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Leiden  
The Netherlands

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Boletsi, M.

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### 3

## IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME: THE BARBARIAN IN HISTORY

Caught—both seized and entangled—in a binary opposition, one of the terms retains its old name so as to destroy the opposition to which it no longer quite belongs, to which in any event it has never quite yielded, the history of this opposition being one of incessant struggles generative of hierarchical configurations.

—Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (4)

“It’s all Greek to me.” This idiom is used when we have no idea what another person is talking about—when the speech of our interlocutor sounds like “bla bla.” What I find intriguing about this phrase is that it succinctly captures the relational nature of the barbarian and thereby questions it as an essentialist category. At the time of its inception in ancient Greece, the term “barbarian” was the exact opposite of “Greek”: it was applied to foreigners who did not speak Greek and whose language was therefore incomprehensible, sounding like “bar bar bar.” To say “it’s all Greek to me” today, then, constitutes a first-hand reversal of Greekness as the standard against which the barbarian becomes defined. Being or speaking “Greek” is clearly no longer criterion for defining what is “civilized.” What is more, in this idiom, “Greek” becomes a signifier of incomprehensibility and confusion and, as such, occupies the place of the barbarian language, which, based on its Greek etymology, is a language the subject does not understand.

The barbarian is thus a relational figure, shaped in opposition to the self, the civilized, the domestic. The designation of somebody as barbarian takes place only in relation to a subject that assumes the status of the “civilized” for itself. This becomes evident if we follow the barbarian in history. The historical travels of the barbarian reveal the various perspectives within European space (and probably even more perspectives outside of European space) from which barbarism has been defined. From a different viewpoint each time, barbarians are the non-Greeks and the Greeks, the Christians, the non-Christians, heathens or Muslims, the Romans, the Germanic nations, the inhabitants of the Orient, the colonized peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Asia, the European colonizers, the Jews, the Nazis, Romany, members of the working class, terrorists, neo-imperialists, and many others. This category is not permanently fixed upon specific subjects. Practically every group in Western history has been assigned a “barbarian status” from the perspective of another group.

Nevertheless, in each period and context this category tends to fix upon particular features assigned to certain people as inherent qualities. The relational aspect of the term's definition is thus subject to a dualist and essentialist logic that dictates a static hierarchization between civilized and barbarian. As a result, the "barbarian" supports the superiority of those who assume the status of the "civilized." Thus, the term's shifting connotations and referents in history highlight the following paradox: such a protean and relational concept has always sustained one of the most rigid binarisms in Western history. The persistence of the barbarism/civilization dichotomy in the discursive construction we call "Western history" indicates the dependence of civilization on the notion of the barbarian for its own self-definition. The barbarian appears as an abjected outside, which, to borrow Judith Butler's words, is always inside the subject "as its own founding repudiation" (1993: 3).

The usage and precise content of the "barbarian" waxes and wanes from Greek antiquity to the present. The changing connotations of the barbarian are interdependent with the shifting self-perceptions of the civilized. Therefore, when following the notion of the barbarian historically, the discussion is always also about civilization: the barbarian functions as a mirror against which the "civilized man" observes the hinterland of his own nature.<sup>1</sup> Standards that delimit the realm of the "barbaric" and the "civilized" are under constant change. Nevertheless, in history both concepts often appear as fixed, ahistorical entities, "being played out over time, but not themselves historicized" (Scott 778).<sup>2</sup> Within the discourse of Western history, the civilization/barbarism opposition is often naturalized. As Joan Scott argues in "The Evidence of Experience," "[h]istory is a chronology that makes experience visible, but in which categories appear as nonetheless ahistorical" (778). History tends to exclude or "under-state" the "historically variable interrelationship" of categories of identity—in this case, between the "barbarian" and the "civilized" (778). Therefore, unpacking the "barbarian" in its historical complexity is a necessary step to question its present or historical moments of objectification and fixity.

This chapter follows the connotations of the "barbarian" in Western history in its relation to the notion of the civilized. In this venture, I have not opted for a chronologically ordered historical account or a genealogy of the "barbarian." Instead, in order to map the dynamic space that the figure of the barbarian occupies in the West, I relate its changing meanings and uses to the normative standards that established the basis for the antithesis between civilized and barbarian in each era and context. To that end, I develop a typology of what I call *civilizational standards*, which have—in different degrees—determined the definition of the "barbarian" from Greek antiquity to the present. The standards

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault makes this observation in relation to madness, but it applies to the barbarian as well (1965: 115).

<sup>2</sup> Scott makes this argument for categories of gender, such as femininity, masculinity, sex, homosexuality and heterosexuality.

I provisionally distinguish are: 1) language, 2) culture, 3) political system and ideology (including empire), 4) morality, values and manners, 5) humanity, humanism, and the human, 6) religion, 7) ethnicity and race, 8) class, 9) gender, 10) progress (including technique and modes of production), and 11) psyche.

These standards constantly shift. If language was the main criterion for the definition of the barbarian in archaic Greece, in other periods the criteria become more political (as, for example, in fifth century BCE Greece), cultural (as in the Hellenistic period), religious (as in the Middle Ages in Europe), and so on. However, to claim that each standard corresponds to a particular period or context in history would be an oversimplification. In most periods, even when a certain standard is dominant, it is combined and forms a unique constellation with other standards, which are relevant to a lesser or greater degree. Therefore, the barbarian in Western discourses is a construction grounded in complex constellations of the defining features of self and other. Civilizational standards do not only shift over time; different and even contradictory criteria defining the barbarian can function within the same period and the same social space.

In opting for the structuring principle of civilizational standards instead of a chronological presentation, I resist the conception of the history of the barbarian as linear and progressive—an uninterrupted succession of significations. This structuring principle precisely emphasizes the changing and contested terrain that the barbarian and the civilized simultaneously occupy, because it focuses on the changing criteria that determine the meanings of these notions. Thus, in this typology the barbarian emerges through a web of cultural, social, political, religious, and scientific discourses. As a result, the history of the barbarian becomes a narrative of discontinuities, repetitions, tensions, and unexpected intersections.

The standards I bring together in this chapter indicate the pervasiveness of the barbarian in various spheres of the Western cultural and ideological space and highlight the plurality of its operations. In addition, following the barbarian through civilizational standards underscores the imbrication of this concept in Western civilizational discourse, but also highlights the dependence of this discourse on the barbarian. Further, the multiple standards through which I look at the “barbarian” show multiple histories of the barbarian in the West. There are several ways to tell a history of the barbarian, and there are at least as many ways to tell a history of Western civilization.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this chapter prepares the ground for pluralizing “barbarism” and the “barbarian,” and for contesting their dominant uses in the following chapters.

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<sup>3</sup> Although there are many studies of the barbarian in specific eras in Western history, a comprehensive and systematic historical study of this notion is, to my knowledge, missing. A genealogy of the barbarian can be found in the study *Généalogie des barbares* (2007) by French philosopher Roger-Pol Droit, who offers a popularized account of the barbarian in history. Also, Mark Salter in his book *Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations* (2002) gives an overview of the discourse on barbarism and civilization since the Middle Ages.

To examine how the barbarian is produced through a multiplicity of standards, I probe a selection of representative case studies: slices of history, forming a kaleidoscope, through which the barbarian is cast in various ways. I particularly focus on contexts that enabled shifts in the signification of the barbarian: moments when new connotations are attached to this figure; moments of reversal of the hierarchy between civilized and barbarian, when the “civilized” are projected as more corrupt and barbaric than those others on whom they confer the label “barbarian”; and, finally, moments of profound critique and renegotiation of the concept of barbarism and the barbarian. By focusing on such shifts, I show that the discursive mechanisms producing barbarism and civilization are historically contingent and therefore open to critique and resignification.

While I look at the barbarian through the eyes of (Western) “civilized” subjects, I also interrogate the notions of the “West,” “civilization,” and “Western history.” Thus, before delving into the civilizational standards, in the first part of this chapter I scrutinize the main terms involved in this historical exercise—barbarian, civilization, and the West—and address the question of the researcher’s voice and perspective in this historical venture.

## Unpacking the Terms

It would be a good idea.

—Gandhi’s reported remark about Western civilization

The borders separating Greeks, Romans, Christians, Europeans, or Westerners from barbarians are embedded in the civilized imagination as mental archetypes. To be sure, the barbarian is only one of the “others” that the civilized imagination constructed. Slave, woman, guest worker, migrant, nomad, savage, wild man, cannibal, lunatic, Oriental, Jewish, gypsy, animal, and monster are all categories that enabled (Western) subjects to define themselves in distinction from others, situated beyond the borders of their home, class, society, religion, race, gender, nation, empire, or of mankind. The category of the barbarian is coextensive and imbricated with some of these others.

The “savage” or “wild man” is one of the categories that come closest to the barbarian, although it is a more recent construction.<sup>4</sup> While in many ancient and medieval writers these categories become confused with each other, only in the eighteenth century and during the Enlightenment do they develop distinct uses.<sup>5</sup> The savage represents an uncorrupted and pure state of humanity, closer to nature, but because he is a kind of

<sup>4</sup> The word “savage” comes from the Latin word for wood (*silva*) and was first employed for men who lived in the German forests without an organized society (Salter 20).

<sup>5</sup> See White 1972: 19 and Salter 19. In the sixteenth century, Michel de Montaigne, for example, equates “barbarians” with “savages” in his essay “On Cannibals” (1580).

*tabula rasa*, he is considered capable of education and learning the European manners.<sup>6</sup> The barbarian, on the other hand, cannot be educated—he represents “the liberal project gone awry” (Salter 22). While the savage and the barbarian are both “bad,” the savage is often considered redeemable, whereas barbarians are not (22). Another difference concerns the kind of threat these figures were perceived to constitute. In writers of different periods, barbarians were generally considered to live “under *some kind* of law” and to be able to organize themselves “into groups large enough to constitute a threat to ‘civilization’ itself.” Wild men, on the other hand, were thought to live alone and thus “represented a threat to the individual” rather than to society in general (White 1972: 20). This difference in societal development between barbarians and savages is also reflected in eighteenth-century models of human societal progress. In such models, barbarism and savagery represent two different stages in societal development, with barbarism situated between “savagery” and “civilization” (Salter 23).

Pinpointing what distinguishes the “barbarian” from other related categories becomes difficult due to the constant shifts in the content of the “barbarian” itself. The term carries various connotations in history: it has been used to denote simply the foreigner (a person who speaks another language), to suggest decadence, moral, cultural or racial inferiority, cruel, savage or inhuman behavior, an infantile, natural or primitive state, lack of education or manners, and the like. However, if we put together a schematic typology of “others” in Western imagination, the barbarian would probably stand out as the opposite of civilization *par excellence*: the absolute other, which—as a paradox-object—threatens the frontiers of the civilized world and simultaneously sustains its self-definition.

Although in this chapter I focus on the construction of the barbarian within what we call “Western civilization,” the notion of the barbarian is not an exclusively Western construction. Almost every culture has developed its own standards for defining itself and its barbarians, although, as Edward Said observes, it is particularly interesting how the European standard of civilization came to prevail over all others (2003: 17). Categories akin to the barbarian appear in the conceptual schemes of many cultures. Such are the Japanese notion of the *gaijin* for foreigner and the Jewish notions of the *goy* and *gentile*, used to denote non-Jews, all of which carry pejorative or even offensive connotations.<sup>7</sup>

However, terms comparable to the “barbarian” in other cultures are often premised on different standards than those defining the barbarian in the West. In archaic Greece, for example, the main criterion for defining the barbarian was language. The geographical

<sup>6</sup> The savage is either “noble” or “ignoble”: he is either in a pure, uncorrupted state or “entirely unrestrained by ‘civility’ and thus closer to an animal state” (Salter 20; Sheehan 2). The trope of the “noble savage” was used by the Romantics to formulate a critique of the European civilization. See Hayden White’s “The Noble Savage Theme as Fetish” in *Tropics of Discourse*.

<sup>7</sup> *Gaijin*, literally meaning “outside person,” is the Japanese word for a foreigner and was especially used for Westerners (European travelers and merchants) visiting Japan. It refers to difference in ethnicity or race (Buckley 161-62).

dispersal of the Greeks over various coasts and islands, the variety in ways of life, and the differences in tradition, culture, and political allegiances among the (Ionian, Dorian, Aeolian) Greek communities prevented a definition of the barbarian based on habitat and lifestyle (E. Hall 4-5). Lifestyle and habitat, however, were the main criteria for the civilized/barbarian distinction in ancient China, where equivalent terms for “barbarians” meant “nomads” “shepherds” or “jungle people” (Lattimore 451, 455).<sup>8</sup> The same importance attributed to habitat can be found with the Sumerians, whose standard of civilized existence was the sedentary urban lifestyle of the plain. They thus used derogatory terms for the “nomads” and “mountain-dwellers” of the steppe and the highlands (Limet in E. Hall 5). The Hebrews also attached high value to language as a marker of differentiation.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, in their distinction between themselves and Gentiles, religion had a more central place than in the definition of Greek versus barbarian (E. Hall 5).<sup>10</sup> However, as Edith Hall argues in *Inventing the Barbarian*, despite the existence of comparable terms, in other ancient cultures there is no equivalent that “precisely and exclusively embraced all who did not share their ethnicity” (4).<sup>11</sup>

Homer’s *Iliad* (eighth century BCE), according to D.N. Maronitis, may be considered the “womb” of the hierarchical pair civilized/barbarian, although this opposition is only fully-shaped and articulated two centuries later, in the sixth century BCE (27). Whether we place the beginnings of the “barbarian” in the eighth or the sixth century BCE, approximately twenty-five centuries separate the first appearance of the word “barbarian”

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<sup>8</sup> In Chinese culture, the figure of the barbarian has had a very central place in the people’s collective imaginary. The Chinese resisted cultural influences from the West and saw no need to adopt foreign practices, habits, and cultural elements. Within this ideology of self-sufficiency, which by Westerners was perceived as xenophobia, peoples outside the Chinese borders, and Westerners in particular, were viewed as barbarians. For an exploration of barbarians in Mandarin culture, see Cameron.

<sup>9</sup> A typical example of the importance of language in differentiation in the Hebrew tradition is the word “*shibbōleth*.” In *Judges* 12:4-6, the pronunciation of the word was used as a test for nationality, to distinguish Gileadites from Ephraimites (*Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* 1998). The word’s pronunciation thus marked some people as insiders and others as foreigners. The word is used until today as a word, phrase, or principle that distinguishes a particular class, nation, or group of people (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Religion was also central to the Hindus’ opposition between themselves and non-Hindus, *mlechhas*. See Diamond 125 and E. Hall 5.

<sup>11</sup> The recent developments in classical scholarship on the “barbarian,” of which Edith Hall’s study is an example, deserve a note here. Since the 1980s a shift occurred in scholarly work on the ancient and medieval world, in which Said’s *Orientalism* played an important role. Whereas in the 1970s and early 1980s there is a clear emphasis on conflicting ideologies in history, since the mid-80s many classical scholars have turned to identity and difference as organizing principles (Miles 1; Woodward 18-19). Moreover, recent and contemporary scholarship tends to read texts and images not just as empirical data for the reconstruction of the “reality” of antiquity, but as “dynamic cultural forces that create their own ‘imaginaire’ and meanings” (Miles 2). Postcolonial theory and criticism has been influential for cultural historians of the ancient and medieval world (2). The use of the term “barbarian” in primary sources is now being studied in relation to issues of identity, cultural exchange, relations with foreign people, and the like. Since the mid-80s there is a shift towards a more critical, self-reflective, and less Eurocentric examination of the term.

from that of the term “civilization.” “Civilization” is first documented in French in 1767 and in English in 1772, and it first appeared in an English dictionary in 1775 (Williams 57; Salter 15). Despite its relatively brief history, “civilization” also has a complex genealogy. According to Raymond Williams, its main use was to describe “a state of social order and refinement, especially in conscious historical or cultural contrast with *barbarism*” (57-58). But “civilization” also denoted a historical process, which carried the spirit of Enlightenment, “with its emphasis on secular and progressive human self-development” (58). In fact, what is specific about the term “civilization,” according to Williams, is the “combination of the ideas of a process and an achieved condition.” As an “achieved condition,” civilization conveys a celebratory view of modernity as the most advanced state of human society (58). The static and dynamic conception of civilization as both a state and a process are, according to Wendy Brown, reconciled within the Western progressivist historiography of modernity:

civilization simultaneously frames the achievement of European modernity, the promised fruit of modernization as an experience, and crucially, the effects of exporting European modernity to “uncivilized” parts of the globe. European colonial expansion from the mid-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century was explicitly justified as a project of civilization, conjuring the gifts of social order, legality, reason, and religion, as well as regulating manners and mores. (Brown 2006: 179-80)

In the nineteenth century, the term was thus mobilized within the colonial project and used to justify European expansion (Tsing and Hershatter 36). Within imperialist ideology, the term assisted conceptualizing the European “civilizing mission” of enlightening the savage and barbaric non-European worlds.

In modern European history, “civilization” is often understood specifically as the European (or Western) civilization. As such, it expresses a singular European identity, based on the idea of a secular (rather than religious) unity.<sup>12</sup> In the twentieth century, however, “civilization” also started to be used in the plural, as a “relatively neutral form for any achieved social order or way of life” (Williams 59). As I showed in the previous chapter, its use in the plural does not necessarily contradict its singular use for the Western/European civilization. European civilization often is projected as a universal ideal, to which all non-Western civilizations should adhere. As Walter D. Mignolo argues, “civilization” is a geopolitically grounded notion that often turns into “a European self-description of its role in history,” while it is simultaneously “disguised as the natural course of universal history” (2005: xvii, 8).

Given that the term “civilization” is a modern construction, its application to pre-modern periods is inevitably somewhat anachronistic. Thus, when I talk about *civilizational* standards in Greek antiquity, for example, we must realize that neither the

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<sup>12</sup> Gerrit Gong 23; also discussed in Salter 17.



notion of civilization nor of Western history as we understand it today were part of Greek consciousness. Even the idea of a unitary Greek consciousness is debatable.<sup>13</sup> Of course, an accurate reproduction of the way the Greeks (or any other group or culture of the past) looked at the world would not be possible either, since it would be mediated by many layers. Therefore, the conceptual tools we apply to earlier periods are always to some degree anachronistic. In this chapter, when I refer to *civilizational standards* that determine the identity of the Western subject in history, these standards do not (always) pertain to the explicit term “civilization,” but to a central self-defining principle, on which dominant groups, nations, or empires in Western history built their sense of superiority vis-à-vis a barbarian other. This principle determines the perspective from which the rest of the world is viewed and decides which subjects will be excluded from the sanctioned realm of the self by being relegated to the barbaric. *Hellenicity* or *Romanitas*, for example, are linguistic incarnations of the principle that can catachrestically be called “civilization.” Thus, throughout history, the hegemonic discourse I call “civilizational” finds its “barbarians” in “all those who do not belong to the locus of enunciation (and the geo-politics of knowledge) of those who assign the standards of classification and assign to themselves the right to classify” (Mignolo 2005: 8).

The fact that the term “barbarian” has a longer history than the term “civilization” leads to an intriguing realization: in the age-old dichotomy within which the barbarian is implicated since its inception, the “barbarian” is the stable term, while its positive opposite changes (Greek, Roman, Christian, European, and the like, until the term “civilization” is coined). This suggests that a stable category for the absolute other is even more essential for the discourse of the self than a stable positive category of self-definition. The assumption that a solid denomination of the other is prioritized over a fixed self-defining category finds support in the mechanism Hayden White calls “ostensive self-definition by negation” (1972: 4). According to this mechanism, the self defines itself by pointing at what it thinks it is definitely *not*. Remarkably, Samuel Huntington formulates the same claim, but also adds a necessary dimension of conflict, hostility, and violence to the process of self-definition by negation: “We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often when we know whom we are against” (1996: 21). Nevertheless, although the persistence of the term “barbarian” in Western history serves the self-definition of dominant groups, it could also turn against this purpose: it could enable us to assert the priority of barbarism over civilization and question the former’s dependence on its positive opposite. In other words, the continuous presence of the “barbarian” in history also harbors the insight that civilization may in fact be the weakest link in this opposition.

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<sup>13</sup> In Herodotus’ account of the Greco-Persian Wars (499-449 BCE) we already have manifestations of the contrast between the West (Greece) and the Asiatic East (the Persian Empire). However, in archaic Greece identity was structured primarily around city-states.

My choice to use “civilization” as the overarching concept for the various standards probed in this chapter is motivated by the particularity of the concept of civilization compared with other categories of self-definition. One could argue that “civilization” is simply one standard for defining the “barbarian” among many. Instead, I argue that there is no other concept before modernity that captures the totality of standards in the way “civilization” does. What distinguishes “civilization” from the separate standards listed in this chapter is that in principle it can contain all of these standards, together or separately. Huntington’s definition of “civilization” demonstrates this point; for him, “civilization” is a “complex mix of higher levels of morality, religion, learning, art, philosophy, technology, material well-being, *and probably other things*” (1996: 320, emphasis added). In this definition, civilization emerges as an all-encompassing and open container, accommodating a plurality of standards; it can also, depending on the context, reject and leave out other standards. As the phrase “and probably other things” suggests, the number of standards within the umbrella of civilization is mobile, infinite, and open to renewal and reordering. The concept of “civilization” thereby turns into a machine for producing different versions of the “barbarian” tailored to the needs and priorities of the “civilized we.”

In this machine, the contents of “civilization” are kept as broad and flexible as possible in order to secure the stability of the opposition between civilization and barbarism. With the introduction of the term “civilization” in modernity, “barbarism” finds a constant and stable opposite. While the standards contained within “civilization” remain flexible, one thing becomes fixed: “civilization” becomes a powerful conceptual wall for keeping the “barbarian” at bay. The moment both parts of the opposition are formalized in language, their dichotomy is enhanced even more. In this sense, the introduction of the concept of civilization constitutes a unique modern phenomenon: for the first time the superiority of the (Western) subject is established through a single term, containing a multiplicity of standards that define the realm of the self and the barbaric. As a result, even as the status of particular standards changes through time—if, for example, religion and culture replace political ideology as the key to defining civilization—the opposite of the barbarian does not have to change: it can still be expressed by the term “civilization” as a container of all active standards in a particular context.

Of course, similar concepts used in earlier periods also accommodated different criteria. *Romanitas* functioned simultaneously as a marker of culture, education, and virtue. But the concept of *Romanitas* remains bound to a particular context and empire, and is thus not easily transferrable to other contexts or groups that succeeded the Roman Empire. In contrast, “civilization” offers this shifting plurality of standards a permanent conceptual space in language, which did not exist before. “Civilization” is thus paradoxically a chameleonic and dynamic concept meant to solidify a hierarchical opposition in the most steadfast way possible. Whenever the opposition is threatened or

weakened, the civilizational machine can shift the defining standards of the self in order to slightly redefine the self and the barbarian without changing the terms—and thus the basis and violent structure—of the opposition between them.

“Western history,” just as “civilization,” is a modern construction. The same holds for the globalizing phrase “the West,” which came into general usage over the past two centuries (Sakai and Morris 372).<sup>14</sup> Although the term “the West” is supposed to unify a group of people called “Westerners,” this constructed unity comprises a constellation of heterogeneous ideologies, traditions, races, and cultural practices. The West is a collective heritage, not simply influenced, but also partly constituted, by non-European influences.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the diverse forces constituting “the West,” as Said says, the West has “a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence” (2003: 5). Thus, even as a mythical construct, “the West” has “powerful effects as it gathers varying and contradicting properties around itself” (Sakai and Morris 374). Therefore, the terms “the West,” “Western history,” and “Western civilization” in this study refer to powerful discursive constructions, and not to objective realities. They are products of a civilizational discourse that has shaped the thought, language, and imagination of Western subjects in common ways, and that perpetuates the binary logic of civilization versus barbarism, and of the West vis-à-vis the “non-West” or “the Rest.”

The idea of Western history as a linear progressive narrative originating in classical Greece is also a product of modernity. My earliest temporal point of reference in this chapter is archaic Greece. This choice does not suggest an endorsement of the foundational narrative that views Greece as the origin of Western civilization. Rather, it is premised on the word “barbarian” as it was incepted in ancient Greece. Moreover, given my Greek identity and background, my focus on the Greek context demonstrates the inevitable implication of the analyst in her object of study.

When using “barbarism” and “civilization” in this historical exploration, it is not possible to effectively distance myself from discourses of which these concepts are part, which are the discourses shaping my formation and education as a “citizen of the West.”

<sup>14</sup> Although the specific construct we call “the West” has only been in use in the last two centuries, there are of course older uses of “west.” According to Sakai and Morris, “older uses of ‘west’ or its equivalent in other languages indicated a direction or an area on a political map, such as the west-east division of the Roman Empire in the [mid-third century CE], the division of the Christian church into Western and Eastern from [the eleventh century], the ‘New World’ of the Americas perceived from Europe, or the oceans located furthest west of the Central Kingdom (China)” (372). See also Williams 333.

<sup>15</sup> As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue about the relation between West and non-West, “the two worlds interpenetrate in an unstable space of creolization and syncretism” (15). However, the construction of the inferiority of non-European cultures presupposes a discourse of purity of the European civilization, which was premised on exclusions of other cultural influences, such as Nubia’s importance for the formation of Egypt, the influence of Egypt on Greek civilization, of Africa on the Roman Empire, and of Islam on Europe’s economic, political, and intellectual history (58; Robinson 4). One of the best-known (and most controversial) attempts to revise the Eurocentric construction of the West is Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*.

One option would be to use quotation marks each time I use the term “barbarian” or “civilization” in a way unreflective of my own viewpoint or position. However, quotation marks create an illusion of objectivity and suggest that a subject is able to stand outside the discourse in which she is embedded. This would sidestep my complicity with the object of my research—in this chapter, Western discourses on the barbarian. Therefore, by refusing to position myself on the outside or the margins of this discourse, I see myself as what Mireille Rosello has called a “reluctant witness,” participating in discursive constructions I would “much rather not condone,” while also trying to resist them (1998: 1).<sup>16</sup>

### Civilizational Standards

The standards in this typology do not stand in isolation as strict conceptual frameworks, but constitute mutually illuminating and inextricably related discursive domains. For example, race, class, and gender function as systems of social stratification superimposed on each other, and either undermine or reinforce one another (Shohat and Stam 22). The intersection of empire with culture, economy, and politics is also demonstrated in many studies, including Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).<sup>17</sup> Certain standards are only applicable to particular periods, as some of them were not (fully) conceptualized earlier. The standard of “progress,” for example, applies primarily to modern conceptions of civilization.

There are also standards formally left out of this typology, which enter the discussion under the rubric of other standards. For instance, “geography” is not treated separately, but is nonetheless important in this discussion, insofar as the conceptual borders separating the “civilized world” from the barbarians often coincide with geographical divisions. The barbarian is usually “appointed” to areas outside the borders of a “civilized” society or empire. The “Orient” is such a mythically invested geographical space, where barbarians supposedly dwell. Geography is a crucial component of empire, since, as Said notes, “the geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about” (1993: 78). Hence, geography is a parameter underlying many other standards examined here.

Finally, certain standards are more inclusive, and (partially) encompass, or overlap with, other standards. “Culture” is a case in point. As a complex and broad concept, it encompasses standards such as “religion,” “political ideology,” or “morality, values, and manners.” These standards are nevertheless examined separately in my typology, because of their specific role in the definition of the barbarian.

<sup>16</sup> In her study on ethnic stereotypes, Rosello takes the “reluctant witness” as “an emblematic figure who can teach us fascinating lessons about how to address the issue of ethnic stereotyping.” The “reluctant witness,” she argues, “knows that there is no outside, especially if two speakers share the same language, the same linguistic crucible where stereotypes have slowly formed over centuries of intertextual references” (1998: 1).

<sup>17</sup> For Said, culture is a site where imperialist ideology and practices are inscribed, reproduced, legitimized, or, occasionally, contested (1993: 13).

## Language

Language is found at the heart of the definition of the barbarian. In ancient Greece, language is the first criterion for distinguishing the other as barbarian. However, it should be noted that despite the Greek etymology of the word “barbarian,” scholars locate similar words in other early languages, such as the Babylonian-Sumerian *barbaru* (“foreigner”) (E. Hall 4). There are thus indications that the Greek word *βάρβαρος* might have been formed under oriental influences.

In the earliest Greek sources, foreignness is already identified with linguistic difference. The word “barbarophōnoi,” referring to those who speak a language other than Greek, makes a first appearance in Homer’s *Iliad*, although Homer never uses the word “Hellenes.”<sup>18</sup> Here, the Carians are called “barbarophōnoi” because they speak a different language (Munson 2). Accordingly, the leader of the “barbarophone” Carians is qualified as a fool, “nēpios,” which literally means “infantile,” like a baby who has not entered the system of language (2). Notably, some scholars, like Julius Pokorny, relate the word “barbarian” with Indo-European words that signify the “meaningless” or “inarticulate,” such as the Latin *balbutio* and the English *baby* (E. Hall 4). Thus, even in its early manifestations the term “barbarian” implies inferiority.<sup>19</sup> Although at the time of its inception and up until the Greco-Persian wars (499-449 BCE) it primarily signified linguistic difference, this difference was sometimes accompanied by a depreciation of other peoples, based on the perception of their language as non-human speech (Long 131). Linguistic difference had more connotations. The word’s onomatopoeic etymology (the repetition of the *bar-bar* sequence) suggested not just foreign speech, but also to speak with difficulty or with harsh sounds, to have elocution or pronunciation difficulties, to stutter, to lisp or to speak inarticulately (Long 130-31; Hartog 80). But although the term is certainly not complimentary, François Hartog argues that its early uses denote “a Barbarian way of speaking” and not “a Barbarian nature” (80).

In the archaic period, the linguistic criterion for the definition of the barbarian is more dominant than political or ethnic-based factors, because there is not yet a formed sense of shared ethnicity in the Greek world. Before the fifth century BCE, identity in Greece is shaped around city-states, with considerable differences in laws, political system, lifestyle, and even language. Although language remains the basis of the dichotomy throughout

<sup>18</sup> According to the fifth-century BCE Greek historian Thucydides, Homer does not use the term “Hellenes” or the term “foreigner” because “in his time the Hellenes were not yet known by one name, and so marked off as something separate from the outside world” (Thucydides 37).

<sup>19</sup> Not all scholars are unanimous about this matter. Maronitis, for example, argues that in the *Iliad* the distinction between the two opponents is made exclusively in terms of language and there is no value judgment attached to it (27-28). Jonathan Hall argues that during the archaic period the term was possibly not only applied in the linguistic sense (2002: 111-12). We should not forget that the notion of one Greek language, even in the classical period, is contestable, since Greek was a “collection of myriad regional dialects.” Thus, in many cases, communication among Greeks of different regions would have been just as difficult as between Greeks and non-Greeks (116-17).

Greek antiquity, the “barbarian” is enriched with more negative connotations in later texts, especially during and after the Persian Wars, when the Greek-barbarian opposition acquires clear political, ethnic, and cultural connotations. In this context, foreign speech is an index of primitivism, intellectual or cultural inferiority, and irrationality (Munson 2; Long 130-31; E. Hall 3-5).

Athenian drama fostered the Greek-barbarian antithesis and contributed to shaping the meanings of both terms. In the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the word “barbarian” means “non-Greek,” “incomprehensible,” and eventually “eccentric” or “inferior” (Kristeva 51). Nevertheless, the criterion of language also plays a protagonistic role in drama. For example, in Aeschylus’ *Persians* there are catalogues of Persian proper names meant to capture the confusing sounds of a strange language (Broadhead xxx; Munson 2-3; E. Hall 76-79). Comedies often feature barbarians (foreigners) speaking Greek poorly for the production of comic effects. Moreover, the word “barbarian” is used in both comedies and tragedies to characterize sounds of animals, such as horses and, especially, birds (Munson 3).<sup>20</sup>

The understanding of a barbarian (foreign) language as noise, gibberish, or poorly spoken Greek may also account for the association of intelligible (Greek) speech with reason and intelligence. For example, the orator Isocrates argues that *logos* is what distinguishes Greeks from barbarians (E. Hall 199). The logic is the following: the barbaric is unintelligible; thus, it does not make sense; thus, it is irrational.

Despite the deep-rootedness of the barbarian/Greek antithesis in Greek thought, there are also ambivalent or even critical responses to the stereotypes involved in this distinction. The historian Herodotus (ca. 484–425 BCE) is an interesting case in this respect. His *Histories*, and particularly his ethnographic descriptions, deal extensively with language difference and translation, and contain nuanced analyses of “barbarian” languages. Although in his account of the Persian Wars Herodotus fully endorses the distinction between Greek and barbarian, in his ethnographic accounts, as his lens gets closer to “barbarian peoples,” he differentiates among barbarian languages and refrains from generalizations about barbarians (Munson 23).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For extensive analyses of the use of the “barbarian” in Greek drama, see E. Hall, Long, Colvin, and Bacon.

<sup>21</sup> Rosaria Munson argues that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish which statements belong to Herodotus’ voice and which are focalized by different characters or viewpoints. His writing embodies an ideological and cultural heteroglossia, which precludes a monolithic representation of the Greek/Barbarian distinction. However, Herodotus does not always avoid the derogatory stereotypes of his time. When confronted with entirely unfamiliar languages, for example, he occasionally compares these languages with animal or bird sounds (25). Recounting a myth about two Egyptian women who were abducted, and of which one was transferred to northern Greece (Dodona) and the other to Libya, Herodotus tries to explain why in another version of the same myth the place of these women is taken by two black doves. He writes:

It seems to me that the reason why these women were called “doves” by the Dodonians is this, that they were barbaroi, and seemed to them to speak like birds. After a while they say she

Due to his multi-lingual competency, Herodotus was in a privileged position from which he could criticize Greek linguistic ethnocentrism, according to which “only Greek has meaning and what has meaning is Greek” (67, 69). Herodotus deconstructs this ethnocentric position. For instance, he observes that Egyptians, just like Greeks, also call “barbarians” all those who speak another language as well as all “noise-makers,” including the Greeks. Within the Greek space, the Spartans confuse “barbaros” (non-Greek) with “xenos” (non-Spartan stranger/guest), and thus include other Greeks too under the name “barbaros.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, he argues that all languages function in more or less similar ways, and that the unfamiliar can become familiar through translation (51). His writings therefore invalidate the supposed “linguistic handicap of non-Greeks” and show “that the barbarian/non-barbarian antithesis is relative” (66).

In the Hellenistic era—usually defined as the period between the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE and the annexation of the heartlands of classical Greece by Rome in 146 BCE—a simplified version of the Attic dialect known as “Alexandrian *Koine*” (common) becomes the official written and spoken language in the Eastern Mediterranean until the sixth century CE. This common language meant to serve the communicational needs of linguistically heterogeneous populations, formed as a result of the intense cultural exchanges that followed the establishment of Alexander’s Empire. This semi-constructed simplified version of Greek could be seen as a kind of creolization (or even “barbarization”) of the Attic dialect of classical Greece. The spreading of this common language among diverse populations, as well as the processes of hybridization in this period, resulted in the weakening of the role of language in the differentiation between barbarian and Greek.

Even though in the Hellenistic and Roman eras language gradually moves to the background as a civilizational standard, it certainly does not disappear. It returns in late Roman times, for example, in writers such as Porphyry of Tyre, a neoplatonic philosopher of the late-third century CE. As Gillian Clark explains about Porphyry’s *On Abstinence*, Porphyry argues that animals also have language, even though we cannot speak or understand it (119). In order to build his argument about the language of animals, Porphyry refers to the experience of hearing an utterly foreign language, which you cannot understand or even hear as language, whereas other people can:

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started to speak with human voice, when the woman uttered sounds that were intelligible to them. So long as the woman was speaking barbarian, she seemed to them to be speaking with the voice of birds—for could a dove really speak with human voice? (2.57; qtd in Munson 68)

The women’s speech is leveled to that of birds because it is barbarian, and thus non-human. The fact that the women themselves are replaced with doves in one of the myths suggests that barbarian women are reduced to non-humans. Only when the woman who went to Greece starts speaking Greek does she acquire human status. Clearly, to the ancient Greeks (Pelasgians) of Dodona, “human voice” is only the Greek language (68). Interestingly, in an older tradition, the voice of birds also functions as a metaphor for the poet’s voice, whose speech is abnormal but also close to the gods (Nagy 88; Munson 68). There is an underlying association here between poetry or literature and barbarian language.

<sup>22</sup> All these examples are presented in Munson 65-66.

Greeks do not understand Indian, nor do those brought up on Attic understand Scythian or Thracian or Syrian: the sound that each makes strikes the others like the calling of cranes. Yet for each their language can be written in letters and articulated, as ours can for us; but for us the language of Syrians, say, or Persians cannot be articulated or written, just as that of animals cannot be for any people. For we are aware only of noise and sound, because we do not understand (say) Scythian speech, and they seem to us to be making noises and articulating nothing. (qtd in G. Clark 119-20)

What is refreshing about Porphyry's views is that the "problem" of the other's incomprehensibility is not located with the others (the barbarians), but with the self and its limitations. The suggestion is that everyone is a barbarian to other people. A similar relativization is articulated by Saint Paul. The latter writes in *Corinthians*: "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore, if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me" (*New Testament* 1, Cor. 14.10-11).

In the same period that Porphyry writes, the word "barbarism" had a linguistic meaning already in use, signifying faults in pronunciation (G. Clark 120).<sup>23</sup> The linguistic standard at the heart of "barbarian" survives until modernity through this second meaning of "barbarism." According to this meaning, "barbarism" denotes mistakes in speech or writing, inferior linguistic forms, or foreignisms and linguistic hybridizations. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there is an intensification of this linguistic usage of the term in Western Europe. Classical languages (Latin, in particular) were starkly opposed to the "barbaric" vernaculars, and foreign linguistic importations were perceived as a "barbarization" of the pure classical languages. In the context of Renaissance humanism, the linguistic meaning of barbarism is enriched with negative cultural and political connotations. Linguistic barbarism becomes a negative signifier in the context of a cultural and political program—fed by the nationalist aspirations of the Italian intelligentsia—which sought to defend the purity and superiority of Italian culture against foreign influences (W.R. Jones 403).

## Culture

"Culture," as Raymond Williams claims, is "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (87). Generally, it finds use as a synonym of civilization, to describe the accumulated habits, attitudes, beliefs, values, behavior, and way of life shared by the members of a society. Specifically, it involves practices relatively autonomous from the economic, social, and political realm, which are often expressed in aesthetic

<sup>23</sup> In this early context, this meaning of "barbarism" had primarily acoustic connotations, and referred to sound and pronunciation rather than grammar (G. Clark 120).



forms (Said 1993: xii). In an even more specified sense, “culture” is, according to Matthew Arnold, reserved for the refined and elevated elements in a society, a “reservoir of the best that has been known and thought” (Said 1993: xiii). In the latter case, culture is identified with what we often call “high culture.”

“Culture” is perhaps the only civilizational standard approaching the broadness and all-inclusiveness of the term “civilization.” Although “culture” partly overlaps with “civilization,” the two terms also share a historical tension. In the nineteenth century, Mignolo writes, culture “created national unity: national languages, national literature, national flag and anthem, etc. were all singular manifestations of a ‘national culture’” (2005: xvii). Thus, “European civilization was divided into national cultures.” At the same time, the rest of the world’s population was—and still often is—“conceived as having ‘culture’ but not civilization,” because the latter required an advanced level of science and history (xvii). This meaning of civilization in relation to culture was somewhat relativized in the twentieth century, when “civilization” started to find use in the plural as a (quasi) neutral term (Williams 59). Nevertheless, in general, civilization carries universalist claims, while culture poses as more particularistic (Salter 13). Where civilization is used to express Western identity vis-à-vis the “outside” of the West, “culture” often denotes a sense of unity, a mode of living, or a level of achievement *within* a certain nation or group. Hence, “civilization” has an outward direction (also due to its association with the colonial project), whereas with “culture” the emphasis tends to be on the internal practices and values of a group.<sup>24</sup>

The conceptual complexity of “culture” is partly responsible for its intricate relation to “barbarism” and for the surprising turns this relation historically takes. I distinguish five different ways in which the concept of culture adjoins its fate with barbarism, through which the intricate meanings of culture are also illuminated:

1. Culture is opposed to barbarism, with the “barbaric” situated outside the “we.” Culture is here the privilege of the “we”: “we” have culture while “they” are barbarians.
2. Culture as “fine art” is opposed to the barbarism within modern European society and life.
3. Culture is opposed to barbarism, but barbarism is identified (or associated) with “civilization.”
4. Culture and barbarism are inextricably intertwined forces in the constitution of Western societies. This intertwining is in some cases accompanied by a positive resignification of barbarism.
5. Culture *is* barbarism.

<sup>24</sup> In this sense, the term “civilization,” more than “culture,” is almost automatically conceived in opposition to an outside and a barbarian other. Hence, it seems to me that “civilization” needs the figure of the barbarian for its self-definition more than “culture” does. This is why I consider “civilization” the opposite of the “barbarian” *par excellence*. Nevertheless, “culture” and “civilization” remain partly overlapping terms with a dynamic interrelationship.

Some of these modes of intertwinement between culture and barbarism are specific to a certain context. These five modes do not reflect a chronological ordering of the shifts in the dynamic between culture and barbarism. Nevertheless, I contend that there is a general movement from “culture” as an exclusive site of the “we” to a contemporary conception of culture as a bad word, a prison of the “they.” In the following, I try to trace this movement.

1. The opposition of culture to barbarism, whereby culture belongs to the “we” and barbarism is situated outside the domain of the “we,” persists throughout Western history.<sup>25</sup> In Greece, cultural criteria for the opposition between Greeks and barbarians came to the fore in the fifth century BCE, during and after the Persian Wars, when the barbarian finds its main embodiment in the figure of the Persian. In Greek (cf. Athenian) rhetoric, Greek culture—and primarily its political dimensions (democracy and freedom of spirit)—was opposed to the barbarian customs and societal formations of the East. Although for Greeks the superiority of Greek culture was generally a given, there were also authors who questioned the assumption that “culture” was exclusive to the “we.” In his *Histories*, Herodotus formulates his objective as recording “the astonishing achievements both of Greeks and non-Greek peoples” (qtd in Hartog 79). Herodotus thus acknowledged the existence and complexity of other cultures.

In the fourth and third centuries BCE, the Greek/barbarian opposition was somewhat depoliticized (Hartog 96). Hellenicity was recast as a cultural category, defined as a matter of education (97). As the Athenian orator Isocrates declared in 380 BCE:

So far has our city left other men behind with regard to wisdom and expression that its students have become the teachers of others. The result is that the name of the Hellenes no longer seems to indicate an ethnic affiliation (*genos*) but a disposition (*dianoia*). Indeed, those who are called “Hellenes” are those who share our culture (*paideusis*) rather than a common biological inheritance (*physis*). (Isocrates qtd in J. Hall 2002: 209)

In the words of Isocrates, Hellenicity becomes a matter of enculturation rather than birth. While “culture” is identified with Hellenicity and is therefore exclusive to the “we,” the definition of culture as education (*paideusis*) suggests that barbarians could also eventually become “hellenized” and thus enjoy the “fruits” of culture.<sup>26</sup>

In the Hellenistic era, the individual became the subject of geographically vast states and acquired a “cosmopolitan” consciousness (J. Hall 2002: 220). The new conditions

<sup>25</sup> In the ancient world, the specific term “culture” is of course not used as such, but the idea of it is expressed through other related concepts.

<sup>26</sup> Isocrates was also a fierce proponent of a strict opposition between Greeks and barbarians, and saw the “barbarians” of Asia as the natural enemies of the Greeks (Long 149). It needs to be noted that the cultural ideal of Hellenicity was rather Athenocentric. Thus, for Isocrates, Hellenicity was identified with Athenian education (J. Hall 2002: 209).

that arose in this period shaped a completely different framework for self-definition: the city-state system was overshadowed by the Macedonian dynasts, and many Greeks were transplanted to “barbarian” territories (220). Alexander the Great’s policy of fusion and integration weakened the dichotomic character of the Greek/barbarian distinction. “Culture” was still identified with Hellenicity and barbarism with its outside, but Hellenicity as a cultural and educational ideal became a “common good” that could be possessed by either Greeks or barbarians.<sup>27</sup>

As Jonathan Hall argues, the “culturally based definition of Hellenic identity endured well into the period of Roman rule” (2002: 224). However, Alexander’s policy of cultural syncretism was partly met with opposition by the Romans, who still saw Rome as the center of dissemination of political and cultural influence (Hartog 152). In the early Roman period, the Greek/barbarian opposition was partly revised into a Roman/barbarian dichotomy, although Greek culture remained at the basis of Roman education. In this context too, the distinction between *Romanitas* and barbarism was premised on culture. *Romanitas* could be acquired through education (Heather 241). Being barbarian was thus not an irreversible state, but one that could be “remedied.” In Roman consciousness, however, the (cultural) division between Roman and barbarian was stronger: barbarism was located outside the Roman borders, while culture was the sole privilege of those educated into *Romanitas*.

2. “Culture” defined as *fine art*, has been opposed to a kind of barbarism found within European culture (in a more general sense). My example here comes from Friedrich Schiller’s “Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man” (1794), written at the dawn of German Romanticism. Schiller ponders the paradoxical coexistence of rational Enlightenment and (ethical) barbarism.<sup>28</sup> If “[o]ur age is enlightened” and “the spirit of free inquiry has [...] undermined the foundations upon which fanaticism and deception had raised their throne,” Schiller famously asks: “How is it, then, that we still remain barbarians?” (106). Subsequently, he wonders: “how under the influence of a barbarous constitution is character ever to become ennobled?” (108). Seeking an “instrument” for the ennoblement of character, Schiller turns to “fine art,” which remains unaffected by the corruption of history and by a “degraded humanity” (108-9). Schiller proposes art as the means for an elevation from the barbarous (immoral) habits and qualities of man, and

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<sup>27</sup> In his treatise *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*, the Greek historian Plutarch (46-127 CE) depicted Alexander as a civilizing philosopher and educator of the human race, who saved countless people from their “savage nature” (Hartog 154). According to Plutarch, Alexander challenged the division between Greeks and barbarians and dreamed of creating a mixed civilization that would unite all mankind (154-55). On the other hand, Plutarch argues, Alexander risked his own identity and veered to Eastern barbarity by adopting a Persian lifestyle and degenerating under its influence (151, 153). As an Eastern despot or a mad tyrant, he was an enemy of Hellenicity (151-52). Alexander’s attempt to fuse Greek culture with Asian barbarism is ambiguously received by Plutarch.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of Schiller’s views on the relation between ethics and aesthetics see Jane Bennett.

from the barbarism of (European) Enlightenment and history. He adds, “[h]umanity has lost its dignity; but art has rescued it and preserved it in significant stone” (109).

While he puts art on a pedestal, Schiller simultaneously degrades (European) history and reason as the causes for an internal barbarism in European society. For Schiller, art has to be protected from “the corruption of the age,” and the artist has to “leave the sphere of the actual to the intellect” (109). The “sphere of the actual,” which seems to consist of history, rationality, and everyday reality, has led to a degraded human existence. Schiller views art as somewhat detached from its age. Art embodies an ideal of beauty through abstraction and not from human experience (115). But although art and barbarism are here strictly opposed, art can positively influence our barbarous reality: Schiller sees in art the antidote to barbarism. This barbarism is not external to European society: it lurks within the civilized classes of Europe, and the “‘refined members of society’ led by the aristocracy,” who are in a state of slackening and decline (Früchtl 12). Thus, the intertwinement of culture with barbarism, which we later find in Walter Benjamin and other critical thinkers, finds in Schiller one of its early expressions (12).

3. The constellation whereby *culture* is on the opposite side of *barbarism*, but *barbarism* is on the same side as *civilization*, captures the relation between the German concepts “Kultur” and “Zivilisation,” as it took form from the end of the eighteenth century through World War I. The splitting of the meaning of “Kultur” from “Zivilisation” in German can be traced back to Johann Gottfried von Herder in his unfinished *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784-1791). Herder argued that we should speak of “cultures” in the plural, to refer to the “specific and variable cultures of different nations and periods,” but also, significantly, to the “specific and variable cultures of social and economic groups within a nation” (Herder presented in Williams 89). The latter sense was taken up by the Romantic Movement as an alternative to the “orthodox and dominant ‘civilization’” (89). “Kultur” was used as a positive term for national or folk cultures, but also, later, as a critique of the mechanical character and inhumanity of the industrial development, which was identified with the concept of “Zivilisation.” As Williams writes, the terms “Kultur” and “Zivilisation” were “used to distinguish between ‘human’ and ‘material’ development” (89).

In the above hierarchical distinction, “Kultur” is the positive term, whereas “Zivilisation” carries negative connotations. So much so that the latter is often identified with barbarism—a barbarism of intra-European kind. As Europe found itself in a period of crisis and cultural pessimism at the *fin de siècle*—the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries—Europeans started questioning rationalism, positivism, and the Enlightenment ideal of progress, which also supported the colonial project. The negativity of “Zivilisation” reflected this critical attitude to progress and reason, which was thought to have brought a new kind of barbarism. Literary authors, artists, and philosophers started projecting the vulnerability and precariousness of European civilization, and the

fact that Europe too, in Joseph Conrad's words, "has been one of the dark places on the earth" (48).

The positive connotations of "culture" as opposed to the association of "civilization" with barbarism are vividly performed in Oswald Spengler's famous historical epic *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, in two volumes, 1918-22). In his pessimistic account of Western civilization, Spengler deploys the distinction between "Kultur" and "Zivilisation," by defining "Kultur" as the healthy and creative energy of a people, whereas "Zivilisation" as the decadent spirit of decay (Salter 71). For Spengler, "Zivilisation" represents a culture's decline—the remains of a culture when its energy depletes. The loss of creative energy in the West is causally linked with the prevalence of reason. Spengler—just like Friedrich Nietzsche—does not only use barbarism as a negative signifier, referring to the declining Western civilization, but also as a positive notion. The barbarian is seen as a dynamic figure who could remedy civilization (Salter 71).<sup>29</sup> The idea of a kind of barbarism that would revitalize Europe gained ground among many European thinkers at the *fin de siècle*. The cultural critic Matthew Arnold and the historian Jacob Burckhardt are two exponents of this line of thinking (Tziouvas 170-71). Thus, the questioning of civilization through a positive notion of culture ("Kultur") was also accompanied by attempts to positively redefine barbarism. In these recastings, barbarism is not the opposite of culture, but just like "culture" in Spengler, it is invested with a creative force.

4. The idea that culture is inextricably intertwined with barbarism almost automatically evokes Walter Benjamin's famous dictum in "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (1999b: 248). It is worth noting that Benjamin uses "Kultur" where the translator uses "civilization." Thus, in this case, we are not dealing with the old distinction between "Kultur" and "Zivilisation," since here it is "Kultur" that becomes affiliated with barbarism. Benjamin's statement suggests the exploitation of anonymous masses and subjugated others in the name of civilization's prosperity. The realization that culture (here a synonym for civilization) is premised on perpetual violence against its others locates barbarism in the very heart of culture.<sup>30</sup>

Along similar lines, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) established strong ties between (European) culture and barbarism. The writers explain in the "Preface": "what we had set out to do was nothing else than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism" (xiv). With "barbarism," Adorno and Horkheimer had the totalitarian state in mind, in the form it took with German Fascism and the Communism of the Soviet Union. The total annihilation of one's political enemy in these regimes signaled the complete collapse of

<sup>29</sup> For Nietzsche's use of the "barbarian" see "Morality, Values, Manners" in this chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin's maxim is more extensively discussed in Chapter Four.

reason and a regression to barbarism. For Horkheimer and Adorno, this barbarism is not an exception, but an “immanent constituent” of Western history (Früchtl 10). Barbarism is thus the flipside of progress, Enlightenment, and European culture. We come across a similar idea in Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Zygmunt Bauman’s *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), and Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* (1998).<sup>31</sup> In these thinkers, barbarism is an internal antagonistic principle and an inherent contradiction of culture, and specifically of modern European culture as the legacy of Enlightenment.

Another attempt to criticize and counter the inherent barbarism of a culture based on reason came from a very different corner: the artistic movements of Dada and Surrealism.<sup>32</sup> Both movements emerged as a response to what was seen as a crisis in modernity. Dada was a revolt against the barbarism of World War I and of new technology. Surrealism was also a reaction to the barbarism to which progress had given birth. Surrealists and Dadaists took issue with nineteenth-century ideals and bourgeois values, and turned antipatriotic, antipolitical, and antinationalistic (Kreuter 41). Surrealism was a “departure from familiar reality” and a “repudiation of unquestioned norms, achieved through emancipated vision.” It sought to liberate imagination, and thereby achieve “a better grasp on the real,” “uninhibited by social, ethical, cultural, and aesthetic restrictions” (Matthews 115-16). The Dadaists created a new kind of art marked by negativity: anti-aesthetic, anti-rational, anti-bourgeois, anarchist, shocking. But in both movements barbarism also received a positive valuation, as a force that resists the rational and conventional structures of European culture. As Stephen Foster writes, Dadaists “turned the negative qualities of crudeness and barbarism into a virtue” (1979: 143). Surrealists are regularly referred to as “barbarians hammering at the gates of culture” or as “barbarians storming the gates” of European culture (Vaneigem 20).<sup>33</sup>

5. In the face of their complex opposition in history, today the concepts of “culture” and “barbarism” are engaged in a constellation that paradoxically makes them synonymous. “Culture is the new barbarism,” writes Marxist critic Terry Eagleton in an article in *The Guardian* May 21, 2008, entitled “Culture Conundrum.” This is how Eagleton comes to this claim:

These days the conflict between civilisation and barbarism has taken an ominous turn. We face a conflict between civilisation and culture, which used to be on the same side. Civilisation means rational reflection, material wellbeing, individual autonomy

<sup>31</sup> These thinkers are also mentioned in Früchtl 13.

<sup>32</sup> The Dada movement, which started in Zürich during World War I and reached its peak from 1916 to 1922, was a movement in art, literature, theater, and graphic design (Kreuter 41). It is considered one of the most radical avant-garde movements. Dada artists used crude materials and everyday objects, arranged in collages, photomontages, three-dimensional assemblages, and ready-mades. Surrealism began in the early 1920s and many surrealists were initially involved in the Dada movement.

<sup>33</sup> See also the title of one of the most comprehensive publications on Dadaism: *Paris Dada: The Barbarians Storm the Gates* (2001).

and ironic self-doubt; culture means a form of life that is customary, collective, passionate, spontaneous, unreflective and irrational. It is no surprise, then, to find that we have civilisation whereas they have culture. Culture is the new barbarism. The contrast between West and East is being mapped on a new axis.

For Eagleton, the separation of “civilization” from “culture” is the product of a contemporary Western discourse identifying “civilization” with Western liberal societies and “culture” with non-liberal, non-Western societies that are based on collective identifications. In this Western liberal discourse, the West appears as “civilized” because it promotes individualism, whereas non-liberal societies, “enslaved” to their respective cultures, are identified with “barbarism.” Slavoj Žižek and Wendy Brown make the same observation, but where Eagleton sees a split between “civilization” and “culture,” they detect two different types of relations to culture. According to Žižek, the liberal vision relies on an opposition between “those who are ruled by culture” and “those who merely ‘enjoy’ their culture” and have the freedom to choose it (2009: 120). This leads Žižek to the same conclusion as Eagleton: from a Western liberal perspective, “the ultimate source of barbarism is culture itself.” Barbarism is defined as a complete identification with one’s culture (120).

If culture is a source of barbarism, Žižek notes, the conclusion would be that the subject has to be extricated from culture. This is the universal liberal Cartesian subject, which is *kulturlos*: able to step outside its cultural and social roots and assert its autonomy and universality (120-21). While their fundamentalist barbarian others “are caught in their specific culture,” modern Western subjects pose as “flexible, constantly changing their presuppositions” (125).

According to Brown, who develops a similar argument, Western civilizational discourse contends that non-liberal peoples are *owned* by culture, whereas liberal people in the West simply *have* culture(s). Thus, according to this discourse, “‘we’ have culture while culture has ‘them,’ or we *have* culture while they *are* a culture” (2006: 150-51). Liberalism conceives itself as “culturally neutral” and tolerant, and non-liberal cultures as “disposed toward barbarism” (151). For the non-liberal subject, culture and religion (or “culture as religion, and religion as culture”) are authoritative, while for the rational liberal subject, culture and religion form a kind of “background,” something that can be “entered” or “exited” at will, and is thus considered extrinsic to the subject (153). Žižek also argues that within liberalism culture is a way of life and a set of practices and ideas free from the “binding power of a collective” (2009: 150). In the West, culture and religion are “privatized” and “depoliticized” (Brown 2006: 169). Culture is something the individual “chooses” and “has a right to” (170). On the other hand, for non-liberal subjects culture and religion are a “source of irrationality and violence” (153).

In liberal discourse, barbarism is associated with the condition of being governed by culture. Because Western liberal democracy considers itself “cultureless” or “culturally

neutral," Brown argues, its principles are considered "*universalizable*," "above" culture, and thus supposedly applicable to all cultures (170). This conception of the West is reflected in the rhetoric of George W. Bush. In a speech at the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, Bush said:

We have no intention of imposing our culture. But America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women; private property; free speech, equal justice; and religious tolerance. (Bush qtd in Brown 2006: 172)

The values Bush lists, which pose as markers of civilization, are presented as *a priori* and independent of a particular culture. But the logic of Western liberalism, as Žižek argues, does not reflect a lack of culture; it represents modern Western culture—a culture that becomes intolerant when subjects of other cultures do not enjoy freedom of choice (2009: 123).

### Political System and Ideology

Systems of governance, regimes, and political ideologies have always drawn strict dividing lines to separate themselves from their political "other(s)." Designating the political "other" as barbaric, and thus as an enemy and not a worthy interlocutor, is often a means of safeguarding the sovereignty of a regime, whose legitimacy could be challenged if dialogue with the political other were to be sanctioned.

In the twentieth century, the setting provided by the Cold War (1945-1991), marked by a continuous state of political conflict between the American and the Soviet blocs, enabled the division of the world along political/ideological lines. In the dualist structure set by the capitalism/communism divide, each ideology found its "barbarians" in the opposite camp. In this context, both capitalism and communism were tagged as "barbaric," depending on the camp to which one belonged.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Not only communism, but also Marxism has been identified with "barbarism." Bernard-Henri Lévy's *Barbarism With a Human Face* (1979) is a fierce attack on communism as well as on Marxism and the "Sovietophilia" of left intellectuals. The group "Socialisme ou Barbarie" presents an interesting intervention in this divide between capitalism and communism. Founded in France in 1949 by Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort, "Socialisme ou Barbarie" was a revolutionary political group, which also produced a journal under the same name, still circulating in the mid-1960s. The group, with Castoriadis as its main representative, advocated an alternative position both to Western capitalism and to the Soviet Union. Castoriadis opposed the bureaucratization of the capitalist system, which he saw as based on an opposition between managers and executants (Curtis xix; Beilharz 47). Thus, his group sought to "repudiate the capitalist model in all domains and in all its implications" (Castoriadis 1997a: 7). But the group also positioned itself against the distortions of socialism in the Soviet bloc, which engaged in ruthless exploitation of the workers and whose "means of production were administered by a new class: the bureaucracy" (Beilharz 47). Thus, "barbarism" in "Socialisme ou Barbarie" is represented both by Western capitalism and Soviet communism, and by the new class of bureaucrats, to which they had both given rise, albeit in different forms. Castoriadis's socialist



The construction of one's political enemy as a barbarian varies in degrees according to the nature of a regime or ideology. Thus, one may argue that a democratic society, founded on the principle of dialogue and participation, is more willing to engage with its "others" without reducing them to the realm of the "barbaric." This would not be the case in a totalitarian or fundamentalist regime, where the political other is a barbarian enemy to be eliminated. In *On the Political*, Chantal Mouffe sees conflict as a necessary dimension of democratic social life and proposes the notion of the "adversary" as a better alternative to the "enemy." By turning enemies into adversaries we acknowledge the legitimacy of the other, despite our differences (Mouffe 15-16, 20). As a result, the "them" is not a barbarian, but someone we can oppose on a "common symbolic space" (20). However, Mouffe's "common symbolic space," in which conflicts between adversaries can emerge productively, is only imaginable within the structures of a democratic society, and not between democratic and non-democratic societies. Exactly how democratic societies would engage with "adversaries" from societies that do not play the political game according to the same rules is a question that remains unanswered. Thus, to my initial claim about democracies I would add a small clause: a democratic society is more willing to engage with its others without reducing them to the realm of the "barbaric," *as long as these others play by the rules of the liberal democratic system*. Therefore, the "other" of democracy—such as the subject of fundamentalist societies today—is often tagged as "barbaric" from a democratic viewpoint.

The identification of democracy with "civilization" and of the non-democratic other with barbarism can already be found in the distinction between Greek and barbarian in the fifth century BCE. Many scholars view the Greek-barbarian opposition in the fifth century BCE as predominantly political, because it reflected the opposed political ideals of Greeks and non-Greeks: the Athenian democratic ideal that produces free citizens, versus the despotism of the barbarians (Persians) (E. Hall 13, 16, 154). In his recounting of the Persian Wars, Herodotus' distinction between Greeks and barbarians is political: it is the opposition between those who live free in the context of the *polis*, having the law as their only master, and those who need masters to rule them (Hartog 84). These conflicting political ideals define the cleavage between Greeks and barbarians, as well as between Europe and Asia (95).<sup>35</sup>

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alternative to this barbarism was an *autonomous socialism*, "based on the self-rule of factories by workers" and on the "assertive free development of the critical individual living in equality with others" (Bronner 214; Curtis xix).

<sup>35</sup> The political foundations of the opposition are also played out in Aeschylus' *Persae*, which dramatized the repercussions in Persia of the Persian defeat by the Athenian fleet in Salamina. In this tragedy, it is suggested that the Persians were defeated because they were liable to despotism, slavishness, and excess, whereas the Greek/Athenian greatness was based on equality, freedom, and democracy, and therefore destined to last through the centuries. The depiction of the barbarian enemy in this tragedy thus contributes to the Greek/Athenian self-definition and self-praise (E. Hall 10).

Despite the profiling of the Greek/barbarian distinction as an opposition between Greek democracy versus Persian despotism, in fact, as scholars argue, the (political) definition of Greeks and barbarians in classical Greece was Athenocentric (J. Hall 2002: 86). Democracy was considered an Athenian invention. Consequently, since the wars against the Persians were presented as an attempt to protect democracy against Asian despotism, the polarization of Greek and barbarian served the legitimation of the Athenian leadership amongst the Greek allied states. As Jonathan Hall argues, the image of the barbarian was constructed as the exact antipode not of Greeks in general, but of the citizens that proclaimed themselves to be the most free of all, enjoying a democratic society *par excellence*: the Athenians (188-89). After the wars, the Athenians posed as the saviors and future protectors of Greece (Hartog 84). The alliance that Athens formed following the retreat of the Persians (479 BCE)—the so-called “Delian League”—turned Athens into the major power among Greek city-states. Under Athenian leadership, this league was the basis for Athens’s economic prosperity and hegemony over the Aegean. The demonization of the barbarian (the Persian) legitimated Athens’s demands for regular toll from its allies (J. Hall 2002: 186-87).

By the mid-fifth century, the allied states could be characterized as an “Athenian Empire” (454-404 BCE). Revolts by members of the league were suppressed by Athens. Therefore the Greek/barbarian antinomy in classical Greece could also be understood in an imperial context.<sup>36</sup> If we place classical Athens in a loosely defined imperial context, “empire” can be seen as a constant factor in the construction of the “barbarian” throughout Western history. “Empire” holds a key-position in this typology of standards, as a political, ideological, and cultural apparatus that produces—and depends on—the discourse on barbarians and civilized.<sup>37</sup> Empire can be seen as a separate civilizational standard insofar as it functions, ideologically and geographically, as the boundary delimiting the civilized world. As empires expand, they tend to develop strict borders and oppositions in order to maintain the hierarchical relationship between center and periphery. Thus, a clear-cut distinction between civilized and barbarians is essential for an empire to sustain its political, cultural, and military hegemony. As a result, Brown writes, the barbarian “has been continually established vis-à-vis empire and imperial definitions of civilization” (2006: 181-82).

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<sup>36</sup> Admittedly, the Athenian Empire differs from the way other large empires in Western history have functioned. It was based on a democratic political system and sought economic and cultural domination not so much over foreign (barbaric) nations, but over other Greek nation-states. Despite these (and other) differences, however, we could gain useful insights by viewing the Greek/barbarian antinomy in classical Athens as produced by a form of imperial ideology. In light of contemporary neo-imperialism, led by U.S. democracy, it is particularly significant to realize that in history democracy and imperialism are not incompatible.

<sup>37</sup> The concept of “empire” pervades and extends over several of the “civilizational standards” laid out in this chapter, such as ideology, economy, politics, gender and sexuality, race, and culture.

The “barbarian” figured prominently in the context of the Roman, and later of the Spanish, British, French, and the other Western European colonial empires.<sup>38</sup> The Roman Empire sustained a strong sense of center versus periphery. Rome operated as a control panel, imposing laws, policies, educational norms, and military structures upon the provinces. In this context, being barbarian was not (always) an irremediable state, but one that could be “cured” through a civilizing process that involved Roman education (Heather 241). This idea can be compared with the civilizing mission of European colonialism. However, as opposed to the European missionaries who systematically tried to convert colonized peoples, in the Roman Empire it is not the task of the Roman to (collectively) educate and lead the ignorant barbarians to civilization.<sup>39</sup> The educational process towards *Romanitas* took place more on an individual rather than on a collective level. It was primarily the responsibility of the barbarian, who should consciously wish to rise above his or her state and the society that produced him or her. In Rome, the promotion from barbarism to *Romanitas* was more an option for the barbarian than a systematic mission for the Roman.

However, not every barbarian was a potential Roman citizen. There were conquered barbarians within Roman borders: those were the groups that could potentially share the benefits of *Romanitas*. But there was also a barbarous exterior of savagery, turbulence, aggression, and lack of organization, “waiting to be conquered” (Goffart 280). This external *barbaricum*, which was defined in more absolute terms, contributed to the self-perception of the Roman Empire as the order that warded off chaos from the civilized world (280).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Although the terms “imperialism” and “colonialism” are often used interchangeably, I use colonialism in a more historically-specific sense, to refer to the process (starting in 1492) by which Western European powers achieved military, economic, political, and cultural hegemony in the Americas, Africa, and a large part of Asia. Although I use the term “imperialism” to talk about all previous great empires in Western history, in the context of modern European history the term “imperialism” applies more to a specific phase or form of colonialism, roughly situated between 1870 and 1914, “when conquest of territory became linked to a systematic search for markets and an expansionist exporting of capital, and also, in an extended sense, to First World interventionist politics in the post-independence era” (Shohat and Stam 15). This period of colonialism is what Eric Hobsbawm has called “the age of empire” and is characterized by an unprecedented concentration of power in the hands of certain European countries (mainly England and France), which came to a climax in the beginning of the twentieth century (Said 1993: 6). This phase ended after World War II with the disintegration of the great colonial structures.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Goffart writes, for example: “It has been suggested that the treaties sometimes made by Rome with neighboring peoples were a step in their “progressive assimilation,” but the existence of any imperial plan or intention to assimilate outsiders is highly doubtful (280).

<sup>40</sup> Even towards the conquered barbarians there is a shift in the Roman attitude, leading to their gradual dehumanization. From the early imperial focus on the inclusion and Romanization of conquered enemies, we encounter increasingly violent visual representations of barbarians in the third and fourth centuries, as depicted on official imperial coins and sculptures (Ferris). In representations of barbarians on imperial coins, the barbarian grows more and more abased and physically smaller from the end of the second century. He is depicted almost as an accessory to the figure of the emperor. The constant presence of barbarians on Roman coins and sculptures suggests their constitutive role

Modern European empires were not focused on warding off the barbarians from the gates of civilization, but aimed at territorial expansion, economic exploitation, and the violent subjugation of the colonized peoples, often coated in the logic of the civilizing mission.<sup>41</sup> As Aimé Césaire argued, the colonizers' mission as "the world's civilizers" relies on turning the other into a barbarian.<sup>42</sup> The idea of the "white man's burden" determined the image of the "barbarian" in the colonies: the colonized subjects were seen as ignorant, infantile, and waiting to receive the merits of civilization.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, they were also perceived as a dangerous threat to civilization. As Shohat and Stam argue, colonialist discourse "oscillates between these two master tropes, alternately positing the colonized as blissfully ignorant, pure, and welcoming on the one hand, and on the other as uncontrollably wild, hysterical, and chaotic, requiring the disciplinary tutelage of the law" (143).

The supposed barbarian nature of the colonized justified deviations from European standards of "civilization" in the colonies. Interestingly, the same double standards in the treatment of "barbarian" enemies are found in Roman authors as well. The historian Ammianus Marcellinus, for example, records an incident in which the Romans violated a truce with a group of Saxons and brutally slaughtered them. Because the Saxons were not equal enemies but a "destructive band of brigands," their slaughter is fully justified from the Roman author's perspective (Heather 234). The construction of the barbarian as wild, dangerous, and brutal functions as a ruse for imperial expansion and violence (Brown 2006: 182).

The gradual decolonization in mid-twentieth century set off a wave of fierce criticism against European colonialism. The anti-colonial movement, with thinkers such as Aimé Césaire (in his seminal polemic text *Discours sur le colonialisme*, 1950) and Frantz Fanon, turned the civilized/barbarian dichotomy on its head. By exposing the barbarism of imperial rule and of the European colonial project, they conferred the tag of the barbarian on the European colonizer.

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in the formation of Roman identity. The gradual diminishing of the barbarian-figure on imperial coins does not only indicate the confidence of Rome vis-a-vis its enemies. It also projects the Empire's fear of an external barbarian threat lurking in the background of the Roman Empire, which these coins try to counter visually (Levi).

<sup>41</sup> When talking about modern European empires, we could distinguish two periods: first, the colonization of the Americas (1492 to the 1830s) and, second, the colonization of Africa, Asia and the Pacific (1730s until after World War II) (Mills 21). Both periods generated strict oppositions between the European (Spanish, British, French) self and colonized others, drawn along diverse lines, such as geography (Europeans versus non-Europeans), religion (Christians versus infidels), culture and progress (civilized versus savages or barbarians), race, and so on (21).

<sup>42</sup> Césaire presented in Kelley 9. As Kelley writes, "[t]he Africans, the Indians, the Asians cannot possess civilization or a culture equal to that of the imperialists, or the latter have no purpose, no justification for the exploitation and domination of the rest of the world" (9).

<sup>43</sup> In colonialist literature, colonialists are presented as heroes who spread civilization to the whole world, just like the Romans or the crusaders did (Noble et al. 890).

### Morality, Values, Manners

Although morality, values, manners, and decorum are all components of a broad definition of “culture,” they are treated separately in this typology due to their specific role in dictating what defines “civilization” or “civilized behavior.” It is thus worth probing what kind of values, attitudes, and behavior have functioned as tickets to civilization—or to barbarism.

In ancient Greek drama, barbarians are distinguished from Greek characters not only by language, but by specific moral qualities, which deviated from “Hellenic virtue”: Greek monogamy is contrasted with barbarian polygamy, promiscuity, and lax morals, and barbarians are often shown as “emotional, stupid, cruel, subservient, or cowardly” (E. Hall 17). Cruelty or savageness as a connotation of the term “barbarian” appears on few occasions in Euripides, but does not become a standardized connotation of the term until the Roman age and the “barbarian invasions” (Kristeva 51). It is, however, significant that in classical Greece the term is already an ethical category.<sup>44</sup>

However, barbarians are not always negatively portrayed in Greek drama. There is sometimes a slight reversal of roles, as in Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, where Andromache attributes “barbarian deeds” to the Greeks (J. Hall 2002: 181). The moral distinction between Greek and barbarian is not absolute: Greeks are not exclusively virtuous, but are also capable of lapsing into barbarism if they exhibit decadent, foolish, cowardly, or cruel behavior. In *Trojan Women*, for instance, although many Trojan characters embody typical barbarian features, it is also suggested that the real barbarity lies with the Greeks, who burn down Troy (Hartog 82).

Moral virtues are key in the definition of “Roman” in relation to “barbarian.” One of the main defining qualities of the civilized Roman was rationality, which could be acquired through education (the study of classical literature produces virtue), ethical stance (control of passions), and living according to the rule of law (*civilitas*) (Heather 236). The image of the barbarian was constructed as the antipode of Roman virtue: barbarians were slaves to their passions and sexual desires; they drank too much; they were unable to form consistent or sensible policies and obey written laws; they lacked the ability to achieve true freedom (*libertas*) (237-38).

The Roman image of the barbarian, which stressed irrationality, wildness, and lack of discipline, influenced the late medieval conception of the “barbarian” as well, as soon as the religious definition of the term started fading (W.R. Jones 397). Even when applied to non-Christian nations, like the Ottomans after the fall of Constantinople, the term did not just have religious, but also moral connotations. It conveyed an image of the Ottoman as

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<sup>44</sup> The figure of the barbarian is particularly foregrounded in Euripides. In his tragedies, the projection of typical barbarian qualities such as foolishness, cowardice, and injustice enhanced the audience’s perception of the opposite virtues—wisdom, courage, and justice—as typically Greek (J. Hall 2002: 177-78).

“the rampaging, rapacious barbarian whose ferocity in battle and whose fanatic hatred for Christianity seemed to place Christian Europe in dire jeopardy” (393).

As a moral category, the “barbarian” was not always negatively tinted. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, northern European humanist circles sought to reassess their “barbarian” Germanic origins (404). Since their ancestors—the destroyers of Rome—were indissolubly linked with the term “barbarian,” northern European scholars were stuck with the term as descriptive of their own past. Thus, they tried to endow the barbarian status of their ancestors with connotations of moral probity, virtue, manliness, vigor, and simplicity. Teutonic scholars glorified the barbarian conqueror of the Roman Empire as the “upright, brave and hardy fellow, unencumbered by an articulate but possibly debilitating past” (406).

Although the moral connotations of the “barbarian” persist throughout Western history, in modernity the concept of civilization becomes particularly associated with a refinement of manners and with social etiquette, both in the English and French contexts (Williams 58).<sup>45</sup> After the Middle Ages, and particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, civilization comes to signify an entire modern social process. In his study *The Civilizing Process (Über den Prozess der Zivilisation, 1939)*, Norbert Elias traces the “civilizing” of manners and personality in Western Europe from the Late Middle Ages as a process whereby the standard of human behavior gradually changes “in the direction of a gradual ‘civilization’” (Elias x). Elias examines how post-medieval European standards regarding violence, sexual behavior, bodily functions, hygiene, table manners, and modes of speaking were subjected to increasingly strict thresholds of inhibition and shame and became part of a system of social demands and prohibitions (x). The new standards that came to signify “civilized behavior” also determined a “threshold of repugnance,” which functions as the line between civilized and barbaric behavior. Elias writes:

The greater or lesser discomfort we feel towards people who discuss or mention their bodily functions more openly [...] is one of the dominant feelings expressed in the judgment “barbaric” or “uncivilized.” Such, then, is the nature of “barbarism and its discontents” or, in more precise and less evaluative terms, the discontent with the different structure of affects, the different standard of repugnance which is still to be found today in many societies which we term “uncivilized.” (51)<sup>46</sup>

In modernity, the negative moral valuation of the barbarian, as opposed to the well-mannered, virtuous, and morally superior civilized subject, has also been subjected to

<sup>45</sup> In the nineteenth century, the term “culture” was also used to denote a “moral force through which individuals might be enabled to improve themselves” (Tony Bennett 66).

<sup>46</sup> According to Elias, the individual civilizing process to which every young person was subjected from early on in his or her life is intertwined with a larger civilizing process over the centuries (the “sociogenesis of our ‘civilization’”) (xi). Thus, in his account, changes in personal behavior or manners and shifts in social structures are interdependent.

critique and reversal. In the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche we encounter a mobilization of the barbarian as a dynamic figure, capable of revitalizing the decaying European civilization. The figure of the “new barbarian” can be situated within Nietzsche’s radical questioning of the foundations of reason, logic, and language in European Enlightenment thought. According to Nietzsche, the belief system of Enlightenment is not based on any truth or fact, but manages to invent the moral or intellectual foundations it needs and cast them as truth. Nietzsche rejects the Enlightenment ideals of progress and reason and sees European civilization as corrupt and declining. In his writings, the barbarian embodies the solution to this decadence (Salter 68).

Nietzsche’s barbarians are not simply non-civilized beings, but individuals with the energy and will to regenerate European culture by disregarding moral inhibitions. In *The Will to Power (Der Wille zur Macht, 1901)*, Nietzsche envisions the barbarians of the twentieth century as “elements capable of the greatest severity towards themselves, and able to guarantee the most enduring will” (1968: 464). He describes the barbarian as belonging to “a species of conquering and ruling natures,” who obeys his natural instincts and gives vital energy back to European society (479). In some of his writings, Nietzsche’s barbarian is equated with his *Übermensch*, the apogee of evolution, and an individual who overcomes moral inhibitions in order to impose his will to power, “creating his own truth and re-investing barbaric characteristics with moral value” (Salter 69). Nevertheless, as Salter argues, despite the radical change in European civilization Nietzsche saw as necessary, in his thought Europe is still “the center for the dissemination of these (new) values and power” (70).

Although in the course of the twentieth century social decorum and manners became less rigid as civilizational standards in Western societies, the association of civilization and barbarism with moral values and modes of behavior holds strong today. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, contemporary civilizational discourse generally tends to project liberal values (such as individualism, compassion, tolerance, or respect) as markers of civilization, while their opposites are ascribed to the (fundamentalist) barbaric other. In the context of globalization and multiculturalism in the West today, “tolerance” emerges as a cardinal civilizational value, although the precise content of this value becomes the object of heated debates. Jay Newman, a philosopher of tolerance, writes on the subject: “Intolerance is the most persistent and the most insidious of all sources of hatred. It is perhaps foremost among the obstacles to civilization, the instruments of barbarism” (3). According to Newman, intolerance can be remedied through education, which he views in terms of a civilizing process.<sup>47</sup> In her critical analysis of the contemporary discourse on tolerance, Brown explains how this discourse constructs the non-Western other as incapable of tolerance and thus as barbaric. In fact, Brown argues, the Western tolerant, enlightened, rational subject only tolerates what

<sup>47</sup> Newman’s argument is also presented in Brown 2006: 183.

has joined, or is capable of joining, modernity. The fanatic, the fundamentalist, and the barbarian are often seen as pre-modern figures, whose sensibility must be remedied by modern tolerant societies (2006: 183-84).

### Humanity, Humanism, and the Human

The concepts of the "human," "humanity" or "humanism" have not only functioned as criteria for defining the barbaric, but also as the opposites of the barbarian and barbarism, just like "civilization." But unlike "civilization," which finds in the "barbarian" its perfect antipode, the notion of the "human" has found its opposites in several categories, such as the "monster," "God" or "the divine," the "mechanical" or the "technological," and the "animal."<sup>48</sup> "Humanity" can be a synonym for "mankind" or the "human race," but it can also refer to "human nature," and, by extension, to virtues or states of being that typify this nature. The opposite of "humanity" or the "human" is thus determined according to the different views on what constitutes "humanity" as "the essence of man" (Heidegger 1998: 244). Thus, as Martin Heidegger observes in his 1947 "Letter on Humanism," while Marx finds "man's humanity" in the notion of society, Christianity views humanity in contradistinction to *Deitas* (244).

In the Roman Republic, *homo humanus* was opposed to *homo barbarus*. *Homo humanus*, according to Heidegger, "means the Romans, who exalted and honored Roman *virtus* through the 'embodiment' of the *paideia* [education] taken over from the Greeks" (244). Thus, *humanitas* in this context means a specific kind of education leading to virtue, while "barbarian" is someone excluded from this educational process. *Homo humanus* is here another term for *homo romanus*, and *humanitas* another term for *Romanitas*. But Roman literature and education were based on Greek, and the (educated) Roman could not deny that the *humanitas* of the Greeks distinguished him from the "*barbarae nationes*" (Balsdon 35). This notion of *humanitas* as *Romanitas* in opposition to the *homo barbarus* is found in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance (Heidegger 1998: 244). However, the content of the "barbarian" changes in this new context: it represents the "supposed barbarism of gothic Scholasticism in the Middle Ages," which is contrasted to the *humanitas* of the Greek civilization, as interpreted and filtered through Roman (and Renaissance) humanism (244).

In certain contexts, the barbarian is completely excluded from the realm of humanity, here defined as "mankind." The barbarian has often figured as an animal disguised in human form. In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben makes a distinction between the production of the outside of the "human" in "modern" and "earlier" times. While in modern times the inhuman is produced "by animalizing the human," in earlier times the "non-man" is brought forth through the "humanization of an animal": "the

<sup>48</sup> For the relation and opposition between "human" and "animal" see Giorgio Agamben's study *The Open: Man and Animal* (2002).



man-ape, the *enfant sauvage* or *Homo ferus*, but also and most of all the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form" (2002: 37).<sup>49</sup> Here, the barbarian's "animal nature," which excludes him or her from humanity, is ascribed to horrifying appearance, different habitat, and undomesticated, savage behavior.

In the context of European colonialism, the distinction between civilized and barbarians is often reformulated as a distinction between human and animal. The so-called "Age of Discovery," when Spain and Portugal began colonizing new lands in the late-fifteenth century, occasions unique encounters between European civilization and the utterly foreign civilizations of these lands. These encounters generated a series of new distinctions, classifications, and debates in Europe about the status of these "others."<sup>50</sup> Not only were the "others" of the colonies considered as lesser, inferior human beings, but they were sometimes also denied a human status and treated as beasts. Africans and Asians were put on display all around Europe in anthropological-zoological exhibits or "freak shows" (Shohat and Stam 108). Academic and popular debates were held regarding the humanity of non-white races (Mills 20). According to Jean-Paul Sartre, the world during colonialism was divided in "men" and "natives" (Sartre qtd in Mills 20). European humanism, as Charles W. Mills puts it, "usually meant that only Europeans were human" (27).

A recent definition of the barbarian in relation to humanity can be found in Tzvetan Todorov's *La peur des barbares* (2008). As I laid out in Chapter Two, Todorov proposes a definition of the barbarian as someone who does not acknowledge the humanity of others (33). Although by "humanity" Todorov means "human nature," his definition is also invested with moral and ethical undertones: acknowledging the humanity of others, and thus respecting them and refraining from violence against them, is what distinguishes the "civilized" from the "barbarian." In Todorov's definition, humanity is intertwined with civilization: it poses as its distinctive feature and as the only valid criterion for designating barbarians and recognizing barbaric behavior.

## Religion

With the advent of Christianity in the Roman Empire, religion becomes a defining factor in the construction of the barbarian. As the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, assumes power, Christianity rises as a powerful force and invites a serious rethinking of the categories of self-definition (Miles 10). Late antique definitions of "Roman," "Greek," "barbarian," "Christian," and "pagan" are, as Richard Miles notes, complex, unstable,

<sup>49</sup> Agamben's account shows that although the barbarian functions as the opposite of the human, he or she is certainly not the only candidate for this position. The complex genealogy of the concepts of the human, humanity, and humanism, and the precise ways by which they produce their outside, exceed the scope of this study.

<sup>50</sup> For one of many analyses of encounters between European civilization and indigenous civilizations of America, and the cultural confrontations to which these encounters led, see Todorov's *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (1984).

and “deeply problematic,” because each term “has a myriad of potentially different and often contradictory meanings” (10).<sup>51</sup>

In late antiquity, the two religious and philosophical codes of Christianity and Hellenism are in tension in their fight for domination. For Christians, Greek or Greek-educated people signified the barbarian other who does not accept the true faith. But for those who identified themselves as culturally Greek (including Romans), it was the Christians, regardless of origin or education, who were seen as barbarians, because they “had rejected Hellenism for barbarian scriptures” (G. Clark 122). Porphyry of Tyre, for example, a Pheonician neoplatonic philosopher of the late-third century and a great polemic of Christianity, is reported to have said the following about a Greek-educated man who “went” barbarian: “Origen, a Greek educated in Greek literature, made straight for *barbarism*, putting himself and his literary training on the market; he lived like a Christian, lawlessly, but thought like a Greek about the divine and about things in general.”<sup>52</sup> This statement not only demonstrates the identification of Christianity with barbarism by Greek-educated philosophers, but is also a sign of the confusion and crisis around identity in late antiquity. The subject of the statement, Origen, seems to be torn between Greek and Christian affiliations, which were both perceived either as the domain of the self or of barbarism, depending on perspective.

As a result of the so-called “barbarian invasions” and the disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West, the distinction between *Romanitas* and barbarism is redefined primarily on the basis of religion. By the end of the seventh century, the “barbarian” in Western Europe is usually the pagan or (Arian) heretic, as opposed to the (Catholic) Christian (Heather 245). During the Middle Ages, the term “barbarian” generally captured the “other” of Christendom. However, according to W.R. Jones, for a long time in medieval Europe the term “barbarian” had not been applied to Muslim enemies, because the primary stereotype of the medieval barbarian was the pagan. Muslim warriors were often depicted as the “chivalric counterparts of Christian knights”—not as barbarian savages. Even during the crusades, the term was only applied to Muslims on few occasions, where it served as a generic synonym for the non-Christian (W.R. Jones 392-93). Only after the fifteenth century and the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans did the word start to be used for the Muslim “antagonists of Christian Europe” (393). However, it is worth noting that from the perspective of the Orthodox Christian writers of Constantinople, the designation “barbarian” was systematically used for the late Roman Emperors.

<sup>51</sup> Useful studies on the “barbarian” in late antiquity, in the Byzantine Empire, and in the Middle Ages, especially in relation to religion, are Walter Goffart’s “Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians” (1981), Richard Miles’s and Peter Heather’s essays in the volume *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (1999), and E.D. Digeser’s “Lactantius, Porphyry, and the Debate over Religious Toleration” (1998).

<sup>52</sup> This quote is by Eusebius, one of Porphyry’s great adversaries, who here indignantly reports what he claims were Porphyry’s own words (G. Clark 127). Porphyry’s work was banned and burned by Constantine and other emperors (Digeser 130).

Throughout the Middle Ages, these Byzantine writers viewed the West as “barbarian,” lost to “barbarian rulers.”<sup>53</sup>

In the later Middle Ages, the term’s use as a religious category receded (394). From the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the “other” of Europe ceases to be predominantly defined in religious terms (Salter 19). This can be attributed to the gradual secularization of Western European life. Europeans stop thinking about their lives in exclusively religious terms and acquire confidence in the ability of human beings to determine “truth” and “falsehood” for themselves. At the same time, the encounter of Europeans with the “others” of the “New World” brought cultural and racial standards for defining the barbarian more to the foreground.

Nevertheless, religion continued to occupy an important place in the ideological apparatus of early European colonialism, especially in the colonization of the Americas. The material exploitation of the conquered people in the Americas was often legitimized on religious grounds. The rationale behind their colonization and exploitation was that if the “New World” had been left to its original inhabitants, barbarism and idolatry would have triumphed (Shohat and Stam 70). Converting the natives to Christianity would lead to their salvation. But whether or not the “barbarians” of the Americas could, in fact, be converted was an object of heated debate in Europe. Many Spaniards supported the idea that the natives of the New World were incapable of receiving faith. This reasoning enabled their lack of constraint in the violent treatment of the natives. In 1537, Pope Paul III issued a Bull that condemned as heretical the opinion that the American Indians could not receive the Christian faith, although this had a very limited effect on the behavior of the “conquistadores” (Jahoda 16). While conversion of the infidels to Christianity served as justification for the conquest of their land, the rejection of the Christian message by the natives was proof of bestial irrationality and barbarism, and thus legitimized violent intervention (Mills 22).

At the time of the conquest of the “New World,” Christian Europe also had its internal barbarian others. The Jews were among the most common victims of religious demonization and stereotyping. When the colonization of the “New World” started, the religious othering already taking place on European ground was exported and applied to the indigenous “infidels” of America (Shohat and Stam 60). The Jew and the non-European barbarian were subjected to similar characterizations. Thus, a discourse of intra-European religious discrimination against Jews was transfigured into colonial racism (60).

With the secularization of Europe, and especially during the Enlightenment, religion receded as a civilizational standard, giving its place to race in the divide between Europeans and barbarians (Mills 23). However, today religion has made a comeback in the rhetoric on civilization and barbarism. Since the 1990s religion has grown to be one of the key

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<sup>53</sup> For a detailed exploration of this perception of the West as barbarian by Byzantine writers, see Goffart (1981); see also the entry “βάρβαρος” in Liddell and Scott.

components in the way global divisions and conflicts are perceived. In Western political rhetoric, the “new barbarian” is often associated with the religion of Islam, which is seen as feeding violence and barbarism. Moreover, the religious vocabulary of “good versus evil” has been employed in Western political rhetoric after September 11, 2001, in order to provide legitimation for military action against the “forces of evil” embodied by terrorists and those who support them.

### Ethnicity and Race

Although the categories of race and ethnicity are embedded in material structures and power-relations, in history they are often assumed to refer to natural and biologically predetermined characteristics.<sup>54</sup> As such, they provide a supposedly “natural” basis for hierarchical distinctions—a basis complemented by other standards, such as physiological similarity, shared geographical origin, culture, religion, values, political institutions, and language (E. Hall 4). If we compare race with ethnicity, race is a category into which one is supposed to be born, while ethnicity is usually seen as an active affiliation, resulting from social and cultural identification with a specific group.<sup>55</sup> But the two categories are interrelated. In the nineteenth century, for example, ethnic distinctions became part of a racial discourse, which viewed them in terms of biological difference (Williams 214). In modern history, ethnic distinctions are often made through the category of the “nation.” The two words are in fact synonyms: nation translates the Greek “ethnos.” But if ethnicity is usually understood as a “quasi-primordial collective sense of shared descent and distinct cultural traditions,” “nation”—at least by the end of the eighteenth century—acquires a definition that is political at its basis: “a union of individuals governed by one law, and represented by the same law-making assembly.”<sup>56</sup>

Ethnicity is a relatively constant basis for the distinction between “us” and “them” in Western history, although it is not privileged equally in every context. According to Edith Hall, the polarity between Greek and barbarian in fifth-century BCE Greece had an ethnic basis, as the term “barbarian” embraced those who did not share the Greek ethnicity (4).<sup>57</sup> The Persian Wars played a decisive role shaping the ethnocentric discourse on Greeks and barbarians by giving the barbarian a face and a territory: that of a Persian, whose domain was Asia (Hartog 81, 84). Confronted with the Persian threat, the Greeks sought to emphasize unifying factors that would set aside the differences among Greek city-

<sup>54</sup> For this argument with regard to “race,” see Shohat and Stam 18-19.

<sup>55</sup> According to Manning Marable, race is a passive affiliation, as opposed to ethnicity (Marable presented in Shohat and Stam 20).

<sup>56</sup> For the definition of ethnicity, see Murji 112; for the definition of “nation” see Abbé Sieyès (1789) qtd in Hindess 232. Nation does not exclusively denote a political formation, but can also mean “an aggregate of people associated with each other by common descent or history” (Hindess 233).

<sup>57</sup> In archaic literature, the sense of a Greek collective identity was overshadowed by an identity attached to individual city-states (E. Hall 54).

states and would define Greekness in opposition to non-Greek nations. By constructing the “barbarian” as the non-Greek (particularly the Persian), the heterogeneity of the Greeks themselves “could begin to appear more uniform by contrast with the more alien practices of others” (J.M. Hall 1995: 92-93).<sup>58</sup>

In ancient Greece, race (i.e., “common blood”) was not a stable criterion in the ethnic determination of “Greekness,” because Greeks had varied ethnic composition, and, according to some ancient historians, “barbarian” origins (Munson 15). However, in some fifth-century authors the distinction between Greeks and barbarians becomes essentialized and acquires racial (and, from a contemporary perspective, racist) connotations. In Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia tells her mother: “it is right that Hellenes should rule over barbarians and not barbarians over Hellenes, for they are slaves while we are free” (qtd in J.M. Hall 2002: 180; lines 1400-02). As Benjamin Isaac argues, Iphigenia’s words assert the natural superiority of Greeks over barbarians, used for the doctrine of imperialism, which in its turn finds justification in the idea of natural slavery (278). In *Politics*, Aristotle also propagates the distinction between *natural* slaves (the barbarians) and *naturally* free men (Long 150).<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, there are also contestations of the “natural” (racial or ethnic) basis of Hellenic identity.<sup>60</sup> In *Statesman*, Plato questions the “natural” basis of division between Greeks and barbarians. It is worth quoting the relevant passage:<sup>61</sup>

just as if some one who wanted to divide the human race, were to divide them after the fashion which prevails in this part of the world; here they cut off the Hellenes as one species, and all the other species of mankind, which are innumerable, and have no ties or common language, they include under the single name of “barbarians,” and because they have one name they are supposed to be of one species also. Or suppose that in dividing numbers you were to cut off ten thousand from all the rest, and make of them one species, comprehending the rest under another separate name, you might say that here too was a single class, because you had given it a

<sup>58</sup> However, as Jonathan Hall notes, the notion of *Panhellenism* (the ideal of the Greeks as a unified *ethnos*) and, accordingly, the perception of all foreign peoples as a collective genus, was specific to Athenian rhetoric (2002: 205, 208). The opposition between Greek and barbarian in Athens was reinforced through ethnic stereotyping. Thus, the purported “facts” that “Thracians were boors, Egyptians charlatans, and Phrygians effeminate cowards” were consistently integrated in Athenian drama, which provided “cultural authorization” for perpetuating these stereotypes (E. Hall 103). Comedy also magnified ethnic stereotypes for comic effects (Long 156). Moors, for example, were untrustworthy, Dalmatians were ferocious, Cretans were liars, Persians were ridiculed for their luxury and softness, Lydians for their proclivity to sexual pleasure, and Phrygians for their cowardice (140). Northern nations were generally depicted as wild, coarse, and ferocious races, whereas Asian nations were softer and servile. Situated between East and North, the Greeks believed they occupied the golden middle and had the most balanced development (141-43).

<sup>59</sup> For more on Aristotle’s views on this, see “Class” in this chapter.

<sup>60</sup> Herodotus also questions Hellenicity as resting on a homogeneous ethnicity (J.M. Hall 2002: 190-91). In his conception of Hellenicity, cultural criteria (including language and religion) are promoted “to the same level as kinship” (193).

<sup>61</sup> Plato’s views are expressed through the voice of the “Stranger” in the dialogue.

single name. Whereas you would make a much better and more equal and artistic classification of numbers, if you divided them into odd and even; or of the human species, if you divided them into male and female; and only separated off Lydians or Phrygians, or any other tribe, and arrayed them against the rest of the world, when you could no longer make a division into parts which were also classes. (540; 262a-263a)

In this passage, Plato underscores the arbitrariness of the generic categorization “barbarians,” which he finds to be dependent on the eye of the beholder. The opposition Greek/barbarian does not correspond to a natural division of the world. In fact, the passage suggests that all ethnic divisions are artificially construed and are thus philosophically unsound.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the conflicting views on the matter, ethnicity remained a dominant basis for the Greek/barbarian antithesis in classical Greece. However, in late antiquity and particularly in the Hellenistic period, ethnicity plays a very limited role in the definition of the barbarian, overshadowed by the cosmopolitan and multicultural ideals of the period. In Roman times, as Heather argues, there was no “overriding ethnic content” to *Romanitas*, since in principle every individual could be educated into becoming “Roman” (241). Nevertheless, the term “barbarian” still applied collectively to non-Roman nations (*barbarae nationes*) and in that sense it was also an ethnic category. According to Liddell and Scott’s *Lexicon*, in the beginning of the Roman Empire “barbarian” was used for all non-Roman nations who had not received Greco-Roman education. But as the Roman Empire grew and annexed more people and lands, the term was limited to the Teutonic nations. Although the definition of the barbarian in the Roman Republic underwent a few shifts, it was a generalization premised on a flawed homogenized perception of the Teutonic nations (Goffart 277-78). As Goffart argues, “barbarian” as a collective term for these people expresses a Greco-Roman point of view. In fact, these people were “diverse and disunited,” with no “collective mind or collective aspirations” (285).

The ascription of a unified Germanic identity to the “barbarians” of Rome by modern historians can be ascribed to the desire of modern Germans to construct a coherent national account of their past (279). Notably, Northern European humanist scholars in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries embraced the term “barbarian” for their Germanic ancestors and thus also for their own national determination (W.R. Jones 404). A surprising contribution to the German national self-determination—performed not against, but through the use of the term “barbarian”—comes from the historians of Constantinople. Whereas historians in the Byzantine Empire portrayed past Roman emperors in a negative light, they praised the “barbarians” (the Germanic nations) and their heroic leaders (303).

<sup>62</sup> Despite Plato’s relativism in this passage, his other writings contain contradictions on this matter, which have led commentators to adopt different interpretations of his position. According to Julius Jüthner, for instance, Plato did maintain a belief in racial purity, which created an unbridgeable gap between Greeks and barbarians (Jüthner presented in J.M. Hall 2002: 213).

Authors in Constantinople even tried to construct a coherent ethnic context and history for the Germanic “barbarians”—a construction that would provide a foundation for the idea of a unified Germanic identity (Goffart 303-04).

But the “barbarian invaders” of Rome were not consistently seen as a positive signifier in the construction of modern German national consciousness. Hegel’s views on the origins of the German nation in *The Philosophy of History* (1837) are revealing in this respect.<sup>63</sup> The origins of the German world were located in the migration into the central European forests, but according to Hegel this migratory origin represented a barbarian state. As John Noyes argues, the barbarian origins of the Germanic nation are “only viewed in a positive light where their tendency is sedentary.”<sup>64</sup> Hegel makes a distinction “between the German nations who remained in their ancient habitations and those who spread themselves over the Roman Empire, and mingled with the conquered peoples” (Hegel 348). He thus distinguishes between two branches of German nations, which we may call “the nomadic and the sedentary” (Noyes). After the Roman Empire was conquered by the “barbarians,” according to Hegel, the initial contrast between the civilized Romans and the barbarian victors was eventually “terminated in the hybrid character of the new nations” consequently formed (Hegel 349). These hybrid nations became the Romanic nations—Portugal Spain, Italy, and France (349). As opposed to these barbarians, the other “*German-speaking* nations” (from which the modern Germans formed) “maintained a consistent tone of uninterrupted fidelity to native character” (349). “*Germany Proper*,” Hegel writes, “kept itself pure from any admixture” (349). Hegel views ethnic hybridization as a sign of degeneration. Therefore, the “barbarian invaders” of Rome—the migratory German nations—are not the real ancestors of the modern Germans. This is perhaps why Hegel does not hesitate to use the term “barbarians” for these migratory ancient Germans. For Hegel, “nation” is not just a social and political formation, but also a racial affiliation, and thus needs to be kept pure from “barbarizations.”

The rise of nation-states in modern history made “nation” an important factor in the self-determination of Europeans. Nevertheless, the civilized/barbarian distinction in modern Europe, and especially in the context of colonialism, is particularly marked by the establishment of *race* as a civilizational standard. With the rise of the Enlightenment, race takes the place of religion in the definition of the “barbarian.” The belief of Europeans in their racial superiority vis-à-vis native Americans and Africans provided a legitimation for the enslavement and exploitation of those natives; at the same time such practices would be condemned within Europe, especially if directed towards members of the “superior race.”<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* was published posthumously (1837).

<sup>64</sup> Noyes’s article “Hegel and the Fate of Negativity After Empire” is published online without page numbers.

<sup>65</sup> The following statement by the French imperial theorist Jules Harmand (1845-1921) illustrates this point:

Despite their national (or other) differentiation, Western Europeans appeared quite similar when they compared themselves to non-European races. As Lisa Lowe argues, nineteenth-century Orientalism “supported a coherent notion of the ‘nation’—the ‘one’—while subsuming and veiling a variety of differences in the figuration of the Orient as Other” (78). Therefore, constructing the Orient as Europe’s great Other helped foster the national identity and racial superiority of Western European nations. Nevertheless, the term “barbarian,” along with other derogatory terms, also came to be applied to Europe’s internal others. There were “*intra*-European varieties of racism,” directed against “borderline” European nations or ethnic groups—“white people with a question-mark”—such as the Irish, Slavs, Mediterranean peoples, Romany, and the Jews (Mills 78-79).

In the nineteenth century, *biological* racism was established and sanctioned by scientific discourses. It was accompanied by an obsession for classifications, taxonomies, and a general codification of difference. Socioeconomic distinctions among ethnic groups, classes, and sexes were redefined as an epiphenomenon of biology. Nineteenth-century “pure blood” theories foreclosed the possibility of conversion of the other and led to colonial exterminations. Within European borders, these racial theories fed the ideology that led to the Jewish genocide by the German Nazis (Shohat and Stam 91). Fascism, especially the form it took in Hitler’s Germany, was motivated by the utopian dream of a return to a “mythical past of national-racial purity” (Neilson 89). The “other” of the superior race was constructed as barbarian and inhuman, but also as a virus or plague, containing the threat of “barbarization” of the “pure race.”

## Class

“Class” as an axis of social stratification is a concept of modernity, linked to the capitalist system. Nevertheless, several scholars have viewed the distinction between Greeks and barbarians in classical Greece in terms of class. Edith Hall, for example, argues that the Greek perception of barbarians as inferior or slavish was cultivated partly because most slaves in fifth century Athens were non-Greek: a class division along ethnic lines (2).

In Aristotle we find a class division along natural (and partly ethical) lines. In the first book of the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that some people are meant for slavery: “there are species in which a distinction is already marked, immediately at birth, between those of its members who are intended for being ruled and those who are intended to rule” (15; 1254.17). Those destined for slavery lack self-control and need the protection and

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Expansion by conquest, however necessary, seems especially unjust and disturbing to the conscience of democracies [...] But to transpose democratic institutions into such a setting is aberrant nonsense. The subject people are not and cannot become citizens in the democratic sense of the term [...] It is necessary, then, to accept as a principle and point of departure the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilization, and that we belong to the superior race and civilization [...] The basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority.” (qtd in Mills 25)



restraint their master offers them. The features of the slave-figure in Aristotle—servility, weakness of character, inability for self-governance—correspond to features the Greeks generally attributed to “barbarians” of Asia, and especially the Persians. In this sense, the “barbarian” in the Greek context acquires class undertones *avant la lettre*. As Shohat and Stam argue, the rationale Aristotle provided in favor of slavery was not based on racial criteria, but on “class as a rationale for privilege” (78).

Later, colonialism used this class rationale to tag entire societies as “slave nations” meant to be ruled (78). But in modern European history, the distinction between civilization and barbarism was also mobilized in class distinctions within European nations (Salter 16). During the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term “barbarian” was applied to “an underclass of disenfranchised, newly urbanized European peasants”—an application that expressed the fears of the middle and upper classes (26). The increasing gap between classes in Europe led to a conception of civilization as “the achievement of aristocratic races” (Tziouvas 179). In this context, there is an intertwinement of the discourses of class and race. In the nineteenth century, the barbarism and moral degradation of “the British urban poor,” as Ann Stoler argues, was expressed through the use of racial metaphors, drawn from the “savage tribes” of the colonies (125). The interpenetration of race and class discourses is eloquently described by British historian Victor Kiernan:

In innumerable ways his [the European gentleman’s] attitude to his own “lower orders” was identical with that of Europe to the “lesser breeds.” Discontented native in the colonies, labour agitator in the mills, were the same serpent in alternate disguise. Much of the talk about the *barbarism* or darkness of the outer world, which it was Europe’s mission to rout, was a transmuted fear of the masses at home. (Kiernan qtd in Stoler 125-26, emphasis added)

The poor classes at home and the primitive barbarians of the colonies were drawn together as the “dangerous classes” that threatened British bourgeois domesticity (126).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Remarkably, in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), the English cultural critic Matthew Arnold uses the term “barbarian” as a positive signifier to refer to the aristocratic classes. He contends that all the qualities of the barbarians have been inherited by the aristocracy in his present-day England. He views the barbarians as a source of life and vigor for Europe, and as the true ancestors of the British:

The Barbarians, to whom we all owe so much, and who reinvigorated and renewed our worn-out Europe, had, as is well-known, eminent merits; and in this country, where we are for the most part sprung from the Barbarians, we have never had the prejudice against them which prevails among the races of Latin origin. (100)

Among the merits and qualities he ascribes to the barbarians (and thus to English aristocracy as well) are personal liberty and individualism, the care for the body and for manly exercises, vigor, good looks, chivalry, self-confidence, “high spirit,” and “choice manners.” The only flaw he finds with the barbarian disposition lies in the fact that they have an “exterior culture,” not much concerned with the “powers of thought and feeling” (101).

The notion of class was also mobilized for pinpointing barbarism within European civilization. The strict class structure of Europe and the inequalities it produced—with the largest part of the population working for the well-being of the few—was treated by philosophers and political thinkers as one of the main ills of civilization. The injustice of class distinctions was treated by many Enlightenment thinkers as one of the main reasons why European societies are more barbaric than tribal societies. Already in 1580, Michel de Montaigne in his essay “On Cannibals” (“Des Cannibales”) condemns the barbarism of class in Europe by contrasting it with an indigenous perspective in order to illustrate how unnatural the European class system appears from an external viewpoint:

They [the Tupinamba] said [...] that they had noticed among us some men gorged to the full with things of every sort while their other halves were beggars at their doors, emaciated with hunger and poverty. They found it strange that these poverty-stricken halves should suffer such injustice, and that they did not take the others by the throat or set fire to their houses. (119)

In the twentieth century, French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss claimed that he received similar remarks about class inequality from the Brazilian Indians (Shohat and Stam 97).

With Karl Marx, the tag of barbarism is conferred on the capitalist system of production, which turns workers into the victims of its barbarism. In “Estranged Labour” (1844), Marx lays out how capitalism alienates and enslaves workers to their objects of production. He sees a necessary connection between civilization and barbarism in the relation between the worker and the product of labor in capitalism: the more “civilization” society produces, the more barbarous it becomes for the ones who produce, because workers become entirely alienated from the product and process of production, as well as from their own life-activity (Marx 76). With capitalism, the life activity of the worker—what Marx calls “species-life” and what distinguishes man from other animals—becomes just a means for the worker’s physical existence. “[T]he more the worker produces,” Marx writes, “the less he has to consume; [...] the more civilized his object, the more barbarous the worker; the more powerful the work, the more powerless the worker.” And while machines often replace human labor, some of the workers are cast “back into barbarous forms of labor” or turned into machines themselves (72). The barbarism of the capitalist system ironically turns the worker into less-than-human—not a barbarian, but a machine.

Although class is not one of the most prevalent standards defining barbarism and civilization, it is often an implicit factor in civilizational discourse. Thus, class is “silently” involved in one of the definitions of the “barbarian.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the barbarian is “an uncultured person, or one who has no sympathy for literary culture.” This definition hides two civilizational standards. The explicit standard here is culture, and specifically an elevated form of culture and love for the *belles-lettres*. The underlying standard is class. In this definition, civilization becomes implicitly identified

with high European culture, which is the privilege of a social and cultural elite—an elite that finds its members among the bourgeois and the upper European classes.<sup>67</sup>

## Gender

The figure of the barbarian has often been cast in gendered and sexualized terms. In Western imagination, barbarians are usually invested with features of masculinity and virility, which enhance their supposed violent and unrestrained nature, and solidify their perception as a threat to civilization. The blueprints for this image of the barbarian can be traced back to (textual and visual) representations of the Germanic warrior-nations that invaded Rome. Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written in the late eighteenth century, is a classic source of masculine barbarian imagery, feeding the European imagination with images of barbarian hordes at the gates of Rome, threatening the borders of civilization.

Such imagery has sparked a wide range of fictionalizations of the barbarian warrior. "Conan the barbarian" is probably the most famous barbarian in popular fiction. Conan was created by the Texan writer Robert E. Howard in 1932 for a series of fantasy stories. His long-standing popularity has made him a protagonist in movies such as "Conan the Barbarian" (1982) and "Conan the Destroyer" (1984), as well as in television series, comic books, fantasy fiction, video games, and role-playing games. Conan is "an icon of thick-muscled, sword-wielding manhood" (Miller).<sup>68</sup> Although his adventures are usually set in a mythical age, he is often depicted as Germanic-looking—an allusion to the Germanic "barbarians" of the late Roman period. As John Miller writes, Conan "is no knight in shining armor who piously obeys a code of chivalry." Rather, he "has little patience for social conventions he doesn't understand." As Howard writes in one of his Conan tales, "[t]he warm intimacies of small, kindly things, the sentiments and delicious trivialities that make up so much of civilized men's lives were meaningless to him."<sup>69</sup> Conan "feels no responsibility to be anything other than his authentic, barbaric self" (Miller). In Conan's words, "I live, I burn with life, I love, I slay, and am content."<sup>70</sup>

Despite the heavy doses of masculinity with which the barbarian figure has been injected, women have also claimed this trope. If male barbarians tend to be depicted as hyper-masculine, female barbarians are shown as "hyper-feminine" and "over-sexualized" (Salter 55). Nevertheless, female barbarians also assume male features or roles. In ancient Greek tragedy, the opposition between Greek and barbarian is often presented as analogous to that between man and woman.<sup>71</sup> In many cases, transgressive

<sup>67</sup> Brown also quotes and comments on this definition (2006: 252).

<sup>68</sup> John Miller's piece "From Pen to Sword" is published online without page numbers.

<sup>69</sup> The quote is from "Beyond the Black River" (Howard qtd in Miller 2006).

<sup>70</sup> The quote is from "Queen of the Black Coast" (Howard qtd in Miller 2006).

<sup>71</sup> E. Hall makes this point in her discussion of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (205-06).

female characters in Greek tragedy either are actual barbarians (foreign, non-Greek) or their transgression is considered as an endorsement of barbarian customs (E. Hall 202). The figure of Clytaemnestra in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* belongs to the latter category. The woman who murdered her husband, king Agamemnon, as an act of revenge for the sacrifice of their daughter, Iphigenia, is one of the most dominant women in tragedy (204). Clytaemnestra is often referred to as a "manly woman" (205). Her masculinity is also pronounced through the attitude of her weak-willed husband, who, in bowing to her lavish demands and wishes, is disavowing Greek values and resorting to barbarian decadence. As Hall argues, this perversion of the natural order regarding man-woman roles, with the woman taking the upper hand, could only be associated with the barbarian (Persian) world (205). This is also made clear in Agamemnon's words, as he tries to resist the decadence to which Clytaemnestra draws him: "do not pamper me like a woman nor grovel before me like some barbarian with wide-mouthed acclaim, and do not bring down envy in my path by strewing it with fabrics" (qtd in E. Hall 206; lines 918-22). Femininity, luxury, excess, hubris, and barbarism are "drawn into the same semantic complex as interconnected aspects of all that Greek manhood should shun" (206).

Associations between barbarians and femininity also pervade Orientalist discourses and the context of European colonialism. European descriptions of Asian women in the colonies contributed to the construction of a female barbarian figure, typified by lax morals, sexual promiscuity, deceptive seductiveness, the threat of racial or genetic contamination, and so on.<sup>72</sup> But the ways gender and sexuality are mobilized in the construction of the barbarian in the colonial context are far from stable. For example, while African "barbarians" were often depicted as masculine, Asian "barbarians" tend to be portrayed in feminine terms (Salter 55). Moreover, feminine features were not only attributed to women in the colonies, but also to the Orient itself. As Anne McClintock argues in *Imperial Leather*, France and Britain posed as masculine nations, while the colonies were effeminized (54-55). The Orient was constructed as a female space, while Europe—the domain of civilization—was cast in masculine terms. In a representational system that, according to Said, finds its beginnings in classical Greece, the Orient appears as defeated, excessive, irrational, dangerous, mysterious, queer, and weak, while Europe is powerful, articulate, mature, rational, or "capable of holding real values" (Said 2003: 40, 45, 49, 57, 103). European civilization is endowed with a stereotypically male sexuality. Its superiority gives civilization the right to penetrate, decipher, and give meaning to the female Asian mystery.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the gendering of the barbarian can be seen as a mirror for the gendering of Europe vis-à-vis the East (Salter 55).

<sup>72</sup> For the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race in the colonies, see Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995) and Ann Stoler's *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995).

<sup>73</sup> For the sexual metaphors of penetration and conquest, which were used to describe the attitude of Westerners vis-à-vis the Orient, see also Said 2003: 44.

A noteworthy reversal of the association between civilization and male dominance takes place in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century American feminists. Their feminist discourse tried to reshape traditional valuations of Western patriarchal societies by drawing from the discourse of barbarism and civilization. Nineteenth-century activists for women's rights turned to native American societies, which they viewed as *gynocratic*, because they were marked by equal gender relations and a social system more just to women (Grinde and Johansen 226-27). In the eyes of these feminists, native American societies—traditionally viewed as “barbarian” from a European perspective—were exemplars of civilization. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton said in an address to the National Council of Women in 1891, “our barbarian ancestors seem to have had a higher degree of justice to women than American men in the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (Stanton qtd in Grinde and Johansen 227).

In this reversal of the barbarism/civilization opposition, women appear closer to civilization than men, because male dominated societies are immersed in barbarism and savagery. Feminists like Matilda Joslyn Gage, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others, turned away from “civilized” European history, and found inspiration in “barbarian” (native) societies. In their rhetoric, gender equality and equal participation in politics and decision-making are presented as the ticket for the passage from savagery and barbarism to true civilization.<sup>74</sup> But although these feminists deployed the barbarism/civilization discourse in order to challenge male dominance, one must also consider that the patriarchal structures they were trying to overthrow were deeply inscribed in the same discourse.

## Progress

Contrary to more descriptive terms such as “change” or “development,” progress is an axiological and normative concept (Niiniluoto).<sup>75</sup> The concept generally refers to the idea that humanity can gradually become better in various domains such as technology, science, standard of living, modernization, and freedom. In particular, the belief in progress as the cornerstone of the European civilization can be attributed to Enlightenment philosophy.

Progressive or evolutionary models often placed barbarism or the barbarian on a scale of development: the barbarian was not just the opposite of the civilized, but an earlier stage in a course that usually ended with the European civilization as the

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<sup>74</sup> A newspaper print from May 16, 1914 shows Indian women observing three prominent women activists leading a parade of women. Under the print we read:

“Savagery to Civilization”

We, the women of the Iroquois  
Own the Land, the Lodge, the Children  
Ours is the right to adoption, life or death;  
Ours is the right to raise up and depose chiefs;  
[...]

Our lives are valued again as high as man's. (qtd in Grinde and Johansen 233)

<sup>75</sup> Niiniluoto's article on “Scientific Progress” is published online without page numbers.

apogee of human progress.<sup>76</sup> Thus, under “progress” I look at various (pseudo)scientific, philosophical, or social models, in which “barbarism” or the “barbarian” represent a stage in a process toward a higher civilized state. The criteria on which such models are based range from technique, modes of production, economic system, and culture, to geography, race, and biology.

Although progress is a modern concept, several pre-modern theories have mobilized the “barbarian” in attempt to categorize societies based on stages of development. The Greek historian Thucydides (460–395 BCE), for example, traces the origins of the Greeks of his time in barbarian groups. His view implies an evolutionary model, according to which barbarians represent a more primitive stage of human development, and thus belong to another temporality. Another Greek historian, Hecataeus of Miletus (550–476 BCE), reports that Greece had been inhabited by barbarians in the past. The views of both historians hold a double implication. First, since Greeks emerged from barbarian nations, Hellenicity was something that could be acquired through apprenticeship and was not dependent on blood. Second, barbarism and Hellenicity were conceived in terms of a temporal succession: first there were barbarians, who then progressed to Hellenicity. Of course, Thucydides also observes that there is “a current Barbarian world.” Thus, there are barbarians who became Greek, and barbarians who remained barbarians.<sup>77</sup>

Other theories consider the evolvment toward civilization as premised on *manners* and *social behavior*. The twelfth-century Anglo-Welsh author Gerald of Wales, for instance, uses the term “barbarians” for the Irish, because he perceives their society as less advanced. What he finds barbaric are their uncultivated manners and attitude, their ignorance, pastoralism, isolation from advanced nations, and marginalized way of life (W.R. Jones 396).

While earlier thinkers also placed the barbarian in a temporal frame of development, the systematization of the idea that humanity progresses from barbarism to civilization, as expressed in social, political, or (pseudo)scientific theories, is specific to modernity. Developments in *technique* and *means of production* often pose as standards for determining a society's level of civilization. For instance, in a model developed by French and Scottish philosophers in mid-nineteenth century, societal development advances in four stages: savage societies (consisting of hunter-gatherers), barbarian societies (consisting mainly of shepherds), agricultural societies, and finally the institution of a commercial, capitalist market (European society) (Meek 14-23; Salter 16). The Greek geographer Strabo (ca. 64 BCE–24 CE) also regards lifestyle and modes of production as criteria for different

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<sup>76</sup> Some progressive models mentioned in this section could also be called “evolutionary.” “Evolution” is most notably inscribed in the discourse of the life sciences, and it is from evolutionary processes as understood by biologists that the concept has been transferred to the social sciences too (Rose 117). What is implied in both “progress” and “evolution” is the idea of a gradual and steady progression toward an improved state. This also suggests that change in history takes place according to a logic of steps or stages, and not as the result of a radical break or revolution (117).

<sup>77</sup> The views of these historians are discussed in Hartog 80-81.

degrees of societal development. For Strabo, the passage from a nomadic lifestyle, wherein people are primarily warriors or hunters, to a sedentary lifestyle and agriculture is identified with progress on the way to civilization (Todorov 2008: 57).<sup>78</sup> In the eighteenth century, Johann Gottfried von Herder considers the domestication of animals, agriculture, and the development of commerce, science, and art as stages in the acquisition of culture (57).<sup>79</sup>

Another model comes from Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Languages" (1852). This time, barbarism is placed between a savage and a civilized society based on *alphabet* and *writing*. Rousseau writes:

These three ways of writing correspond almost exactly to three different stages according to which one can consider men gathered into a nation. The depicting of objects is appropriate to a savage people; signs of words and of propositions, to a barbaric people, and the alphabet to civilized peoples [peuples policés]. (17)

Hegel's lectures on the geographical bases of history, which had a deep impact on nineteenth-century European perception of the non-European world, suggest a model in which spatial difference is combined with temporal distance. "The History of the World," Hegel says, "travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the End of History, Asia the beginning" (103). In his scheme of historical progress, a spatial divide (East-West) turns into a model of temporal development: the East is the beginning and childhood of History, while the West is its mature age and its end. Africa is missing from this model. For Hegel, some nations, such as those of Africa, are without history: these are characterized as "barbarian nations" (Dossa 100; Salter 32). Similarly, in the context of European colonialism, indigenous peoples in the conquered lands were perceived as living "allochronically" in earlier stages of human life (childhood) or history (primitivism), far behind European modernity and progress.<sup>80</sup>

In the face of evolutionary or progressive models, in history we also encounter several reversals of the civilized/barbarian opposition, whereby a higher value is set upon more primitive or "natural" ways of life than on civilization. After the "discovery" of the "New World" in 1492 and up to the nineteenth century, many European philosophers, travelers, and writers idealized native American societies. Native Americans were often depicted as dangerous barbarians, but they were also often construed as "noble savages": close to nature, free, maintaining values such as liberty, happiness, government by consensus, and equality of property (Grinde and Johansen: 2-3). From the sixteenth century, accounts of societies without class structures and poverty, wherein people lived without jails, judges, or kings, led to a boom of utopian literature in Europe, which lasted well until the end of

<sup>78</sup> *Hygiene* is also a marker of progress for Strabo (57).

<sup>79</sup> Narratives of progress from savagery, primitivism, or barbarism to civilization were very popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such models were for example formulated in France by d'Holbach in 1770 and Diderot in 1776, or in England by Ferguson in 1767. The latter describes the progress of humanity as a movement from "rudeness" to civilization (Todorov 2008: 49).

<sup>80</sup> The critique of this idea is developed by Johannes Fabian in his study *Time and the Other* (1983).

the nineteenth century. In these European narratives, utopian primitive societies were used as a vehicle for social criticism of “civilized” Europe, aimed both at European colonialism and intra-European social problems (40-41).

One of the most famous reversals of the civilized/barbarian hierarchy is performed in the writings of sixteenth-century author Michel de Montaigne, who is said to have introduced the notion of the “noble savage” to the European world of letters. In “On Cannibals” (1580), Montaigne portrayed American natives as free, natural, uncorrupted, and more civilized than Europeans. For Montaigne, European practices were more barbarous and unnatural than those of native Americans. He even showed sympathy for the natives’ anthropophagy: he finds their habit of eating people after they have killed them less barbarous than the practice of Europeans to “eat a man alive” and to do that “under the cloak of piety and religion” (Montaigne 113).

Montaigne goes so far as to question the essentialist use of the term “barbarian”: “I do not believe, from what I have been told about these people, that there is anything barbarous or savage about them, except that we all call barbarous anything that is contrary to our own habits” (108-09). Thus, barbarism is not an inherent quality of certain peoples, but a name for the uncommon or the unfamiliar. In this sense, Montaigne can be considered as an early proponent of cultural relativism. But despite his admiration for the barbarians and his critical view of European societies, Montaigne still placed the natives of America in an earlier stage in progress: “These nations, then, seem to me barbarous in the sense that they have received very little moulding from the human intelligence, and are still very close to their original simplicity. They are still governed by natural laws and very little corrupted by our own” (109). Contrary to popular models of progress, Montaigne considers lagging behind in progress a desirable state instead of a marker of inferiority. Thus, his essay does not cancel out the temporal model of progress but reverses its valuation.

In the eighteenth century, thinkers such as Montesquieu (in his 1721 *Lettres persanes*) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are also skeptical about the merits of civilization and formulate a critique of their own societies by pleading for the supposed simplicity and purity of savage or barbarian societies.<sup>81</sup> Denis Diderot also provided an inversion of the barbarian/civilized hierarchy, by depicting Europeans as the real barbarians:

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<sup>81</sup> In *Persian Letters*, which is both a critique of Europe and a reaffirmation of the otherness of the (non-European) barbarian, Montesquieu thematizes the ambivalent relation of the “barbarian” to Europe. On the one hand, the barbarian hordes threaten Europe; on the other hand, the barbarians have also been seen as “a source of innovation, strength and vigour” (Montesquieu presented in Salter 22). The Tartar, Montesquieu writes in “Letter 81,” “truly dominates the universe” and “has proved its power across the earth,” but “in every age it has been the scourge of nations.” (Montesquieu 160; also qtd in Salter 22). For an analysis of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, see also Boer 2004: 49-74.



Barbarous Europeans! The brilliance of your enterprises does not impress me. Their success does not hide their injustice. In my imagination I have often embarked in those ships which bring you to distant countries, but once on land, and witness of your misdeeds, I separate myself from you and I join your enemies, taking arms against you, bathing my hands in your blood. (qtd in Shohat and Stam 89)

But the use of the barbarian as a tool for criticizing civilized societies is not exclusive to modernity or Enlightenment thought. Reversals of the civilized/barbarian hierarchy, whereby the progressed civilized appear more barbarous or corrupt than the barbarians, are witnessed throughout Western history. We see them already in Homer's *Iliad*, in Plato's *The Republic*, or in the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus (Rawson 6; White 1972: 27-28). The high value set upon a certain kind of primitivism also appears in various philosophical, historical, and literary writings. During the Hellenistic period, the Cynics (445-365 BCE) were well-known proponents of primitivizing life and aimed at dislodging "the real Barbarian who lurked at the very heart of the city" (Hartog 98). Ephorus of Cyme (405-330 BCE) saw primitivism as a more just and pure way of life, and thereby closer to the gods (99).<sup>82</sup> Also, the idea of "alien (barbarian) wisdom" was popular among many Greek intellectuals of that period (99).

Thus, from the ancient Cynics, to Enlightenment thinkers, to primitivism and exoticism in twentieth-century modernist literature and art, the attraction to the barbarian other is almost omnipresent in Western history. Theories of primitivism, the figure of the noble savage, and other attempts to invert the civilized/barbarian hierarchy all challenged discourses of civilization. As Richard Bernheimer writes about the "Wild Man," "[n]othing could have been more radical than the attitude of sympathizing or identifying oneself with the Wild Man, whose way of life was the repudiation of all the accumulated values of civilization" (144-45). Nevertheless, whether such attitudes focus on the commendable traits of the barbarian or on the barbaric behavior of the civilized, they often feed on the Eurocentric elements they seem to question. By valuing barbarism or primitivism more than civilization they may question the merits of European progress, but they do not (always) invalidate the idea of progress itself: barbarians can remain behind civilization in the scale of progress, and still be used as a vehicle for criticizing European societies. As Salter argues, representations of barbarians "can be mobilised simultaneously to reify Europe's position as superior *and* criticize its values, mores and institutions as inferior" (22).<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> In the Hellenistic period we encounter several challenges to, or reversals of, the opposition between Greek and barbarian. Agatharchides of Cnidus (second century BCE) criticized the excess and corruptive desire for riches and power that marks civilized society, and juxtaposed it to the lifestyle of more primitive peoples, who lived by the laws of nature (Hartog 100-01). For Posidonius of Apamea, a Stoic philosopher and ethnographer of the first century BCE, the Celts were barbarians, but also "a simple race, free from vice" (Hartog 101). Such views are comparable to the ideals behind the figure of the "noble savage," which became popular in the eighteenth century.

<sup>83</sup> Of course, we cannot generalize all attempted reversals as ultimately Eurocentric and unable to radically question European civilizational discourse. Each reversal needs to be examined separately.

## Psyche

In "The Forms of Wildness," Hayden White argues that in modern times concepts of otherness, such as the barbarian, which have served the process of "ostensive self-definition by negation," have been relegated to the category of fiction or mere prejudice (5-6). While the category of the barbarian was generally only applicable to specific groups of people outside the borders of civilization, in modern times, White contends, a partial demythologization and despatialization of the barbarian has taken place, which has led to a "compensatory process of psychic interiorization."<sup>84</sup> The barbarian or the wild man are not just out there anymore, but lurking in every individual as part of the human psyche, which we have to repress in order to function in a civilized society (6-7). According to White, barbarians or wild men have been debunked as essentialist categories, and now exist as sociopsychological categories, describing areas of our psychological landscape rather than whole portions of humanity (35). This interiorization has led to a "remythification" of the barbarian, which finds expression in the trope of "the barbarian within."<sup>85</sup>

The trope of "the barbarian within" in modernity is indissolubly associated with Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Freud's main contribution to the discourse on barbarism lies in his idea that barbarism is internal to every individual. The barbarian is not a different race or group, but an aspect of our unconscious, which civilization tries to keep under control. Freud's introduction of psychoanalysis at the dawn of the twentieth century led to a radical shift in the self-perception of the "civilized" and revealed civilization as more unstable than previously thought.

The interiorization of the barbarian—the idea that barbarism is the irrational side of the human psyche—is older than twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory. In the Roman Republic, for instance, while the distinction between Romans and (external) barbarians was the basis of Roman identity, there were authors who acknowledged the irrational and barbaric side of the human psyche. In a speech celebrating a deal between the emperor Valens and a group of Goths in 370 CE, the philosopher and political statesman Themistius says: "There is in each of us a barbarian tribe, extremely overbearing and intractable—I mean temper and those insatiable desires, which stand opposed to rationality as Scythians and Germans do to the Romans" (Themistius qtd in Heather 236). The idea that there is a barbarian in each of us, but that (Roman) civilization is able to restrain this internal barbarism and is thus more rational than its barbarian others, does not seem too far from Freud's approach to the issue.

<sup>84</sup> White focuses on the notion of the "wild man." Although the image of the wild man differs from that of the barbarian, White's observations on the wild man are to a large degree applicable to the notion of the barbarian. White also discusses the similarities and differences between the two concepts (1972: 19-21).

<sup>85</sup> White sees the interiorization of the wild man as a remythification, because it still functions as a projection of repressed anxieties and desires. He argues that "fictions" such as barbarism, savagery, and wildness are treated as signs "designating the existence of things or entities whose attributes bear just those qualities that the imagination, for whatever reasons, insists they must bear" (1972: 7).

Themistius' rendition of the barbarism within, however, is not issued as a criticism of his Roman peers. On the contrary, it is intended as a reaffirmation of the superiority of the Romans, who are set apart from their external barbarians due to their ability to control their passions. As Peter Heather argues, Themistius here appeals to the conviction of the Roman elite that its members were more rational than the barbarians from beyond the borders (236). Remarkably, Themistius makes his point about the internal barbarian by drawing an analogy with the external division between civilized and barbarians as distinct groups. Therefore, the generally accepted understanding of the barbarian as an external other remains his stable reference point. Even though he observes the barbaric drives within all humans (including the Romans), the opposition between civilized and barbarians as distinct groups emerges unscathed from his claim. Ironically, his belief in the ability of the Romans to control passions through rationality stands in stark contrast with the acts of brutality of the Roman Empire against its barbarians, which did not show signs of restraint (238). The idea of the "inside barbarian" was thus not strong enough to challenge the Romans' belief in the legitimacy of their own barbaric acts. The Roman Empire would not allow its foundations to be challenged by making the (internal) barbarism of its own "civilized" citizens an issue.

Freud's ideas were certainly more successful in challenging the self-perception of the European subject. *Civilization and Its Discontents* (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 1930) is the main source for Freud's views on this matter. The central theme of this study is the irresolvable antagonism between instinct and the restraints of civilization. Freud sees a progression of humans from an unrestricted satisfaction of instincts (a primitive state) to a repression of instincts, which is the precondition for a civilized society. Love is found at the foundations of civilization: the goal of a civilized society is to make its participants happy (Freud 1962: 48). But there is also a destructive drive in civilization. Love and the destructive drive form civilization's struggle between Eros and Death.

For civilization to be sustained, individual instinct needs to be repressed. This condition generates unhappiness, frustration, neurosis, and self-hatred. While civilization uses the law as an external mechanism for regulating aggression, the internal mechanism that prevents the externalization of aggressive impulses in the individual lies in the production of a *sense of guilt*. Freud elaborates:

What means does civilization employ in order to inhibit the aggressiveness which opposes it, to make it harmless, to get rid of it perhaps? [...] What happens to him [the civilized individual] to render his desire for aggression innocuous? Something very remarkable, which we should never have guessed and which is nevertheless quite obvious. His aggressiveness is introjected, internalized; it is, in point of fact, sent back to where it came from—that is, it is directed towards his own ego. [...] The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it, is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment. Civilization therefore, obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by

weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city. (70)

The repression of drives is thus effectuated through guilt. According to Freud, our “loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt” is the price we pay for civilization’s advances (81). This control-mechanism, however, does not always succeed in keeping our aggressive instincts at bay. In Freud’s model, the “return of the repressed” instincts becomes the greatest threat to civilization.

The universalism of Freud’s views—the fact that they were presented as applicable to all individuals—destabilized the prevalent belief that barbarism was external to Europe. The barbarian is not another race, nation, or religious group, but part of our unconscious. This idea, as Salter argues, unsettled the foundations of the colonial project, by suggesting that the “colonial barbarian” and “European imperialist” do not differ fundamentally: there is a barbaric drive in everyone, which “civilization restrains by degrees” (74-75).

However, the tension between barbarism (aggression) and civilization (restraint) does not exist in equal degree within all individuals. The synchronous relation established between civilization and barbarism in *Civilization and Its Discontents* is elsewhere in Freud associated with a scheme of societal progress from barbarism toward civilization. In Freud’s study *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), barbarism is linked with group identity, while the individuated psyche is a marker of civilization. In Freud, strong group identity is pathologized as dangerous and irrational, and is associated with less advanced social formations. Here, Freud builds on views by Gustave Le Bon, whom he also quotes in *Group Psychology*: “by the mere fact that he forms part of an organized group, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian—that is, a creature acting by instinct” (Freud 1959: 12). Groups represent a state of regression of the psyche. This is why groups, even when they consist of civilized individuals, can exhibit mob behavior (Freud in Brown 2006: 163).

In many readings of Freud’s progressive narrative, Brown argues, Western liberal values, with their emphasis on individualism and their disavowal of group identity, stand for the “highest state of ‘maturity’ for man and are equated with civilization” (2006: 155). In *Group Psychology*, Freud normatively aligns “maturity, individuation, conscience, repression, and civilization,” and opposes them to “childishness, primitivism, unchecked impulse, instinct, and barbarism” (157). Civilized individuals are favored vis-à-vis primitive, barbaric groups with collective identifications. However, the individuated psyche does not represent a permanent state of civilization, because there is always the possibility of regression from the civilized state to barbarism and irrationality. Thus, Freud’s views take away civilization’s confidence in its own power by suggesting that civilization’s restraint of instinct is precarious and fragile. In *Thoughts for the Times of War and Death* (*Zeitgemässes über Krieg und Tod*, 1915), Freud saw World War I as a great example of this fragility

(65). Therefore, Freud faces the technological advances of civilization with an ambiguous feeling. But while he is skeptical of the purported progress of European civilization, he does not reject or condemn it either (Freud in Salter 74). Whether civilization is a blessing or a curse can only be judged by the outcome of the struggle between instincts and rationality in each particular case.

The barbarian, as this chapter shows, is not a self-identical concept. Its history demonstrates that it carries internal contradictions and diverse narratives that disjoin its identity to itself, unsettle its assumed fixity in Western discourse, and point to its connectivity with several categories and contexts. Its disjoined self-identity guarantees its transformability in the present. According to Mieke Bal, a word or image never forgets where it has been and always carries the memory of its previous uses, but “every re-use of pre-existing material changes it” (1999: 100). Thus, the history of the barbarian does not decide the future of this concept in a deterministic, linear manner; its past can also be reshaped *from* and *by* the present. Its past and present uses and meanings shape and transform each other. Therefore, the history of the barbarian does not only produce its present, but also emerges as an effect of the present.<sup>86</sup>

The outcome of the struggle between historical and new potential uses of barbarism or the barbarian is not predetermined. Neither is the outcome of the relation between civilization and barbarism. Barbarism cannot be fully contained by civilized discourse. Thus, not only civilization can define and mold barbarism, but the reverse is also conceivable. The following chapters perform the tensions between these concepts, in an attempt to chart a new space for barbarism, though which—why not?—perhaps a new typology of *barbarian* standards may take shape in the future.

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<sup>86</sup> In suggesting the recasting of the past as an effect of the present, I take my cue from Bal’s notion of “preposterous history,” an approach that she proposes as a way of dealing with the past in the present. “Preposterous history,” according to Bal, describes a “reversal, which puts what came chronologically first (‘pre-’) as an aftereffect behind (‘post’) its later recycling” (1999: 6-7). A “preposterous inquiry” can establish “a certain coevalness” between the “pre” and the “post” of a past and a present object, through which they may affect and revise each other, as well as change each other’s status (7). Bal’s term “preposterous history” is coined after Patricia Parker’s “Preposterous Events” (7).