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Towards a Modern Theory of Romanian Nationalism in the Interwar Period

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1. Theory

According to the common view, a nation emerges by a slow process of "awakening", a metaphor that is taken to mean that the nation under consideration becomes self-conscious of the distinctive features which mark it off in relation to other (surrounding) nations. The implication of this metaphor – which incidentally comes forth also in the national anthem of Romania – is that the nation was previously "slumbering", living on quietly without bothering itself about its identity. This "slumber" itself can be seen as just another name for a (long) historic period when an ethnic group either chooses to, or is forced into living inside a larger state or empire in accordance both with the laws of this state, or empire, and its own traditions. The "slumberous" ethnic group tries to accommodate its traditions with the general laws of the state in spite of the "double bind" imposed by such an arrangement or even without feeling frustrated by it. Although the group realizes its traditions are different of those of its neighbors, it does not try to give this difference a (separate) political shape, either because it does not want to, or because it is not allowed to take such consequences.

In conclusion, "awakening," means at least starting to feel uneasy about the situation and at most fighting to change it

and to enter thus the process of transformation of an original ethnic group into a nation.

This common view does not explain what exactly puts into motion the process of "awakening" but its presupposition is that the process is starting by itself, the impetus is internal, the nation feels suddenly seized by an impulse to act. The nation is, in other words, the historical subject of nationalism. This interpretation fits into an essentialist view on the nation: this is either "just there", somewhere where it always was, and behaving like it always did, or, if it does not yet exist, there is an ethnic group "just there", like a germ waiting to put out buds, to become a real historic organism, i.e., a – corresponding – nation. According to both versions, "the essence" of the group does not really change when the group enters the way towards becoming a nation.

This last implication came under fire during the last years. The starting-point of this debate was a statement by Ernest Gellner:

> Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invests nations where they do not exist but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on even if these are purely negative, i.e., consist of disqualifying marks from entry to privilege without any positive similarity between those who share the disqualification and those who are destined to form a new nation. (*Nationalism*, ed. By John Hutchinson & Anthony Smith, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 62.)

Thanks to this new view, the nationalism itself becomes the subject of action and the nation is "downgraded" to its (invested, invented, created) object. Also according to Gellner, the

intellectuals and/or the proletariat, i.e., the discontent, marginalized, frustrated groups of the old regime are those who create the nationalism. Therefore

> nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority and in some cases of the totality of the population. (Idem, p. 65)

Were the agents of the mentality change are for Gellner internal, they are for Tom Nairn external: "the machinery of the world political economy" (Idem, p. 72) and the local entrepreneurs who are desperately trying "to do it for themselves" and in their own way. These (internal or external) agents, however, do not belong to the folk. The question then rises how could these agents who, according to Gellner, work upon the "pre-existing differentiating marks" of the folk, do their job if they do not belong to the folk? Eric Hobsbawm (*The Invention of Tradition*, co-edited with Terence Ranger, 1983) answered the question by bringing into contact the entities disjoined by the former theories, namely state and society, and by coining a new concept for it, namely the "invented tradition". This term refers to a view on the history of the ethnic group which first somebody "invented" (produced, made) but which eventually was socialized by school and by public ceremonies and monuments so that it became an unquestioned tradition of the group, a part of its "cultural memory". The tradition is thus as little an entity "just there" as the nation is. We know well that all kind of oral culture has been "invented" by somebody, at some point of the history, and that eventually it has been taken over, adopted, by the whole community without bothering to retain the name of the inventor. However, although we logically have to admit the existence of an origin for every

tradition, it proves often very difficult to point at it; most traditions *seem* to be "just there". Hobsbawm is bound to offer only modern examples for his theory because only these ones are well documented. A good example is the opening of the Siegesallee in Berlin in 1896 in order to immortalize the Prussian victory on France in 1871 by giving it, 25 years after the event, a "pan-German" shape, inventing, as it were, a German tradition of national unity and irresistible power in spite of the fact that, due to the endless rivalry between the many small German states in the previous centuries, such a unity did simply never exist.

The conclusion of this debate is that there is a choice to be made between "primordialists", who consider, from inside a national tradition, that their nation is a natural phenomenon and that it does exist since ever exactly such as it now is, and "circumstantialists", who analyze a nation from outside and see it as "unnatural", i.e., a man-made entity, the product of a group at some time of the history, made in order to reach a certain (political) goal. In the words of Paul Brass, nationalism is "a politically induced cultural change", a symbolic product of an elite, or a counter-elite, in order to mobilize popular support for its political project.

It is generally understood that such a project is typical for the modern age. Anthony Smith (*The Ethnic Revival*, Cambridge University Press, 1981) makes clear that nationalism belongs to modernity, an age wherein rationality has won from the religious belief. During this age, an ethnic group which neither fits into the new rational order nor is able to stick to its pre-modern traditions, can turn to nationalism: "through spiritual self-help the dejected ethnic community can be raised up anew" (Idem, p. 121). So comes on the scene the so-called "cultural nationalism". In *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* (London, Allen Unwin, 1987), John Hutchinson distinguishes

between "political nationalism" which forces modernization upon a traditional society, and "cultural nationalism" which, thanks to the devotion of a young generation and in fight with the dogmatic (religious) beliefs of the older generation, exalts a dignified, purified new version of the traditions. Interesting enough, Hutchinson stresses the importance for Central and East European countries of such "cultural nationalists" as Polacky in Czechia, Hrushevsky in Ukraine and Nicolae Iorga in Romania as well as Swami Vivekananda in an Asian country like India. He criticizes Gellner and Hans Kohn who consider these nationalists as sheer retrograde spirits and praises them instead as moral innovators. It is true they invented Cultural myths as a kind of compensation for the rural backwardness of their countries but they nevertheless restored "the superior mystical, organic bond between peasant, land and community" (128) while remaining future oriented, i.e., trying to improve the future of their nation by solving its present problems.

Are all these cultural nationalists alike? Peter Sugar distinguishes in East Europe bourgeois (Czechia), aristocratic (Hungary, Poland) and populist (Serbia, Bulgaria) from "bureaucratic nationalists" (Romania, Turkey and Greece) and presents the last ones as people who tried to impose from top to bottom badly needed reforms in the society by taking advantage form their high position in the administration.

All these efforts of both political and cultural nationalists are made in order to help, or to push an ethnic group to become a nation. An *ethnie* – this originally French term was taken over by English-speaking authors because English lacks a corresponding noun – is determined by the vernacular language and the common descent of its members (irrespective of being a presumed or a real one), by same customs and traditions and by a homeland, the cradle of the people, whereby it is again irrelevant if this place is mythical or corresponds to a historical

reality and if the ethnie is still living there or has abandoned it a time ago. A strong sense of solidarity among the members of the ethnie, *Gemeinsamkeit* according to Max Weber, can be strong even if it is imaginary, and has to be therefore distinguished from kinship, i.e., real family or clan relations.

So far we can speak, following J. Hutchinson & Anthony Smith (eds., *Ethnicity*, Oxford, 1996), of an "ethnic group". If this is also in control of a fixed territory and has a minimal (political) organization for administrative tasks, we speak of an "ethnic community". Finally, if this community has built up a national, sovereign state as well, and if this is supported by a unified economy, a system of institutions, and is also able to defend its frontiers, we can speak of a "nation". The concepts of *nation* and *nation-state* presuppose thus one another. Anthony Smith (*National Identity*, Penguin Books, 1991) considers nevertheless this correlation as typical for the Western, so called "civic-territorial" concept of nation whereby he puts the emphasis on a legal-political community (*la Patrie*, in French), on a unified corpus of laws and institutions and on civic culture. An individual participates in all these organizations but, at the same time, he may be free to get out and seek affiliation to another nation without feeling he is losing his personal identity. Smith contrasts this model to a non-Western one, the so called "ethnic-genealogical" concept of nation, existing mostly in Eastern Europe and Asia, whereby he puts the emphasis on a community of birth and native culture and specifies the individual can come out of it only by losing his identity. Friedrich Meinecke, who called the two kinds of nations *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation* respectively, made this distinction too. The implication of this second meaning of the relation between nation and nation-state seems to be that we may acknowledge the existence of a nation also when it has

not yet reached the capacity of building its own nation-state, at least a nation-state in accordance to Western standards.

It is nevertheless an open question how strongly this implication reads? As the theory originated in Western political philosophy, the above implication might be understood only in a weak sense, that is in a sense which better fits in the Western political culture: *Kulturnation* would then be a mere stage in the development of a nation, on its way towards becoming a *Staatsnation*. Only when this point is reached may a nation be considered to have completed its task and become a real nation. According to this evolutionary reading, and to the political norm, which probably underlies it despite the political correctness exhibited on the surface of the discourse, *Kulturnation* is considered a lesser nation than *Staatsnation*.

Anyway, all these theories assume, first, that there is a threshold between an ethnie and a nation, and/or between the two stages of the development of a nation, and second, that the crossing of this threshold means a lot in terms of mentality change, cultural maturity and institutional complexity. Some of these differences in mentality are obvious. The members of an ethnie can, for instance, easier say what they are not than what they really are; by contrast, the members of a nation define their identity mostly in positive terms. "An ethnic group may be other-defined, the nation must be self-defined" (Walker Connor, quoted in J. Hutchinson & A. Smith, eds. 1994, pp. 45-46). Or, put in other words, the members of an ethnie see themselves as "us" – a casual, non-marked term – but consider the members of another ethnie as "they". This second term is a marked one and suggests that people covered by it are different, strange, deviant, dangerous, threatening, or ridiculous. A significant opposition appears thus between "normal" and "abnormal" groups such as Greeks and barbarians, (Roman) *populus* and a (foreign) *natio*, the majority of a people and its

various minorities, etc. A similar distinction occurs in all contexts where a Self confronts the other. It is nevertheless essential to understand that members of an ethnie are more likely to participate in a defensive language, to be closed upon themselves and feel suspicious about any stranger, than are the members of a nation who are supposed to have more chances to develop an open community and adopt a more tolerant look at the Other. This is another way to say, without jumping to generalizations, that ethnic communities cannot be credited only with beneficial qualities, such as many romanticists made us believe while they were in search of rural authenticity.

We should further distinguish between the self-image of nationalists and their image as seen from outside, an image that is often a more realistic one. The stress on folk, popular culture, manly vitality, unquenchable thirst for traditions, or for "the real thing", masks sometimes the fact that these values are in an advanced process of dissolution, or did already become obsolete. Many members of nationalistic movements see themselves as living up to these norms but are in fact either deluding themselves or being manipulated from outside in order not so much to revive the traditions but to reach other, unmentioned political goals. Accordingly, these nationalists might be much deeper involved in actuality than they could ever suspect. It might therefore be the case that although some political as well as cultural nationalists mean it sincerely, they come too late on the scene and take fakes for real sources of renewal.

The object of nationalism is, in other words, and especially in (post) modern times, an artifact. My reading so far was that the artifact could have negative effects and could lure its worshippers into self-delusion. Yet, an artifact is not necessarily a fake. We should rather acknowledge that an inscrutable

ambiguity seems to characterize the concepts of nation and nationalism. Their real significance does very much depend on the point in history where we look from at both concepts, and on our approach from inside or from outside a given tradition. Benedict Anderson made once a brilliant observation over the three paradoxical dilemmas wherein these terms get involved:

> 1. The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye *versus* their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists; 2. The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept *versus* the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations; and 3. The political power of nationalism *versus* their philosophical poverty. (*Imagined communities*, London, Verso, 1983, 1991, p. 5)

Anderson also stipulated, "in an anthropological spirit" that "a nation is an imagined political community, and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (idem, pp. 5-6). "Imagining" does not mean for Anderson "inventing", that is fabricating, forging, but rather creating something new by people who communicate with each other although they never meet. An imagined community contrasts thus with the face-to-face communication, which is working, for instance, in small villages. Nationality, or "nation-ness", as Anderson puts it, is then "a cultural artifact of a particular kind" (Idem, p. 4). This collectively imagined community is an artifact in the aforesaid meaning, i.e., it is not a naturally born entity but a man-made one. Although somebody originally inspired the movement, it went eventually on because it responded to a deep necessity. Benedict Anderson believes that nationality and nationalism are responses to the modern movement of secularization that threatened, by the rejection of any divine outline for the

mankind, to represent history as meaningless. What was required, since the 18th century, was therefore a "secular transformation of fatality into continuity" (idem, p. 11) by constructing new lasting communities, the nations, which "grow out of and replace religious communities and dynastic realms" (p. 22).

What I find so illuminating in the book of Benedict Anderson is, first, the fact that he goes beyond the pointless dilemma between "primordialists" and "circumstancialists", which I mentioned above, and, second, the fact that he views the nation-building as a complex process which is maybe started by a group according to self-interests but which nevertheless responds to general needs and expectations.

The conclusion of this debate is that "nation" is a construct, in contradistinction to the ethnie, which is a given, that is a complex of unquestioned ways of behavior like language, rituals and customs, beliefs, social rules and roles, etc. The "nation" construct is nevertheless imagined by, and thanks to countless groups, social movements, cultural needs and individual intellectuals and artists. Nation and nationalism are to be studied, accordingly, as a common ground of anthropology, cultural theory, political and social history and literature and arts, and as a cooperation project of scholars working in these fields (I must add for the sake of precision that even the ethnie is a construct for the above cited circumstancialists, or functionalists, while the ethnie is viewed as a given fact only by primordialists like Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz (see, for instance, Geertz' article in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smiths, eds., 1996, pp. 40-45). Interesting enough, some of these "primordial ties" like language, religion, custom, etc., according to Geertz (p. 42), "seem to flow more from a sense of natural – some would say spiritual – affinity than from social interaction". This remark is also appropriate to my quotations

from the Romanian philosopher Vulcănescu in the 3rd chapter of this paper. Anyway, I shall stick further on to the distinction already mentioned between the ethnie as "given" and the nation as a "construct".

If nation is a construct, that is an entity to be made out of a pre-existing ethnic community, how is this community rendered self-conscious of characteristics and ways of behavior that it followed for a long time without reflecting upon them? Anderson is an expert in South-East Asia and gives many examples of how the English administration in India and the Dutch one in Indonesia tried to promote an English, or a Dutch identity, and how local intellectuals tried on the contrary to foster among the natives a new mentality, an identity of their own, using the same systems of socialization and acculturation as the colonial power. I do not insist on the details of this struggle, although they may appear to be very useful for drawing a comparison between (real) colonial policies and the systems of influence the same Great Powers had at their disposal in Eastern Europeans countries, which formally have never been their colonies. (The outcome of such a comparative analysis might prove to be the – previously unsuspected – existence of an *indirect cultural colonialism* in these latter countries.) Instead, I am concerned in this paper by the theoretical contribution of Benedict Anderson. It seems to me that he, as an expert in former western colonies, is somehow inclined – maybe without realizing this inclination – to consider the developments in these countries as fundamentally other than the earlier, but similar, developments in the Western countries themselves. (This seems to be a rather widespread tendency among historians, even among Western historians.) So Anderson claims there are, or were, two major historic routes for transforming an ethnie into a modern nation. The first one is state-sponsored, or is devised by the upper class of an ethnie,

often in "lateral" cooperation with the upper classes of some other, neighboring ethnies. The second route is "vertical" instead of "lateral", and is taken by intellectuals who are addressing all social classes in an effort to trigger off a general mobilization of the people. The lateral model provides self-perpetuation for the leading group, gradual incorporation of other social groups in the management of the state and their eventual inclusion in what is going to be called "the nation". Thanks to the contribution of lower strata and/or of other ethnies, which are convinced to take part in the game, the original ethnic culture becomes the dominant culture, i.e., the national culture. So long the other ethnies or social groups involved in the process accept the domination of the first group and their norms as the general cannon, the process is peacefully going on along bureaucratic lines of development. Problems arise only if, and when, this model is questioned by ethnies, or by intellectuals who originate from marginalized or socially despised groups. These intellectuals feel disregarded by the dominant groups in spite of their personal value, which is, in their eyes, or should be, if only properly understood, considered higher than the performances of the national leaders.

Nationalism would then be nothing else than the efforts undertaken by such "vertical" intellectuals to transform their ethnies into nations. Anderson divides further these intellectuals into "modernists" who desire to assimilate the western modernity and transform their people accordingly, "traditionalists" who oppose western standards and wish to ground the emancipation of their ethnie in its own values, and different forms of synthesis of these extreme positions (Idem, p. 63). The common problem of all these intellectuals is how to turn members of the ethnie into citizens of the national state. The first group attempted to adopt western norms and implant them in the society without worrying about possible damage

to previous norms. The second group claimed that people had to gather, on the contrary, around old, revamped vernacular values. In fact, Anderson rejoins by his remarks the authors I mentioned above, Hans Kohn for instance, whom he quotes on page 80. The "lateral", western, associating version of nationalism had been working in Britain, France and the USA, while the "vertical", Eastern, organic, mythical version was realized in the other European countries and, as a matter of fact, in all other countries in the world. Anderson admits, somehow self-ironically, that the second model seems to work everywhere "east of the Rhine" (p. 80).

How are then to be explained these cases, which are surprisingly in majority? I think I have now to come back to my previously suggested criticism. Historically, the "lateral" model can be questioned and it might prove to be only a cultural myth constructed in some Western (English- and French-speaking) countries, as an indirect proof of their supposed superior, because peaceful, historical development. I put it bluntly only to express my point more clearly. What I mean is that many developments, which seemed governed by rational, "lateral" incorporation in the dominant ethnie appear, when put under scrutiny, to have been the result of sometimes fierce conflicts.

Michel Foucault gives many examples of French and English historians which brought to the fore the point of view of the "losers" in the internal wars in France and England, respectively, and whose voice was silenced by other historians who wrote on behalf of the "winners" (*Il faut défendre la société,* Seuil / Gallimard, 1997). Eugene Weber published a standard book on how to make modern citizens in a national state out of former rural people (*Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1979).

19th century (Napoleonic) France and (Victorian) England were at the zenith of their economic, political and military power. When their presence in colonies – take the example of the shrewd English conquest of India – became overwhelming, their power and stability were seen by their new subjects as everlasting and certainly as big as in the past. It is therefore probable that some intellectuals, above all those who were living in non-Western countries, took *that* stage of development as witnessing a permanent structure of power, towering above history, and idealized it into a *model* for all times, a highly respected model which they, poor East Europeans and Asians, would never be able to reach. Consequently, *their* model had to be constructed at a lower level, as being less rigorous, deviant, and full of compromises.

When trying to synthesize these remarks, the following table could be set up:

Models		Pre-independence	Post-independence
Lateral	Civic-territorial Nationalism	ejects foreign rulers, sets up nation-states, is anti-colonial	integrates other ethnies, makes a new nation out of the colonial past
Vertical	Ethnic-genealogical Nationalism	secedes from broader states, makes a new ethnic nation	expands, includes kinsmen outside frontiers, irredentism

The cited authors seem to agree about the existence of these two models even if they phrase them in different terms. They take thus two stages of development into consideration, before

and after the nation in question becomes independent. The dividing line between these two stages passes through the declaration of independence of a new state although this does not (necessarily) express the fact that the new state is a sovereign nation-state; it could be only a state under the sovereignty of another one, or it could be as well a confederacy of states or a multinational state. I shall not go further into juridical details. My point is simply that nationalism, according to the above statements, has to take the necessary steps in order to achieve independence, to transform the ethnie into a nation and to improve its standards of life, or to expand the nation, irrespective of the question if this nation has already built up its nation-state. Nationalism could be thus envisaged as stopping short before imagining a nation-state. But even if this last point is disputable, it seems that internal integration of other ethnies and/or expansion outside the frontiers to include kinsmen are the last tasks of nationalism. It is not specified how far these two last tasks should or might be carried out but, supposing a reasonable limit is reached, nationalism should not lead to conquest of foreign territories where no kinsmen live; an ethnic limit should be observed by a nation in its acceptable endeavors.

The conclusion seems to be, for the aforesaid authors, that the mission of nationalism could be seen as completed when its two last tasks are fulfilled. In other words, although there are historical reasons for the rise of nationalism and also historical tasks to be fulfilled by it, nationalism is no permanent movement in the history of a people; once the last reasonable points on its agenda are met, nationalism has *logically* to disappear. But *does it really* disappear, i.e., historically and politically, as well? The facts show during the last years that the creation of national states does not prevent nationalism

from acting and that there is no foreseeable limit to its manifestations.

Without being able to refer here to these more general aspects of nationalism I would like to apply the model to the history of Romania. There are at least four points of criticism to be made on this model in Romanian context:

1. Is not true that national elites resort only to one of the above mentioned models; they follow both of them, alternatively or even simultaneously, according to historical circumstances.
2. It is not true that nationalism puts an end to its actions either when the construction of the nation-state is completed or when the expansion of this state has reached a "reasonable" limit; instead, it seems that nationalism adapts itself to the new circumstances and goes on indefinitely, by "imagining" new goals.
3. It is not true that, once the ethnie becomes a nation, national feelings disappear; a new appeal to these appears always to work, although the context and the forms of its functioning may change.
4. It is not true that the development of an ethnie into a nation is a one-way process; ethnicity is somehow residual, a nation can always "fall apart" into one or more ethnies, or "fall back" on ethnical attitudes, as it happens with the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavian nations; one could even say that nowadays it is ethnocentrism rather than nationalism that characterizes the behavior of these peoples as well as that of many peoples in western countries.

I shall try to explain all these points of doubt by taking under scrutiny the recent history of Romania.

2. 20th Century Romania

The Romanian Principalities Muntenia (Wallachia) and Moldova (Moldavia) united in 1859, enthroned the German Karol von Hohenzollern as their Prince in 1866, when the country also adopted a modern, democratic constitution, won independence, even sovereignty, in 1878, in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin and after a victorious war against Turkey when they were (partially) supported by Russia, and became a kingdom in 1881. After the First World War, in 1918, the Romanian Kingdom united with the former Habsburg provinces Transylvania, Banat, and Bucovina, as well as with the former Tsarist province Bessarabia – in all of them the majority of population was Romanian – and constituted the so-called Greater Romania. This democratic state lasted until 1938, when Germany put it under pressure and, pushed towards the Soviet-Union, it had to give up Bessarabia and parts of Transylvania and Bucovina; it fell afterwards also under different rightist dictatorships. After the Second World War Romania regained the lost part of Transylvania but not Bessarabia and North-Bucovina, which remained under Soviet occupation, while Romania itself was governed by the communists until 1989.

This short history of Romania seems to fit in the terms of the table above. "Ethnic-genealogic" nationalist groups called the people to fight for its rights in the period of the 1848 revolution through 1859, in obvious accordance with the "vertical" model. The war the Romanian Principalities waged on Turkey in 1877 could also be seen as a typical movement of secession from a broader state and of establishing of its own "ethnic nation". Nevertheless, a "post-independence" one according to the same model did not follow this "pre-Independence" activity. The Romanian Kingdom showed no irredentism after 1878 and even neglected the fate of Romanians

outside the country, although they were denied elementary (political) rights, both in Transylvania and in Bessarabia. Besides, it certainly did not move to expand beyond its frontiers at the time. In fact, sovereign Romania feared its former ally of 1877, Russia, more than the Habsburg Empire and entered therefore a defensive (secret) coalition with the Triple Alliance, including this Empire, against Russia. Romania, in other words, gave a higher priority to its interests as a state than to its supposed devotion to Romanians abroad. Or, put it again in other words, the Romanian élites appeared to be more concerned by the goals of the political nationalism than by those of the cultural nationalism. Interesting enough, the "post-Independence" policy of Romania shows in 1866-1914 and 1918-1938 an affinity rather to the "civic-territorial" model. In both periods the governing élite put aside from power former vociferous intellectuals and tried very cautiously to give political form to other, especially middle-class groups, and to involve them into state management. Many reforms in the twenties were essential to this policy, first of all those which conferred the peasants ownership over theirs ground and franchise.

The alternation of the two models before 1914 and their merge in the interwar period support the first point of criticism on the standard model I presented above. The Romanian élites switched from the "vertical," "ethnic-genealogical" model (applied until 1866) to the "lateral," "civic-territorial" model because the first one was suited for political crisis and the second one for a period of peaceful development. Besides, addressing the people "vertically" suits intellectuals and "lateral" involvement in the government suits professional politicians. The alternation of the two models expresses in a way the alternation on the political scene of two groups of élites. The – universal – ambiguity of the term "élite" is especially striking in Romania. While the political,

administrative, economical élites represent "men in power", the intellectual élite is "power-less": normally it does not reach power, or it is even excluded from power, and boasts only with having a certain social status. During a crisis it tries, and sometimes briefly succeeds, to take over the power just because the (old) powerful élites are not able to exercise it, or are overthrown. The intellectual élite functions thus occasionally like a political counter-élite but it is never accepted as such in the long run. Accordingly, the Romanian system shows – and, unfortunately, this observation seems to be still valid in our days –, that it is lacking a *built in* political alternative and, therefore, it tries to provide an alternative by appeals to *outside* groups, which can be only the intellectual élites. This unusual construction is also an unfortunate one. Since the begin of the modern age (1866) the political élites succeed one another easier in peaceful times than during a major crisis; now the system shows an unexpected fragility and no "fresh" group seems to be able to take the helm of state in good order from the previous steersman. The alternation of politicians and intellectuals on the political stage and of the "vertical" and the "lateral" models in the nationalist activities are, on the one hand, refurbishing the political class but are also reproducing, on the other hand, the chronic political inadequacy of the system. The intellectuals seem to be the eternal losers of this game: they are called in when recurrent dysfunctions threaten to stop the machine but are immediately rejected when this is restored.

This dual basis is reflected in the duality of the nationalistic movements. The first one, the political nationalism – in accordance with the standard model – expressed itself in economical and social policies and was promoted first of all by the liberal party. It inspired all the modernization trends in the 19th and in the 20th century and the most important reforms

of these times as well. By contrast, the cultural nationalism expressed itself in actions undertaken by intellectuals. The alternation of the first élite with the second one or, to put it more accurate, the conflict between these two élites – they were never able to cooperate effectively – led to a situation which is deviant in respect to the model: the reappearance of "vertical" nationalism in the nation-state in spite of the fact that its "reasonable" expansion was already reached and the process of integration of the minorities was slowly emerging.

As I remarked in my second point of criticism above, nationalism does not disappear when the nation-state is realized but it only adapts itself to these new circumstances and "imagines" other, more appropriate goals. This is the most important point of my disagreement with the standard model: it functions only for pre-, not also for post-independence nationalism.

The Romanian case shows that cultural nationalism does oppose not only the appeal to reason of the liberals who endeavor to continue the modernization of the country, as seen in the model, but it opposes even the national state, i.e., its reasons to function within the existing institutional forms. All the nationalists of the interwar period, from old style Conservatives to sophisticated intellectuals and extreme right groups, criticize alike the fundamentals of the liberal state: Cartesian rationalism as well as other modern views on the Subject in philosophy; secularization; liberal political structures and the very principle of political representation (elections, parliament, parties, ideologies); modernism in the art as search for individual identity in an atomized society, etc. By contrast, these fundamentals are defended not only by the liberals but also by many other political nationalists who identify themselves with modern western principles. On the other hand, we cannot

say that all cultural nationalists have a common appeal to the second principle of legitimacy mentioned in the model, namely the received traditional values. The fact is that in Romania, the pro-western modernism is in a way homogenous, flatly liberal when expressed by sociologist Ștefan Zeletin and cultural historian Eugen Lovinescu, or devoted to esthetic autonomy when phrased by literary critics Eugen Lovinescu, George Călinescu, Șerban Cioculescu, Tudor Vianu, as well as by many modernist writers such as Camil Petrescu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Anton Holban, etc. By contrast, only some cultural nationalists are inspired by genuine traditions: the historian Nicolae Iorga, the only Romanian cited by John Hutchinson (see above), or literary critic Nichifor Crainic, inspired by Christian, i.e., orthodox, faith. *My first hypothesis* in this paper, that I can put here only in general terms without being able to elaborate on it, is that many, possible all kinds of cultural nationalism in the interwar period can be related in some way to the agrarian ideology, which was expressed at the time, above all, but not exclusively, by the National-Peasant Party and its economist Virgil Madgearu. He tried to advocate a third way of development for Romania, an agrarian one, which should avoid both pitfalls: of liberal capitalism and of communist state economy. When this hypothesis proves to be acceptable, we can speak of a second general political and cultural discourse in the interwar culture besides the liberal one. A third discourse could then be the social democrat one although it was at that time rather thin and uninspiring. Anyway, this hypothesis can lead to the partition of the political and cultural interwar field in four "blocks", one central-right (liberal) and one central-left (agrarian) block, while the other two ones were of extreme-right (The Iron Guard) and extreme-left (communist) orientation.

3. Some Post-political Cultural Nationalists. A Hypothesis

If I ignore nevertheless these general but loose connections between ideology, politics, and culture and limit myself to explicit *cultural* nationalism, and if I ignore also the explicit *political* nationalists – from the neo-conservative C. Rădulescu-Motru, the philosopher Nae Ionescu and the neo-liberal M. Manoilescu (who eventually became an admirer of Italian fascism), to the extreme-right-wingers Nicolae Roșu, Octavian Goga, A.C. Cuza, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (The Iron Guard) – it is easy to remark that many remaining intellectuals expressed their nationalism as a *politically not bound search for identity*. Lucian Blaga and especially the former students of Nae Ionescu, who took part in the activities of the *Criterion* group, were inspired by traditions in quite another sense of the word "tradition". *My second hypothesis* in this paper thus is that, although these intellectuals share with the other cultural nationalists the opposition to any values promoted by the liberal and social democrat discourses, they do not participate in the agrarian discourse at all and maybe in any other politically colored discourse. The interesting question which will then rise is if these developments could not be seen as post-political, or post-ideological, something that will of course depart completely from the standard model discussed through this paper.

The philosopher Mircea Vulcănescu (1904-1952), the writer and philosopher Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), and the philosopher E.M. Cioran (1911-1995) are the most representative members of the *Criterion* discussion group (1932-1934). When First World War ended, they were still very young but they felt already that the twenties were to become the first "free" years in Romanian modern culture and history. As Eliade

speculated about this attitude, freedom signified for all of them freedom of political engagement for the emancipation of the lower classes, an ideal which had been so important for the previous generation, that of Nicolae Iorga among others. The democratic reforms after 1918 and the breakthrough in cultural relations between Romania and Western Europe made these young men feel the liberty of concentrating on cultural activities and experience with new methods of thinking and writing. A certain vitalism characterized their attitude as well as a kind of permissibility: everything was to be thought over again, every truth was to be put under scrutiny and every norm was to become a matter of doubt. Two concepts were central in their writings: "generation" and "spirituality". In his papers and novels Eliade defined his generation as being obsessed with culture and rejecting all the compromises their parents had to accept before or during the war. For Nae Ionescu as well as for Eliade and Cioran, the criticism on "politicianism" shall eventually be meant as a critique on liberals and their "political opportunism" and shall lead at the end of the thirties to a dangerous rejection of any democratic institution and to a fateful proximity to the positions of the Iron Guard. This was however not yet the case in the first half of the thirties, a period I would like to see as an essay to overcome any form of politics. The second concept, (the search for) spirituality, provided for an alternative to political activity. In the article published in 1934, *Spiritualitate* (Spirituality), Mircea Vulcănescu defines three meanings of this term: 1. religious; 2. cultural, i.e., an exaltation of humanist, nationalist or Marxist values; and 3. a quest for authenticity in emotions and daily life, "the inner life seen as intensely living any moment regardless of the quality the content of this moment had" (Mircea Vulcănescu, *Dimensiunea românească a existenței*, vol. I , București, Ed. Eminescu, 1996).

The last meaning, inspired by the writings of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Papini, was ascribed by Vulcănescu to the experiences of Eliade. In another paper of the same year, *Tendințele noii generații în domeniul social și economic* (Social and Economic Trends in the Attitudes of the New Generation), Vulcănescu wrote: "We do no longer believe either in the individual or in his effective use of liberty", these values appearing to be only never fulfilled promises. Instead, "we acknowledge the fact of living the tragedy of a general crisis".

> Neither class dictatorship nor integral nationalism can become for us the absolute values we are looking for. However, the old relativism does not satisfy us either, we need real answers for earnest questions about existence… we, all of us, agree upon a search for alternatives, upon the fact of being a generation which wants to overcome both absolutism and systematic doubt. (idem, vol. III, p. 34)

Vulcănescu was nevertheless aware of the fact that such a passionate but unfocussed search for intensity of living could lead only to gratuitous, meaningless experiences. In a paper on *Experience* Vulcănescu criticized Eliade who would mistake "experience" for "adventure" by thinking that passing through unrestricted new experiences enriched knowledge and did not have any impact on the personality of the individual. This is not true, replied Vulcănescu, real experiences do modify the personality, only sheer adventures do not, and mixing up these two different categories only increases the risk of irresponsibility.

This call for ethical reflections will become later a persistent theme in the work of Eliade. He lived in India between January 1929 and December 1931 studying Sanskrit language, classical Indian philosophy, but also contemporary life. His later published novel *Maitreyi* (1933) and some fantastic tales, such

as *Nopți la Serampore* (1940), many papers in the Romanian press, the book *India (*1934), the first volume of his *Memoirs* (1980) as well as the very technical study of *Yoga* (1936), show the profound influence of India on Eliade. Living in the house of Dasgupta in Calcutta, Eliade thought first of striking roots in India, but the personal drama he went through later on made him think he had to devote himself rather to eternal India. Another setback in Himalaya where he tried to live a life of meditation led to the reconsideration that he was to become only a scientist and he better would go back to Romania for resuming his literary career. Eliade considered seriously he could deterritorialize in India and when returning to Bucharest he obviously came back as another man. He discovered in India almost all the grand themes of his later work as a scientist, and he also learned to look at the daily life in Romania from a distance. On the other hand, living in Calcutta, he acknowledged in 1930 the nationalist protests led by Gandhi and he also wrote a comprehensive essay on it, in the book *India (*1934); this has recently been translated into English in: *Changing Religious Worlds. The Meaning and End of Mircea Eliade,* ed. by Bryan Rennie, State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 191-203. I think one of the most important lessons for Eliade in India was the belief it was possible and even desirable to implant religious and moral values in daily politics. If Gandhi and his followers could do it, why would fail young Romanians? This is a *third hypothesis* I would like to advance here in general terms. Eliade came back to Romania enriched by his Indian experience in the sense of becoming open for a new way of writing and acting as a nationalist. He would not act in the usually demagogic way, like many politicians, journalists and writers did, but in the more responsible way of focusing his former rather vague search for identity on

spirituality, on an intensity of living permeated by values. I think Vulcănescu was right in the above-mentioned article, written in 1934, three years after Eliade's return from India, in crediting Eliade with undertaking this meaning of spirituality.

Spiritual values should thus be implanted in politics, an "Indian" idea that was hoped to lead both to overcoming and ennobling politics, to its transformation into an instrument of profound change of Man. It is this new kind of cultural nationalism I tentatively name post-ideological, or post-political. Eliade sincerely hoped he could achieve more in the daily life in Romania by such an unusual struggle than by just abandoning politics and looking for retirement in a local, instead a Himalayan hut. It could be rewarding, I think, to look at the later work of Eliade in the light of his Indian years but also in accordance to the views of Vulcănescu I mentioned above.

If my hypotheses can be sustained, the Romanian nationalism in the first half of the thirties will be interpreted in another way than the standard works on nationalism allowed us to do so far. There was, I would say, a non-politic, or a post-political way of thinking nationalism in those years, which, in contradistinction to other expressions of nationalism in that time, still deserves our attention and can still inspire us. This proves my second and third point of criticism I mentioned above on the theoretical model discussed in this paper: nationalism is still alive not only in a negative but also in a positive way. On the other hand, the ability of nationalism to adapt itself to new circumstances can, and should be also seen in the negative way it was to develop in the second half of the thirties. The post-political nationalism of Eliade and of other *Criterion* members, but not of Vulcănescu, was to be engulfed by the huge waves of the very rightist nationalism it tried first to ignore.

Some nationalists were to fall back in ethnic intolerance instead of looking for new ways of constructing the nation. This is, however, a more general phenomenon: "In many ways, ethnicity has become a residual category for people to fall back on when other projects and loyalties are found wanting", observe John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, Eds., 1996, p. 13, referring to similar remarks by Hobsbawm and Giddens. This recurrent aspect of the ethnicity, which I mentioned in my fourth criticism on the model above, is still a problem for some Romanians today. As some recent political developments show, many leading intellectuals try again to reflect on how to construct the Romanian nation although some politicians, and their supporters, are rather inclined to fall back on ethnic intolerance. Nationalism, in all the meanings of the word, seems to be irrepressible.