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## Who's Afraid of Barbarians?

Interrogating the trope of 'barbarian invasions' in Western public rhetoric from 1989 to the present

Since 1989 and particularly since the attacks on September 11, 2001, talk of barbarians and civilization is common practice in public and political rhetoric in Europe and the US. This rhetoric often mobilizes the trope of the 'barbarian invasions,' constructing analogies between present realities and the historical narrative of Rome and its barbarians. Revisiting this narrative as it was popularized by Enlightenment historiography and especially Edward Gibbon, this article critically probes contemporary evocations of the trope of barbarian invasions and the framing they produce for understanding contemporary realities. To that end, it charts the political climate that motivated the rekindling of the barbarian as a pivotal figure in Western rhetoric from 1989 to the present.

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, 'barbarian' has been the most favored tag for groups or individuals perceived as (external) enemies of Western societies. As George W. Bush declared on September 15, 2001, that 'a group of barbarians have declared war' on America, Islamic terrorists emerged as the new barbarians in the 'crusade' against terror.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, British Prime Minister Tony Blair stated about the perpetrators of what has been nicknamed '9/11' that 'their barbarism will stand as their shame for all eternity.'<sup>2</sup>

Recent figurations of 'barbarism' and the 'barbarian' in Western political rhetoric and the media vary in their connotations and referents. Nevertheless, many of these figurations hark back to the tropes of the

'barbarian invasions' or 'barbarians at the gate,' fostering explicit or indirect historical analogies between present realities and Rome's history. A few examples among many: 'The New Rome meets the new barbarians' was the title of a 2002 article by Joseph Nye in the *Economist*, which examined the character of American power at the dawn of the new millennium in relation to the 'barbarian threat' of terrorists and other enemies of the US.<sup>3</sup> More recently, in 2013, an article in *Aljazeera* reported that a controversial immigrant reform legislation approved by the US Senate was meant 'to deal with the new "barbarians" at Rome's door' by increasing control and harsh measures against illegal immigrants.<sup>4</sup> In the same year, Poland's Foreign Minister, Radek Sikorski, voiced the country's purported wish to belong to Western Europe by stating that 'it is in [our] interest to be part of the metropolitan area and not part of the barbarian periphery.'<sup>5</sup>

Such analogies, widely popular since the early 1990s, have recently received new impetus in European public rhetoric owing to the terrorist attacks in France and Belgium in 2015-2016 but also to the ongoing European 'refugee crisis' since 2015. Comparisons between the fall of Rome and the refugee crisis are spread throughout the internet. Titles of opinion pieces such as 'Europe's Barbarians Inside the Gate' or 'Remarks on the European Refugee Crisis and the Fall of the Roman Empire' are cases in point.<sup>6</sup> One need not only search in opinion pieces, blogs or internet commentaries for such analogies, as they also figure prominently in mainstream political rhetoric. Referring to the refugee crisis in a rally in Paris on 14 September 2015, Marine Le Pen, for example, warned supporters of the French far right, the Front National, that 'without any action from the French people, this migrant invasion we are experiencing will be like that of the fourth century, and will possibly have the same consequences.'<sup>7</sup> A few months later, in November 2015, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte stressed Europe's need to safeguard its borders or face a downfall similar to Rome's. Stating that '[as] we all know from the Roman Empire, big empires go down if the borders are not well protected,' he forged a highly problematic implicit comparison between the barbarian warriors of the fifth century and unarmed Syrian refugees who flee a terrible war at their home-country.<sup>8</sup>

Such comparisons reinforce the sense of living in a permanent crisis under the specter of an imminent 'fall' and exacerbate the fear of others threatening to disrupt 'our' way of life. This fear typifies political and popular rhetoric in Western societies since the attacks on 9/11.<sup>9</sup> These attacks and

the West's response to them propelled the popularization of the rhetoric of barbarians and civilization. But the rekindling of this rhetoric, as I will show, can already be traced back to the collapse of Eastern-bloc communism in Europe after 1989. Of course, the barbarian never disappeared from dominant discourses in modern European history. Despite the concept's historically shifting meanings and referents, the opposition between barbarians and civilized has been a constant one in Western narratives since the inception of the barbarian in ancient Greece, where it was first used to denote the incomprehensible language of non-Greeks, sounding like gibberish or 'bar-bar-bar.'<sup>10</sup> However, in the twentieth century, the term's use had somewhat waned in European public discourse after World War II and decolonization, until it made a strong comeback after the end of the Cold War.<sup>11</sup>

Insight into the conceptual history of the barbarian is indispensable in untangling the implications and rhetorical force of its contemporary uses. Although sketching the concept's history exceeds the scope of this article, I will briefly revisit the historical narrative of Rome and its barbarians as it took shape in Edward Gibbon's magnum opus *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Gibbon's history was the main source of dissemination of the trope of barbarian invasions. His historical narrative and the Enlightenment spirit inscribed in it resonate in contemporary uses of this trope and could thus shed some light on the ideological operations of these uses. I then turn to recent history in order to trace the political climate and discursive tendencies that helped reintroduce the barbarian as a pivotal figure in Western rhetoric from 1989 to the present. Questioning the self-evidence with which the term is used today, I ask which historical, political and cultural forces produce this semblance of self-evidence and which narratives of self and other are promoted or repressed in the contemporary talk about civilization and the fear of barbarians.

### *Barbarian Invasions: An Enlightenment trope*

The catchphrases 'barbarian invasions' and 'barbarians at the gate' may hark back to Roman history, but owe their dissemination to Enlightenment historiography, and particularly Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (in six volumes, 1776-1789). In the Western imaginary, the collapse of the Roman Empire is causally linked with the

‘barbarian invasions,’ as the aforementioned statement by Mark Rutte suggests. Gibbon, however, sketches a far more complex picture. According to him, the Empire’s fall was the result of a constellation of factors: internal problems, the Empire’s division into West and East, the use of mercenaries for the Empire’s defense, the impact of Christianity in shaping a servile, pacifist, effeminate character and discouraging a tough military lifestyle, all enfeebled the moral character and civic virtue of Roman citizens and hollowed out the Empire’s power from within. Consequently, the Empire’s ‘stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight,’ allowing the ‘barbarians’ to gradually take over.<sup>12</sup>

Gibbon’s narrative is steeped in the spirit of Enlightenment, marked by a strong belief in progress and reason and a distrust of religion. His optimistic outlook on history is registered in his ‘General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West’ in chapter 38, where he proclaims his certainty at the permanent disappearance of the barbarians from the historical stage. The equilibrium of power within Europe may shift, but the prosperity of European civilization is not at risk, as no event can

essentially injure our general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners, which so advantageously distinguish, above the rest of mankind, the Europeans and their colonies. The savage nations of the globe are the common enemies of civilized society.<sup>13</sup>

Echoing eighteenth-century evolutionary models in which European civilization poses as the final stage in a progressive development, Gibbon predicts towards the end of the eighteenth century that the barbarians cannot pose a serious threat anymore. One of the explanations he offers for this involves the rearrangement of the European space: by the late eighteenth century, empires, kingdoms and states have replaced the formless spaces that facilitated the movement of nomadic barbarian hordes from the North. Even Russia, Gibbon remarks, is now a ‘civilized Empire,’ so ‘such formidable emigrations can no longer issue from the North.’<sup>14</sup> The equilibrium of power among empires and states in Europe therefore prevents total war and ensures stability, order and justice. Nevertheless, the possibility of new enemies is not fully dismissed:

The reign of independent Barbarism is now contracted to a narrow span; and the remnant of Calmucks or Uzbecks, whose forces may be almost numbered, cannot seriously excite the apprehensions of the great republic of Europe. Yet this apparent security should not tempt us to forget that new enemies, and

unknown dangers, may possibly arise from some obscure people, scarcely visible in the map of the world. The Arabs or Saracens, who spread their conquests from India to Spain, had languished in poverty and contempt, till Mahomet breathed into those savage bodies the soul of enthusiasm.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, even if 'obscure people' arise as new barbarian enemies, Gibbon is still confident that they would be defeated by the forces of European civilization:

If a savage conqueror should issue from the deserts of Tartary, he must repeatedly vanquish the robust peasants of Russia, the numerous armies of Germany, the gallant nobles of France, and the intrepid freemen of Britain; who, perhaps, might confederate for their common defence. Should the victorious Barbarians carry slavery and desolation as far as the Atlantic Ocean, ten thousand vessels would transport beyond their pursuit the remains of civilized society; and Europe would revive and flourish in the American world which is already filled with her colonies and institutions.<sup>16</sup>

'Civilization' in Gibbon's account emerges as a clearly structured, organized, sedentary societal formation (empire, state, kingdom), as opposed to the nomadic character and lack of advanced societal organization that defines barbarism.<sup>17</sup> It is also noteworthy that he sees the United States as an extension of European civilization, establishing a transatlantic cultural alliance between Europe and the US as carriers of the same civilized (Enlightenment) values. Thus, Europe's nation states and the United States of America are identified with civilization as such and represent the apogee of progress. The postulation of a transatlantic discursive community, united in its fight against barbarism, is also prevalent in evocations of barbarism and civilization in contemporary Western discourses, as we will see in the following. Gibbon's remark that the Barbarians may 'carry slavery and desolation' across the Atlantic – ironically blind to the identical barbaric practices of the European colonial empires – also suggests how starkly distinct the domains of barbarism and civilization are in his narrative: nothing can shake Europe's status as civilized.

Europe's military power, guns and technology not only contribute to its safety from barbarians but also, remarkably, to its civilized status:

Cannon and fortifications now form an impregnable barrier against the Tartar horse; and Europe is secure from any future irruption of Barbarians; since, *before they can conquer, they must cease to be barbarous*. Their gradual advances in the science of war would always be accompanied, as we may learn from the example of Russia, with a proportionable improvement in the arts of peace and civil policy; and they themselves must deserve a place

among the polished nations whom they subdue.<sup>18</sup>

Gibbon's argument here follows a strange self-authenticating rationale: civilization (identified with Europe) is invincible because of its progress in 'the science of war.' Thus, if barbarians were to take over 'fortress Europe,' they would cease to be barbarous, because such a conquest would presuppose such a level of scientific advancement by the barbarians that they would outgrow their barbarian status. Based on this logic, the barbarians *by definition* stand no chance against civilization: even if they would defeat civilization, the name 'barbarian' would not befit them anymore, as they would have entered a new stage of progress. For Gibbon, history is an unstoppable progressive course that moves forward without the risk of regression: 'it may safely be presumed that no people, unless the face of nature is changed, will relapse into their original barbarism.'<sup>19</sup>

### Barbarians and civilization in public rhetoric after 1989

Figurations of the trope of barbarian invasions in recent political and popular rhetoric largely tap into Gibbon's narrative, which casts Europe as the antithesis of barbarism and synonymous with civilization. However, they hardly share his optimism regarding the disappearance of the barbarian threat from the 'civilized' Western world.

The renewed currency of the 'civilization versus barbarism' rhetoric after 1989 goes hand in hand with a shift in the understanding of global relations, which has come to be known as the 'culturalization' of conflict. According to this new discourse, after the fall of communism, global dividing lines are less determined by political ideology – capitalism versus communism or democracy versus totalitarianism – and more by culture.<sup>20</sup> In the words of Samuel Huntington, 'the velvet curtain of culture' has taken the place of the Cold War's 'iron curtain of ideology.'<sup>21</sup> In his well-known book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), which helped establish this discursive shift, Huntington reduces global conflicts to a 'clash of civilizations.' In this model, political and economic differences are revamped and translated as cultural differences, and thus become essentialized – i.e. ascribed to a way of life and cultural origin that are taken as a given.

Where does barbarism fit in this new understanding of global relations? At first sight, the discourse of the culturalization of conflict, at least in the

way it flows from Huntington's model, grants to other cultural formations the status of 'civilization' rather than 'barbarism,' as it divides the world into independent civilizations that compete with each other. Huntington uses 'civilization' in the plural as a (quasi) neutral term for cultural entities that he simplistically casts as homogeneous and distinct. Nevertheless, barbarism makes a comeback in the last pages of Huntington's book, where he warns readers that the 'clash of civilizations' today threatens to regress into 'the greater clash, the global "real clash," between Civilization and barbarism.'<sup>22</sup> Drawing from the trope of barbarian invasions in order to construct a sense of impending doom, Huntington sketches a present in which global forces of barbarism – located, for example, in 'transnational criminal mafias, drug cartels, and terrorist gangs violently assaulting Civilization' – pose an increasing threat to 'Civilization' (this time, used not as a neutral term but as moral category with a capital 'C'), generating 'an unprecedented phenomenon, a global Dark Ages, possibly descending on humanity.'<sup>23</sup> Huntington echoes Gibbon's narrative, but countering Gibbon's optimism, he warns that barbarians are still out there, threatening to disintegrate the new global order.

As an antidote to this barbarian threat, Huntington proposes a set of common universal values that could bind together 'the world's major civilizations' and help foster a stronger Civilization (in the singular, with a capital 'C') able to effectively counter Barbarism.<sup>24</sup> Although 'Civilization' is not openly identified with the 'West' in this argument, the West is nonetheless suggested as the source of the values of this global 'Civilization.' In Huntington's vision, only Western (Enlightenment) values can lead the fight against Barbarism. According to political theorist Wendy Brown, in Huntington, 'what will hold barbarism at bay is precisely what recenters the West as the defining essence of civilization and what legitimates its efforts at controlling the globe.'<sup>25</sup> This suggestion is reinforced by Huntington's metaphorical vocabulary of light versus darkness (e.g., in his reference to a 'global Dark Ages' today), reflective of the Enlightenment values Gibbon's narrative carries. He thereby rhetorically produces this fight as the continuation of a long-standing opposition between the (enlightened) West and its (obscurantist) barbarians. Unsatisfied, perhaps, with an image of the world consisting of equal civilizations, Huntington reclaims the moral opposition of civilization versus barbarism as a means of reasserting hierarchical power relations in the world, and particularly the West's superiority as the leading 'civilization' in this fight. His reintroduction of

Civilization and Barbarism as moral categories showcases how the ‘culture talk’<sup>26</sup> in the post-1989 Western world was accompanied by a moralization of global conflicts, whereby the we/they opposition is understood as a battle ‘between “right and wrong” or ‘good and evil.’<sup>27</sup>

Huntington’s image of Civilization facing an imminent barbarian invasion is symptomatic of the way Western societies, and particularly the US, responded to the new state of affairs after the Cold War. As the USSR could not function as the big antagonist of the US anymore, Western neoliberal capitalism led by the US seemed to reign uninhibited. Its hegemony was welcomed by many liberal thinkers who saw in this new reign of Western neoliberalism the ‘end of history’ and the prospect of global democratic consensus and socio-political stability – an optimism not very unlike Gibbon’s at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Western politics celebrated the disappearance of antagonism in a professed ‘post-political’ era without a big identifiable ‘they’: an era without barbarians, as Gibbon also predicted.<sup>29</sup> However, an Empire’s legitimacy relies on the construction of barbarians: an external enemy that breeds ‘nightmares of impending attack’ and justifies escalations of military violence.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the ‘enemy deficit’ after the Cold War and prior to 9/11 became a cause of anxiety for the US, which could not justify its military power without a plausible external enemy. This anxiety prior to 9/11 was registered in statements such as the following by Colin Powell: ‘Though we can still plausibly identify specific threats – North Korea, Iran, Iraq, something like that – the real threat is the unknown, the uncertain.’ An even less subtle statement by George W. Bush (before he became president) betrays his discomfort at the post-Cold War lack of an identifiable enemy: ‘We do not know who the enemy is, but we know they are out there.’<sup>31</sup>

In this context, the terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks appeared as an answer to ‘the crisis of imperial legitimacy’ that marked the 1990s and came to fulfill the role of the ‘new barbarians’ of the post-1989 era.<sup>32</sup> However, these new barbarians were not real or visible enough. The terrorist as a new type of barbarian after 9/11 is marked by a *lack* of distinctive features, inducing uncertainty regarding this enemy’s identity, geographical location, motives and modes of operation.<sup>33</sup> The shadowy nature of these ‘new barbarians’ – those ‘obscure people, scarcely visible in the map of the world,’ to use Gibbon’s words for the barbarians of the future – served as a justification for the declaration of total war from the US and its allies, in an attempt to make this new barbarian enemy more visible and thus masterable.<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, a climate of paranoia and fear was cultivated in the years after 9/11 in the West. Anne McClintock sees the American 'Empire' after the Cold War and especially during the 'war on terror' as entering a 'domain of paranoia,' typified by 'fantasies of global omnipotence' and simultaneous 'nightmares of impending attack.'<sup>35</sup> The blueprint of Rome's barbarian invasions, so popular in diagnoses of the present by means of historical comparison, served to exacerbate this foreboding of an imminent attack, thereby validating the fear of others through a (fallacious) sense of historical authority.

The use of the terms 'barbarian' and 'barbarism' by the Bush administration in the aftermath of 9/11 tapped into the culturalization and moralization of conflict after the Cold War in order to provide legitimization for repressive politics and military interventions during the 'war on terror.' Tagging the other as barbarian helps establish the other's *moral* inferiority and unbridgeable *cultural* difference. Consequently, the other becomes an enemy to be eliminated rather than a legitimate adversary we may try to understand or communicate with. No-one can reason with 'evil' or 'barbarism.' Speeches by George W. Bush from 9/11 until the Iraq phase of the 'war on terror,' with their constant references to 'forces of Evil' (terrorists and their supporters) versus 'forces of Good' or 'civilization' (America and its allies), invested with Biblical references, divide the world into two opposed camps and cast America as representative of (and synonymous with) civilization: 'This is not, however, just America's fight. [...] This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight,' and thus the 'civilized world is rallying to America's side.'<sup>36</sup> Whoever does not side with the US is thus cast as complicit with the evil spread by the 'new barbarians.'<sup>37</sup>

The 'civilization versus barbarism' rhetoric also responded to the desire for a straightforward notion of reality and for the false security of absolute truths in the 'post-9/11' world. Immediately after the attacks, US commentators proclaimed the end of the postmodern 'age of irony,' while relativism was considered morally reprehensible, especially when it (purportedly) resulted in a reluctance to acknowledge the reality of the attacks and the evil, barbaric nature of the enemy.<sup>38</sup> In this context, in the US, the narrative of civilization facing barbarian invasions served (but also co-produced) the desire to pinpoint 'good' and 'bad' guys as a means of restoring one's grasp on 'reality' after the traumatic rupture of the attacks.

## How obvious is the obvious? Barbarism in contemporary responses to terrorism in Europe

Contemporary political rhetoric in Europe may be less keen than US rhetoric on mobilizing a religiously tainted vocabulary of good versus evil, but it does not shy away from the narrative of ‘civilization’ versus ‘barbarism.’ This narrative, for example, formed a dominant frame for responses to the shootings in the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris by two members of an Islamist terrorist group on January 7, 2015, as well as to the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 14, 2015. The frame of ‘9/11’ was transposed to these events too, promoting their understanding in terms of the same battle between the ‘free civilized West’ and the dark forces of barbarism, as Huntington sketched it at the end of his book and the Bush administration used it in the war on terror. ‘We will be merciless toward the barbarians of Islamic State group,’ stated French president François Hollande after the Paris attacks in November 2015, in a speech that was reminiscent of George W. Bush’s after 9/11.<sup>39</sup> The extrapolation of the tag of ‘9/11’ to these terrorist attacks in Europe reinforced the image of a transatlantic community – the West – as a unified front against the same barbarian enemy. The following article headings about the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting are telling: ‘Will Charlie Hebdo Become the French 9/11?’; ‘Paris Attack is Europe’s 9/11’; ‘Charlie Hebdo: After France’s 9/11, this land will never be the same again’; ‘Why Paris is Calling the Charlie Hebdo Attack France’s 9/11.’<sup>40</sup>

In official reactions by governments and international organizations to the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting, the November 2015 Paris attacks and the bombings in Brussels in March 2016, the term ‘barbaric’ figures as the most popular qualifier for these events.<sup>41</sup> In a *Wikipedia* article that collects the statements issued by international leaders in response to *Charlie Hebdo*, thirteen statements use the term ‘barbarism’ in different forms (barbarous, barbarian, barbaric, barbarianism etc.) to condemn the shooting, making it by far the most prevalent term for capturing the ‘nature’ of the event and the perpetrators. The same holds for official statements by governments and organizations in response to the November 2015 Paris attacks and the Brussels bombings, where barbarism and its derivatives appear fourteen and six times respectively.<sup>42</sup>

The use of the term in these responses carries an air of self-evidence: how can one question the legitimacy of this qualifier and thereby appear to doubt the barbarism of these violent acts? Breaking through this veil

of self-evidence, I wish to probe the semantic complex in which this term partakes and thus the framing that its use produces. To take the responses to *Charlie Hebdo* as an example: whenever barbarism and its derivatives appear in the above-mentioned government statements, they are involved in the production of a binary rhetorical scheme: on the one side, we find words such as 'terror,' 'horror,' 'crime against humanity,' and 'barbarism,' and on the other side we find 'France,' 'Europe,' 'the free nations' of the world, 'civilization,' 'humanity.' The signifier 'barbarism' is implicated in a series of metonymical associations that produce Europe and its values (in this case, freedom of speech and expression, democracy, peace) as exemplary of Civilization. This process becomes blatantly manifest, for example, in the following statement by the Albanian Prime Minister, according to which the attack was 'a wound opened barbarically to terrorize France, Europe, the free nations of the democratic world and to impose us [*sic*] the abandonment of the values of this world that France embodies solemnly.'<sup>43</sup> In this series of synecdochic substitutions, France becomes a *pars pro toto* for Europe, for all democratic nations, and eventually for universal values ('the values of this world'). As the 'we' in this and other similar statements grows bigger and encompasses the whole of (civilized) humanity, the opposed side of the barbarian enemy is reduced to just 'a handful of people' who 'do not share these values.'<sup>44</sup> The shooting was in fact framed as a direct attack on 'these values' rather than on actual individuals.<sup>45</sup> These values that are cast as the 'universal' defining principles of civilization in these statements, are nevertheless the product of a particular cultural space: they are the liberal humanist values that constitute the legacy of European Enlightenment and represent today's liberal democratic West. These are the values inculcated in Gibbon's narrative about the fall of Rome and in his optimistic prognosis of a barbarian-free future for Europe. Despite Gibbon's prediction, present-day mainstream European rhetoric (notwithstanding the several critical voices) showcases that the narrative of civilized Europe is unsustainable without the construction of others as barbarians.

The rhetoric of civilization versus barbarians relies on a familiar and simplistic narrative in order to produce certain 'realities' as unquestionable. This narrative, as I have shown, projects a series of metonymical associations, through which civilization is identified with Europe or the West and its liberal Enlightenment values, and barbarism with terrorism, Muslim fundamentalism, and by extension, all non-liberal societies, Islamic religion

or Muslim culture as an undifferentiated whole. This is why, in his own response to the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting in *The Guardian*, British novelist and journalist Hari Kunzru feels the need to exclaim: 'Above all I want to hear nothing about barbarism.'<sup>46</sup> He knows that the term 'barbarism' is more than a self-evident characterization of these acts, and that its use in this context imposes a polarizing logic that mirrors the black-and-white logic of the Jihadists. Kunzru resists the framing of this event as part of a long ongoing conflict between the values of European Enlightenment and the dark forces of barbarism. 'The caricature of the jihadi as a medieval throwback, animated by ancient passions, may be comforting to those who would like to wrap themselves in the mantle of civilisation and pose as heirs of Voltaire, but as a way of actually understanding anything, it's feeble', he adds.<sup>47</sup> Avoiding this polarizing rhetoric does not entail relativizing or even silently condoning the act, but resists its divisive, violent logic.

The figuration of the term barbarian in responses to recent terrorist attacks in Europe or the current refugee crisis inevitably conjures up the discourses in which this concept has been implicated in its history. Gibbon's narrative, and by extension the discourse of Enlightened Europe trying to ward off barbarian invaders, shines through several of these responses. It grants an illusory historical validity to an interpretation of contemporary conflicts and challenges, while this 'diagnosis' of the present is based on a highly selective comparison with a narrative of the European past, bound to confirm the hypothesis put forward. Thus, the present appears to be 'illuminated' through a caricatured blueprint-narrative of barbarian invasions that creates the illusion of a historical repetition of the same. This process adds to the effect of self-evidence that the term's current uses produce: obviously, one is inclined to say, Islamic terrorists and their acts or beliefs are 'barbaric.' Moving beyond the obvious, however, we can ask, for example, how many times the term 'barbarism' comes up in official statements to other violent incidents and terrorist attacks in Europe that are unrelated to Muslim fundamentalism, such as the attacks in Norway on July 2011, during which Anders Breivik killed 77 people to call attention to his view that Muslim immigration should come to a halt. The answer is zero.<sup>48</sup> It seems that the semantic complex to which the barbarian belongs is conveniently kept away from white European agents of extreme violence, like Breivik. The narrative of civilized Europe defending itself against external barbarian invaders seems less apt to frame such cases, betraying a reluctance

to face barbarism as also endemic to the European cultural and political space, and not the exclusive or permanent attribute of its others.

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## Notes

1. Bush quoted in Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 38.
2. "Blair's Statement in full," *BBC News website* (11 September 2001), under "UK Politics," [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/1538551.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/1538551.stm) (accessed 15 August 2016).
3. Joseph Nye, "The New Rome Meets the New Barbarians," *The Economist* (21 March 2002), <http://www.economist.com/node/1045181> (accessed 10 August 2016).
4. The article's author is critical of this legislation. William I. Robinson, "New Face of the War on Immigrants? US Immigration Reform," *Aljazeera* (10 July 2013), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/07/201372142250284963.html> (accessed 10 August 2016).
5. Sikorski quoted in Norman Davies, "Poland Refuses to Stay among the Barbarians," *The Times* (4 April 2013), <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article3730253.ece> (accessed 10 June 2016).
6. Nouriel Roubini, "Europe's Barbarians Inside the Gate," *Project Syndicate* (30 November 2015), <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/european-union-lack-of-unity-by-nouriel-roubini-2015-11?barrier=true> (accessed 10 August 2016); Olav Dirkmaat, "Remarks on the European Refugee Crisis and the Fall of the Roman Empire," Gold Republic website (13 October 2015), <https://www.goldrepublic.com/news/refugee-crisis-roman-empire> (accessed 5 August 2016).
7. My translation from French, quoted in Marc de Boni, "Marine Le Pen compare la crise des migrants à la chute de l'empire romain," *Le Figaro* (15 September 2015), <http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2015/09/15/25002-20150915ARTFIG00111-marine-le-pen-compare-la-crise-des-migrants-a-la-chute-de-l-empire-romain.php> (accessed 10 August 2016).
8. Rutte quoted in Pieter Spiegel, "Refugee influx threatens fall of EU, warns Dutch PM," *Financial Times* (26 November 2015), <https://www.ft.com/content/659694fe-9440-11e5-b190-291e94b77c8f> (accessed 16 August 2016).
9. Cf. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations*, trans. Andrew Brown (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).
10. Given that the term 'civilization' is much more recent than the term 'barbarian,' the positive part of this opposition has been historically occupied by various other notions that denote the 'self,' depending on the historical context, e.g., *Hellenitas* or *Romanitas*. The first known appearance of the 'barbarian' can be found in Homer's *Iliad* (ca. eighth century BCE), in which the term barbarophone comes up. However, the Greek/barbarian opposition is only fully shaped after the sixth century BCE and especially during the Greco-Persian Wars (499-449 BC), during which the Hellene - barbarian opposition was politicized: the 'barbarian' was identified with

(Persian) despotism while *Hellenitas* with democracy and free citizenship. The term 'civilization' appeared approximately twenty-five centuries after the word 'barbarian' and is first documented in French in 1767 and in English in 1772. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Revised Edition) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 57; Mark Salter, *Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 15; and Maria Boletsi, *Barbarism and Its Discontents* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 62.

11. The use of the term 'barbarian' for the 'others' of European civilization was discredited after its association with Nazi violence, but also owing to its use by anti- and postcolonial thinkers (Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon e.a.) as a signifier for the violence of European colonialism. In both cases, 'barbarism' was associated with forces endemic to Europe, making Europe's identification with 'civilization' dubious and the use of the 'barbarian' for its external others less convincing.
12. The quotations from Gibbon are from the online publication of chapter 38, part VI of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: Edward Gibbon, 'General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West,' *Internet Medieval Source Book*, <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/source/gibbon-fall.html> (accessed 10 August 2016).
13. *Ibidem*.
14. *Ibidem*.
15. *Ibidem*.
16. *Ibidem*.
17. It is telling in that respect that Gibbon counts not only Western Europe and the US, but also Russia and China among the forces of civilization, due to their imperial structure.
18. *Ibidem*. (emphasis added).
19. *Ibidem*.
20. See Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim/Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004), 18. According to Mamdani, this 'culturalization' can be credited to Bernard Lewis's 1990 article "The Roots of Muslim Rage" and Samuel Huntington's article "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993) in *Foreign Affairs*, which he developed into a book (1996). Parts of this exposition of the culturalization of politics are developed in Boletsi, *Barbarism and Its Discontents*, 40-45.
21. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 31.
22. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 321.
23. *Idem*, 321.
24. *Idem*, 321.
25. Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 181. See also Boletsi, *Barbarism and Its Discontents*, 42; and Christian Moser and Maria Boletsi, "Introduction," in *Barbarism Revisited: New Perspectives on an Old Concept*, ed. Maria Boletsi and Christian

- Moser (Amsterdam: Brill/Rodopi, 2015), 16-17.
26. 'Culture talk' is the term Mamdani uses to refer to the culturalization of political conflict. Mamdani, *Good Muslim/Bad Muslim*, 17.
  27. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 5; see also Boletsi, *Barbarism and Its Discontents*, 40-41.
  28. 'End of history' alludes to Francis Fukuyama's book *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
  29. Mouffe, *On the Political*, 31.
  30. Anne McClintock, "Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib," *Small Axe* 28 13:1 (2009): 51.
  31. Colin Powell and George W. Bush quoted in McClintock, "Paranoid Empire," 55.
  32. *Idem*, 54.
  33. Cf. Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 88.
  34. This argument is elaborated in Boletsi, "Still Waiting for Barbarians after 9/11? Cavafy's Reluctant Irony and the Language of the Future," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 32:1 (2014): 63-64.
  35. McClintock, "Paranoid Empire," 51.
  36. From the "Presidential Address to a Joint Session of Congress," September 23, 2001 (Bush 2003, 15-16).
  37. Cf. Boletsi, *Barbarism and Its Discontents*, 43-44.
  38. *Idem*, 48-49.
  39. Hollande quoted in Jon Henley and Angeliqe Chrisafis, "Paris Terror Attacks: Hollande Says Isis Atrocity Was 'Act of War,'" *The Guardian* (14 November 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/13/paris-attacks-shootings-explosions-hostages> (accessed 5 August 2016).
  40. Vladimir Platov, "Will Charlie Hebdo Become the French 9/11?" *NEO (New Eastern Outlook)* (26 January 2015), <http://journal-neo.org/2015/01/26/rus-charlie-hebdo-i-posledstviya/> (accessed 25 June 2016); Murat Yetkin, "Paris Attack is Europe's 9/11," *Hurriyet Daily News* (8 January 2015), <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/paris-attack-is-europes-911.aspx?PageID=238&NID=76639&NewsCatID=409> (accessed 25 June 2016); John Lichfield, "Charlie Hebdo: After France's 9/11, this Land Will Never Be the Same again," *Independent* (9 January 2015), <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/charlie-hebdo-after-france-s-911-this-land-will-never-be-the-same-again-9969165.html> (accessed 10 August 2016); Alessandria Massi, "Why Paris is Calling the Charlie Hebdo Attack France's 9/11," *International Business Observer* (15 January 2015), <http://www.ibtimes.com/why-paris-calling-charlie-hebdo-attack-frances-911-1784830> (accessed 25 June 2016).
  41. The term figures in a bit more than 15% of international government statements in response to this event (as they are collected on *Wikipedia*), and the majority of its appearances belongs to responses by Western nations. "International Reactions to the Charlie Hebdo Shooting," *Wikipedia*, last modified 9 July 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_reactions\\_to\\_the\\_Charlie\\_Hebdo\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_reactions_to_the_Charlie_Hebdo_shooting) (accessed 10 June 2016).

42. These numbers amount to the term's appearance in a bit more than 10% of official international statements on the 2015 Paris attacks and in 5% of statements on the Brussels bombings that are collected on *Wikipedia* "Reactions to the November 2015 Paris attacks," *Wikipedia*, last modified 11 August 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reactions\\_to\\_the\\_November\\_2015\\_Paris\\_attacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reactions_to_the_November_2015_Paris_attacks) (accessed 10 June 2016); "Reactions to the 2016 Brussels bombings," *Wikipedia*, last modified 12 August 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reactions\\_to\\_the\\_2016\\_Brussels\\_bombings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reactions_to_the_2016_Brussels_bombings) (accessed 10 June 2016).
43. From the statement of the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama. See "International reactions to the C.H. shooting".
44. From the statement of the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Xavier Bettel. Ibidem.
45. For example, Didier Reynders, Belgium's Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that this was '[a]n attack against freedom of expression, a precious fundamental freedom which we must continue to defend.' Ibidem.
46. Hari Kunzru, "Charlie Hebdo: Understanding is the least we owe the dead," *The Guardian* (8 January 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/08/charlie-hedbo-collusion-terror-jihadi-twisted-logic> (accessed 10 June 2016).
47. Ibidem.
48. "International reactions to the 2011 Norway attacks," *Wikipedia*, last modified 17 July 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_reactions\\_to\\_the\\_2011\\_Norway\\_attacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_reactions_to_the_2011_Norway_attacks) (accessed 10 June 2016).