

## Intercultural relations in East-Central Europe: the cases of Banat and Transylvania

MIHAI I. SPARIOSU

---

This essay presents the preliminary findings of an ongoing collective research project, entitled 'Clash of Civilizations or Peaceful Co-Evolution? Intercultural Contact in the Age of Globalization.'<sup>1</sup> The project proposes to look at the most influential Western contemporary theories of intercultural relations and test them through both concrete historical analyses and computer-assisted models of ethno-confessional harmony and conflict in various East-Central European regions, beginning with Banat and Transylvania. I present its preliminary findings here in the hope that they will be useful to other scholars in East-Central Europe and that some of them will join us in order to expand this research to other regions within and outside the European Union.

Intercultural relations is a highly controversial issue in our increasingly globalized environment, both within the contemporary scholarly community and within the political sphere, where public policies are based on various, often conflicting theoretical approaches to this issue. The disputes in the field tend to oscillate between two principal concepts: multiculturalism/post-multiculturalism and interculturalism. The multiculturalist and postmulticulturalist models prevail in Anglo-Saxon circles, whereas the interculturalist models are largely favoured in francophone ones.

The multiculturalist model tends to privilege the collective identity of the ethnic group over the identity of the individual. It sees social diversity as a mosaic, with groups and individuals being positioned in a fixed, cohabitation pattern (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2004). Its proponents, such as Charles Taylor (1994) and Will Kymlicka (2007), argue that multiculturalism favours the integration of immigrants, enhances their pride in belonging to the receiving culture and discourages xenophobic attitudes. In contrast, the critics or reformers of the model point out its limitations: a tendency towards communitarianism and identity politics through over-emphasis of religious, ethnic or racial differences, rejection or exclusion of the other, ghettoization of the urban space, etc. In turn, the proponents of the interculturalist model, such as Gerard Bouchard (2013) and Rogers Brubaker (1996; 2006), stress individual over group identity and the interactions among individuals and groups: diverse cultures intermix and communicate, borrowing from each other. Interculturalists argue that due to the new reality of globalization, multiculturalism needs to be revised to take into account transnationalism and super-diversity; they also

emphasize underlying commonalities in addition to acknowledging the differences between cultures.

Both the multiculturalist and the interculturalist models, however, belong to the same mentality of power that informs contemporary socio-political thinking and sees identity and difference in agonistic terms, resulting in counter-productive policies at the level of both nation states and transnational unions. Our project attempts to develop a different kind of theory of intercultural relations, based on an irenic mentality, which does not ignore conflict but has alternative ways of approaching and resolving it. In the present essay, I shall present some guiding theoretical principles as well as preliminary results of this project in regard to the sources of conflict in Banat and Transylvania, determining, on the basis of concrete historical analyses,<sup>2</sup> to what extent the major conflicts within these regions have been due to their ethnical and confessional diversity. In other words, what is the role of ethnic and religious identities in developing conflictive or harmonious intercultural relations? Or, more generally, could it be that there is a certain mentality that actually determines such relations, as well as ethnic and religious identities?<sup>3</sup> These questions are of obvious import not only for the two regions but also for many other regions with a great ethnic and religious diversity within and outside the European Union.

In developing our theory of intercultural relations, we have adopted and modified the notion of 'culture contact', which was first introduced in cultural anthropology and geography and was later taken up by other academic fields, such as literary and cultural studies, sociology and cultural history. Today 'culture contact' features prominently in North American and West European cultural studies and often implies conflict and force, being invoked in the so-called 'culture wars'. It is evident, for example, in Samuel Huntington's well-publicized theory of the 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996) and in Mary Louise Pratt's less-known notion of 'criticism in the contact zone'. Pratt defines such zones as 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination' (Pratt 1992, 4). These theories and their hypothesized methods (such as the concept of 'domination') are supported by anecdotal data only. Computer-assisted analytic methods that we have already developed for our project can test the validity of theories that are power-based, as well as theories that depend on historical personalities or on geographical boundaries. Since Banat and Transylvania were for a long time part of the Habsburg Empire, they could additionally help test the thesis that this empire was a 'prison of nations', as well as the counter thesis, advanced by a number of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century prominent cultural figures such as Lajos Kossuth, Karl Renner, Joseph Roth, and Robert Musil that this Empire was – or could have been – 'a multicultural haven', with enlightened ethnic and religious policies.

In the first phase of our project we have focused particularly on the conditions and factors that lead to unsuccessful, violent 'culture contacts', which, we believe, can more properly be described as intercultural contacts, because by studying such contacts, one hopes to offer strategies and methods of avoiding them. There have been a number of analyses and computer-assisted simulations of various violent conflicts, including the 1990s war that led to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia (Kaplan

1994; Silber and Little 1997; Gagnon 2004). Despite this increased scholarly attention, there is no agreement among researchers as to the causes of these violent episodes in the life of the world communities. The most common explanations include 'dire economic conditions', 'ancient hatreds', 'religious intolerance' and 'political manipulation'. A widely supported thesis holds that since World War II national and ethnic questions have become a major source of violent conflicts (Gurr 1993). Scholars point out that between the time of the Vienna Congress (1815) and the 'New Order' in the wake of World War I, most of the major armed conflicts did not have national liberation as a principal cause (Wimmer 1995; Wimmer, Cederman and Min, 2009). By contrast, 77% of the wars after World War II were inner state, as opposed to interstate, wars (Waldmann 2004). In the aftermath of the Cold War, 75% of the wars were fought in the name of the nation (Wimmer 1995). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of nationalist conflict in Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War appear to indicate the rise of an age of ethnic conflicts (Gurr 1993). Identities instead of interests, the argument goes, have become the dominant motive for violent actions in our time. Our project has proposed to test this thesis and explore the counter-thesis (which to us seemed more plausible) that interethnic relationships and ethnic identities are too numerous and multi-faceted to explain the relatively rare event of generalized violence (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Gilley 2004).

We have chosen historical Banat and Transylvania as our initial objects of study, because these regions have been characterized by extensive intercultural contacts over several centuries, witnessing harmonious cohabitation as well as violent conflicts that involved diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Serbs, Bulgarians, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Jews and Gypsies. We have adopted a comparative approach to the two regions and, taking into consideration both the differences and the similarities between them, we have concluded that, overall, Banat was a zone less prone to ethno-religious conflict than Transylvania. There are multiple reasons for this phenomenon, but it has relatively little to do with 'dire economic conditions', 'ancient hatreds', 'religious intolerance' and 'political manipulation'. Rather, the causes are very complex, occurring in various combinations, from case to case, occasionally involving the aforementioned elements as well.

Some differences between the two regions originate in their different geographical situations and, during certain periods, their different historical trajectories. Banat is situated on the so-called 'Danubian corridor' and its neighbouring population is largely made up of Eastern Orthodox Slavs (Serbs and Bulgarians). Transylvania, on the other hand, is completely surrounded by mountains, thus somewhat more isolated geographically speaking. It was also under the sway of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, reconstituted later on within the Habsburg Empire. By contrast, Banat was the property of the House of Habsburg, governed directly from Vienna during a crucial period in its economic and cultural development. Thus, Banat, unlike Transylvania, constituted a liminal space of sociocultural experimentation (or what sociologists would call 'social engineering' today) for the House of Habsburg, at least until the dual monarchy (1867–1918) when the socio-political differences between the two regions became less significant.

The different historical and geographical conditions considerably affected the relations between the various heterogeneous communities in the two regions, those in Banat being, *grosso modo*, more harmonious than those in Transylvania over the five centuries we looked at. The principal moments of interethnic and religious conflict in Transylvania were related to the imposition of inequitable policies from the 'Centre', that is, Budapest (during the medieval Kingdom of Hungary), then Vienna and again Budapest (during the dual monarchy), and finally Bucharest (after 1918).

But Banat has also experienced interethnic conflicts, some of them quite violent, chiefly during periods of large, regional or continental upheaval, for example during the Revolution of 1848 or during World Wars I and II. Politics, ideology and the will to power of the elites led to bitter disputes and bloody clashes there as well, despite the fact that scholars and politicians often present Banat as a showcase for religious tolerance and interethnic harmony. For example, Romanian and Serbian relations with the German communities in the region, which had generally been peaceful until World War II, suffered a devastating setback during that war, leading to the massacre of over 30,000 Serbs at the hands of the Nazis and to the reduction of the German population from around one million to a mere few thousands after the war. Serbian-Romanian intercultural relations also suffered as the Serbs welcomed the Red Army as liberators, whereas most of the Romanian population bitterly resented the imposition, under the threat of that same army, of Soviet-style communism in Banat, Transylvania and Romania in general.

We have also looked at the two regions in terms of the six indicators for the causes, as well as the prevention, of conflicts (both within and outside a homogeneous community) that were identified by Leatherman et alia (1999). These indicators include: 1) distribution of income and ownership (which can lead to inequities and discrepancies in the socioeconomic development of a community); 2) territoriality (leading to conflicting claims over the same territory by various heterogeneous groups, or nations); 3) the nature of social divides within the same group or among heterogeneous groups; 4) material conditions, such as the availability of natural resources, and demographic and environmental pressures; 5) institutional conditions (i. e. the source of authority and legitimacy regarding the control of political and military institutions; and 6) cultural identity – collective memory and language as well as the different systems of values and beliefs of the disputing parties.

Based on our historical research so far, our preliminary conclusion is that cultural identity, including ethnic-religious identity, has not been a determining factor in the major conflicts within the two regions, the other factors playing a more prominent role, especially in violent conflicts. For instance, research into the ethno-confessional relations between Romanians and Serbs during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century shows that the disputes over power and wealth between the leaders of the two Eastern Orthodox churches had priority over the differences in language, ethnic group or culture, as well as over the unity of faith. At the same time, however, interethnic and interfaith relations remained relatively harmonious at the level of many villages and local parishes in both Banat and Transylvania, where Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant and Unitarian priests often held services in churches

outside their denomination, based on their parishioners' needs, not on the power politics of their higher-ups.

In fact, up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (to be precise, up to the Revolution of 1848 and the nationalist policies of the revolutionaries), the divergences and solidarities in Banat and Transylvania were determined more by social status than by membership of a specific ethno-religious group. In the late medieval period, for example, the Romanian-Hungarian 'ethnic question' (as debated in the Romantic period and later on) was practically inexistent: while there were some tensions between the nobility of the two people, these tensions were not of an ethnic nature but had to do with the political rivalries and struggle for power within the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. Wallachian nobles took part in these struggles, often supporting Hungarian allies against their own 'people'. To cite just one early example, dispossessed Romanian and Hungarian peasants participated in the Bobalna uprising (1437–1438); in turn, Hungarian and Romanian noblemen banded together to put a violent end to it.

One should note, however, that all of the aforementioned factors form a chain of mutual causality, engaging in various amplifying feedback loops. Thus, if one of them is present, the others will soon manifest themselves as well, amplifying one another. For example, if economic or political inequities are present, they will bring about a negative perception of one's own or one's neighbour's cultural identity, which will, in turn, negatively affect the socioeconomic and political condition of all. Or, the infringement of the territorial space of one's neighbours will impact on their religious and cultural identity, which will in turn impact their socioeconomic and political condition, as was the case with the Hungarian conquest of Transylvania, followed by the effort of imposing Catholicism on a largely Eastern Orthodox population.

Furthermore, the amplifying feedback loops function on the principle of resonance, which can, in turn, be negative (mimetic) or positive (non-mimetic). Negative or mimetic resonance is of most interest in the present context, because it is closely linked to the will to power, as illustrated in the archaic principle of an eye for an eye. Wars and violent revolutions, as well as pandemics, spread through mimetic resonance. Unfortunately, the history of the two regions (as well as of the entire history of humankind) abounds in instances of reciprocal negative amplification through resonance, affecting interethnic and interfaith relations as well.

The Revolution of 1848 is a good example of the phenomenon of negative or mimetic resonance. It started with economic, political and administrative demands, but nationalist ideology gradually came into the foreground as well. Certain revolutionaries (primarily Hungarian and Italian) then used this ideology to promote political, administrative and economic emancipation from the House of Habsburg for their own people but not for others. In turn, the House of Habsburg tried to put an end to the revolution through linear methods, meeting violence with violence, imprisoning or even executing the instigators, repressing freedom of speech, and so forth. These methods temporarily quashed the conflagration, only to have it start up once more, a few years later, like a smouldering fire that bursts out again at the first gust of wind.

The same thing happened with the Magyarization policies originating in Budapest during the dual monarchy, and later on, with the similar nationalist policies, in Transylvania and Banat, of the Romanian regime in Bucharest after 1918. These policies amplified, instead of eliminating, the feedback loop of negative resonance that certain Hungarian and Romanian elites engaged in, especially after the Revolution of 1848 and the propagation of 'modernity' to the periphery of the Habsburg Empire.

Nevertheless, our research has also shown that although political and other elites can stimulate the emergence of intercultural mistrust and violent clashes, their ability to do so is shaped by the network structure of their communities. As it turns out, one can detect rather complex feedback loops not only between the various populations engaged in close intercultural contact but also between an individual population and its own elite, as well as those between the heterogeneous elites themselves; in many cases, the larger and the smaller groups of the same population may be at variance, leading to unsuccessful, violent contact at the intercultural level as well.

In other words, elites and their communities engage in positive or negative feedback loops that may occasionally erupt in violence. The question is to find out why some of these loops never turn violent, despite expectations to the contrary (for instance, the Romanian and Hungarian interethnic disputes in Transylvania during the 1990s, unlike those in former Yugoslavia, did not result in generalized violence) and how we can defuse those that have a strong violent potential before they escalate to the point of no return. Complexity and emergence theory with its computer-assisted methods can be useful in exploring these issues as well.

Be that as it may, our research has also determined that, generally speaking, the elites from both Banat and Transylvania used ethnic identity and solidarity as weapons in their power contests whenever it suited them to do so. Otherwise, Church and aristocratic elites did not encourage disputes and violence but tolerance and peace among the ethnic groups, especially when it was in their interest to maintain the political status quo ante. At the same time, however, the principle of an eye for an eye has applied to interethnic relations across the centuries in both provinces even to this day, regardless of the religious denomination of the parties involved. If a party, be it Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant or of another religious faith, considered that it was wronged, it would answer in kind (instead of 'turning the other cheek').

In contrast to this negative, mimetic resonance, non-mimetic resonance creates positive amplifying feedback loops and is best expressed in the Christian principle of 'love your neighbour as you love yourself' or in the Golden Rule of the ancient tradition of wisdom. This principle manifests itself in communities characterized by a mentality of peace, instead of a mentality of power. Unfortunately such communities have been rare on our planet, and their irenic mentality has often been co-opted by the will to power, for example by defining the concept of peace as the absence of war, as illustrated in the well-known Roman dictum: 'if you want peace, prepare yourself for war'<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, over the centuries, the irenic mentality has spontaneously manifested itself in the context of intercultural relations in the two provinces as well, and deserves a separate, in-depth study.

Finally, the concept of liminality plays an important role in our theory of intercultural contact. The term 'liminality' derives from the Greek and Hebrew *limen*, meaning 'harbour' or the meeting place between land and sea, but also 'threshold'. Furthermore, in Latin, *limes* meant the confines or the borders of the Roman Empire. Thus, liminality, in its broadest sense, refers to the 'transit' areas in between organized systems and reference-frames, whether they are physical, geographical, or cognitive (such as the 'grey areas' at the interface of disciplines). Our hypothesis has been that this notion can become an important conceptual tool in understanding not only how cultural (and cognitive) transformations may occur but also how they may be shaped into a peaceful mode.

We believe that computer-assisted social modelling may help reveal unexpected, nonlinear causes of conflict, as well as patterns of peaceful coexistence in the contact zones between heterogeneous cultures. It might well turn out to be the case that the liminal spaces between cultures, the 'grey areas' along borders can constitute privileged sites for intercultural dialogue and cooperation, not just privileged sites of conflict. Thus, borders or boundaries may not only separate people but also bring them together. In this regard, we have attempted to complement the conclusions of a recent computer simulation in the social sciences, carried out by Yaneer Bar-Yam and his team at the New England Complex Systems Institute in the USA, which has a number of methodological features in common with our project, although it starts from different theoretical assumptions. It studies the interactions between multi-ethnic communities in Switzerland, former Yugoslavia and India, concluding that boundaries (mainly geographical, such as mountains and rivers) between these communities have largely prevented violent conflict (Lim, Metzler, Bar-Yam 2007)<sup>5</sup>. One can factor in and further test their conclusions, exploring the possibility that boundaries between heterogeneous cultures can also be fertile, liminal spaces which facilitate peaceful intercultural cooperation and in which new social arrangements may emerge.

For example, through the concept of liminality one can throw new light on the relationship between centre and margin/periphery that has preoccupied cultural theorists and sociologists in the past two decades and has gained renewed relevance in the context of the enlargement of the European Union. As a rule, this relationship is seen as asymmetrical and conflictive, with the centre dominating the margin, and with the margin challenging the centre, often seeking to replace it. One can circumvent this power-based dialectics by drawing a distinction between the marginal/peripheral and the liminal. The margin or periphery can be liminal, but the *limen* can never be marginal or peripheral: whereas the periphery always defines itself in terms of the centre, the liminal moves away from it, often in irreversible fashion.

Given the fact that for long periods, Banat and Transylvania were liminal regions or borderlands in relation to the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, the concept of liminality can productively be applied in their case as well, thereby opening a new perspective on the relationship between periphery/margin and centre. I have already mentioned the fact that Banat functioned as a liminal space in which the House of

Habsburg conducted all kinds of socio-economic experiments. These included the creation of multicultural communities made up of immigrants from all the corners of the Empire and beyond, who managed to get along quite well until the Revolution of 1848. This and other examples demonstrate that alternative ways can be and were found in the liminal geographical areas at the intersection of heterogeneous cultures, which are not just points of friction and conflict but, more often than not, seminal places of intercultural experimentation and cooperation, out of which new patterns of social organization may emerge.

Along the same lines, there have also been a number of liminal cities in Banat and Transylvania, such as Timișoara, Oradea, Sibiu, Brasov and Cluj-Napoca, and one can profitably study their complex relations with the Centre (Vienna, Budapest, or Bucharest). We have already carried out research on the town of Timisoara in Banat, and have found that the relationship between local, heterogeneous ethno-confessional groups has seldom been determined by the culturalist policies of the Centre, be it Budapest, Vienna or Bucharest, but by the local need for interethnic and interfaith cooperation in everyday life. Throughout most of its history, Timișoara/Temesvar/Temeschburg had all the features of an intercultural, plurilingual society with a well-developed common civic spirit. Its writers and artists of diverse ethnic backgrounds and political orientations cultivated not just a local patriotism but also a creative cosmopolitanism within the larger context of East-Central Europe. After the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when a part of the historical Banat went to Romania, Timisoara continued to be a city of extensive intercultural dialogue with a special opening towards Western European cultures. This cosmopolitan tradition has managed to survive even through the decades of repressive communist rule, and after 1989 Timisoara has returned to its vibrant, plurilingual and multiethnic culture.

Actually, one can find liminal frontier cities like Timisoara throughout East-Central Europe: Bratislava/Pressburg/Pozsony, Vrsac/Vârșeț, Novi-Sad/Újvidék/Neusatz, Pécs/Fünfkirchen, Görlitz/Goražde, Brno/Brünn, Kraków/Krakau, Lemberg/Lwow, Cernăuți/Czernowitz, Koenigsberg/Kaliningrad, and so on. The very fact that they bear different names in different languages bespeaks their plurilingual and pluricultural nature. It would be very interesting to initiate comparative researches with transnational and transdisciplinary teams in order to determine what they have in common and in what ways they differ.<sup>6</sup>

One could also cite a number of 'liminal' historical figures who came from the border regions of the Habsburg Empire, including many from Banat, such as the Jesuit Gheorghe Buitul, Stephan and Franciscus Fogarasi, and the two Mihail Halicis – father and son – Archbishop Joseph Jovanovich of Sacabent – who played a prominent cultural role not only in the region but also throughout Central Europe. Another interesting figure from Banat was Paul Iorgovici Brancoveanu, a late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century man of letters and polyglot, whose mode of thought and action, based on the 'perennial philosophy', could be usefully adopted not only by present-day Romanian elites but also by their European and global counterparts. Later prominent liminal personalities include Lajos Kossuth, Karl Renner, Bishop Josip



Strossmayer, Oszkár Jászi, Joseph Roth, and Robert Musil (whose father was born in Timisoara), who believed that the Habsburg Empire, with all of its shortcomings, was nevertheless ‘a multicultural haven,’ with wise ethnic and religious policies. They played a major role in proposing creative models of intercultural relations precisely because they were aware of the liminal opportunities offered by the ‘periphery’ of the Empire. They were suspicious of extreme nationalism and strove to preserve the Empire by proposing such integrative projects as Kossuth’s ‘Danubian Federation’ or, later on, Aurel Popovici’s (less enlightened) ‘United States of Greater Austria’ which lost relevance with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the outbreak of World War I.

Thus, another assumption that underlies our project is that if we are to acquire a genuine transnational, or transcultural, or transdisciplinary, perspective inside and outside the European Union, we can most effectively work towards it not from the centre of a multistate political or economic union, nation, culture or academic discipline, as many contemporary thinkers, scientists and politicians believe, but from its limes or borders. A liminal position, outside the established structures (be they social, political or cognitive), allows the observer to discern the limits/limitations of any such structure so that s/he can begin to work toward remapping them or transcending them altogether. In other words, liminal spaces can also be transit points to new reference frames and systems, whether social, political or cognitive.

Finally, based on our research so far, I would like to propose the following general principles as guidelines in studying intercultural relations in general and intercultural conflicts in particular, as well as developing efficient methods of defusing the latter:

- Perception often creates reality and, consequently, cultivating a certain perception is very important in the case of intercultural relations as well. Most helpful would be to cultivate perceptions associated with an irenic mentality and not with a power-oriented one.

- Elites (political, cultural and spiritual) can play a crucial role in creating certain perceptions and in the management of intercultural relations. They need to show social responsibility and generous ethical principles by acting not just in their own interest but, above all, in the interest of all the communities involved. It would be essential to educate new elites in this generous spirit.

- Despite contemporary agonistic theories, the immediate zones of intercultural contact are often places of peaceful cohabitation, not of conflict. More often than not, intercultural and interfaith conflicts emanate from the Centre, with its ideologically motivated policies, or from the struggle for power between elites who do not care about the wellbeing of the entire population. At the same time, initiatives for change should start not from the Centre (be it Brussels, Budapest or Bucharest), but from the ‘margin,’ i. e. from the local communities themselves.

- We need a much more complex understanding, both historically and conceptually, of the ideas that circulate today concerning intercultural relations, which are mostly driven by counterproductive identity politics. In this sense, political decision-making in Romania and the European Union could benefit from a well-informed historical perspective by learning from the errors of the past. For example, we

must rethink the idea of ethnic or national ‘minorities’ inherited from the communist regimes: even the concepts of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ concerning democratic processes (at the intercultural level as well) are quite recent, having their roots in the ‘bourgeois’ ideology of the French Revolution, and need to be rethought in the near future in both a regional and a global geopolitical context where the nation state of Romantic origin will gradually lose its relevance.

- In the new context of globalization, if we are to avoid major conflicts or so-called ‘clashes of civilizations’ we would be well advised to adopt and act according to an irenic mentality in all intercultural relations. But the irenic mentality is not linked to ‘cultural identity’ or to the system of values and beliefs of a specific group, or to a certain economic or social organization. This mentality is ‘transcultural’ and is shared by all human beings, independent of their ethnicity, race or confession. It can be summarized in a single word: ‘humaneness’.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The project is supported by the National Scientific Research Council of Romania (PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0771).
- <sup>2</sup> Some of these historical analyses can be found in Spariosu and Boari (2013).
- <sup>3</sup> I define mentality as a specific mode of thought, feeling and behaviour, based on a specific system of values and beliefs that determines, in turn, the sociopolitical, economic and cultural identities of a certain community. For a detailed discussion of a mentality power as incommensurable with an irenic mentality or a mentality of peace, see Spariosu (1997).
- <sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of the two types of mentality and resonance, see Spariosu (1997, 2004, 2006).
- <sup>5</sup> For a similar argument about neighbours needing ‘good fences’ or walls, see Rutherford et al. (2011).
- <sup>6</sup> This research could develop and refine some of the analyses in Cornis-Pope and Neubauer (2004–2010) where the concept of ‘marginocentric cities’ is used to describe the borderland cities in East-Central Europe. Although this concept derives, to a large extent, from my notion of liminality (Spariosu 1997), it differs from the latter in the sense that it does not allow for a transcendence of the dialectic of centre and margin, typical of a mentality of power.

## WORKS CITED

- Abdallah-Pretceille, Martine. *L'éducation interculturelle*. Paris: PUF, 2004.
- Bouchard, Gerard, ed. *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006.
- Cornis-Pope, Marcel, and John Neubauer, eds. *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*. 4 vols. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004–2010.
- Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. “Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War.” *American Political Science Review* 97.1 (2003): 75-90.
- Gagnon, V. P. *The Myth of Ethnic War. Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004.
- Gilley, Bruce. “Against the Concept of Ethnic Conflict.” *Third World Quarterly* 25.6 (2004): 1155-1166.

- Gurr, Ted Robert. *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflict*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993.
- Huntington, Samuel. *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1996.
- Kaplan, Robert D. *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Odyssey: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.
- Leatherman, Janie, et al., eds. *Breaking Cycles of Violence: Conflict Prevention in Intrastate Crisis*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1999.
- Lim, May, Richard Metzler, and Yaneer Bar-Yam. "Global Pattern Formation and Ethnic/Cultural Violence." *Science* 317.5844 (2007): 1540-1544.
- Pratt, Mary. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Rutherford, Alex, et al. "Good Fences: The Importance of Setting Boundaries for Peaceful Coexistence." *arXiv* 1110.1409. 6 October 2011. Web. 17 March 2015.
- Silber, Laura and Alan Little. *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.
- Spariosu, Mihai I., and Vasile Boari, eds. *Armonie si conflict intercultural in Banat si Transilvania: Perspective cultural-istorice*. Iasi: Institutul European, 2013.
- Spariosu, Mihai, I. *Global Intelligence and Human Development: Toward an Ecology of Global Learning*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004.
- Spariosu, Mihai, I. *Remapping Knowledge: Intercultural Studies for a Global Age*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2006.
- Spariosu, Mihai, I. *The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality and the Study of Literature*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997.
- Taylor, Charles. *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994.
- Waldmann, Peter. "The Asymmetry between the Dynamics of Violence and the Dynamics of Peace: The Case of Civil Wars." *Facing Ethnic Conflicts: Towards a New Realism*. Eds. Andreas Wimmer, Richard Goldstone, Donald Horowitz, Ulrike Joras, and Conrad Schetter. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004. 96-110.
- Wimmer, Andreas. "Interethnische Konflikte: Ein Beitrag zur Integration aktueller Forschungsansätze." *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 47.3 (1995): 464-493.
- Wimmer Andreas, Lars Eric Cederman, and Brian Min. "Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflicts: A Configurational Analysis of A New Global Data Set." *American Sociological Review* 74.2 (2009): 316-337.

## **Intercultural relations in East-Central Europe: the cases of Banat and Transylvania**

---

Intercultural contact. Intercultural conflict and harmony. Liminality. Power-oriented mentality. Dialectic of centre and margin. Irenic mentality. Mimetic and non-mimetic resonance.

Based on a comparative analysis of the historical records of Banat and Transylvania, the essay shows that cultural identity, including ethnic-religious identity, has not been a determining factor in the major conflicts within the two regions. More often than not, intercultural and interfaith conflicts emanate from the Centre, with its ideologically motivated policies, or from the struggle for power between elites who do not care about the wellbeing of the entire population. The essay further points out that despite contemporary agonistic theories, the immediate zones of intercultural contact – or the liminal spaces at the intersection of various cultures – are often places of peaceful cohabitation, not of conflict. Such

liminal spaces can serve as models for harmonious social transformation within the nation state and the European Union in general. The essay concludes that in the new context of globalization, if one is to avoid so-called 'clashes of civilizations', one would be well advised to adopt and act according to an irenic mentality in all intercultural relations. This irenic mentality is linked neither to cultural identity nor to a certain economic or sociopolitical organization, but it is 'transcultural' and shared by all human beings, independent of their ethnicity, race or confession.

---

Prof. Mihai I. Spariosu  
Department of Comparative Literature  
University of Georgia, Athens  
USA  
spariosu@uga.edu