in effect to reduce culture to a function of identity politics based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. To employ his own terminology, Appadurai’s approach to culture seems “culturalist” rather than cultural. Putting it crudely, it would seem that for him a Romanian is a Romanian because he is not a Croat or a Serb or a Turk, and vice versa. Furthermore, a Romanian can prove his identity only by fighting a Hungarian, or a Serb, or a Turk. Here we have a mimetic approach to world cultures, in which one culture defines itself not as what it is, but as what it is not, namely, against other cultures. This approach is precisely what Eagleton refers to as a form of “barbarism,” although this term also needs to undergo thorough critical and historical reflection. Binary oppositions such as Civilization and Barbarism are emotionally charged terms, with a long and troubled world history, and will only further fuel the current global “culture wars.”

An extreme, almost paradoxical version of Appadurai's agonistic view of culture, combined with Eagleton's essentialist notion of Culture, can be found in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* by Samuel P. Huntington (1996), who moreover presses it into the service of a neoliberal vision of the New World Order, under the political and military hegemony of the United States. Huntington starts out by appropriately stressing the crucial role of culture in understanding the political and economic decisions and actions of various nation-states from around the world. He notes that people "define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions." (Huntington 1996, 21) People also identify with cultural groups, such as "tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and at the broadest level, civilizations" (Huntington 1996, 21). Huntington then distinguishes among eight major contemporary civilizations: Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American, and possibly African (Huntington 1996, 45-47). He adds that religion is a "central defining characteristic of civilizations" (47) and notes that four out of the five great world religions, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism are associated with his list of major civilizations. He also mentions Buddhism, but argues that there is no Buddhist civilization, and significantly omits Taoism altogether as part of Sinic and other civilizations.

One may object to the number of contemporary civilizations that Huntington distinguishes or to the ways in which he distinguishes them. But, overall, he does neither better nor worse in this respect than other traditional, Western, historians of civilizations such as Oswald Spengler (1926), Arnold Toynbee (1934-1961), and Matthew Melko (1969), from whom he largely derives his general definitions. Much more objectionable, however, is Huntington's injection of contemporary identity politics into his seemingly neutral descriptions. For example, he states from the outset that people "use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity. We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against" (Huntington 1996, 21). By the same token, civilizations are "the biggest we within which we feel culturally at home as distinguished from all the other them out there" (Huntington 1996, 42). Huntington then predicates that conflict will inevitably arise among various civilizations, because "it is human to hate" (Huntington 1996, 130). According to him, people, in order to define and motivate

themselves, will always need enemies. They “*naturally* distrust and see as threats those who are different and have the capability to harm them.” (130, my emphasis) In today’s world, moreover, the “them” is more and more likely to be people from a different civilization. Huntington concludes that “cold peace, cold war, trade war, quasi war, uneasy peace, troubled relations, intense rivalry, competitive coexistence, arms races (...) are the most probable descriptions of relations between entities from different civilizations. Trust and friendship will be rare” (Huntington 1996, 207).

One of the most worrisome aspects of Huntington’s book is his subordination of the great world religions to identity politics or, in my terms, his conflation of religion with religionism. This is most obvious, for example, in his treatment of Islam and what he calls “Islamic civilization”. Huntington contends that “Muslim bellicosity and violence are late-twentieth-century facts which neither Muslims nor non-Muslims can deny” (Huntington 1996, 258). He self-servingly cites James Payne’s statistics in *Why Nations Arm* (1989), according to which Muslims had a high propensity to resort to violence in international crises between 1928 and 1979, especially “high-intensity violence” (Huntington 1996, 258). Huntington’s and Payne’s statistics could be easily dismissed, if they did not involve fairly common, mainstream, Western assumptions and prejudices about other (Western and non-Western) cultures. Some of these assumptions and prejudices have arguably led to two devastating, largely Western-initiated, world wars in this century, possibly the bloodiest in all human history. Unfortunately, violence as a way of solving conflicts is a widespread global phenomenon and no single large culture or “civilization” is more – or less – prone than another to resort to it. Huntington indirectly undermines his own argument when he cites Payne’s statistics according to which China’s use of high-intensity violence in 76.9 per cent of its crises far exceeded that of the Muslim states (Huntington 1996, 258).

According to Huntington, the Koran and other statements of Muslim beliefs contain few prohibitions on violence, and a concept of nonviolence is supposedly absent from Muslim doctrine and practice (p. 258). To realize the invidiousness of his argument, one may simply remember Christ’s statement that he comes with a sword to bring war, not peace, to his land, or the fact that Gautama Buddha belonged to the warrior rather than the priestly cast; or, conversely, that Sufi teachings

do not condone violence and conflict any more than their Buddhist, Taoist, or Christian counterparts do. For example, the prophet Muhammad says: "If a man gives up quarreling when he is in the wrong, a house will be built for him in Paradise. But if a man gives up a conflict even when he is in the right, a house will be built for him in the loftiest part of Paradise" (Frager and Fadiman 1997, 84). If anything, Huntington's and Payne's arguments highlight the ignorance of even well-trained Westerners about other cultures and religions (not to mention their own) and the urgent need for educating the world's youth about each other's – and their own – cultural traditions.

In fact, many of the world's religions seem to have arisen precisely as ways of containing or limiting violence, as a number of Western anthropologists and historians of religions have shown (Girard 1986, 1987). On the other hand, the origins of ethnic and nationalist violence can be traced back less to religious faith, as Huntington and other political analysts argue, than to the kind of mimetic rivalry that certain political elites from around the world engage in and fuel in their own populations. So it is not the case, as Huntington argues, that people use politics and religion to define their identity but, rather, that some politicians use people's need for faith and identity in order to achieve their own, narrow political ends. Huntington himself unwittingly demonstrates this tendency when he argues, somewhat inconsistently, that it is not Islamic "fundamentalism" (i.e., religion) that is "the underlying problem" for the West. Rather, it is Islam, "a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power." In turn, the problem for Islam is not the CIA or the Pentagon. Rather, it is the West, "a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world" (Huntington 1996, 217-218).

For "people" in the foregoing citation, however, one would be well advised to read not the world's populations, as Huntington would have one believe, but certain political elites. So, it is neither Islam nor the West that are a problem for each other, but certain political leaders and their advisers. These include Huntington and a few of the Islamic authorities whom he cites--most of them educated at prestigious Western schools and thoroughly familiar with the kind of discourse that will catch the

attention of Western political elites. It is not the “people” of various cultures, but members of these political elites that are obsessed with the superiority or inferiority of their power, set each other up as mimetic rivals, and then manipulate or force the rest of the population into following them.

Huntington and his kind of political adviser (a *Realpolitiker* of the Kissinger type) seem uncomfortable with the disappearance of the Great Schism, during which the world was divided between two superpowers (at least in their own minds), and the enemies were clearly defined political doubles. In the absence of such bipolar neatness, Huntington proliferates mimetic doubles by setting up several “civilizations,” which he then postulates as engaging in the same conflictive relationship that was operative between the two superpowers during the Great Schism. According to this logic of power, masterfully described by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), when you have no enemy you must create one. So Huntington lumps together Arabic, Persian, Turkic, and other cultures that originated in the Middle East, North Africa, and other parts of the Mediterranean basin, calls them an “Islamic civilization,” and then pits them against “Western civilization,” another huge conglomerate of widely diverse cultures. In turn, he arbitrarily divides the latter into a Catholic-Protestant and an Orthodox civilization, but calls only the former Western, this time using Christian, rather than Islamic religion, to create a mimetic conflict between the West and non-Western Russia and parts of Eastern Europe, including Romania. Thereby, he greatly oversimplifies the rich traditions of all of these cultures and religions and perpetuates some of the common misunderstandings about Islamic and Christian faiths.

Thus, although Huntington seems at first sight to give culture a pride of place in his argument, it becomes obvious that in effect he subordinates it to the will to power. For example, after he proclaims that a cultural approach is indispensable in understanding the complexities of global politics, economics, and finance, Huntington writes: “The distribution of cultures in the world reflects the distribution of power. Trade may or may not follow the flag, but culture almost always follows power. Throughout history the expansion of the power of a civilization has usually occurred simultaneously with the flowering of its culture and has almost always involved its using that power to extend its values,

practices, and institutions to other societies. A universal civilization requires universal power" (Huntington 1996, 91).

According to Huntington, the West is confronted with two (either/or) choices today: it can retreat and become entrenched at home, cultivating "monoculturalism" of the Western variety and allowing other civilizations to occupy the global center stage. Or, if "non-Western societies are once again to be shaped by Western culture, it will happen only as a result of the expansion, deployment and impact of Western power. Imperialism is the necessary logical consequence of universalism" (Huntington 1996, 310). Needless to say, our current U.S. foreign policy makers have decided for this second course. Such a globalitarian course has never worked in the past and there is no reason to believe that it will work in the future. If Huntington's history teaches us anything, it is that power has often fared best under various disguises, rather than through raw display. This truth should now be painfully obvious to those US foreign policy makers who have advocated preemptive strikes as a way of preventing terrorist and other military activities on the part of so-called rogue nations and political groups, inimical to the United States and its closest allies. Such displays of raw power have resulted, for example, in the current debacle in the Middle East. Hopefully, the newly elected US government will have the political imagination, will, and ability to turn away from such a self-defeating and self-destructive path.

By the same token, one can see Huntington's thesis of the decline of the West (borrowed from Nietzsche and Spengler) as yet another ploy of a will to power whose very nature is insecurity, paranoia, and an insatiable desire for continuous expansion and self-affirmation. Elsewhere, I have described what I call the *ethopathology* of power (Spăriosu 1997), of which Huntington's study is a perfect example. Here I shall simply note that my contention is not that the will to power is not alive and well, especially among certain political elites from around the world. It is the values of this global "master race" (Nietzsche's term) in the making that Huntington presents in essentialist and universalist terms, for example, when he says that it is "human nature" to hate and compete with others, to enjoy wielding power, and to resort to violence in order to achieve one's hegemonic goals. Such a global subculture obviously exists and its mode of thought and behavior is exactly that described by Huntington (and Nietzsche). In this sense, his book is a

valuable, if perhaps unintended, critique and caveat: it indirectly points to the disastrous consequences for humanity, should this global subculture based on a raw mentality of power continue to increase its worldwide influence. It also underscores the urgent need to educate young local-global elites in a different spirit, which might be one of the most effective ways of avoiding the kind of brave new world that Huntington, in the wake of Nietzsche, envisages for us.

The local-global communities of the future would obviously not be devoid of “clashing of perspectives” (Featherstone 1995), any more than any previous local communities were. But these differences need not become linked to issues of mimetic identity, leading to Huntington’s clashes of civilizations. One may delight in and encourage cultural differences, in order to enhance the richness and diversity of life, rather than use them as pretexts for violent conflict. One may also imagine new ways in which humans can negotiate their various identities. One could, for example, develop the notion of nonconflictive multiple identities, in which humans can easily and naturally identify not only with their community, ethnic group, nation, race, culture, civilization, and so forth, but also with other humans, as well as with all other beings on this planet and beyond.

In defining culture, then, we can again turn to the notion of globality as an infinitely diverse expression of the global aspiration that I have mentioned earlier in this paper. In this light, various cultures can be seen as primary modes in which the human desire for world making and self-fashioning, i.e., the creative imagination, manifests itself. Specific mentalities or modes of thought and behavior generate, at the same time that they are being generated by, specific ways of life, language, sound and image patterns, knowledge, art, architecture, institutions, and interactions with other human beings and with the physical environment—a complex and fluid web of interdependence that can be called culture. Indeed, it would be more appropriate to speak of “cultures,” rather than Culture (pace Eagleton).

Every culture has the inner potential to renew or transform itself primarily through the imagination and its creative forms, including myths, narratives, folklore, artistic productions, ritual, etc. There are many local collective imaginations that generate ever-fresh social forms, based on the traditional and nontraditional creative resources of a

specific culture, which moreover may fruitfully interact with similar resources from other, nearby or remote, cultures. And there are many human factors other than power that motivate the various collective imaginations, such as playfulness, curiosity, generosity, love and care for others, aspiration toward personal development, spiritual transcendence and self-transformation, to mention only a few. We should then move away from the agonistic concepts that prevail in current social science and should instead adopt a holistic view of cultures as interdependent, self-organizing social systems that form an integral part of the symbiotic web of life (Capra 1997), in line with an emergent ethics of global intelligence, grounded in a mentality of peace.

Needless to say, all of the preceding remarks apply to a proper understanding of the Romanian identity in the context of European identity as well. Since my purpose here has been to sketch a larger, theoretical framework within which to place the theme of the present colloquium, in the last part of my intervention I shall limit myself to just a few general observations on the theme itself. In the first place, it cannot be stressed often enough that one should speak of multiple Romanian (as well as European) *identities* embedded within multiple reference frames. Most, if not all of these identities are fictive or imagined in Benedict Anderson's sense (1991), which does not mean that they are any less operative as historical reality. For example, the idea of a Romanian nation located within a certain geographical, ethnic and linguistic space and based on a specific culture arose relatively early in the collective imagination of the majority of the population that inhabited certain portions of the Carpatho-Danubian region (which it shared with a number of other populations over the course of its long history). This should in turn be distinguished from the relatively recent Romanian nation-state, which developed alongside with its other European counterparts during the Romantic period, reaching its entelechy after World War I. As both Eagleton and Appadurai point out, such nation-states deliberately blur the lines between ethnic, regional, national, and cultural identities to achieve their political goals. The Romanian nation-state has also been partly based on the conflictive mimetic mechanism described by Appadurai and Huntington (according to which Romanian ethnic identity consists not in who we are, but in who we are *not*). No less than its other European counterparts, it arose and flourished on the conflict between ethnic "majorities" and "minorities" and has, in turn, generated improper

forms of nationalism, such as chauvinism and jingoism, thereby weakening rather than strengthening Romanian national identity.

At the same time, the Romanian nation-state, especially during its communist period, has tended to underplay the regional differences or the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities of various historical provinces such as Banat, Transylvania, Moldova, Muntenia, etc. It emphasized unity and uniformity not so much under the banner of Romanian nationalism than that of communist internationalism. But as soon as Ceausescu decided to pursue a political course “independent” from Moscow, he again tacitly allowed Romanian (mimetic) nationalism to re-emerge, using it as an instrument of rallying various popular forces behind his political program. A similar process took place in former Yugoslavia under Tito, although it was Milosevic who fueled Serbian ultranationalism to the point that it led to the violent break-up of the Federation into smaller nation-states, based again on a conflictive mimetic mechanism.

Yet, nationalism and local patriotism are far from being negative social phenomena per se as long as they do not degenerate into chauvinism and jingoism through the mimetic mechanism of identity politics. Regional identities are part and parcel of the larger Romanian national identity, just as the latter cannot be understood without such identities. Furthermore, as Romania is situated at the intersection of Central, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans, it is well-positioned to develop new regional identities, comprising a very rich ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, across political border lines. Obvious examples include the Banat, Maramures, Bucovina, Dobrogea, and Transnistria regions to mention just a few. In this respect, the “ethnic core” and “common language” that social scientists such as Benedict Anderson (1991) and Mike Featherstone (1995) see as prerequisites for some, if not most, local communities are not conditions sine qua non for all such communities. At any rate, ethnic factors and common language do not constitute impassable barriers—on the contrary, they can be very helpful—in constructing a common human core of values and beliefs. In this connection, crosscultural border villages, cities, and regions from around the world, including those I have just mentioned in relation to Romania, can play an important role in imagining the local-global communities of the future. A good example of such interethnic, human solidarity was provided my old hometown, Timisoara, in 1989, when

Romanians, Hungarians, Germans and other ethnic groups came together in resisting and eventually helping to topple Ceausescu's repressive communist regime.

Yet such fertile, cross-ethnic, liminal regions as Banat or Bucovina have so far not been sufficiently studied, and hardly at all from an intercultural, global perspective. Of course, the development of intercultural regional identities across Romanian borders should now be facilitated by the fact that the Romanian nation-state has become part of a larger entity or reference frame, namely the European Union. Within this frame, the identity politics based on ethnic mimetic conflict loses its effectiveness and moves into the background, while the Romanian national, regional, and cultural identities come again to the fore, along with their other Central, Eastern European, and Balkan counterparts. This will certainly have the ultimate effect of weakening the nation-state, but not the Romanian nation itself, now understood as extending well beyond the current political borders and comprising a large and vibrant Diaspora.

But one should also point out that the European Union itself is part of a larger reference frame that includes Romanian and other European national, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities: the Western world or civilization. In turn, the Western world is part of a larger, global, reference frame, with its own cultural and regional identities. Perhaps a graphic way of describing the multiple global identity frameworks and their complex interrelations would be to revert again to personal example. Apart from my religious, familial, social, sexual, and professional identities, my multiple Romanian identities include various regions and localities within Romania, such as Banat (and within Banat, Timisoara, and within Timisoara, the neighborhood where I grew up and went to school); Transylvania where I spent most of my vacations (and within Transylvania, the Apuseni Mountains, and within the Apuseni Mountains, Tzara Motzilor, and within Tzara Motzilor, Zlatna, Dumbrava and Poiana); Muntenia (and within Muntenia, Bucharest, and within Bucharest my neighborhood where I lived and went to the university), etc.

Additionally, I have a number of North American, but also European, identities (French, German, Greek, Italian and Spanish) that are too complex to go into here. The larger frame of these identities is the

Western one, within the even larger reference frame of Planet Earth. If pressed to “choose” between these identities, I would choose that of a human being and a citizen of our planet. But I should point out that this would be a purely hypothetical choice, because it is never a question of choosing between various identities, but rather assuming the appropriate ones according to a specific reference frame. In other words, it is a question of constantly (re)prioritizing and harmonizing them in line with the ethics of global intelligence.

I would like to conclude this paper by emphasizing once again that in relation to Europe, the most appropriate reference frame for a viable and vibrant Romanian identity is *cultural*, rather than political or socioeconomic. In this respect, Romania is part of Europe, just as Europe is part of Romania, with many cultural feedback loops defining both identities. At the same time, one must resist the economic and political pressures that tend to pay only lip service to cultural diversity and attempt to create uniformity throughout the European geophysical space. In the last few decades, a rampant utilitarian mentality has unfortunately constructed a Europe of sprawling malls, consumerist habits, mindless “pop culture,” and centralized, technocratic bureaucracies. This is a socio-political nightmare already envisaged by Orwell in his *Ninety-Eighty-Four*, but whose dangers remain quite real today and must urgently be addressed. The best remedy against such a disastrous scenario is precisely a strong and proud local identity, based not on mimetic, conflictive, localism or nationalism, but on the best spiritual and cultural traditions of the various European regions. In this sense, Romania and the Romanian people, as well as their European counterparts, ought to concentrate not so much on material or economic development, as on *human* development. And educating our younger generations in the spirit of global intelligence would be the most effective way of contributing to this development.

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